

# Looking Beyond Our Horizon



By George Carol

In a double-take interview, David Micallef, Regional Director and Lorraine Tagliaferro, Innovation Manager with Ateknea Solutions Malta explain why every SME in Malta is eligible for most of the funding programmes presented in the European Funding for SMEs - Info Day on Horizon 2020 event being held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2015. The event is important for all SMEs and third parties working with SMEs.

**MBR:** How long have you been involved with providing consultation on EU funding for SMEs and what, or who, inspired you to take up this work as a full time career and vocation?

**DM:** I actually got involved with 'EU Funding' working as engineer on several projects which Ateknea was handling as coordinators. After some time and experience I started working with clients looking for EU funds for their projects, helping them form consortia of partners, doing research for their projects and

ultimately writing and winning proposals within the FP6 and FP7 funding programmes. The best thing about this work is that one can experience the whole lifecycle of an innovative product or service from concept to a commercial solution.

**MBR:** Ateknea Solutions Ltd are the main sponsor and you are keynote speaker for "European Funding for SMEs - Info day on Horizon 2020" event being held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2015. Are you looking forward to this event, can you give us a precursor to your presentation and why is this a must-see-must-attend B2B event for Maltese family businesses and SMEs in particular?

**DM:** The event is very interesting as it gives an overview of available funds for SMEs and above that it also identifies national contact points



who could help guide interested parties. One common comment we get from our clients is that they heard about EU funding but would not dare look into it due to the complexity of the programs. The primary aim of this event is to make clear to SMEs what each funding program offers and identify the main contact points where SMEs can ask for assistance in acquiring such funds.

**MBR: Do you agree that one of the aims should be to raise the profile, importance and knowledge of EU funding within the SME sector as a precursor to growth?**

**DM:** Any innovative product comes with its own set of risks and the security of a local market is diminishing fast due to globalization. Therefore any knowledge about acquiring funds to support any innovative project development would be considered vital especially if a concept or idea requires costly development time and expertise. During the event the speakers will present different forms of funds available at different stages of a product lifecycle.

**MBR: What about the scope of having a platform to provide a unique learning event to illustrate how SMEs can achieve growth locally or in the international markets through the EU Funding schemes and procedures, such as Horizon 2020, or JEREMIE?**

**DM:** A key requirement to successfully acquiring EU funds is a European or International dimension. Part of the process in acquiring funds (locally and on an EU scale) is the formation of this dimension. Often companies are quite versed in how to make or develop a product but the big question is 'Are you prepared to compete on an international scale?'. This is major challenge faced by any global company and one of the key 'checkboxes' which is commonly overlooked. In this event we will explain the importance of this dimension and how such funding instruments can help SMEs reach the levels of internationalisation.

**MBR: Can you walk us briefly through the list of good quality speakers covering the key areas in "European Funding for SMEs - Info day on Horizon 2020" event?**

**DM:** The event will kick-off with the Parliamentary Secretary for the EU Presidency 2017 and EU Funds, Hon. Dr Ian Borg who will speak about the role of the ministry with EU funds and their work in acquiring regional EU funds. Bridgette Tanti from Malta Enterprise and EEN will follow with a presentation related to the availability of funds and services provided by Malta Enterprise & Enterprise Europe Network. Raphael Scerri from FPD will present the role of the funds and programs division in supporting SMEs to acquire EU funds specifically regional funds. Miklos Zoltai, CEO of Ateknea Solutions will present Ateknea and how the company supports SMEs in

acquiring EU funds, while I will be giving a presentation specifically on the SME instrument which is one of the main EU funding instruments for SMEs.

The event will also showcase some success stories, with presentations from SMEs who will share their experience of working with Ateknea in acquiring EU funds, and how this has helped them achieve their product development. Experienced Horizon 2020 evaluator Ms Anamaria Magri Pantea will provide key advice to SMEs regarding the evaluation process and will give essential tips on writing a successful proposal.

**MBR: What would you like to give SMEs and other business start-ups who will attend in the hope to take away something they could apply when they come to submit a proposal for EU funding?**

**DM:** Our aim is to provide relevant knowledge that could help SMEs and people attending the event decide on the best route for funding of their concepts and products. Furthermore what is most important is that the attendees learn to develop their concepts in a way that would be beneficial for them when the time comes to apply for EU funds or similar funding.

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**MBR: What are the biggest challenges related to SMEs when they look for growth beyond our shore and also on a local level?**

**DM:** There is no one major challenge but a series of related complexities for SMEs who want to expand their business. More often the challenges are on a case by case basis but the biggest mistake one can make is to overlook these challenges. Distribution, language, policies and politics are only a few of these challenges but overlooking one of them can easily lead to failure of a project.

**MBR: Do local SMEs and business start-ups have the capacity to grow an understanding of what it entails to procure EU Funding?**

**DM:** Yes for sure, in fact many SMEs have participated and where successful in acquiring such funds. The key to success is to have the right support in developing your project or concept. The aim of this event is actually to show that support is available and also guide the attendees in the right direction for acquiring help.

**MBR: Why is "European Funding for SMEs - Info day on Horizon 2020" event important?**

**DM:** Every SME in Malta is eligible for most of the funding programmes presented in this event and therefore the event is important for all SMEs and third parties working with SMEs. Even SMEs who are not currently seeking funds may in the future end up needing funds to support new concepts and products.

**MBR: Do you feel your work is of value to SMEs? If so, how can we discover it?**

**DM:** Over the past 15 years Ateknea has helped more than 600 SMEs all over Europe develop their ideas and concepts into commercial solutions. Unlike large corporations who can afford to have departments focused on acquiring funds, SMEs require a tailored service that is complementary to their resources. Throughout our 15 years of service we have tailored our offerings to become the best in Europe in acquiring EU funds and assisting SMEs implement their projects from start to finish.

**MBR: Finally, why and who should attend "European Funding for SMEs - Info day on Horizon 2020" B2B networking event and information seminar, including the interactive workshop?**

**DM:** The event will benefit all SMEs and anyone working in close collaboration with SMEs. The information which will be shared at the event will be essential for anyone who is developing disruptive innovation and is interested in funding. Moreover, third parties can continue to share the knowledge they acquire from this event with their clients to continue supporting the growth of European SMEs. **MBR**

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#### EDITOR'S NOTE

David Micallef is the Regional Director of Ateknea Solutions Malta. David started working with Ateknea as a Research Engineer before taking the lead of the company in the Maltese office in 2014. He has worked on more than fifteen projects with the company and has written several successful proposals for EU funding. He has experience in all the stages of European projects including project management, reporting and auditing.

Lorraine Tagliaferro is an Innovation Manager at Ateknea Solutions Malta. Lorraine has over ten years of experience working in EU projects as a project manager and assisting SMEs in forming their ideas and writing successful projects. She is very active in the SME Instrument and has experience in guiding SMEs to the right topics and instruments for funding.