

Building partnerships as value proposition

SMEBOOK

Institution: Q4i Consulting
Country: Spain
Type of partnership: HEI-SME partnership
Website: smebook

Background

Q4I is a Spanish tech-based SMEs that provides support to adapt high-tech companies to future value chains by means of the development of digital collaborative systems which facilitate the emergence of open innovation spaces.

Its main product SMEBOOK, which is an AI-based open innovation platform where European technology-based companies and their employees can intelligently connect, communicate and exchange resources and information. It has been developed in collaboration with universities and used in several EU projects.

SMEBOOK aims to provide the Industry with a smart Innovation Hubs builder, which allows for setting up ecosystems so that companies can find partners and customers and gain visibility in the market.

Story

Q4I Consulting was founded by the interviewee, Basilio Fernández. Since its foundation they have participated in European projects that led to their main product: SMEBOOK.

Mr. Fernández worked in the aerospace industry as an engineer. He faced difficulties which pushed him to developing a platform underpinned by AI that provided the technology to generate open innovation ecosystems so that companies could share capacities.

Stakeholders

The SMEBOOK is aimed at technology-based companies and those entities that work with them along and across industry and sector-specific value chains facilitating the innovation process, such as universities, clusters or hubs:

- Madrid Aerospace Cluster (MAC)
- Fighting COVID-19 Innovation Hub
- Go2Space HUB - Madrid
- Global Cloud Digital Innovation Hub - Málaga

Additionally, the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid as HEI and other institutional support as the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation rewarded the company with the "INNOVATIVE SME" accreditation.

The European Commission has also provided Q4I with funding so that SMEBOOK could be used in European projects to foster cross-border and cross-sectoral collaborations among SMEs.

"The company is built upon European projects results"

Resource needs

Resources include:

- **Access to funds: private or public.**
 Capital market is narrow and slow. In the private sector, investment funds are not familiar with this sort of companies. Regarding public funds, for a small startup, it takes a lot of effort to apply to open calls, which also has decreasing success rate.
 Adapt the regulation so that the processes for calling European projects are accessible to a greater number of companies.
- **A strong ecosystem to generate a network of contacts**
 Not only for avoiding cold door strategies such as email communication, but for the efficiency of the action: contacting the right person and the right moment makes the difference between waste or success.
- **Access to Knowledge for the development of the platform SMEBOOK.**
 It is very important to rely on alliances of HEI or RC to develop upon knowledge to provide the best experience ever.
- **Skill training for the human resources of the company,** generating a well-trained and agile team, is essential for participation in European projects.

Outputs

- Strategy definition for engaging the traditional industry ecosystem towards knowledge economy. (Ended in 2018, first EU project for Q4I)
- SMEBOOK platform
- Q4I accredited with "INNOVATIVE SME" seal
- UIIN 2021 Annual Conference recognition under the category of "Outstanding Practitioner": "SMEBOOK, a one stop platform for open-innovation". Recognition shared with Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, as knowledge partner and user of the platform.

"For Horizon Europe, skills and experience in European projects are highly recommended."

PLATFORM ATTRIBUTES



Intelligence-based

It is supported by a matchmaking algorithm capable of recommending best-fit partners to client .



Cutting-edge technology

It is devised to cope with the most demanding requirements regarding computing science, upgradability, resilience, user experience, security and storage needs.



Dynamic and scalable

Marketplace allowing for sharing tech offers and demands categorised into sectors, lines and all the way down to hundreds of technologies.



Motivations

- Obsess with technology and connections, Basilio Fernández, driver for launching the company was the generation of a platform to generate innovation ecosystems covering a market gap.
- The collaboration with the university brings access to multidisciplinary and complementary knowledge.
- The participation in European projects allows for:
 - The generation of a network of contacts necessary for then platform to achieve significant growth that will give the company competitiveness
 - Access potential funding

Barriers

The main barrier is operational agility. While the SME has to be very agile both in decision-making and in strategy, commercialization and development, HEI or RC have different maturity requirements more related to the long term.

Administrative protocols of the public knowledge generators.

Difficulties to get university staff to be actively involved in projects developed by SMEs. Regardless the knowledge intensity of the question, an SME or startup raise less interest than a big company problem.



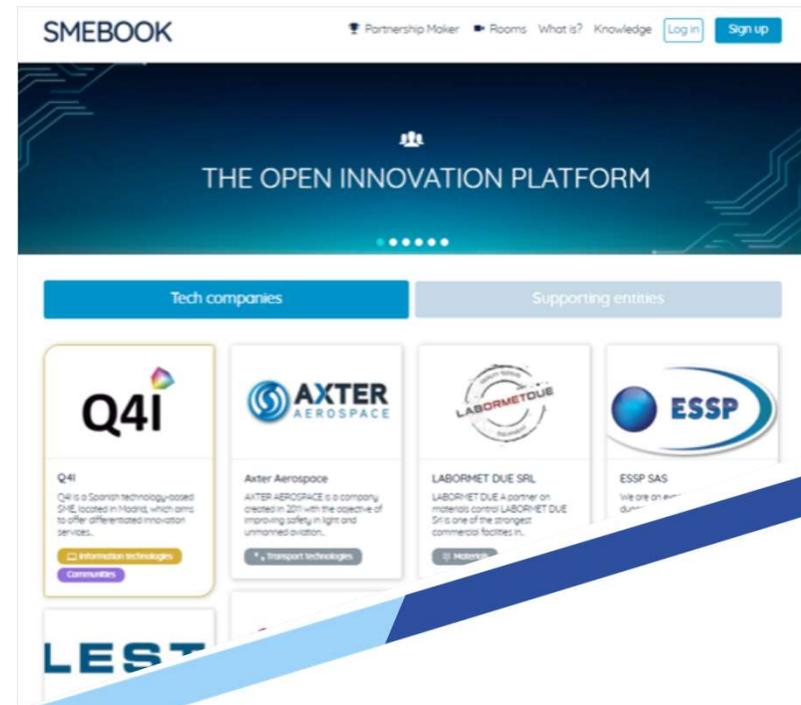
Basilio Fernández in a round table about innovation trends. (Source: Invertia. El Español)

“Strong alliances bring collaboration and commitment to the project”

Key success factors

- 1 Knowledge intensive product or service**
 As is the only way to provide value and remain competitive in the long term.
- 2 Strong alliances**
 Fluid communication channels with the university, through the Leganés Science Park or access to research groups.
- 3 Experience in European projects**
 Awareness of the consequences of participating in them, such as financing and access to knowledge (technological innovations, knowledge of the current market, etc.) implying a technological surveillance of the market.

SMEBOOK web page (credit: SMEBook)



“Find the most suitable partners to boost your business potential”

Author: María José Herrero Villa; Ester Martínez-Ros; José Luis G. Sacristán. (Uc3m team project)

Interviewee: Basilio Fernández. CEO