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The Yritysuomi (EnterpriseFinland) Portal as a One-stop-shop for Public Information to Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in Finland

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Abstract

The aim of this presentation is to describe the Yritysuomi (EnterpriseFinland)¹ portal, a public online service and portal for enterprises in Finland. The portal provides access to public services providing assistance in issues such as setting up a business, growth and development measures and international business activities.

A strategic objective in developing public services for enterprises is to have 70% of customer contacts electronically by 2012. As it is essential, that the portal itself provides the information in a customer oriented and easy manner, it has been discussed whether the semantic web could be of help here.

The portal was marketed to users in a campaign “Finland in the Web” that was organised to improve citizens’ knowledge of services and information available online. The campaign involved over 1500 library and public service point employees in the 280 participating municipalities.

¹ <http://www.yrityssuomi.fi/>, <http://www.enterprisefinland.fi/>

The aim of this presentation is to describe the present state and plans for future development of the YritysSuomi (EnterpriseFinland)² portal, a public online service and portal for enterprises, entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs in Finland. The portal provides access to public services providing assistance in issues such as setting up a business, growth and development measures and international business activities.

Some Facts About Finland

*Some basic facts about Finland:*³

Population:	5 236 611	(2004)
Capital:	Helsinki	
GDP per capita:	\$36 751	(2005)
GDP by sector:	services 62.9%	
	industry 32.7%	
	agriculture & forestry 4.3%	(2004)
Enterprises (excl. primary production):	231 600	(2004)
- of which SMEs	99.7%	(2003)
R&D expenditure as share of GDP:	3.4%	(2004)

High-tech exports represent a share of 24% of all manufacturing exports. The main industries are information and communications technologies electronics (ICTs), engineering and metal products, pulp & paper, chemical products and shipbuilding. Most enterprises however are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). According to the European Union's definition of SMEs (less than 50 employees) 224 100 of Finnish enterprises are SMEs, 93% of them employing less than 10 persons and nearly two-thirds employing less than two persons. There are approximately 3 100 amount of medium-sized enterprises (50-249 employees) and approximately 4 000 is 3 100 and the number of 1 large companies (more than 250 employees). is approximately 4 000.

Finns think well of education, and the younger generation in Finland are among the most highly educated in the world. Science and engineering enrolment ratio among tertiary-level students is 39%. In OECD's PISA study of learning skills among the 15-year-olds, Finland has reached top positions in all three assessments (2000, 2003, 2006).

² <http://www.yrityssuomi.fi/>, <http://www.enterprisefinland.fi/>

³ A Development Track Adds Finnish Business Services to World Lead, MTI Publications 19/2005, Ministry of Trade and Industry 2005 (only in Finnish); Finland as a Knowledge Economy, World Bank Institute 2006

Since the year 2000, Finland has repeatedly been ranked in the top ten by several international competitiveness comparisons.⁴ Finland's success is not based on natural resources, but rather on education, technology, well-functioning public institutions (e.g. practically no corruption), openness of the economy and its integration within international trade blocs. Modern elements of success are things like network readiness, research, innovation and creativity, equal opportunities for all individuals (free education for all, 66% of women between 15 to 64 years old are employed) and environmental sustainability.

Why a Portal?

There are approximately 3.1 million Internet users in Finland in the age group from 15 to 79 years. Looking at professional groups, 100% of the students use the Internet, and of clerical workers, entrepreneurs and leaders, 95% use the Internet regularly. When people were asked of their perceptions on public Internet services, most people thought, that while although the use of public online services is likely to reduce the amount of public service points, it makes it faster and easier to do business with public authorities, improves the enterprise's competitiveness and saves the customer's costs.⁵

The use of both the ICT and the Internet has proliferated rapidly in SMEs, and 91% of enterprises use the web for interaction with the public sector, among other things. According to an autumn 2005 survey by Statistics Finland, 75% of Finns use the Internet on average 7.,8 hours per week. Of enterprises with at least five employees 73% had a broadband connection in early the spring 2005, and 65% had home pages. Large enterprises have a broadband connection more often than small companies (94% with more than 100 employees 100+ versus 64% with less than 9 employees 9-). In the spring of 2006 there were 1,1 million broadband connections in Finland.⁶

The government has the policy objective of enhancing the broadband capacity but, the government does not directly provide for the infrastructure in order to but to ensure the neutrality of the technology and the free functioning of the market, the government does not directly provide for the infrastructure. The Finnish government has, on the other hand, facilitated the ICT usage and diffusion by investing in the ICT equipment and providing public services on the Internet.

⁴ for example WEF (World Economic Forum), IMD (International Institute for Management Development), GITEI (Global International Technology-Economy Index), EIU (Economist Intelligence Unit, e-readiness rankings)

⁵ Taloustutkimus Oy, Internet Tracking – Internetin käyttö Suomessa (The Use of the Internet in Finland) – a survey ordered by the Ministry of the Interior

⁶ <http://www.laajakaistainfo.fi/english/today.php>

Both the technological infrastructure and people's attitudes and abilities are favourable for online services. It is worth mentioning, that 71% of people in working life use the Internet for banking business.

As 99.7% of all the enterprises are small and medium sized, it is clear, that there is a great need for different kinds of business services.

The Yritysuomi Portal

The Yritysuomi portal is available in Finnish and in Swedish (both official languages in Finland), and its English version EnterpriseFinland is a service aimed at immigrant entrepreneurs. The portal is produced and coordinated by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and managed by the SME Foundation (PKT-säätiö).

The Yritysuomi online service provides information on the obligations towards the public authorities that need to be taken into account when setting up an enterprise and acting as an employer. There are topics on how to establish a business, how/where to get public funding for an enterprise, and information about accounting, taxation and audit, employer obligations and the rules of the Finnish working life. There is also situational advice, for example when a change of generation or owner is due in a family business.

On an average month, the portal's Finnish section has some 55 000 visits (between 35 000 and 74 000, with the Finnish holiday month July as an exception, only 25 000 visits). The English pages are visited between 8 000 and 18 500 times a month, and the Swedish speaking visits are around 5 000 a month.

The most popular search words have been *business plan*, *start-up money*, *form of enterprise*, *taxation*, and terms for different forms of enterprises.

Information providers for the portal at this moment are

- Employment and Economic Development Centres (TE-keskus), regional authorities, where the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Agriculture give service and advice on matters concerning their respective fields of expertise
- The Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (TEKES)
- The Finnish National Fund for Research and Development (Sitra)

- Finnish Industry Investment Ltd (Teollisuussijoitus, a government-owned investment company)
- Finnvera plc, a state-owned financing company
- Finpro, a consulting organisation for companies that need services for internationalisation

The YritysSuomi portal was established in 2002, and since 2003 it has been developed as part of both the Finnish government's Information Society Programme and the Entrepreneurship Programme, two of the four policy programmes of the present government.⁷

The portal can be seen as part of a group of electronic public services aimed at different users:

- suomi.fi portal (finland.fi), public information for citizens
- lomake.fi (form.fi), public sector online forms and e-services for both citizens and companies
- yritysSuomi.fi (enterpriseFinland.fi), public information for companies

Future Development of the Portal

Presently the portal gathers useful advisory and contact information for SMEs. A recent report outlines the future development of the portal as part of a complete range of business services. The aim is to provide these services in a more interactive and customer-oriented manner. These services would include

- Internet service built on the enlarged and technically renewed YritysSuomi portal
- New web tools for self analysis, for example for planning and updating of a business plan
- Broadened contents of the portal's English version (now only 20% of the Finnish version is translated into English)
- New information providers for the portal, e.g.
 - The Foundation for Finnish Inventions (Keksintösäätiö)
 - National Board of Patents and Registration of Finland (Patentti- ja rekisterihallitus)
 - Finnish Tax Administration (Verohallinto)
- A national contact centre for acute problem solving and for finding relevant experts

⁷ The policy programmes cover the most important inter-sectoral subject matters in the Government Programme. Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's government launched four policy programmes that are each led and coordinated by a minister responsible for the programme. These are

- Information Society Policy Programme (led by Prime Minister)
- Employment Policy Programme (led by Minister of Labour)
- Entrepreneurship Policy Programme (led by Minister of Trade and Industry)
- Civil Participation Policy Programme (led by Minister of Justice)

- A nationwide regional network of business services for mainly business start-ups and micro as well as small enterprises. These service points provide information service, evaluate the customer's service needs and find providers for further services. - The Yritysuomi portal should be seen as a source of information for both entrepreneurs and these service points.

In the future, the Finnish business service system needs simplifying: the current system is complex and based on service products and organisations producing business services rather than on problem solving in a customer oriented manner. The public sector will evaluate the service need, act as a conveyor and provide actual service only by the market failure principle in order to avoid any market distortion, as we have a lot of knowledge intensive business services on the market.

The English version of the portal, which is presently aimed at immigrant entrepreneurs, is planned to, in the future, serve also companies that are considering of investing in Finland.

As for the Yritysuomi portal, it will be enlarged by adding information providers for example by engaging actors from the private sector in developing electronic business services. Several projects have already been started to ensure, that the services provided by different actors and offered in the Yritysuomi meet both customer needs and technical requirements. Some of the projects are based on public-private partnership. The technical and information architecture and the procedures required by online public services are also coordinated in these projects, taking into account several simultaneous development projects in electronic public services.⁸

A strategic objective is to have 70% of customer contacts electronically by 2012. As it is essential, that the portal itself provides the information in a customer oriented and easy manner, it has been discussed whether the semantic web could be of help here. The semantic web would probably make it easier for information seekers to find associated services and information from the multitude of the contents, as the classification of information contents is based on ontologies that describe a concepts relation to other concepts (e.g. a part of an entity). This work is being done already in the Suomi.fi (Finland.fi) portal (building ontologies), and these experiences can be of help in developing other public service portals.

⁸ <http://www.yrityssuomi.fi/liston/portal/page.lsp?r=5428> and <http://www.yrityssuomi.fi/liston/portal/page.lsp?r=5058>

YritysSuomi.fi Portal and (Public) Libraries

As large enterprises have a broadband connection more often than small companies, it is important, that the information that is in the web is known and available to all.

Recognising this, the Information Society Programme⁹ organised a campaign “Finland in the Web” in the autumn 2005 to increase citizens’ understanding of services and information available online. The campaign involved over 1500 library and public service point employees in the 280 participating municipalities. Library employees were trained to conduct free tutorials on electronic services: participants learned how to use services provided by public authorities, such as YritysSuomi.fi, and other services like the electronic bank etc.

Libraries in Finland are free for users, whether they come as individuals or as enterprise employees. Every municipality in Finland has a public library, and the Finnish library personnel are highly educated: they have been educated at the university level from the 1970’s. According to the Finnish library law, a library director must have a higher university degree and at least 35 study credits in librarianship. Furthermore, at least 2/3 of the other staff must have a certain minimum level of studies in librarianship. – This is one of the reasons, why it is possible to make good use of the public libraries in enhancing the use of public online services and educating people how to use them.

Finnish learn to use their libraries at the latest when they start going to kindergarten, and they are world-record library users: they lend more than 20 books, cd's and other items per inhabitant in a year. Every Finn visits a library more than once a month, statistically.

According to the library statistics¹⁰, in 2005 there were 62,441,388 physical library visits, 47,079,380 web visits and 2,332,604 borrowers in Finnish public libraries.

⁹ <http://www.infosoc.fi> , <http://www.vn.fi/toiminta/politiikkaohjelmat/tietoyhteiskuntaohjelma/en.jsp>

¹⁰ <http://tilastot.kirjastot.fi/default.aspx?langId=en>