

# Help enable the digital evolution

This is one of the quick win strategies in the COM<sup>3</sup> quick win strategy series. Find all available quick win strategies at [www.ruraldigital.eu](http://www.ruraldigital.eu).

## THE DIGITAL ERA DEMANDS DIGITAL SUPPORT

*In this fast-paced world where globalization and digitalisation are ever-growing, digital skills have become an inevitable prerequisite for enterprises no matter size or business sector.*

In an ever more digital world, SMEs in rural areas are faced with many uncertainties. To stay competitive, they need to constantly improve their digital readiness. But public authorities and business support organisations often don't have the right tools and competencies to support rural SMEs on this journey. Digitally enabled and transformed SMEs make rural areas more attractive places to live, work and invest in. Local and regional authorities need the right tools and competencies for supporting rural enterprises in their digital transformation. COM<sup>3</sup> partners developed a unique support model that strengthens and empowers local and regional actors in their role as innovation facilitators and enablers.

## ARE DIGITAL SKILLS NECESSARY?

Digital technologies are profoundly changing our daily life, our way of working and doing business. It is evident that the digitalisation trend is here to stay and it is necessary for SMEs to adapt to the new digital landscape. Many European companies, SMEs in particular, have been slow at taking up digital solutions, and therefore have not benefitted from them and missed opportunities to scale up. SMEs, a vital part of the European economy, are often hampered by lack of available skills, access to finance and markets. The corona pandemic has forced SMEs to join the digital revolution in a faster pace than expected. For some, the inability to adapt and to leverage the full potential of digital environment can mean bankruptcy. Hence digital skill (ranging from using the most basic functions of a computer to creating algorithms) is a crucial pillar stone to make SMEs thrive and stay competitive in Europe and the world (European Commission, 2021. "2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade").

*"A strong digital economy powered by Europeans with digital skills is vital for innovation, growth, jobs, and European competitiveness. The spread of digital technologies is having a massive impact on the labour market and the type of skills needed in the economy and in society. Member States, business, training providers, the European Commission and other organisations need to work together to tackle the digital skills gap." \**

## KEY MESSAGE

- Digital skill (from low tech to high tech) is a crucial pillar stone to make SMEs thrive and stay competitive in Europe and in the world. Today no SME can afford not to master digital skills. It is fundamental for: **competitiveness, efficiency and rural development**
- SMEs have been slow at taking up digital solutions
- Intermediaries and business support organisations plays an important role in providing the SME with relevant information and support related to digital skills for SMEs to leverage and benefit from.



### SOURCES

European Commission. 2021. "2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade"

Eurostat - "How digitalised are the EU's enterprises?"

\*<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-skills-and-jobs>



## COMPARE - BE DIGITAL

Compare is one of the pilot partners in the COM<sup>3</sup> project and they are based in the city of Karlstad, Sweden. Compare is a cluster which brings together companies, organizations and individuals that share a long-term ambition to develop Värmland into a digital, attractive and cutting-edge region. Compare are now in the quest of digitizing the whole of Värmland - they see that the need for digital competence is increasing and Värmland must be at the forefront as an attractive digital region.

In order to achieve their quest Compare have created a database with companies working within the field of digitalisation. Here, SMEs who need digital support are able to filter according to their needs, size and digital maturity and then get matched with suppliers that has the right competences to help them. Furthermore, Compare has started the initiative "Be digital", where companies with the support of a business coach get a better overview of their needs and wants in becoming digital. The formula is easy: the company meets the coach to discuss 9 areas of their business. Based on the answers the company get an overview of what they need to develop to strengthen themselves digitally as well as concrete tools and methods to increase their digital skills. All courses, methods and tools are available online.

## VEJLE - THE DIGITAL STUDIO

The Municipality of Vejle, Denmark, supports economic development by providing local companies with digital services such as video equipment and services. SMEs can use this equipment to live-stream and organise webinars or hybrid conferences. Many small businesses, especially from the food sector, have used the tool to promote their products online. The live-streaming service has been very valuable for businesses, especially during Covid-19 restrictions. During the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, many local businesses realized that they had to go digital to sustain their economic performance. They were in need of more professional ways to promote their products and services online and were lacking facilities for digital promotion as a compensation for physical meetings.

The SMEs have been supported by professional media-designers (SpotOn Studios) who handle the live-streaming studio, placed in Culinary Institute by Vejle Erhverv, during the live-streaming sessions. Companies have shown a high interest in using the online service. It is indeed expensive for a SME alone to invest in a live streaming studio, especially when the business impacts of such investments are not yet known.

A live streaming studio can support SMEs both during and after the Covid-19 lockdown periods. Local SMEs from different industries (production, food and logistics) can test the studio to organize online meetings – and also create promotional videos for an extra fee. Businesses can then measure the impact of these new digital measures – an increase in online sales or a better visibility of the companies on the local regional market. The goal is to encourage companies to adopt further digital technologies in their business processes.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Push the return of investment for SMEs when becoming digital - timesaving and moneysaving!
- Create and overview of wants and needs for SMEs in the region - do this in one-on-one meeting to ensure the right support for each SME. Use the SMART-request found in the matchmaking guide for hosts as guidance.
- Allow SMEs to test digital tools and equipment to show opportunities and lower treshold for becoming more digital.
- Use existing networks (universities, business organisations, intermediaries etc.) to map out digital activities towards SMEs in your geographical area to provide the right digital support and initiatives.

## THE COM<sup>3</sup> PROJECT

Digitally enabled and transformed SMEs make rural areas more attractive places to live, work and invest in. Local and regional authorities need the right tools and competencies for supporting rural enterprises in their digital transformation. COM<sup>3</sup> partners develop a unique support model that strengthens and empowers local and regional actors in their role as innovation facilitators and enablers.

## ALEXANDERSON INSTITUTE

This quick win strategy was written by Alexanderson institute. The Alexanderson Institute is located in the Halland region in the south-western part of Sweden. Our commitment is to provide competitive knowledge that the world around us can benefit from, helping to promote growth and development.

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