

Chapter 44

Euroalert.net: Aggregating Public Procurement Data to Deliver Commercial Services to SMEs

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to describe a use case of information re-use in the field of public procurement in the European Union (EU). It describes how the lack of a pan-European information platform providing one single access point to EU public procurement notices, hampers the access for companies to this market, especially for SMEs. To bring one possible solution to this significant issue, Euroalert.net— a company powered by open data –, is currently developing commercial services fuelled by the re-use of public sector information (PSI) related to public procurement. The chapter also describes 10ders Information Services (10ders IS), a Euroalert.net R&D project aimed at building a pan-European platform to aggregate public procurement information data generated by hundreds of thousands of contracting authorities in the EU.

INTRODUCTION

Euroalert.net (Euroalert.net, 2012) (ISSN 1988-3382) is a brand owned by Gateway Strategic Consultancy Services, S.L. (Gateway, 2012), which is focused in delivering innovative and cost-effective information services. These innovative

services are designed to add value to public sector information generated within the framework of public contracts published by government bodies in EU Member States, as well as within the activities and policies developed under an EU general framework. Euroalert.net monitors, processes, and stores information in four main areas:

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3886-0.ch044

1. News about EU Institutions activity,
2. EU Legislation,
3. EU Funding opportunities and
4. Public Contracts issued in EU Member States.

The use case described in this chapter is specifically focused on public procurement information which, by itself, is a big challenge to be solved in order to provide new customized services to organizations and companies across Europe. Once processed, all data about public procurement is indexed, enriched, mashed-up and repackaged to deliver products under the brand *10ders*, mainly focusing in SMEs market.

Although they might seem apparently unrelated, there are two main driving forces in this context which are crucial in order to understand why Euroalert.net decided to meet the challenge and build such a platform to contribute to a more competitive EU single market. These two elements are, on the one hand, the EU political determination to modernise and simplify public procurement rules as a way to support growth and employment (European Commission, 2011) and, on the other, the development of the European Commission Open Data Strategy (European Commission, 2011b).

BACKGROUND

Modernising European Public Procurement Market: Situation and New Developments

Government bodies and public administrations as a whole are the most important buyers in the European Union, since all their purchases are estimated to represent around 19% of EU Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the lack of a pan-European information service which would provide one single access point to this huge market of business opportunities estimated by the

European Commission at more than €2,406.98 billion in 2010 (European Commission, 2010), is seen as a key obstacle for companies willing to get access to them, especially in the case of SMEs.

Since 2008, the European Commission has made significant efforts in order to improve European public procurement market, making it more transparent and efficient. The “Small Business Act for Europe” adopted in June 2008 (Commission of the European Communities, 2008, p. 394), already highlighted the need to make the public procurement environment more SMEs friendly and to facilitate access for these type of companies to this huge market. This target, which was one of the ten principles identified by the Commission to bring added value, create a level playing field and improve SMEs business environment; was then developed by the “European Code of Best Practices Facilitating Access by SMEs to Public Procurement Contracts” (European Commission, 2008, p. 2593).

As an important part of the European Single Market, public procurement in the European Union has been in the agenda as a way to create growth and improve competitiveness. In his Report to the President of the European Commission on a new strategy for the Single Market, ex commissioner Mario Monti (Monti, 2010), highlighted some of the problems for governments and businesses to fully enjoy the benefits of a strong public procurement single market as well as the gains that could be obtained by lowering barriers to procurement, especially by improving access to cross-border procurement. Furthermore, the role of procurement as a driver for trade has not only been advocated within the EU single market, but also at a global level. This has been the case, e.g., for the deal on the Plurilateral Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) reached within the World Trade Organization in December 2011 (World Trade Organization, 2011) and to which the EU is also signatory.

However, one particular concern within the European Union is the fact that, despite the level

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