

CEOs of SMEs

The competitiveness of the European digital industries relies on the entrepreneurial and innovative potential of European SMEs. SMEs are indispensable for the uptake of digital technologies and therefore have a crucial role to play in their local digital ecosystem. SMEs innovate, develop digital technologies and carry out the activities required for the implementation of the digital agenda of their territory. A wide variety of approaches exist for SMEs to collaborate, build and sustain relationships with key partners in order to drive forward a digital ecosystem.

Facilitating the innovation process

SMEs are the bedrock of the European economy. They are often the source of new, disruptive innovations and are critical to growth and job creation.

However today SMEs are under pressure. Rising competition forces them to innovate better, faster and with fewer means. There is no doubt that digital technologies can help SMEs to improve their innovation performance as they impact operational processes and customer experiences.

CEOs of SMEs should therefore **adopt and invest in digital technologies in order to improve the competitiveness of their firms**. They should also **seek to cooperate with other stakeholders in the ecosystem**, by for example joining collaborative research projects organised by intermediary organisations and clusters, in order to develop new applications.

Closing the gap

Digital technologies have the potential to transform productivity in the workplace.

Yet, this potential will remain unrealised if the workforce does not possess the adequate skills (e.g. big data analytics, cloud computing, mobile technologies and digital security).

SMEs are consistently confronted to a lack of digital talents. CEOs of SMEs have therefore a key role to play in **advancing the digital capabilities of their employees**. In order to do so, they can **get involved in industry-academia collaboration** and **roll out specific trainings** either in-house or outside the company to upgrade the digital skills of their employees.

Benefiting from big data

Technology has now advanced to the point where CEOs of SMEs can now access big data their firm produces and do something with it. Yet, they are still confronted to a series of challenges among which the issue of data protection and the lack of digital talents.

Collaborating with other stakeholders in the digital ecosystem such as digital firms and academia can help CEOs of SMEs to find solutions to these challenges. Experts will help CEOs to identify what data are to be kept or dumped for example. They can also help designing the tools necessary to correlate information coming from multiple sources.

Unleashing the potential of SMEs

Similarly to larger companies, SMEs need access to high-quality digital infrastructure such as fixed and mobile broadband services in order to succeed. This is particularly true in a world where business is increasingly conducted online.

It is therefore critical that CEOs of SMEs **inform local authorities about their infrastructure needs**. If SMEs are to stay competitive, they should for example stop experiencing poor coverage or prohibitively expensive business packages of uploading and downloading services.

CEOs should also seek to **develop partnerships with local investors in order to unlock investments in digital infrastructure**.