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Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance

VOLUNTEERS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH ALLIANCE

BULGARIA BUSINESS AND TRADE DEVELOPMENT (BTD)

SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT

(JANUARY – JUNE 2007)

LEADER WITH ASSOCIATE AGREEMENT (LWA)
EEM-A-00-04-00002-00

Associate Cooperative Agreement
183-A-00-04-00102-00

**Prepared for the United States Agency for
International Development (USAID)**

Implementing Organizations:





PROPOSAL SUBMITTED: AUGUST 1, 2007

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1. OBJECTIVES OF THE VEGA/BTD PROGRAM

The ultimate goal of the VEGA/BTD program is, through demand-driven cooperation with the BSO sector, to mobilize innovative ideas and sound business practices for the purpose of increasing competitiveness, generating jobs and developing sustainable mechanisms for delivery of business services to the private sector.

In addition, VEGA/BTD strives to promote dynamic and efficient public-private policy dialogue through targeted support to the Government of Bulgaria's SME policy agencies. Areas of emphasis include SME assistance and promotion activities, investment promotion and development, economic policy reform initiatives, and improved competitiveness, particularly through assistance to industry-specific clusters active in the local economy.

In compliance with USAID/Bulgaria's Strategic Objective 1.3 "Economic Growth and Increased Prosperity", this initiative will create and improve already existing business systems and consultancy mechanisms. These business systems and consultancy mechanisms will engage in the strengthening of small and medium size enterprises that will secure their future sustainability and economic prosperity in the international market after 2007, when Bulgaria is expected to join the European Union.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND M&E RESULTS

During the period under review, VEGA BTD delivered TA projects to three BSOs and another 80 tourism operators, impacting close to 300 Bulgarian businesses through the introduction of EU standards certification processes, facilitation of consultations with potential investors and public awareness events. Supported BSOs increased their revenues by \$42,552 and their profitability rose by 10%. Fourteen new jobs were created and another 81 were sustained. Over 80% of the new jobs created were for females. Eight new products and services were developed and introduced, with another five improved. These led to attracting 144 new members and an additional 54 new clients served. A business linkage amounting to \$16,000 was completed and another 18 potentials were established. 55 SMEs participated in EU standards certification.

Close to 11 tourism operators throughout the country were assessed and included in the Authentic Bulgaria Certification Project. In the short period of time since the beginning of this project (less than a year), tourism operators reported \$5,800 increase in revenues as a result of introducing 12 new services and attracting 362 new tourists. Eight new jobs were created and another 75 sustained. Two of the tourism operators participated in EU standards certification programs, mainly HACCP.

Contribution to Targets Table

I. Job Creation & Improved Economic Performance				
Performance Indicator	2006 Baseline Data	2007 Annual Target	Cumulative Result	Fulfillment of Annual Target
#1. Increase in BSO revenues	N/A	12% increase	\$42,552	N/A
#2. Increase in BSO profitability	N/A	5% increase	14% increase	N/A
#3. Increase in BSO employment	24 new jobs or 10% increase * 202 jobs sustained	8% increase	14 new jobs * 87 jobs sustained	N/A
#4. Increase in the number of BSO clients / members who are using new/improved products or services	5.4 / BSO / year New members – 280 New Clients - 413	5 / BSO / year	New Members – 144 New Clients - 136	N/A
II. Investment & Trade Indicators				
Performance Indicator	2006 Baseline Data	2007 Annual Target	Cumulative Result	Fulfillment of Annual Target
#5. Number of investment / trade linkages, JV, etc. established	2 linkages completed	5 linkages completed	1 linkage completed * 18 potential linkages established	N/A
#6. Value of investment / trade linkages established	\$9,239	\$2,000,000	\$16,000	N/A
III. Quality Assurance & Certification Indicators				
Performance Indicator	2006 Baseline Data	2007 Annual Target	Cumulative Result	Fulfillment of Annual Target
#.7 Number of SMEs Benefiting from BSO services in the certification process	87 SMEs or 1.6 SME / BSO	3 / BSO / year	135 SMEs	N/A



3. PROGRAM ACTIVITY

a. Ongoing and Completed Projects

I. Information and Communication Technologies

Project: ICT Service and Quality Certification (CMMI)

Client: ESI Center

Dates: April 2006 – September 2007

Project Summary: The ICT Service and Quality Certification activity is designed to help Bulgarian software and ICT service companies attain the international CMMI certification. Essentially, it ensures that companies have the right systems and processes in place to guarantee quality and enable them to absorb more rapid growth or investment. Co-financed by VEGA/BTD, the European Software Institute (ESI) will work with at least 12 companies, ensuring at least 3 get the full CMMI certification and the bulk of the rest reach what is essentially the $\frac{3}{4}$ mark (IT Mark certification). VEGA/BTD is matching the funding for the certification process contributed by the Regional Competitiveness Initiative (RCI).

Results to Date: In the reported period ESI Center Bulgaria completed the project activities for assisting ICT companies in Bulgaria to achieve process maturity, which will give them a quality-based competitive advantage. As of June 2007 the activities directly supported by the project included:

- In the first half of 2007 three (3) companies confirmed their interest in entering the program and conducting ITMark appraisals. The companies were selected according to the selection criteria. As a result, a total of four (4) companies launched CMMI-based programs and ten (10) companies launched IT Mark related activities since the start of the project in April 2006.
- In the first half of 2007 ESI Center Bulgaria completed two CMMI Class B assessments, one IT Mark assessment and provided continuous support to all the companies included in the program. As a result, one company achieved IT Mark certification. So far, one company has been certified against CMMI Maturity Level 2, one company achieved IT Mark Premium certification and two companies achieved IT Mark certification.
- An important output from the project was the initiation and organization of an ambitious technology transfer program for the ESI Center Bulgaria experts. In the reported period, two experts were certified as CMMI instructors, one of whom was also certified as CMMI Lead Appraiser. As a result three experts were qualified as IT Mark appraisals, three experts were trained as CMMI Instructors, and one expert became a CMMI Lead Appraiser. The created local capacity will significantly improve the access of the Bulgarian IT enterprises to the world recognized IT Models.
- ESI Center Bulgaria is also preparing a study on the economic benefits from IT Mark/CMMI implementation, which would generate greater interest in IT Mark and CMMI certification.

The joint organization of the activities was highly appreciated by all of the relevant stakeholders. The project not only created awareness about the importance of the



certification for increasing the competitiveness of the ICT sector in Bulgaria, but also strengthened the capacity of ESI Center Bulgaria to provide such services on a sustainable basis.

Long-Term Expectations: It is expected that the CMMI Certification will improve the management structure and ultimately increase the revenues, future investment and partnerships for each company that goes through the process. In addition, the activity will ensure that at least one Bulgarian consultant/BSO is able to attain the status of CMMI-certified assessor. This will lower the costs substantially for future Bulgarian companies that may want the certification, as currently they must hire expensive international consultants to go through the assessment process.

II. Tourism

Project: Project “Authentic Bulgaria”

Consultants: THR, ELC, Markenstein and Bildebrand; Atanasov and Ivanov; Netage

Dates: May 2006 – September 2007

Project Summary: The Authentic Tourism activity is designed to help smaller hospitality and tourism providers to develop better tourism products and attract high-value tourists – not the low-value, mass-market tourists, common in the Black Sea resorts. This is done through a better understanding of target markets, creation of a certification and assessment system geared toward items of interest for high-value tourists, such as service, hospitality, community integration, local products, knowledge, and culture. The official government star rating system doesn't encourage or measure many of the things that are relevant to the smaller, more authentic establishments (restaurants, hotels, etc.), nor does it provide much that is particularly meaningful to the higher-value tourist.

Results to Date: During the reported period, VEGA/BTD has completed the following activities of the tourism project:

- On February 8th, the Authentic Bulgaria Association held its constituent assembly. VEGA/BTD staff, the Authentic Tourism working group, State Tourism Agency representatives, and USAID representatives attended the meeting. A management Board of 7 people was selected. The new association will continue to carry out all activities of VEGA/BTD Authentic Bulgaria Project. During the period under review 3 meetings of the Managing Board were held. At these meeting the Managing Board approved and adopted the bylaws of the Association and the protocols and procedures for awarding and removing the Quality Mark, as well as the mission, vision and the main goals of the new Association.
- On 22 February VEGA/BTD officially handed out the certificates to 18 of the awarded hotels. The ceremony was part of the official promotion of Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism at the biggest tourism expo in Bulgaria “Holiday and Spa Expo.”
- The Authentic Bulgaria Guidebook was finalized and printed in January, in three languages – Bulgarian, English and German. About 700 copies of the guidebook were distributed at the three tourism trade shows where “Authentic Bulgaria” was presented. It was also sent to 20 Foreign Embassies in Bulgaria.



- To promote the unique tourism product and the “Authentic Bulgaria” brand, VEGA/BTD participated at four specialized tourism exhibitions – the Hannover Alternative Travel Expo, in February, the biggest tourism expo in Bulgaria, “Holiday and Spa Expo in Sofia,” in February, the International Bed and Breakfast Exposition (B&B Expo) in Brussels, in March, and the Cultural Tourism Fair in Veliko Tarnovo, in April.

Some of the results from the participation of “Authentic Bulgaria” at the trade shows:

- Promotion of the program and the brand to a wide audience in the specialized travel industry;
 - Information exchange between tourists, the different tourism sectors, and media;
 - Established contacts with organizations working in sustainable tourism in Western Europe and new opportunities for joint projects; and,
 - More than 700 contacts with interested tourists and organizations.
- The consultant on the Authentic Bulgaria project, Sue Warren, prepared a training program for new assessors on applying the Authentic Bulgaria Quality Mark. The training lasted a week and two new assessors were trained. Kamelia Kaloyanova, Gergana Yankova, Doriana Basamakova and Delcho Stanimirov from the VEGA/BTD staff were also present at the training, and also participated in separate afternoon sessions with Sue Warren to complete a train-the-trainer course, in order to be able to train assessors in the future.

Going forward, Authentic Bulgaria will set up and organize the assessment procedures and the assessments, and will no longer use the services of THR Consulting. However, the employees at THR who were trained as assessors will continue to assess accommodations applying for the Quality Mark.

The assessor training was completed with a real assessment of an accommodation applying for a Quality Mark. The two new assessors were accompanied by Sue Warren and VEGA/BTD staff to a small guesthouse, Eldorod, near Sevlievo.

- Members of the VEGA/BTD staff were trained as mystery guests by a professional tourism consultant.

A “Mystery Checks” program is being introduced by Authentic Bulgaria to ensure that the member accommodations uphold the high standards of quality the Quality Mark is trying to establish as customary for Bulgarian tourism. Mystery guests will be visiting the accommodations carrying the Authentic Bulgaria Mark to check and evaluate the overall quality of the services offered.

The first mystery checks took place in the middle of April at accommodations that had received negative customer feedback.

- In April, “Authentic Bulgaria” initiated a new round of assessments for accommodations that would like to join the program, be assessed and receive a Quality Mark. About 90 invitations were sent to selected accommodations across



Bulgaria. The new round of assessments was open to any accommodation that fits the basic requirements.

19 accommodations sent applications for assessment. A schedule of assessments was prepared. For this new round of assessments VEGA/BTD employed four assessors among whom the interested accommodations were to be divided.

- To better market the brand, "Authentic Bulgaria" developed a special website. Picture galleries of the hotels and guesthouses in the Authentic Bulgaria network were uploaded on the Authentic Bulgaria website.

Another feature of the website that was developed was the integration of a geographic map that shows the location of all the accommodations that carry the Authentic Bulgaria Quality Mark. This option enables the website visitors to browse the accommodations by location.

User profiles for all Authentic Bulgaria member accommodations were also created, so that accommodations owners can log in the website and have access to information that is designed specifically for them. This function also allows Authentic Bulgaria to send newsletters and other materials to all accommodations.

- The Authentic Bulgaria Association organized a familiarization trip for international journalists to some of the best sites carrying the Authentic Bulgaria Quality Mark. The familiarization trip took place from May 27 to June 1, 2007. Journalists from France, Germany, Belgium, United Kingdom and Israel were invited and took part in the trip. All of the participants in the trip were impressed by what Bulgaria has to offer and the Authentic Bulgaria accommodations. They are all interested in writing about Bulgaria, and Authentic Bulgaria in particular, and would like to come back again. A networking reception took place at the last evening of the trip on May 31. At the reception the journalists met with some more of the Authentic Bulgaria members and important stakeholders to the Authentic Bulgaria project.
- The Authentic Bulgaria project was presented at the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR) conference in Sofia, on April 26. EcoLogic Consultancy (ELC), a Bulgarian cross-cultural training company, is a member of the SIETAR network and co-organized the conference in Bulgaria. With ELC's assistance, VEGA/BTD was able to present the Authentic Bulgaria Project in front of the about 300 international participants at the conference. At the conference, VEGA/BTD also distributed the Authentic Bulgaria Guidebook and gave out more than 200 copies of the guide in English and German.
- VEGA/BTD collaborated with a Sofia-based company that distributes the Financial Times Daily Newspaper in Bulgaria for the distribution of the Authentic Bulgaria Guidebook. The distribution company compiled a list of Bulgarian and international companies with offices in Bulgaria, which it considers potential clients. As a marketing effort to increase its sales, the company sent a free



special edition of the Financial Times about the world brands which included a copy of the Authentic Bulgaria Guidebook to 189 of those companies.

Long-term expectations: VEGA/BTD expects that the newly established Authentic Bulgaria Association will successfully continue the above-mentioned activities and will become a strong and sustainable organization. During the remaining period of the program, VEGA/BTD will transfer all activities of the “Authentic Bulgaria” program to the association.

III. Investment

Project: Communication Strategy and Regulatory Impact Assessments

Client: Ministry of Economy and Energy and the Economic Growth Council

Consultants: Institute for Market Economy

Dates: September – December 2006

Project Summary: In the fall of 2006, VEGA/BTD was approached by the Economic Growth Council, to help prepare a Communication Strategy for better exposure of the activities of the Council. VEGA/BTD created a working draft of the strategy as a part of the overall public relations and media exposure initiative of the Council. As a result of the collaboration of VEGA/BTD with the Economic Growth Council (EGC), the Ministry of Economy and Energy has asked VEGA/BTD to provide consultancy support for establishing better regulation and environment for the SMEs in Bulgaria. VEGA/BTD hired a team from the Institute for Market Economy to prepare Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) for three (3) laws.

Results: Another presentation of the three assessments made by the Institute for Market Economy during the previous reporting was made at another session of the Economic Growth Council. A comparison was made with the existing EU methodology for RIA. The EGC accepted that the suggestions by the Institute for Market Economy methodology is more concise but gives enough data for comparison as well being cheaper and easier to use for the untrained personnel of the administration.

Long-Term Expectations: It is expected that the suggestions made by the local consultants will be included in the laws and will be introduced into the Parliament in 2007.

Project: Bases to Business Parks

Local Counterpart: Dobrich Municipality

VE Consultant: Mark Frazier, IESC

Dates: July 2006 – September 2007

Project Summary: In July 2006, VEGA/BTD received approval from USAID to undertake series of actions to equip municipalities with practical tools and services to support preparation of these sites into business park development opportunities for manufacturing, logistics, and service industry users. The decision reflected an ongoing interest of USAID and VEGA in improving conditions for private sector competitiveness. The project was undertaken with the aim of complementing and extending the impact of other USAID-supported programs including the Bulgarian



Competitiveness Initiative and Local Government Initiative to put in place conditions for rapid employment, investment, and skills growth in market segments vital to Bulgaria's future.

Activities to Date: In the last semi-annual period VEGA/BTD engaged international office and industrial park development specialist Mark Frazier of Openworld, Inc. to prepare a toolkit on Park development, and Peristyle, a Sofia urban planning firm, to draft a scope of work for Dobrich municipality to prepare a tender for preparation of a detailed urban plan including the Business Park development site. VEGA also contracted with VIA Spectar to provide audit and advisory services for improvement of business climates through streamlined administrative processes, with a special focus on the community of Dobrich to establish an early example that could be replicated in other communities. Due to this business climate improvement initiative, Dobrich is ready for ISO 9001 and 14001 certification, which will make the municipality a more transparent and attractive community for foreign investment. The mayor of Dobrich was one of the keynote speakers at an investment conference organized by VEGA, in June, which aimed at creating an open platform for communications between municipalities ready to attract investment and potential real estate developers who are looking for venues for expanding their business in Bulgaria.

Expected results: The impacts of the project on Business Park planning in Dobrich have been significant. A public-private working group was formed in response to a suggestion of VEGA at the outset of the project. The Municipality of Dobrich prepared a visual map out investor approval steps and licensing procedures, including timetables for approvals, as a means to affirm its commitment to offering a competitive local business climate. The Municipality reviewed and accepted a VEGA-prepared draft terms of reference for preparation of a detailed urban plan (including the Park development site), and has committed to a tender for selection of a specialized planning firm based on the terms of reference. Dobrich municipality has also actively launched, with VEGA support, a project to document administrative processes as a means of securing ISO certification and further reinforce its commitment to being a reliable and efficient partner in public-private partnerships for Park development. Follow up steps by the municipality to publicize and promote the Park development partnership is expected to begin shortly after municipal elections are held in October 2007.

IV. New Product Development

Project: SME Financial Clearing House

Local Contractor: Business Center Serdon

VE Consultants: Stephen Drozda and Mark Rubin, FSVC

Dates: November 2007 – September 2007

Project Summary: To ensure that SMEs have access to relevant, timely, unbiased information regarding finance and financial services available to them, VEGA/BTD, in cooperation with a local Bulgarian Business Support Organization, Business Center Serdon (BCS), will design and monitor the implementation of a user-friendly, self-sustaining, frequently updated, searchable and comparable database of the most



relevant financial products available, with a transparent accounting of rates, fees and other costs and requirements. The database will be housed and maintained by Business Center Serdon. To maximize the dissemination of information, access to the clearinghouse, and training, could also be provided to Regional Development Agencies, Business Centers and Business Incubators located around the country to ensure that those SMEs without internet access or who are uncertain about the process have easy access to assistance.

There are five, closely interlinked components to this activity:

- Overall project design, including functionality, layout, user interface, and technical specifications for the web and software designers;
- Development of a comprehensive database on current finance offerings for which SMEs are eligible;
- The creation of a robust, user-friendly interface and simple training materials;
- Development of a sustainability plan and clear maintenance procedures; and,
- Distribution, marketing and training campaign

Results: VEGA started this project in the beginning of this period. During that time, Filip Stoyanovic, a business consultant, was hired to develop the business plan for the new product in cooperation with BC Serdon. The business plan, together with an extensive marketing and promotion plan, have been completed and is currently in the implementation phase. VEGA contracted Soft Innovations to develop the web platform for the project. The portal content will include a searchable database, a pool of experts, a knowledge center, a library and an additional resources section that will include things such as an FAQ file, forum, and information about BC Serdon. A flash prototype of the portal has already been created, and Soft Innovations is working with BC Serdon to make final improvements during the development phase of the project. BC Serdon coordinates the activities related to the implementation of the portal with the technical support company Soft-I. A flash version of the website's front page has already been developed. The optimal interface is still in the process of being developed and technically implemented; however, all the details regarding the design and the content have been finalized. BC Serdon and Soft-I have also clarified the necessary functional requirements and divided responsibility for management of the different levels of the portal. All the existing content of the portal has been translated into Bulgarian, while the core of the portal (the database) has been developed. BC Serdon started working on populating it with financing opportunities available in Bulgaria, including information from foreign embassies, government organizations, foundations, and private organizations. The matching criteria for the most applicable financing programs from each organization were established. The promotional plan will be implemented in the coming months before the official closing of the VEGA program.

Expected results: It is expected that this new online product will improve the access to financial information and services for SMEs in Bulgaria and will increase their chances to access financing for strengthening and expanding their business. It will also help BC Serdon open a new venue for consulting services for its clients.



V. Other

a. MBA Enterprise Corps – Year Three Assignments

In Year Three, VEGA/BTD placed two (2) MBA Enterprise Corps (MBAEC) members in local BSOs to work as long-term business advisors for a 7-month term with the BSOs and their SME clients. Unfortunately, one of the MBAEC member was forced to terminate his assignment and leave the country due to serious health problems. The other MBAEC member carried out a variety of tasks that promote the primary components of the BTD program, including, but not limited to:

- business plan development;
- marketing and sales techniques;
- development of new products/services; and,
- facilitation of trainings and workshops throughout the year;

Below are short descriptions of the MBAEC assignment:

1. **Mediation Centers within the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), Stara Zagora Chamber of Commerce and the American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria**

MBAEC Advisor: Megan Weber

Results and accomplishments

General:

- Completed assessment of mediation in Bulgaria and a comparative analysis of the CLRP-supported commercial mediation centers which:
 - 1) Provided an independent, non-biased assessment of the current mediation situation in Bulgaria (presented to AmCham)
 - 2) Analyzed the history of the centers, dedicated resources, service offerings, and both opportunities and challenges of the centers and made recommendations for the future (presented to AmCham)
- Comprehensive study of potential funding organizations - identified 20 potential sources
- Best practices and mediation resources report - organizations, journals, conferences, best practices, etc. (over 40 resources identified)
- Drafted 2 letters of introduction to be sent to grant funding organizations

American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham)

- Provided review of organizational capabilities and resources as related to mediation
- Presented results of 2 studies (see *General Support* below) to the President of AmCham - Review of mediation in Bulgaria and Comparative analysis of CLRP-supported commercial mediation centers
- Helped AmCham Mediation Center Director develop goals and objectives for 2007
- Developed a proposal for reinstating the AmCham Mediation Center Committee
- Reviewed funding application prepared by AmCham



- Assisted AmCham Director with Mediation Center Annual Review document to be shared with AmCham members

Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI)

- Completed an initial review and update of BCCI business plan, which includes the marketing plan (revised based on changing priorities and resource constraints)
- Assisted in the creation of 2007 work plan
- Aided Director in the completion of 2007 action plan based on strategic priorities
- Helped complete a final review of the business plan in preparation for applying for grant funding
- Worked with BCCI Center director to develop an event plan and marketing materials for a lawyers' seminar
- Helped Mediation Center Director finalize two presentations: "Introduction to Mediation" and "Mediation Training"
- Grant Funding
 - Assisted Director in development of budget for activities
 - Helped prepare funding letter that was sent to U.S. donor
- Internal client training (BCCI Center Director)
 - Basic MS Word skills training (e.g., how to insert comments, track changes, etc.)
 - Provided Excel training to the new Mediation Center director
 - Business coaching (basic business principles, business planning, how to work with management, how to prepare for meetings, how to plan/organize an event, defining a target group, determining goals and objectives, developing advertising/ marketing materials)
 - Review of presentation skills and techniques
- General Training (BCCI Employees)
 - Prepared and conducted presentation training program (two 90-minute workshops with more than 15 total people)
 - Prepared and conducted Excel training program (2-hour workshop with more than 10 participants)
- Concluding observations and recommendations for BCCI

Professional Association of Mediators in Bulgaria (PAMB)

- Aided in writing business plan
- Helped with 2007 work plan (January – June)
- Assisted in the creation of rules for the new organization as well as defined roles and responsibilities
- Activities
 - Day-long strategic planning session
 - Marketing planning meetings
 - PAMB board meetings
- Budgeting
 - Helped develop budget for VEGA funding request
 - Developed a template to track budgets for individual projects
- Internal Client Training (PAMB President)
 - One-on-one Excel skills training
 - Written training documents for MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint



- Generated list of contacts (e.g., companies, law firms, etc.) for PAMB to reach regarding its service offerings
- Created scenario plans for PAMB’s future with specific regard to membership challenges
- Identified ways to better involve PAMB members in the organization’s activities
- Developed creative marketing approaches to publicize PAMB
- Offered additional strategic advice geared toward the longer-term success of PAMB
- Helped create strategy around long-term partnerships

Stara Zagora Chamber of Commerce

- Reviewed Center’s business plan and made recommendations

4. MEDIA EXPOSURE

Event	Date	Number of press releases
"New Partnerships for Business and Industrial Park Development" Conference	June 19, 2007	9
Authentic Bulgaria Association constituent assembly	February 8, 2007	12
Authentic Bulgaria general media coverage	January – June 2007	17

5. TESTIMONIALS FROM LOCAL COUNTERPARTS

Bulgarian Association of Software Companies (BASCOM)

The small grant awarded by VEGA-BTD was instrumental for the design and publishing of a catalogue comprising the Bulgarian IT sector participants at Systems 2006 International IT Fair. A CD of the Bulgarian software industry was also produced, containing information on the development of the industry, related BSOs and other institutions supporting the efforts of the sector, company profiles and presentations of their products and services. Copies of the CD ROM were distributed during Systems 2006 specialized IT Fair in Sofia, as well as at the CeBIT 2007 exhibit in Hanover where BASSCOM were presented at the Bulgarian booth as part of BestPractice Arena – an SME forum partnering with the Bulgarian initiative BestPractice IT. Copies of the CD ROM were also distributed at the international business forums in Istanbul and Thessaloniki where BASSCOM took an active participation.



ICT Cluster

Government Policies and Procedures

The ICT Cluster continued its active on-going dialogue with the GOB as well as its support to the implementation of the current tasks, projects and strategies, in accordance with the decisions made and outlined plans for further action during the September 2006 Round Table conducted with the financial support of VEGA – BTD. At the event, representatives of IT businesses, government institutions and NGOs met to discuss the possibilities for increasing the competitiveness of the Bulgarian IT sector.

ICT Markets

Since the beginning of 2007, with VEGA – BTD assistance, the ICT Cluster started conducting monthly ICT Tuesday meetings aimed at discussing major issues related to the development of the sector, as well as increasing the awareness among SMEs and establishing linkages with various IT related initiatives in Bulgaria. VEGA – BTD assistance was also instrumental in the participation of ICT Cluster representatives at the European Business Summit held on March 15 – 16, 2007, in Brussels.

Branding, Positioning and Promotion

With VEGA – BTD assistance in March 2007, the ICT Cluster participated at the CeBIT 2007 exhibit in Hanover. The ICT Cluster continues to maintain a uniform calendar of the Bulgaria IT Industry (<http://calendar.ictalent.bg/>).

Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sofia

The MBAEC volunteer assisted in the enhancement of the business plan of the organization and identified more than 15 potential funding sources. She was helpful in generating new business ideas aimed at improving the activities of the organization. She also conducted in-house trainings on working with Excel and PowerPoint that proved to be extremely useful for the staff. A survey on mediation was conducted during that period also. It identified the good practices in the process as well as the suitable sources of financing these type of activities.

Taurus Consultants

The training products and services offered by the company increased their popularity and attracted new clients as a result of the newly designed and implemented communications strategy. The company's image of a specialized quality marketing training provider increased and a lot of new clients from the banking and retail sectors were attracted in the first four months of 2007.

Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism

At the invitation of the Authentic Bulgaria project, the Association participated in the B&B Expo held in Brussels on March 17 – 18, 2007. International visitors of the Authentic Bulgaria booth were able to acquaint themselves with Bulgaria as a tourist destination, as well as the B&B operators that are part of the project. Copies of the Guide on Bed and Breakfasts were also distributed.



Villa Kibela

The participation in the Authentic Bulgaria Certification project is extremely valuable to our business.

Oborishte Residence

The SWOT analysis of our B&B operation conducted by the VEGA consultant was extremely useful to us.

Ichera Hotel

The Authentic Bulgaria Certificate award proved to be extremely motivating to the personnel and increased significantly their attitude towards the job. Clients in return express their increased satisfaction with our products and services.

Villa Color

As a result of the Authentic Bulgaria Certificate award, the media that followed, and public awareness events, our client base increased significantly.

Alexander Mitushev

At the end of February 2007, the Ethno Establishment in Zlatograd was presented at Vacation Spa Expo at the National Palace of Culture in Sofia. Most of the promotional materials the company distributed there were products made with the assistance of the Authentic Bulgaria project. The promotional materials helped significantly for attracting the interest of potential tourists in Zlatograd as a destination. 19 contracts were signed with tour operating companies. In addition, the media campaign done by VEGA helped increase the number of tourists served and strengthened the financial stability of the company.