



FUTURE e-COMMERCE

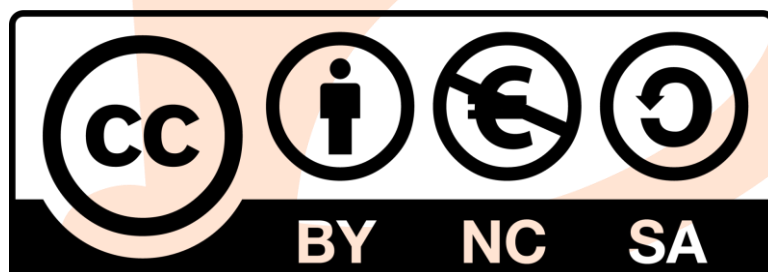
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*Guidelines: Rural Area
Craftsmen Promoting
Education in Europe on
a New Green Economy
Model Based on E-
commerce*

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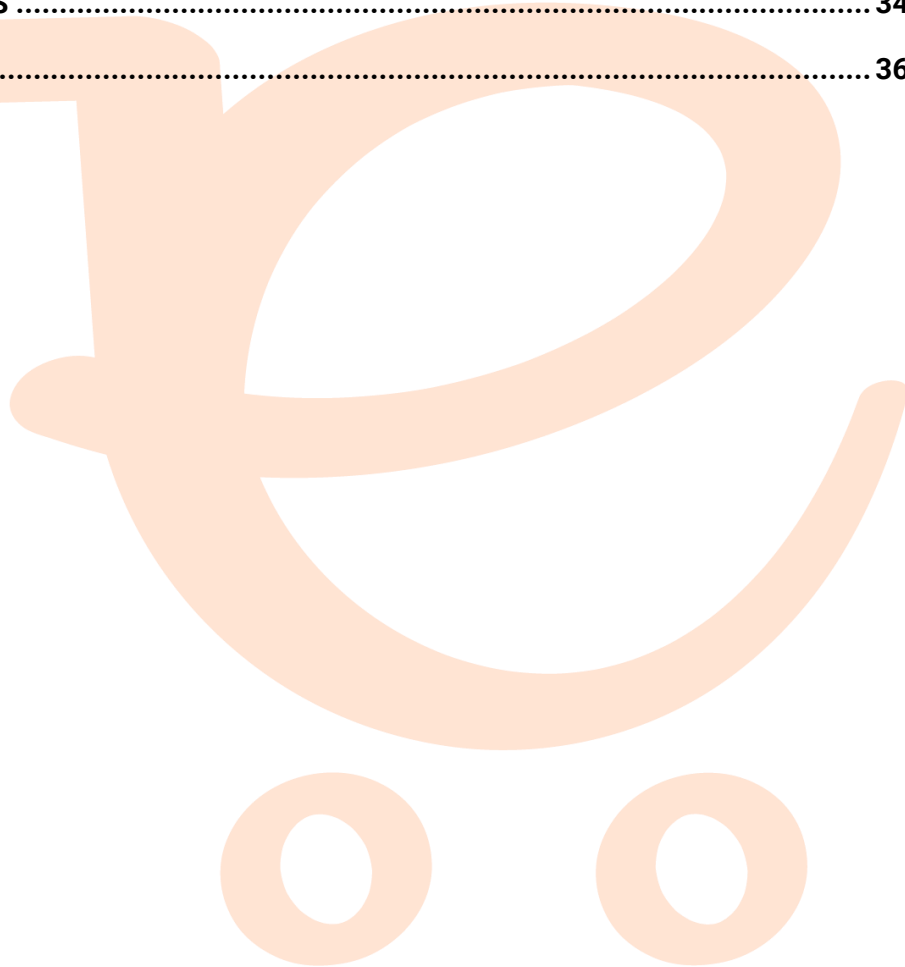
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	4
1.1. Purpose of the Guidelines	4
1.2. Target Audience	5
1.3. Context: Rural Craftsmen and the Green Economy	5
1.4. Defining the Green Economy	7
1.5. E-commerce as a Tool for Sustainable Business	9
1.6. Opportunities for Rural Craftsmen.....	10
2. DEVELOPING A GREEN E-COMMERCE.....	12
2.1. Setting Sustainable Business Goals	12
2.1.1. The Importance of Setting Clear Goals	12
2.2. Choosing the Right E-commerce Platform.....	14
2.2.1. Criteria for Choosing the Right E-commerce Platform.....	14
2.3. Creating a Green Brand Identity	15
2.4. Sustainable Packaging and Shipping	16
3. BUILDING YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE	18
3.1. Designing an Eco-friendly Website	18
3.1.1. What Is Sustainable Web Design?.....	18
3.1.2. Benefits Of Sustainable Web Design	18
3.1.3. Some tips for sustainable web design	19
3.2. Product Photography and Descriptions.....	20
3.2.1. Product Photography	20
3.2.2. Product Description	21
3.3. Storytelling: Showcasing Your Craft and Green Practices	23
3.3.1. What is storytelling for?	24
3.3.2. The advantages of online storytelling.....	24

3.3.3. Storytelling: create your own story.....	25
3.4. Social Media Strategies for Rural Craftsmen.....	26
3.4.1. Why Is It Important to Have a Social Media Strategy?	27
4. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES	29
4.1. Introduction	29
4.2. Examples	30
5. CONCLUSIONS	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY	36



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose of the Guidelines

Small Rural businesses often lack the footfall and the on-the-doorstep support networks of their city-based counterparts. This creates unique challenges around recruiting staff, transportation and access to advice; how can rural businesses overcome barriers to growth and to be connecting with the expertise they need?

Rural businesses are unlikely to benefit from having access to the same size of local customer base as urban areas, unless they're near busy roads or in villages that attract a lot of visitors, so it's common for them to look online to generate trade.

The purpose of this guidelines is to show and describe the sustainability strategy agreed by the FUTURE E-COMMERCE project partnership and the analysis of sustainability potential of the project results. It is one of the core results of work package 4 within the Erasmus+ project Future e- Commerce "The Future will Come with e- Commerce" (Project N° KA220-VET-6D660ED7), co-funded with the financial support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission.

The Virtual Guide and the Handbook Training programme & Collaboration platform for Small Craftsmen piloted, evaluated and improved during the project lifetime will become core part of the training offer of the organizations involved in the project. All partners will exploit and use this training material in the daily work of their organizations.

The Training materials developed using digital skills in the VET system for training and learning aimed at Small Craftsmen in rural areas. In particular, the project aimed to develop the Electronic Commerce Manual for Small Craftsmen in Rural Areas and the Cooperation Platform between Small Craftsmen with the Virtual Network for Training in Electronic Commerce.

This is a platform for the design of multimedia learning content for Digital transformation for Small Craftsmen, therefore they offer free and not commercialized in their actual format, but they can be further adapted, developed and updated in the years after the end of the project and will be proposed for accreditation by some of the partner organizations and for mainstreaming in the vet education systems in each country.

In summary, the sustainability guidelines related to activities aim to achieve the following objectives:

- Continuing further dissemination (keeping the online tools and channels open for 5 years).
- Developing ideas for future cooperation among partners and other stakeholders.
- Contacting relevant EU consortia dealing with similar issues.
- Ongoing cooperation with the policymakers that have been contacted during the project.
- Updating project information on the EU dissemination platform.

Also, these guidelines offer support and guidance to the target group by providing:

- Advice and support for establishing and/or improving their business through a wide range of digital tools
- Allow the participants to “take time” from their hectic schedules in order to reflect and evaluate their businesses and move forwards in a productive way.
- To enhance their competences to better support Craftsmen and at their small rural business and foster their IT skills and competences and successful induction into their rural workplaces.
- To bring together good practices regarding the Green Economy in the Consortium countries and the European Union.

1.2. Target Audience

The training needs of the target groups of the project are Small Craftsmen who run or plan to run micro/family rural tourism businesses (pensions, farm-stays, restaurants, village inns, camping or guest houses, etc.), VET education providers with high exploitation and sustainability potential of the project output.

Aimed at vet learners (tradesmen & small shopkeepers in rural areas), the sustainability guidelines for “The Future will Come with e-Commerce” must ensure a good mix of background information and experience along with an active involvement of the chambers of tradesmen, local people, business NGOs, people who want to learn e-commerce, Community Centres, Representatives from Municipalities, Training Centres, Young People, so they know about the project and can incorporate materials to their professional practice, and an environment promoting the gain of learning experience.

However, the methodological indications in this and the following materials are only sustainability and exploitation recommendations and guidelines; VET trainers are encouraged to adapt them to specific target groups of “Vet trainees/ vet learners” and to consider cultural and regional opportunities and particularities, specifically to the artisans who are working in the rural area of different countries due to COVID-19.

1.3. Context: Rural Craftsmen and the Green Economy

Fighting against the flight of population from rural areas to cities and efforts to reduce territorial inequalities relies mainly in rural development. In this context, crafts are crucial to combat depopulation; the role of crafts on a global level has accrued importance at present, both for developing countries and for rural development in general. Governments and institutions are increasingly trying to promote rural development to fight against the flight of the population from rural areas.

Crafts is considered an important tool for local economic development and job creation. Craft production can be defined as the production of “an item that fulfils a function, requires the use of hands to create and uses materials identified as natural”. Craft is a highly sustainable activity; contributes positively to job creation; and tourism development. Tourists have expressed their interest in the local traditional crafts of the areas they visit, promoting heritage conservation and restoration activities, employment

creation and improvement incomes for the local population living near historic environments.

Besides, it can also encourage a better use of materials and processes an environmentally conscious attitude, on the other hand, crafts often have local identity as a differentiating element, due to knowledge of the context in which craft is developed, cultural response, holistic practices or production the local community to which the handicrafts belong.

The European Network of Rural Artisans, which defines crafts as “part of the economy, due to their capacity to generate employment, as an element of social cohesion in the territories and as a potential tourist resource and distinctive culture resource of the counties”. Moreover, according to creative tourism allows a bridge between local and global creativity to be established, a key aspect, to encourage innovation and community development, being especially important for local communities.

Therefore, the emergence of green tourist crafts in rural areas, provided by local people, is a source of subsistence or economic well-being that is linked to growing tourism being craft itself, most of the time, a motivation for tourism development.

With regard to the environmental aspects, it was possible to demonstrate that craftsmanship can achieve the best possible work performance without damaging the environment, conserving biodiversity and helping poorer communities to access higher incomes. Arts and crafts can therefore be a sustainable business. In this sense, crafts are a cleaner, more sustainable and ecological activity than industrial activities, such as, for example, the production of craft beer; fashion designs; papermaking; jewellery processes; or the use of wood waste to treat grey water.

The rural green tourism economy in Europe is an important field that offers tourists the opportunity to enjoy nature and the countryside, interact with locals and participate in authentic rural life. Implementing environmentally sustainable green tourism practices will help conserve natural resources and reduce the environmental impact of tourism.

The rural green tourism, proving that it has significant potential for promoting the development of rural areas and stimulating the economy.

This issue is of practical importance, as the growing popularity of rural green tourism creates a demand for hotel, restaurant, excursion and other entertainment services, which can lead to the creation of new jobs, regional economic development and the preservation of cultural and traditional aspects of rural communities.

Encouraging the development of local entrepreneurship and crafts can contribute to preserving the authenticity and economic development of rural areas. Rural green tourism can become a forum for cultural exchange between tourists and local people, promoting mutual understanding. A balanced approach that takes into account infrastructure needs, environmental sustainability, cultural aspects and the participation of local communities is key to the successful development of rural green tourism in Europe.

Thus, ecotourism fosters the appearance of handicraft markets, and tourists show interest in touring the villages and visiting the handicraft markets, finding that many were

willing to pay much higher rates than those proposed by the communities. Another example of this is artisanal recipes. In many cases, the typical foods of numerous rural regions have been considered to have a clear impact on rural development.

Concerning the popularity of handicrafts in the rural world, it has been discovered that the relationship between rural development and handicrafts is addressed in rural development projects in various parts of the world. In Europe, LEADER actions are used to implement rural development strategies.

In conclusion, it is interesting to establish correlations between the concept of craftsmanship and the concepts of sustainable development, poverty alleviation, economic development of rural areas and care for the environment, as well as relating the subject of Crafts and SDGs, Crafts and Circular Economy.

Another important line would be to determine how new digital technologies such as 3D printing, E-commerce and new tools are relevant to the design and production of new craft-related products and services.

Likewise, as stated in this guideline's introduction, we should underscore the importance that these concepts have acquired in recent years and the interest on the part of governments in encouraging certain actions to achieve development goals in the future, particularly as solutions for what is called 'emptied Spain' (depopulated rural areas).

1.4. Defining the Green Economy

A green economy is defined as low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive. In a green economy, growth in employment and income are driven by public and private investment into such economic activities, infrastructure and assets that allow reduced carbon emissions and pollution, enhanced energy and resource efficiency, and prevention of the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The role of Green Economy, Sustainable Consumption and Production and Resource Efficiency for Sustainable Development: Sustainable Consumption and Production aims to improve production processes and consumption practices to reduce resource consumption, waste generation and emissions across the full life cycle of processes and products – while Resource Efficiency refers to the ways in which resources are used to deliver value to society and aims to reduce the amount of resources needed, and emissions and waste generated, per unit of product or service. The Green Economy provides a macro-economic approach to sustainable economic growth with a central focus on investments, employment and skills.

Greening the rural economy is central to increasing decent employment opportunities, enhancing resource and labour productivity, and fostering poverty eradication and social inclusion. Through its Green Jobs Programme, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has a growing track record in policy advice, project implementation and institutional development to support its constituents in efforts to turn environmental challenges facing rural economies - including natural resource degradation, growing resource scarcity, and the negative impacts of climate change on productive assets, livelihoods and populations - into opportunities for sustainable development. Yet knowledge, policy and implementation gaps remain in moving towards a more systematic and

comprehensive strategy that links environmental sustainability issues with all dimensions of the Decent Work Agenda. With its technical expertise, tools and means of action, the ILO is well placed to advocate for and promote greater integration of the principles of decent work and environmental sustainability into rural development strategies.

Jobs are green when they help reduce negative environmental impact, ultimately leading to environmentally, economically and socially sustainable enterprises and economies.

More precisely, green jobs are decent jobs that:

- Improve energy and raw materials efficiency.
- Limit greenhouse gas emissions.
- Minimize waste and pollution.
- Protect and restore ecosystems.
- Support adaptation to the effects of climate change.

More info at:

www.ilo.org/greenjobs

The policy interventions proposed below would benefit a wide range of actors and stakeholders in rural communities: agricultural producers, service providers, local authorities, local entrepreneurs, trade unions, youth and women's groups.



Figure 1. The Green Jobs Programme Cycle. More info at: http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/projects/asia/WCMS_218885/lang-en/index.htm

1.5. E-commerce as a Tool for Sustainable Business

The three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, economic and social) can be integrated within the e-commerce sector to make it more sustainable.

E-commerce is so much more than just a new way of doing business, it is a new paradigm and some even state that it is imperative to maintain competitiveness. Furthermore, as e-commerce is growing, there is still questions about how the e-commerce can be sustainable from an environmental, economic and social perspective.

Since the consumption behaviour of today is not always sustainable, there are some incremental changes that companies can do to embrace a more sustainable development. Mainly, companies need to inform the customer on why to choose more sustainable products, what the products can contribute with, and how the products or the company itself affect the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainability. If so, it increases the customer's knowledge and awareness regarding the sustainability, and as a result, it can create emotional attachments and thus change the purchasing behaviour.

By starting with an economic incentive which pushes customers to think and explore options, it can result in getting the customers more involved and informed about the environmental and social dimensions of sustainability as well, and thus they will be given the opportunity to contribute to a more sustainable world. This could create a link and collaboration between the customers and the companies, as protecting the environment, economize with resources and making societies strong, is everybody's responsibility.

So, what are the trade-offs between the three dimensions of sustainability from an ecommerce perspective?

ECONOMIC	ENVIRONMENTAL	SOCIAL
E-commerce enables a global reach of consumers and generates a wider availability for companies	When reaching consumers worldwide, the transportation routes to consumers can be significantly increased.	Due to globalization, the competition and thus the pressure is a lot higher. Forces the companies to often compete with prices and "less sustainable products".
E-commerce technologies permit a high degree of personalization, making it easier to attract consumers on individual levels.	Individualistic consumption behaviour increases number of parcels, transshipments and transports overall and thus leads to higher emissions.	Due to companies might shut down their stores for economic profit, physical store labours might risk losing their jobs, which is not good for their social settings.
E-commerce benefits companies through cost reductions in forms of not	Since the consumers cannot evaluate the products before getting	By dismissing physical stores, the face-to-face interaction with

<p>having any physical stores, and increased flexibility to meet customer requirements.</p>	<p>them delivered, they might discover that they do not want them and send them back. This gives an increased number of transportations with appurtenant greenhouse emissions.</p>	<p>consumers will be lost, and thus it might be more difficult to earn trust and loyalty. Consequently, the trade-off is between making cost-savings or having important social interactions with consumers.</p>
<p>Being available on the ecommerce gives an extended reach of consumers worldwide, which creates more opportunities for sales</p>	<p>Since companies now are crossing borders, the number of regulations and laws have increased, which companies must follow.</p>	<p>Old packages are not appreciated from the consumers, and consumer satisfaction and loyalty are of most importance. The trade-off is thus, risking consumer satisfaction and instead be environmentally friendly, or the other way around</p>
<p>E-commerce enables a global reach of consumers and generates a wider availability for companies</p>	<p>When reaching consumers worldwide, the transportation routes to consumers can be significantly increased.</p>	<p>By crossing the national borders, the e-commerce enables a link between developed and developing countries that can raise the social settings in developing countries.</p>

1.6. Opportunities for Rural Craftsmen

Digital transformation is a great opportunity for rural municipalities and mountain regions. For example, online professional meetings encourage remote work, which reduces the relocation of labour to urban centres. In addition, projects such as an e-commerce website bringing together the village's shopkeepers. This kind of tools contribute to strengthening the attractiveness of local craftsmanship and maintain value creation in the village. Thanks to a simple technological solution, customers can, for example, shop autonomously outside of opening hours, often concentrated in the morning.

The goal is to teach the fundamental aspects of digital transformation without overburdening the schedule of personnel. Rural tradesmen staff, in particular, are often already working at the limits of their capacity, and digitalization represents a colossal additional task. In this context, a several-month-long continuing education program would have a rather discouraging effect.

Hence, the cost benefits and importance of digitalisation of rural entrepreneurship must be clearly understood and be encouraged as this will be an important promotional tool for strengthening company brand. The concept of digitalisation will improve and bring new changing trends in emerging markets including rural industries and scale up product development and product diversification, as well as promoting idea generation through use of Facebook, company emails, Company Tweets and Instagram.

In conclusion, new approaches to enhance innovation and invention within rural businesses are required in the contemporary world of business, and a broad knowledge and understanding of digital technology, how it can be used, when it can be used, where it can be used and why it is used, by rural entrepreneurs should be properly defined in order to achieve this. Promotional marketing strategies using digital technology should be a central issue, and their benefit should be better understood by business owners and managers worldwide. Access to global markets, efficient distribution of products and higher brand awareness can also provide competitive advantage and ensure effective business communication.



2. DEVELOPING A GREEN E-COMMERCE

In this section, we explore the steps needed to develop a sustainable and eco-friendly e-commerce strategy, tailored for businesses in Romania. With a focus on reducing environmental impact, we address key areas such as sustainable business goals, platform selection, eco-friendly branding, and sustainable packaging and shipping.

2.1. Setting Sustainable Business Goals

Establishing clear and measurable sustainability goals is a crucial step in creating a successful green e-commerce strategy. These objectives allow businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices that not only meet customer demands and legal regulations but also contribute to environmental protection. Romanian businesses should define specific goals to address major issues such as reducing carbon footprints, minimizing waste, and supporting ecological initiatives. These goals must align with European Union policies, such as the European Green Deal, and cater to the needs of both local and global markets.

2.1.1. The Importance of Setting Clear Goals

Well-defined goals create a framework for decision-making and provide clear direction for the entire organization. They can be monitored and measured, allowing businesses to adjust strategies based on progress. Additionally, they enable companies to communicate more effectively with their partners and customers about their sustainability commitments, adding value to the brand and fostering long-term trust.

These possible goals could be:

ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY: REDUCING CO2 EMISSIONS AND ENERGY CONSUMPTION

A primary goal for e-commerce businesses should be to reduce their carbon footprint. This can be achieved by identifying and implementing measures to reduce CO2 emissions, particularly in production, distribution, and logistics processes. Here are some ways businesses can reduce emissions:

- **Optimizing Transport Processes:** Using courier services with "green" delivery options (such as electric vehicles) or choosing rail or sea transport for long distances, which have a lower environmental impact.
- **Reducing Energy Consumption In Operations:** Businesses can implement energy-efficient solutions such as eco-friendly lighting and heating systems in warehouses and offices or use renewable energy sources like solar panels.
- **Digitizing Documentation:** By minimizing paper use and switching to fully digital solutions, companies can reduce indirect emissions related to paper production and document delivery.

Goals should be measurable, for example: "Reducing CO2 emissions from transport by 20% over the next two years." This approach will

provide businesses with a concrete way to monitor progress and adjust strategies if necessary.

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY: ADOPTING RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES AND SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAINS

In the long term, businesses should focus on integrating renewable energy sources and sustainable practices into their supply chains. A sustainable supply chain involves working with suppliers who adhere to environmental and social standards and ensuring that raw materials are sourced and transported with minimal environmental impact.

- **Incorporating Renewable Energy Sources:** Companies can invest in green energy technologies, such as solar or wind power, to power distribution centres or offices. They can also purchase green energy from local suppliers.
- **Collaborating with Eco-Friendly Suppliers:** Replacing traditional suppliers with those who practice sustainable production methods can reduce the carbon footprint of the entire supply chain.
- **Circular Economy:** Adopting a circular economy model, where materials and resources are reused and recycled, contributes to waste reduction and the protection of natural resources.

Concrete goals for this category could include: "Ensuring that 50% of suppliers use renewable energy sources by the end of 2026."

ENGAGING CUSTOMERS: PROMOTING ECO-CONSCIOUS BEHAVIOR

Actively engaging customers is essential for the success of a sustainability strategy. E-commerce businesses can educate and encourage customers to adopt eco-conscious behaviour by offering green products and educating them about the benefits of sustainability.

- **Offering Eco-Friendly Product Options:** Promoting eco-friendly products, such as those made from recycled materials or with a lower environmental impact, is an effective way to attract eco-conscious customers.
- **Sustainable Packaging:** Offering recyclable or biodegradable packaging options can encourage customer participation in waste reduction efforts.
- **Loyalty Programs for Eco-Conscious Customers:** Offering rewards or discounts to customers who choose low-impact delivery options or return packaging for reuse.

A goal in this area could be: "Increasing sales of sustainable products by 30% over the next 18 months."

ALIGNING WITH EUROPEAN UNION POLICIES

European policies, such as the European Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan, provide a crucial framework for Romanian businesses seeking to set sustainability goals. These policies encourage the transition to a low-carbon economy, promote the circular economy, and support environmental initiatives across the continent. Businesses that align with these policies not only comply with legal regulations but also benefit from financial support and a positive public image.

2.2. Choosing the Right E-commerce Platform

Selecting the right e-commerce platform is essential for companies aiming to implement a green e-commerce strategy and meet sustainability goals. In an ever-expanding market, e-commerce platforms are not just tools that facilitate online sales but also channels through which businesses can reduce their ecological impact.

For businesses in Romania, evaluating and selecting e-commerce platforms should be based on their ability to support eco-friendly initiatives, offer tools for monitoring sustainability performance, and be scalable and flexible without compromising sustainability.

2.2.1. Criteria for Choosing the Right E-commerce Platform

ENERGY-EFFICIENT HOSTING

One of the first criteria to consider is energy-efficient hosting. E-commerce platforms that use "green" hosting providers are powered by renewable energy, directly contributing to reducing a business's carbon footprint. Platforms that collaborate with eco-friendly data centers or implement green energy solutions are best suited for companies looking to minimize their environmental impact.

- **Green Hosting Providers:** Some platforms, like Shopify and BigCommerce, partner with eco-friendly hosting providers that use solar, wind, or other renewable energy sources to power their servers. These data centers have lower energy consumption and offer solutions for optimizing resource use.
- **Environmental Impact:** According to a report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), data centers are responsible for approximately 2% of global CO2 emissions, comparable to emissions generated by the aviation industry. Therefore, choosing a platform that uses eco-friendly hosting can have a significant positive impact on the environment.

SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES

Another important aspect is the availability of tools to monitor and improve ecological performance. Many modern e-commerce platforms offer specific tools for companies that want to monitor their sustainability and make adjustments to reduce their environmental impact.

- **Carbon Offset Calculators:** Some e-commerce platforms, such as Ecwid and WooCommerce, allow the integration of tools that help calculate and offset carbon emissions generated by production, transport, and delivery processes.

These calculators help businesses be transparent with customers about their ecological impact and offer offset options, such as tree planting or funding green energy projects.

- **Monitoring Sustainable Performance:** Shopify, for example, offers detailed data and analysis on carbon emissions and energy use in the supply chain, as well as recommendations for optimizing logistics and reducing waste.

SCALABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

An efficient e-commerce platform must be scalable and flexible to adapt to business growth without compromising sustainability goals. Platforms that can support high volumes of transactions and orders without proportionally increasing energy consumption or emissions are ideal for businesses expanding into international markets.

- **Sustainable Scalability:** Sustainable scalability means not only the platform's ability to grow in terms of transaction volume but also maintaining a minimal environmental impact. For example, Magento and Salesforce Commerce Cloud offer energy-efficient cloud computing solutions that allow business expansion without unjustified resource consumption.
- **Flexibility In Integrating Eco-Friendly Solutions:** A flexible platform should easily allow the integration of eco-friendly solutions, such as partnerships with green logistics providers, recycling programs for packaging, and payment methods that support sustainability initiatives. BigCommerce, for example, allows a wide range of integrations with third-party solutions that support green logistics and sustainable returns.

2.3. Creating a Green Brand Identity

Building a green brand identity is crucial for attracting eco-conscious consumers and standing out in an increasingly competitive market. Brands that adopt sustainable practices and communicate them effectively to their customers are perceived as more credible and socially responsible. A green brand identity not only helps companies improve their reputation but also contributes to real environmental protection. For Romanian businesses, creating a green brand can become a significant competitive advantage, especially given the growing global trends toward sustainability.

COMMUNICATING VALUES

The first step in creating a green brand identity is clearly communicating sustainable values. Businesses should highlight their environmental commitments in all marketing materials, on websites, in product descriptions, and in social media campaigns. It is essential that the message is honest and authentic, as consumers are increasingly aware of greenwashing – pretending to have environmental commitments without backing them with real actions.

- **Clearly Expressing Efforts:** Companies should transparently showcase how they reduce waste, improve energy efficiency, and cut down on carbon emissions.

- **Educational Campaigns:** Providing information to customers about the importance of eco-friendly products and how these choices contribute to a healthier environment can stimulate brand loyalty.

CERTIFICATIONS AND ECO-LABELS

Obtaining ecological certifications is another effective way to strengthen a green brand's credibility. Internationally recognized certifications help consumers recognize the real efforts of a company to be sustainable. These demonstrate a commitment to strict environmental standards and offer additional assurance that the products or services provided are truly eco-friendly.

- **FSC certifications (Forest Stewardship Council)** for paper or wood products ensure that materials are sourced responsibly, protecting forests and biodiversity.
- **Organic and eco-friendly labels** for food and cosmetic products guarantee that these are produced without harmful chemicals, adhering to organic farming standards.

These certifications not only improve the brand's reputation but also offer a competitive advantage in the eco-friendly product market, especially in a global economy where consumers are increasingly aware of product impacts on the environment.

OFFERING SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

A green brand should actively promote sustainable products, which are ethically sourced, eco-friendly, or made from recycled materials. Romanian companies can diversify their product ranges by:

- **Products Made from Recycled Materials:** For example, clothing made from recycled fibres, packaging made from recycled plastic, or furniture from reclaimed materials.
- **Low-Impact Products:** Long-lasting products that require fewer resources during production and generate less waste can become a strong selling point for a green brand.
- **Supporting Local Producers:** Encouraging local production reduces carbon emissions from transportation and supports the circular economy.

2.4. Sustainable Packaging and Shipping

Sustainable packaging and shipping are essential components of a green e-commerce strategy, as they significantly impact the environment. Businesses that adopt sustainable methods in these areas can reduce waste, conserve resources, and minimize their ecological footprint. In a globalized e-commerce world, transportation is one of the largest sources of carbon emissions, and excessive packaging contributes to the growing problem of plastic pollution.

ECO-FRIENDLY PACKAGING MATERIALS

A key element of sustainability in e-commerce is using eco-friendly packaging materials. Companies must ensure that their packaging is recyclable, biodegradable, or even

reusable, thereby reducing the amount of waste that ends up in landfills or the environment.

- **Biodegradable Packaging:** Materials such as recycled cardboard, corn starch packaging, or mushroom packaging are eco-friendly solutions that break down quickly without harming the environment.
- **Eliminating Single-Use Plastic:** Businesses should eliminate the use of single-use plastic in their packaging and opt for alternative solutions, such as recyclable paper bags or compostable wrap.

OPTIMIZING PACKAGING SIZE

Another important aspect is optimizing packaging size. Many businesses ship small products in oversized packages, leading to resource waste and increased shipping costs. Packaging should be appropriate for the product size and minimize empty space, thereby reducing the need for filler materials and transportation volume.

- **Customizable Packaging:** Using adjustable packaging systems that allow customization based on product size can significantly reduce waste and shipping costs.

CARBON-NEUTRAL SHIPPING OPTIONS

Shipping is one of the largest sources of emissions in e-commerce. One solution to reduce this impact is partnering with green logistics companies that offer carbon-neutral shipping options or eco-friendly transportation methods.

- **Carbon-Neutral Transport:** Some logistics companies, such as DHL and UPS, offer carbon offset programs, allowing customers to reduce or neutralize the emissions generated by transport.
- **Electric Vehicle Delivery:** Adopting electric vehicle fleets for local deliveries can significantly reduce CO2 emissions in cities and urban areas.

By implementing these strategies, businesses in Romania can contribute to environmental protection and create a more sustainable business model in e-commerce. A green brand identity and an eco-friendly supply chain not only help reduce environmental impact but also enhance public perception of the company, attracting eco-conscious customers.

3. BUILDING YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

3.1. Designing an Eco-friendly Website

According to some estimates, digital is responsible for almost 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions and could reach 14% of the total by 2040. In addition, the growth speed of the ICT sector and the increase in the use of digital devices are putting pressure on energy resources and causing unsustainable energy waste.

The digital world has a significant impact on the environment but to date it is still poorly addressed: is it possible that the ongoing digital revolution is compatible with environmental sustainability?

This question deserves a deep reflection and introduces us to a concept such as sustainable web design: in light of what has been said, it becomes increasingly important and fundamental in the development of one's site. Indeed, it should become an essential practice for companies that want to reduce their environmental impact and contribute to safeguarding the planet.

3.1.1. What Is Sustainable Web Design?

Sustainable web design is an approach to website architecture that seeks to minimize their environmental impact and maximize their energy efficiency. It aims to create websites that are both aesthetically pleasing and functional, but also environmentally sustainable.

This approach involves thinking about a website from the very beginning not only in terms of aesthetics and user experience, but also of energy efficiency.

Sustainable web design, making practical examples, influences some decisions that are at the basis of the conception and creation of a website: choosing one hosting rather than another, evaluating which colours to use, influencing graphic choices.

3.1.2. Benefits Of Sustainable Web Design

Sustainable web design offers several benefits, not only from an environmental point of view. In fact, it can also contribute to the success and online competitiveness of the company, as well as leading to cost savings.

Here are the main benefits of sustainable web design:

- It contributes to the reduction of the carbon footprint generated by online activities, thus also contributing to the objectives of the UN 2030 agenda.
- It reduces energy costs and website hosting by up to 10%.
- It increases positioning on search engines, thanks to a more performing site.
- It improves the user experience thanks to reduced loading times.
- It allows you to report the digital sustainability path in the sustainability report and improve your ESG ratings.
- It helps to create awareness and increase the company's reputation.

3.1.3. Some tips for sustainable web design

There are many ways to design and maintain your website in a sustainable way. From resizing images to choosing green hosting, sustainable web design tips are numerous and can help you create an efficient and eco-friendly website.

Here are some tips to get started designing and managing a sustainable website:

GREEN HOSTING

Green hosting is a form of web hosting that uses renewable energy sources to power servers, thus reducing the environmental impact of web hosting. Choosing green hosting can be an effective way to reduce the carbon footprint of your website.

Today, with an ever-increasing focus on sustainability, it is not difficult to find green hosting services with competitive prices compared to traditional ones.

DARK MODE

The brighter the screen, the more energy it consumes. Not only that: colours also impact the energy consumption of devices. Did you know that the white colour on an OLED screen can consume up to 6 times more energy than the black colour?

So, choose darker colours when creating a website, or at least allow users to activate or deactivate a dark mode.

OPTIMIZE IMAGES

Images can have a big impact on the performance of your website. Large and unoptimized images can slow down the website loading time and increase the consumption of server resources, thus contributing to the environmental impact of the site.

It is therefore necessary to:

- **Compress Images:** There are numerous tools available, even free ones, that allow you to reduce the weight without losing quality;
- **Use more recent and performing formats,** such as webp, which are better optimized for the same quality;
- **Use Images of Adequate Size:** Does it make sense to use a high-definition image for a small box on the site? And to have a smartphone download a 4k image, when it has an average width of 440px?

CONTENT STRUCTURE

The structure and hierarchy of content are also important for sustainable web design. A good content structure can help website visitors find the information they are looking for more easily, thus reducing the time needed to navigate the site and therefore the consumption of server resources. In addition, a good content structure can also improve the user experience and ease of use of the website.

It is important to decide on a simple and functional structure and organize the contents into easily identifiable sections, also using internal links in the correct and useful way to connect related contents to each other.

3.2. Product Photography and Descriptions

3.2.1. Product Photography

Product photos for online stores are essential because they allow the customer to orient themselves in the purchase. At the same time, the images to be inserted in the catalogue of the e-commerce site are the visual narration of the store, they arrive before the words and it is unthinkable to manage an e-commerce business without the visual representation of your offer.

Costs and performance of the photographs vary based on the methods of finding the products, but what matters most is being able to satisfy the customer's expectations.

Three ways to have perfect photos for an Ecommerce and some tips to follow to take quality photos:

- **Upload Photos from The Supplier:** For online stores that sell products purchased from a supplier, as in the case of drop shipping, help can come from the supplier himself who, being interested in selling as many products as possible, often makes professional photographs of the goods available to his customers. Once the images have been received, you simply need to upload them to the site and to all the digital touchpoints of the store, such as social profiles. Photographs are also an excellent tool for enriching other content, such as newsletters, and in general they can be helpful in implementing marketing strategies to attract new customers.
- **Hire A Photography Agency:** It is not always possible to find product photographs: an alternative solution is to hire a photography agency, or simply a photographer, who takes care of taking them. The costs vary based on the quantity of images and the type of need, for example, a simple product photo has lower costs than setting up a photographic set with models and scenery. Turning to professionals guarantees the quality of the images, especially if agencies with experience in the advertising field are involved.
- **Take Product Photos Independently:** If there is no budget to invest in this activity, you can consider taking photos with your smartphone or with a camera. The photographic compartment of the latest generation smartphones today is more than sufficient to take excellent photographs. The only costs to bear are those to purchase a minimum of necessary equipment: a tripod to take stabilized and well-defined photos and a kit to recreate a small photographic laboratory. As an alternative to the kit, you can use a space in your premises, as long as it is well lit and has a white background, which can also be recreated with a sheet. Once you have all the necessary tools, all you have to do is start taking photos of your e-commerce products!

It is best not to give in to the temptation to use product images found online. There are several reasons why this is not recommended:

- They are often of poor quality: The images may be grainy and the details that interest the customer will not be clearly visible;
- They do not have a homogeneous style: The product photos downloaded online are different from each other in every aspect: from the background to the quality, including the size and the light used for the shot;
- They could be covered by copyright: Copyright is made explicit by means of a watermark, i.e. a logo or writing printed on the image that identifies its ownership.

Ultimately, we can conclude that photographs for e-commerce are an essential tool that replaces, and does not make you regret as much as possible, the experience in physical stores. Together with exhaustive and timely descriptions, they present the products and guide people in the purchasing process. In a context in which images are increasingly central to people's daily lives, think for example of the main social networks, they have a fundamental role in increasing sales and gaining the trust of online customers.

3.2.2. Product Description

Describing the products on your e-commerce site in the best possible way must be part of a broad copywriting and content marketing strategy, which is able to lead customers to conclude a purchase.

The purpose of describing a product is to provide your customers with a valid reason as to why it is worth spending money to buy it.

Not only that, the information in the product description for e-commerce is also necessary to be able to provide customers with a more complete overview of the proposed object, describing its main features and advantages.

Yet, despite the importance of product descriptions for e-commerce, it is not an uncommon mistake that is noted in various online stores, that is, creating a description: anonymous or, even worse, copied from the one provided by the brand or parent company, or not very attractive and functional for sales.

3.2.2.1. The Difference Between A Good And A Bad Description Of E-Commerce Products

Surely, a good or bad description is determined by the sector it belongs to, by the target audience, by the product you want to sell.

There is no unique formula, but only optimal practices, which allow you to create the best possible description in relation to the product, the customer and the brand that offers it.

There are cases in which, if a product is quite explanatory, such as a white men's shirt, it is not necessary to use imagination or create Pindaric descriptions that are of no use to anyone.

In other cases, however, when we are talking about peculiar products and intended for a limited target of enthusiasts, a more in-depth description is necessary to convince them that that is the right product to carry out a certain activity or to satisfy a need.

A “bad” e-commerce product description, therefore, is one written without thinking about the customer, the product and the brand’s tone of voice.

Descriptions: copied, banal, without really useful information, excessively complex to understand, an end in themselves, do not help to sell or help the customer to make a choice.

A good description is one that neither more nor less gives the user what they want to know about a certain product.

Tip: if you read the description of a product but still have questions that have not been answered, or you feel confused by what is described, then that is a bad description!

To be able to create an optimal and persuasive product description for your e-commerce, we have decided to illustrate 8 tips to always keep in mind:

- **Define The Profile of Your Buyers:** The first step to writing a good product description is to understand and outline the profile of potential buyers for a given product.
- **Features And Benefits to Motivate the Purchase:** Combining the benefits with the features and technical characteristics of the products, in reference to your buyer personas, allows you to obtain maximum conversions, as they will help you attract your target audience by convincing them to make a purchase.
- **Use Sensory Words:** Sensory words can help, in some cases, to increase the appeal of a product. Of course, you have to be very careful about which ones you use and how you insert them in the text. According to David Ogilvy, there are some words that can increase the persuasion of a description. Among the words that we can mention are: Surprising, Revolutionary, Magical, Sensational, New, Innovative, etc.
- **Create A Tone of Voice That Identifies You:** Another important aspect is the tone of voice of the brand, this must also be respected within the descriptions. For example, if you have a brand with a sparkling and youthful tone of voice, the product description must also reflect these characteristics. If instead you are ironic, you could use a bit of irony even within the descriptions. If your brand is sensual, your descriptions must be too.
- **Take Care of The Readability of The Contents:** A very important aspect in the descriptions is also given by the readability of the contents. The contents of the site must be as readable as possible both from the PC and from the smartphone. Having a nice description that is difficult to read is truly a waste of resources and energy. If possible, always remember to use spaces between sentences and include a bullet list for the advantages and main features of the product.
- **Optimize Content for Search Engines:** A good description is primarily important for the buyer, but it also becomes essential for the SEO of e-commerce and its positioning on search engines. The keywords inserted within the product descriptions help the positioning of the page for certain search intents. For

example, if you are searching for: XXX sports watch, using this keyword and its related ones in the product description (always paying attention to the readability of the text) can improve the positioning possibilities of the page. The advice is to insert the main keywords for a product: In the title of the Page; In the meta description of the page; In the Alt TAG of the images; In the product description.

- **Use Social Proof:** Another very important tool to be able to lead potential customers to make a purchase is to use social proof within the product descriptions. Social proof, i.e. the opinion of users who have made a purchase, can be a good approach to increase the appeal of the product. For example, you could include a quote from a customer review in your description, or you could include phrases like “Customer Favourite” or “Most Positively Reviewed by the Press.”
- **Make The Most of Images Along with Your Description:** Words are important, yet 63% of studies show that consumers consider images to be one of the main drivers that lead them to complete a purchase. Combining a good description with images or a video, therefore, can be the winning formula for getting the most out of both tools. Again, depending on your brand and the product you sell, you could apply a short description for each image. Or insert the product description into a video that allows you to see how to put it into action.

3.3. Storytelling: Showcasing Your Craft and Green Practices

E-commerce is more popular than ever. This is, of course, good news for retailers, but at the same time it also means that competition is getting stronger every day. Storytelling is a useful way to make your store and products stand out from the competition and thus increase sales and brand awareness.

In e-commerce, storytelling is a marketing strategy that is used to increase the value of a brand by giving it a story.

Storytelling is effective because it appeals to our innate instinct to tell and listen to stories. It also manages to awaken our emotions, which, according to marketers and psychologists, are what really push us to make a purchase.

Giving a story to your online store and your products creates a completely different perception by customers.

If your online store has a story behind it, it becomes a store with character that manages to stand out from the competition.

Storytelling can be done not only with words, but also with images or videos.

One of the giants of sports, Nike, knows perfectly the potential of storytelling. The following video was sponsored by Nike and went viral (over 31 million views). The slogan is “*Make It Count*”:



Figure 2. Nike “*Make It Count*” Campaign: <https://youtu.be/WxfZkMm3wcg>

3.3.1. What is storytelling for?

The value of an object is influenced by the story behind it.

In e-Commerce, storytelling leverages precisely this: telling a unique and interesting story that captures the attention of customers and gives value to a product or brand.

Your intent must be to evoke emotions that motivate your visitors to make a purchase.

In this way you can stand out from the competition and your customers will also be willing to spend more, because they will have the impression of buying something exclusive and with value.

For e-Commerce, storytelling is therefore a powerful weapon.

3.3.2. The advantages of online storytelling

- **Build More Trust:** Trust is one of the most important factors in ensuring a high conversion rate. In addition to showing reviews and a quality seal, telling the story behind a product or brand helps to build trust in your online store.
- **Stand Out from The Competition:** Since there has been a boom in online sales, the e-Commerce landscape has also expanded. For this reason, standing out from the competition has become more difficult. Focusing on price as a differentiator is not profitable in the long run. A cheaper and more profitable method is to take advantage of the “About us” page. Make sure that this page

(which is visited much more often than you might think) reports the following points:

- What you offer.
 - Why you opened your e-Commerce.
 - What distinguishes you from competitors.
 - Who is part of your team.
 - What are the values that represent you.
 - Show your potential customers why they should buy from you before they have even decided that they want to buy something, this will increase your chances of selling.
- **Strengthens Brand Awareness:** There are countless online stores that try to convince buyers to buy from their e-Commerce. With storytelling, not only do you stand out from the competition and create trust, but you are also perceived as a brand. Creating your own store as a brand has several advantages: You can produce your own products; You can ask for a higher price; Customers are more likely to identify with your store and become loyal fans; The value of your store will increase because you will no longer be just a store, but a strong brand.

3.3.3. Storytelling: create your own story

Do you sell handcrafted bags? Tailor-made shirts? Leather belts?

Whatever product you sell, there will probably be hundreds, if not thousands of artisans who sell more or less the same product.

This should not demoralize you, but rather push you to create something better, something unique.

SEO, Google Ads, Facebook Ads, Instagram or any other web marketing strategy cannot give you any guarantees: an advertising campaign is not enough to sell online.

You have to give people a reason to prefer your products, and to do that you need a story.

You do not sell a product, you sell the solution to a problem, which could be not getting your feet wet when it rains or looking elegant at a business dinner.

This is storytelling: a strategy at the base of modern marketing.

Thanks to storytelling, companies like Apple, Ikea, or Coca Cola have become famous all over the world, entering people's minds by promising change.

Ikea does not sell furniture, but a lifestyle, Apple does not sell computers but a different way of working and studying.

What is your story? Behind every product there is a story, a human connection that links art to manufacturing traditions, to the culture of the workshop and its artist, whose

knowledge is often passed down through generations. Recovering this storytelling is important, especially for today's consumers who make more conscious purchasing choices that are more in line with their ethical and sustainability values.

The combination of storytelling and social media can help reach an audience, even a niche one, all over the world, to whom it is possible to make the value of the artisan work behind the product perceive, thanks to the story of the techniques and materials used. This story also serves, in the case of first contact with a new audience, to stand out from industrial products and get noticed among competitors. For artisans it is particularly important to highlight, with storytelling on social media, the connection to the territory and local culture, given that this factor, especially for the international public, is very relevant. Finally, thanks to the daily nature of the interaction, the product can be projected into the lives of potential buyers, who will then be more encouraged to buy.

For craftsmanship, often made of products that are long-processed with traditional techniques and therefore very expensive, it is even more important to contextualize the product in a story that potential buyers can make their own.

In this sense, storytelling does not mean telling the stories that customers want to hear, or simply nice stories about the product, but selecting and telling stories related to the brand, which resonate in a particular way in the lives of potential buyers.

Storytelling therefore serves to tell stories of exclusivity, due to the niche nature of the products, they are stories shared by the public, because they speak of aspirations and emotions that are part of their lives. All this can be done with texts, photos or videos.

You can tell different types of stories, that is, stories that talk about homemade, elegance (you can understand it from the ambient photos), territoriality, tradition (telling how your products are born thanks to photos and videos of people at work; handmade, created with the same tools used in the 1800s, etc ...), craftsmanship (showing behind the scenes of production, with people at work and stories of the design process).

Nature is another element that must be very present, both for the materials used and for the lifestyle and it is an element that serves to make people understand the origin of your creations. With the work in progress and the explanations of how the pieces are born, stories of art and exclusivity are told.

Another element can be the sharing of the human element, telling your fears, successes, uncertainties. This helps to create an emotional bond with your customers, which goes beyond the simple commercial relationship and, for this reason, has much more value and duration.

3.4. Social Media Strategies for Rural Craftsmen

First of all, a Social Media Strategy is a detailed plan that guides the activities and actions of a company or brand on social media to achieve specific marketing and communication objectives.

It is, therefore, a summary of everything we plan to do on social media, with a strategic and thoughtful approach, which takes into account various factors (analysis of the reference market, competitors, target, etc.).

It is a useful document to collect the objectives set (in a SMART way), the strategy designed to achieve them and the metrics and KPIs that will be taken into consideration to measure the progress made.

The key to an effective Social Media Strategy is to align and converge the activity (and strategy) defined for social channels with the overall company objectives, such as increasing brand visibility or increasing sales.

A Social Media Strategy includes:

- Competitor analysis.
- Target and buyer personas analysis.
- Definition of smart goals.
- Definition of kpis.
- Creation of an editorial plan with related contents.
- Planning and publishing posts.
- Performance monitoring.
- Growth strategies.

3.4.1. Why Is It Important to Have a Social Media Strategy?

First of all, it allows you to define clear objectives: a well-planned strategy helps to establish specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) objectives, ensuring that every action on social media is oriented towards achieving these objectives.

Secondly, it allows you to know and segment your target audience, identifying the ideal and desired audience and creating content that resonates with them.

Furthermore, a Social Media Strategy helps you choose the right platforms: not all social media are suitable for every business, and a strategy guides you in selecting the platforms that best align with your target and business objectives.

Consistency of content is another crucial point; a detailed strategy ensures that the tone, style and frequency of posts are uniform, helping to build a recognizable and trustworthy brand image.

Finally, with a strategy, you can monitor and measure results: the use of analysis tools allows you to evaluate the effectiveness of campaigns and make timely changes to improve performance.



Figure 3. Video guide on how to create your social media marketing strategy: <https://youtu.be/9M00a7mi0oU>



4. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

4.1. Introduction

Rural areas of Turkey and Europe have both great cultural richness and economic potential for small artisans and businesses. However, the long-term success of these businesses is closely linked to their adoption of digital transformation and green economy models. Artisans who are limited to traditional methods can find the opportunity to open up to both local and international markets with digitalization. The studies conducted within the Future E-Commerce project show how rural artisans can transform their business models by effectively using sustainability principles and digital platforms.

Examples of successful rural businesses in Turkey and Europe illustrate the role of e-commerce in rural development. In both Turkey and Europe, small artisans are reaching global markets with environmentally friendly production techniques and sustainable business models. For example, a small workshop in Turkey that produces natural stone jewellery can reach a large customer base in Europe through e-commerce platforms. Likewise, a rural farm in Europe can meet consumers from different parts of the world by marketing its organic food products digitally.

This guide examines how rural artisans in both Turkey and Europe can integrate into the green economy through e-commerce and explains sustainability strategies through successful examples. In this context, recommendations for artisans to adapt to digital transformation, environmentally friendly production processes and strategies to succeed on digital platforms are presented.

The sustainability and digitalization strategies developed within the framework of the project enable rural artisans to address not only local customers but also the global market. These successful practices in Turkey and Europe are critical to the goals of strengthening the rural economy and reducing environmental impacts.

In this context, the Future E-Commerce project offers small artisans operating in rural areas the opportunity to both build a sustainable business model and reach new markets by effectively using digital marketing tools. For example, small businesses such as natural soap makers in Turkey or traditional ceramic producers in Italy have the potential to grow globally through sustainability and digitalization.

Objectives:

- **Gaining Competitiveness through Digitalization and E-Commerce:** Gaining competitive advantage for rural enterprises by establishing a presence on digital platforms, especially in green economy-oriented markets.
- **Sustainable Production Models:** Contributing to rural development through environmentally friendly production processes and the use of renewable resources.
- **Access to the Global Market:** Bringing local and traditional products to the masses through e-commerce and thus increasing the growth opportunities of rural enterprises.

To conclude, this guide provides concrete examples of how rural artisans in Turkey and Europe can be present in digital markets with sustainable business models.

4.2. Examples

FRANCE – LA MAISON DU SAVON DE MARSEILLE (TRADITIONAL SOAP PRODUCTION)

La Maison du Savon de Marseille is a business in the Provence region of France that produces natural soap using traditional methods. This business produces soap with local resources such as olive oil and vegetable oils using environmentally friendly materials. By using recyclable packaging, it reduces waste and minimizes its environmental footprint.

Using the power of e-commerce effectively, La Maison du Savon de Marseille markets its soaps outside France, in Europe and worldwide. Through digital platforms, it brings the cultural heritage of Provence to global customers, contributing to the local economy and ensuring the sustainability of artisanship.



Figure 4. La Maison du Savon de Marseille. Website: <https://www.maison-du-savon-de-marseille.fr/>

SPAIN – LA FÁBRICA DE CERÁMICA (NATURAL CERAMIC PRODUCTION)

Juan Martinez makes traditional ceramic products in a village in Andalusia, Spain. Juan has expanded his family's artisanal business with digitalization, taking online orders and exporting ceramic products to many parts of Europe. He is an entrepreneur who has managed to integrate into the modern world while preserving traditional production methods.

- **Sustainability Practices:** Environmentally friendly production and the use of energy-saving kilns.
- **Digital Transformation:** In addition to selling directly to his customers on his website, Juan informs his customers with videos and blog content showing the production processes of his products. He also strengthens his e-commerce channel by promoting his products on Pinterest and Facebook.

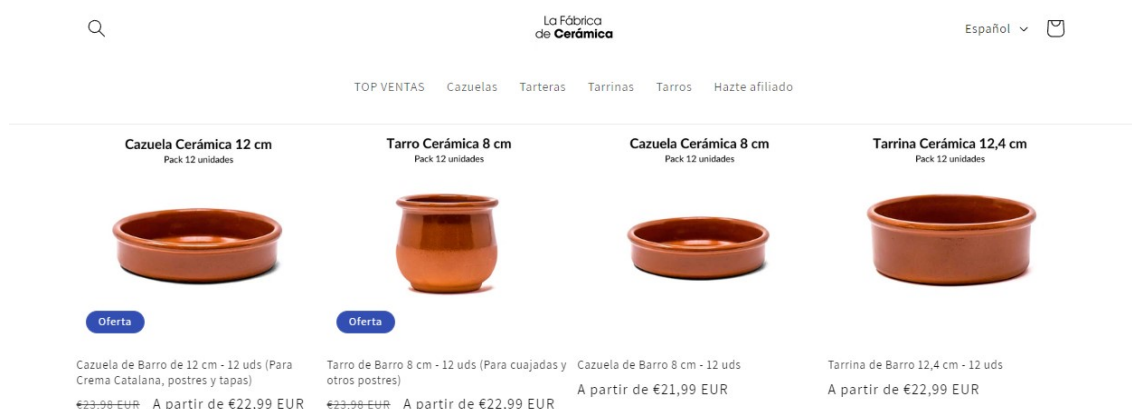


Figure 5. La Fábrica de Cerámica. Website: <https://lafabricadeceramica.com/>

TÜRKIYE – GREEN TRANSFORMATION OF E-COMMERCE (E-COMMERCE GUIDE FOR TRADESMEN AND CRAFTSMEN)

Some small artisans and projects in Turkey are integrating green economy into their e-commerce systems. For example, an e-commerce platform established in Izmir and supported by the Izmir Union of Chambers of Artisans and Craftsmen offers only the products of artisans for sale. This platform helps artisans bring their environmentally friendly products to a wider audience.

In addition, with the regulations introduced under the EU Green Deal, many small businesses in Turkey are taking steps towards sustainability and digitalization. Such initiatives aim to both reduce environmental impact and increase economic sustainability.

Check the guide here:

<https://esnafkoop.ticaret.gov.tr/data/633bf15413b876b344b0fd7f/Esnaf%20ve%20Sanatkarlar%20C3%96zelinde%20E-Ticaret%20K%C4%B1lavuzu.pdf>

ENGLAND – LUSH COSMETICS

Lush Cosmetics is an exemplary company that perfectly blends sustainability and rural artisanship. The company stands out for its environmentally friendly packaging policy, offering many of its products without packaging, thus minimizing packaging waste. For those products that require packaging, it prefers recyclable or biodegradable materials. In addition to reducing environmental impact, this practice offers customers a sustainable consumption experience.

Lush creates an ethical supply chain by sourcing its ingredients directly from local farmers and communities. By using fair trade certified products, it ensures that producers are paid a fair price and working conditions are improved. It also takes a

sustainable approach to both health and the environment by choosing genetically modified organisms (GMO) free and organic ingredients.

It builds strong partnerships with local communities, providing them with economic support and promoting local development. It also adopts an active approach to reducing environmental impacts. It takes various measures in production processes to save energy and water and invests in renewable energy sources. It also minimizes waste generation by supporting zero waste practices. Adopting zero waste practices in its stores, Lush encourages its customers to recycle and reuse.

By educating customers on sustainability and ethical consumption, Lush encourages environmentally friendly shopping habits. It supports conscious consumption by organizing educational campaigns and events. Lush's holistic and integrated approach stands out as a successful example of small-scale artisanship in the modern world and provides an inspiring model for other businesses looking to integrate sustainability principles into their business models.

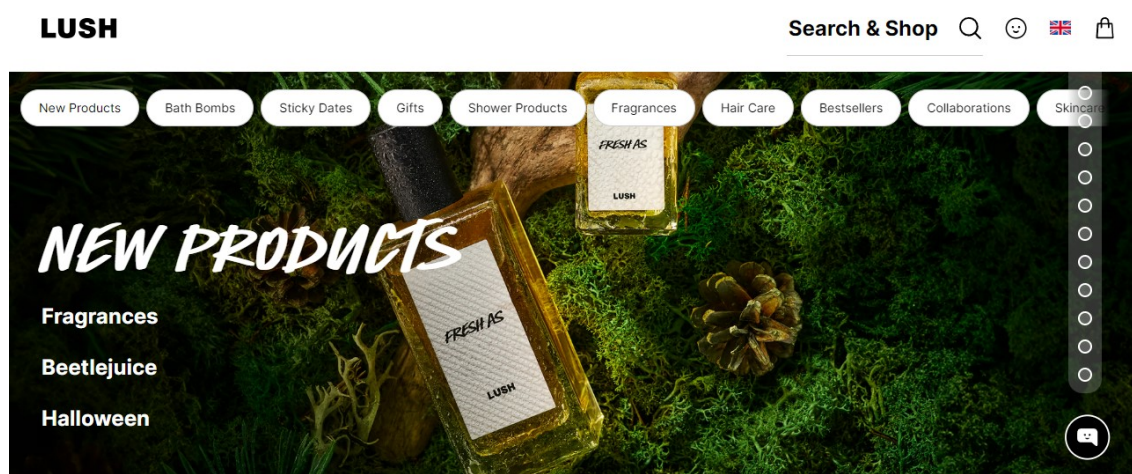


Figure 6. Lush Cosmetics. Website: <https://www.lush.com/uk/en>

EUROPE – PATAGONIA (FROM RECYCLING TO CLOTHES)

Although Patagonia is a US-based company, it also has a significant presence in Europe and is a notable example of sustainable practices. The company successfully operates on both traditional and digital platforms by adopting an environmentally friendly business model. Patagonia's success in Europe is characterized by its sustainable approach and effective use of digitalization.

Patagonia focuses on extending the life of products and encouraging their recycling through its "Worn Wear" initiative. This initiative allows customers to repair or recycle old clothing. By encouraging the repair of its products, the company aims to reduce the amount of waste in the fashion industry. At the same time, it produces new products using recycled materials, minimizing environmental impact in the process. Patagonia's approach inspires consumers to adopt a sustainable fashion approach.

The company aims to reduce its carbon footprint by investing in renewable energy sources. Eco-friendly production processes and energy-saving practices are part of Patagonia's overall sustainability strategy. In addition, as part of their efforts to reduce

waste, they offer incentives for recycling old products and can track these processes through digital platforms. This is an important step to both reduce environmental impact and help consumers make sustainable choices.

Its success in Europe is also supported by Patagonia's digital e-commerce strategies. Through its online store, the company reaches a broad customer base and offers comprehensive information about its sustainable products. It also provides informative content on its digital platforms about recycling processes and repair services, guiding customers to make environmentally friendly choices. Patagonia's e-commerce platforms function as a tool to increase both product sales and sustainability awareness.

Patagonia's presence and sustainable practices in Europe provide a valuable example for rural artisans and small businesses. It demonstrates how the company has succeeded in combining traditional business models with modern digital platforms and how they support sustainability. These practices can be inspiring for other small businesses adopting similar strategies and offer important lessons on how sustainable business models can be effectively implemented.

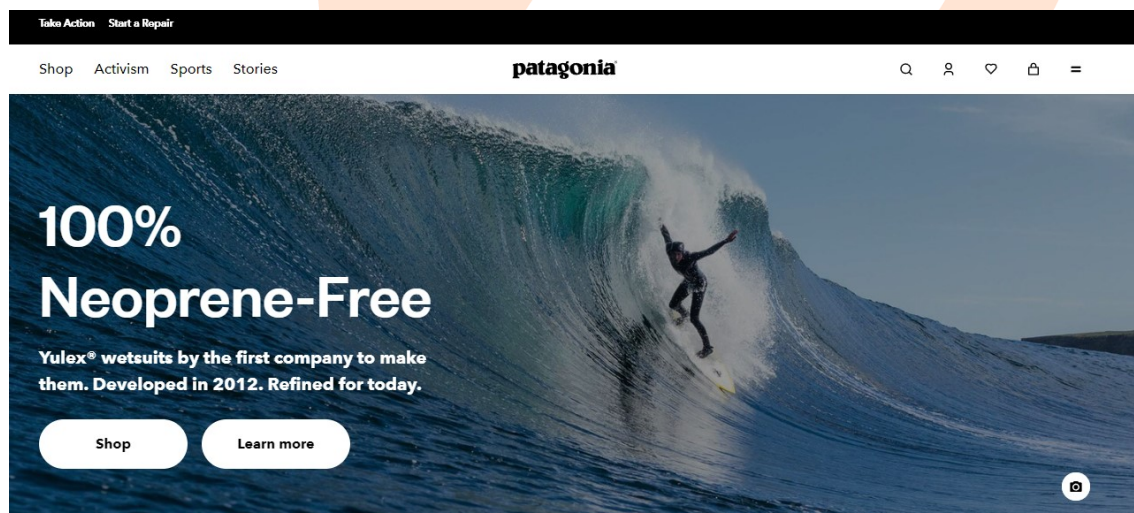


Figure 7. Patagonia. Website: <https://eu.patagonia.com/gb/en/home/>

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Future E-Commerce project has made significant strides in supporting small rural businesses in Europe to grow using sustainable practices and digital tools. Developed within the Erasmus+ project “The Future is Coming with E-Commerce” (Project N° 2022-1-RO02-KA220-VET-000088579), this guide provides a comprehensive framework on how to integrate e-commerce in rural artisans' transition to a green economy.

INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY AND E-COMMERCE

The guide emphasizes the importance for small rural businesses to integrate sustainability into their e-commerce strategies. By focusing on sustainable practices, the project not only addressed the environmental impact, but also created opportunities for rural businesses to succeed in the digital economy. Sustainable practices such as reducing waste, using environmentally friendly materials and minimizing carbon footprint are critical to the long-term success of rural businesses. E-commerce platforms offer these businesses the chance to reach a wider market, while allowing them to adhere to green principles.

DIGITAL TOOLS AND EDUCATION

The development of digital training materials and a collaboration platform is an important outcome of the project. The Guide to Electronic Commerce for Small Artisans and the Virtual Network for E-Commerce Training aim to equip rural artisans with the skills to use digital tools effectively. These resources bridge traditional craftsmanship with modern e-commerce practices and help small businesses compete in the global market. Digital skills and multimedia learning content enable artisans to adapt to technological developments and increase their operational efficiency.

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND COLLABORATION

To ensure the sustainability of the project's results, several main objectives are set out in the guidelines. These include keeping the online tools and channels open for the next five years, developing ongoing collaboration between project partners and stakeholders, interacting with relevant EU consortia and policy makers. By keeping these channels open and actively maintained, it is intended to ensure the continuation of the project's objectives and support the adoption of green economy practices in rural areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Next steps should focus on expanding the scope of training materials and digital tools. This could include exploring accreditation opportunities and integration into national VET systems. Furthermore, digital resources need to be continuously updated according to feedback and technological developments. Engaging with new stakeholders and maintaining an active dialog with policy makers is important for the project to achieve its objectives and for rural artisans to continue to benefit from these initiatives.

In conclusion, the Future E-Commerce project has laid a strong foundation in the integration of sustainability into e-commerce for small rural enterprises. By providing practical tools, fostering collaboration and offering ongoing support, the project has

provided a valuable resource for rural artisans to succeed in the digital economy. The guidance presented here offers a strategic approach to ensure the sustainability of these efforts and to develop the green economy model, thus contributing to the long-term success and resilience of rural businesses across Europe.



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