



A Guide for attracting applicants to the EU Ecolabel Scheme

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Background

The EU Ecolabel has been promoted now since 1992. There have been many good tools that have been developed in that period and this guide is hopefully another tool that may help in acquisition work .

***That is:** A tool to help anyone who is engaged in attracting applicants to the Ecolabel scheme.*

Common practice acquisition:

Here the idea is to increase the awareness of the Ecolabel and instigate an interaction of market forces that will induce the manufacturers to apply for the Ecolabel.

This is done through different marketing ideas such as:

1. **Media use:** advertising, articles, coverage of events and so on. This can be very expensive in the case of advertising.
2. **Promotional work:** seminars, events through retailers, relevant organizations, exhibitions, etc. This can also be expensive
3. **Direct approach:** Canvassing, target seminars, mailing, phone contact, letters, etc. This can done quite inexpensively

This guide concerns “direct approach” and is meant as a guide for new country participants as well as others having problems in increasing the number of applicants.

The first stage:

Research and Target

Research provides us with facts and figures so we can make a plan of procedure and the first thing to research is the **industry situation** regarding the various product groups under the Ecolabel.

The information from such research will make it easier to plan your actions

For the purpose of this guide, we will use the **textiles and clothing** group as an example. This guide however can also apply to all product groups with small adaptations.

Find out:

- How many companies are there in the country producing in this group. This will help you decide on the size and type of action you take.
- Who produces what and where do they produce it. (work wear, fashion, children's, outdoor, accessories, etc. This will give you an idea of where and how to start and who to focus.
- Research the companies on the net and find out if they have any products certified with another Ecolabel. This shows that the company either has customers that are asking for environmental performance or that this company is progressive thinking in this area or both. Either way it will give you a very strong position especially if the company exports
- Find out if they have an environmental policy. If they do it means that they are aware of their image.
- Do they supply the public sector. This will let you know if regulation on GPP is an important issue to the company.
- Who do they supply in the private sector. Do these customers have an environmental policy. Do they want a good environmental image.
- Find out if the customers (retailers, other companies) are willing to cooperate on promoting the Ecolabel.
- Find out who the "trend setter" is. Which company is it that everyone else copies. This will be a good company to get.

Research:

- Possible non-profit organizations that could possibly contribute in some way. EU and local environmental organizations. It could be through articles in their magazines, web pages, seminar participation and so on.
- Branch organizations (Textile organization). Find out if they can contribute with articles, seminar organization, information etc. Make a good contact.
- National Ecolabels. Are there any possibilities for cooperation, are there criteria almost the same as the EU Ecolabel etc.

Now you have enough information to move to the next stage

The second stage

Preparation

What you need to prepare for, is the eventual meetings you are going to have with the companies.

Here is a check list:

1. **Be familiar with the criteria** so you know what you are talking about. You don't need to know all the technical side of it but you need to know the important things like, what happens where, who does what and what documentation is needed from them:
 The criteria are based on LCA, it means that there are criteria for the **raw product, spinning/weaving, Dyeing/printing, wet processing** because that is the main processes in textiles.
 Documentation is needed to fulfill the criteria and you must be familiar with what is needed
For example: work wear of cotton/polyester, raw products: cotton- pesticide test, polyester-antimony/VOC etc.). For the processes: use of dyes, chemicals and substances whose criteria are about biodegradability, certain compounds that can't be used etc.
 This becomes more important during the application process. A very important thing to remember is that the waste water must be treated either on site or locally. Chemicals can be substituted but without waste water treatment a company cannot get a licence.
 The **Ecolabel web page** can give you an overview of the criteria which is basically the minimum you need to know.
2. **Be familiar** with the practicalities of the Ecolabel, how and where to apply, costs etc
3. **Facts and figures** from other countries on the textile situation. Know some of the big company's names that have the flower and any other information that is positive.
4. **Make a list of probable questions and prepare the answers.** This is where your research helps. **Examples:** *Why should I apply? Because you supply the hospitals and "PP"s are now expecting/demanding environmental products. Can I get the license? As long as the waste water is treated everything else can be worked out, who can help me? The CB etc.* A role play situation with a colleague is always a good exercise. Always remember that companies are interested in the bottom line (what's in it for me)
5. **Available information.** Find some information leaflets about ecolabel textiles, some news articles, EU and national GPP guides etc. Your research again will point to what you should take with you to the meetings.
6. **Meet with retailers.** Remember that it does not cost them anything to ask a supplier to ecolabel the products they are buying. Point this out to them and point out the benefits of buying these products. Many retail buyers think that the products will be more expensive, but that is simply not true. The cost of having the ecolabel is 0.15%, and having the ecolabel does not entitle the producer to increase prices on that ground. 0.15% is an expense that anybody can bare without going bankrupt. Point out to retailers what the ecolabel means for a product (environmentally produced and quality assurance)
7. **Telephone Public Purchasers.** Find out if they have read the GPP guide and offer to send them a copy if they don't have one. Also find out how they put out tenders and how they select the products.

The third stage

Contact

Contact can be done usually in 2 ways:

1. By arranging a seminar for the industry (get the CB and what other organization to help).

In this case you plan an interesting seminar. Do not just throw something together because it is the first contact and a good place to get the names of the company representatives.

Invite decision makers or sales chiefs because it is their responsibility to sell more and come up with ideas.

Prepare a presentation based on your research. Do not waste a lot of time boring them with too much Ecolabel information, (If they want to know more than you have presented, they will ask for it, so leave room for questions).

Use the little time you have to point out the benefits of the ecolabel and put weight on what your research points to. **For example:** *If you decide that the focus group will be the work wear: Point out very clearly the GPP policies, suggest how the ecolabel can help, suggest possibilities of been able to participate for tenders in other EU countries, suggest that they can get help to find out and get informed about EU tenders etc. Now you have their attention.*

By direct contact. This is something that can be done after the company has received information at a seminar OR it can be done "COLD". Whichever the case, make it your aim not to give any information over the phone.

The purpose of the phone call is to get a meeting with a decision maker and not to get them to start an application. **SO REMEMBER:**

- Ask for the decision maker by name; that way the secretary will think that you know him/her.
- Be very nice to the secretary or any other person you may be forwarded to, but do not get in a conversation about the ecolabel with them if they are not either, the owner, the director or sales chief. In some big companies it may be the environmental manager that is the appropriate person to speak to::: research again.

When you get to talk to the responsible person, BE DIRECT and CLEAR. My name is so and so, I work... ..with the European ecolabel. I'm ringing because I would like to make a meeting with you so I can tell you about the Ecolabel and what is happening and I think that it is something that can benefit your company. After that it is not so easy to control the conversation and it is good to be prepared for the person's reactions, JUST REMEMBER that you want to meet not sell the ecolabel over the phone. (A role play with a colleague can help)

Keep the benefits of the ecolabel for this particular company (research) in front of you all the time so that you can always refer to them if needed to get a meeting.

Surprise the person with something that is relevant to the particular company. *They may be supplying the police so you can mention very briefly GPP but only enough to get the meeting.*

Answer questions clearly and briefly and point out that if the responsible person could find a suitable 1 hour, you can explain the question in more detail as well as go through the advantages.

You will either get a time or it is simply a bad time you rang. If so ask if you can ring at a better time. Do not be desperate. Sometimes it helps to hint that competitors are doing work in this area (careful it does not sound like a threat)

The fourth stage

The Meeting

The meeting is where you want to promote ("sell") the ecolabel. You are prepared, because you've done your research.

Write a check list related to the company you are visiting and remember some very important things.

- Do not appear to be a salesman because you are not. You are actually doing this company a favour. They have much to gain by joining the ecolabel scheme.
- Be very clear in your mind about what you can **offer** this company. It may be help with the application work, marketing material, and so on.
- Be very specific about how the ecolabel can **benefit** this particular company. It may be export opportunities, competitive advantage, keeping existing customers happy, improving their environmental image, attracting new customers, future investment etc.
- Be attentive, listen carefully and make sure you understand their questions or their concerns. If you do not have an answer for a question, simply admit that you don't have this information, jot it down and tell them you'll get back to them on this. Sometimes this is good because it gives you a legitimate reason to call them back.
- If you don't have experience in attending meetings with highly placed company employees, find out what your country's "meeting culture" is and prepare yourself accordingly. It does not mean that you should behave like them, this research is for your own benefit so that you are not too surprised or unprepared. *For example: The director hands over his card and looks at you expecting one back.* It is not a big thing if you don't have a card, but it may make you feel uncomfortable.
- Make sure that before the meeting is over you have some kind of agreement to contact the person in the near future. It could be to get back with some more info or it could be to give them time to study and think about the matter.

After the meeting

- It is important to evaluate your meeting and look at what worked /didn't. It will help you either at the next meeting or with another company.
- VERY IMPORTANT: If you promised to do something, DO IT.
- Prepare for the next meeting

