

## How SMEs can leverage power of the Internet

### Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises are referred to as SME although the size definition of SME varies – e.g. in the US, an SME is a company with revenues of US\$10-15 million whereas in India it could be 1/10 of that! However, interestingly, SME business needs are the same across the globe. This article looks at how SMEs given their resource constraints, can leverage the power of the internet and enhance their business at relatively minimal cost.

### What SMEs need

SMEs require many types of resources and assistance across their business – e.g. business contacts, financial resources, process and standards definitions, training, coaching and mentoring, clarifications on compliances and governance, legal, human resources, partnerships, administrative and business support services, best practices and many other such needs. While a lot of useful resources are found online, it takes effort to find such resources and stay engaged to derive suitable benefits.

### Business networking and DIY templates

This is the simplest need of an SME to get connected to other organizations, people, industry associations and resource institutions. Some good examples are [us.smetoolkit.org](http://us.smetoolkit.org) for ready to use tools and templates (US), [www.smeweb.com](http://www.smeweb.com) (UK), [india.smetoolkit.org](http://india.smetoolkit.org) (India), [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) for business networking in the US, [www.xing.com](http://www.xing.com) for business networking in EU etc. An interesting portal to check out is <http://smetrade.283808.free-press-release.com/> which is actually a free press release distribution service that has access to lot of useful resources and news. FISME and several SME associations also run a portal called [www.smenetwork.net](http://www.smenetwork.net) to promote business networking for Indian companies.

### Corporate Services, Marketplaces and IPR

SMEs often look for online marketplaces and there is plenty to choose from – e.g. [www.smetradecenter.com](http://www.smetradecenter.com) has got a list of several trade websites for SMEs. There are also online trade centers that mimic a complete marketplace including creating online showcases for products – a good example is [www.smetc.com](http://www.smetc.com). In India one could check out [www.tradeindia.com](http://www.tradeindia.com), [www.indiamart.com](http://www.indiamart.com) and [www.indiatradezone.com](http://www.indiatradezone.com). For publishing trade catalogues and microsites that are aligned to an industry vertical, one can try [www.sme.in](http://www.sme.in). For SME trademarks and patents services, try [www.wipo.int/sme/int](http://www.wipo.int/sme/int).

### Banks and financial resources

SME Banks are popular in countries like Malaysia and Pakistan e.g. [www.smebank.com.my](http://www.smebank.com.my). In India, one can find SME portals – e.g. [www.sme.icicibank.com](http://www.sme.icicibank.com) or specific lending institutions for SMEs such as SIDBI – [www.sidbi.in](http://www.sidbi.in). There are VCs who focus on SMEs – e.g. [www.aavishkar.org](http://www.aavishkar.org) and [www.acumenfund.org](http://www.acumenfund.org) to provide micro equity funding. Canara Bank has a unique program with SME marketing managers that help SMEs get proper credit rating, funding, project appraisal and in adding value to supply chain – <http://www.canarabank.com/English/scripts/PCsmeMarketingUnit.aspx>

### Training and certification

SMEs also look for training and certification – good examples of such resources include the MSME institutes set up by the Government of India which not only provide training and certification but also help with trade events and business networking. A good example is [www.msmehyd.ap.nic.in](http://www.msmehyd.ap.nic.in) or [www.nimsme.org](http://www.nimsme.org)

### SME marketing, research and rating

There are specialist firms that work with SMEs on marketing – e.g. TjL Marketing [www.tjlmarketing.co.uk](http://www.tjlmarketing.co.uk), Marketing on a Shoestring [www.marketingonashoestring.co.uk](http://www.marketingonashoestring.co.uk) and for marketing consultants one can visit [www.hotfrog.in](http://www.hotfrog.in). For research firms that work with SME, visit <http://www.marketing-intelligence.co.uk/> and [www.kaybase.com](http://www.kaybase.com) and for SME rating agencies visit [www.smera.in](http://www.smera.in).

### IT and related services for SMEs

There are several IT service providers also focusing on SMEs – good sites to visit include [www.nbzit.in](http://www.nbzit.in), [www.busy.in](http://www.busy.in), [www.agile-labs.com](http://www.agile-labs.com), and almost any large IT vendor's site that have specific SME products and services. Emerging popular sites includes sites that provide software and hardware on tap – e.g. iDuple and Zoho etc. In addition to IT products, there are several IT enabled services available for SMEs who cannot afford to have in house staff – good examples are self service sites for travel, ticketing, insurance, car rentals and many other such services that are targeted at SMEs – e.g. Google Maps is one of the most commonly used service by many individuals & companies.

### Summary

As one can see, there are several useful resources and services (not all free) that are available for SMEs on the internet. It does take some time and patience – however, if want a good deal as an SME with limited resources, it is worth becoming a little internet savvy and spending some quality time getting familiar with these organizations and services. Finally, if you want a list of SME's in India, you can buy one on [www.niir.org](http://www.niir.org) ! BTW, most of these companies are SMEs themselves....