The Making Of The High-Growth Technology Business Conference 2019:

Reengineering Conference Delivery To Maximize Impact

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Abstract

Conferences are a very traditional way to stay up to date in a certain field or industry, but are less popular for smaller and younger enterprises and their management. The huge success of the High-Growth Technology Business Conference 2019, organized by LESI and the EPO, was based on an extensive re-engineering of how conferences ought to be delivered.

The key goals of the re-engineering were inclusion (attract IP professionals as well as high-growth business decision makers), efficiency (minimize the time at a conference but maximize the outcome), learning (provide original content from top speakers and trainers), implementation (ensure learnings can be applied in the organizations of participants) and networking (enable networking also for those not so networking savvy).

The tools used to achieve the key goals were a dual track system (one track for IP and one for business), conference and training day combination (only one day of conference followed by one day of in-depth training sessions), short and crisp sessions (shorter presentations focusing on key messages), meet-the-speaker opportunities for participants, summary slides (one summary slide at the end of each session), summary videos (short, two-to three-minute summary videos of selected speakers for recall at home), speed networking (structured get-together), and IP Clinics (IP specialists providing one-on-one input for participants).

1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent 99 percent of all businesses in the European Union (EU) and contribute 57 percent of the EU's gross domestic product. SMEs are also very important in other economies. A large proportion of the value generated by SMEs comes from a small number of high-growth businesses,[1] which are often very innovative.

Research on Europe shows that SMEs that have filed at least one IP right are 21 percent more likely to experience growth afterwards and 10 percent more likely to become a high-growth business than enterprises with no patent applications. SMEs that go beyond national protection and file for European patents have an even greater likelihood (17 percent) of becoming a high-growth business. Research found that in high-tech industries, SMEs that have filed a European patent are 110 percent more likely to experience high growth; in low-tech industries, the figure is 172 percent. The chances of an SME becoming a high-growth business increase by 33 percent if it uses "bundles" of trade marks, patents and designs instead of one single IP right category.[2]

Effective use of the IP system is increasingly viewed by governments, international organizations and businesses as key to the success of economies. Due to its tremendous impact on growth and job creation, more attention is paid to potential high-growth businesses to unleash the full power of patents and technology. Providing IP expertise, training resources and contacts to support the commercialization activities of numerous businesses is a demanding mission that can only be achieved through joint effort that leverages the resources of committed organizations.

1.1 The LESI-EPO Collaboration

In 2018, LESI and the EPO took their cooperation to the next level by signing a memorandum of understanding. One joint endeavor was the creation of a new conference format with the goal of getting more business decision makers from SMEs engaged with IP-related topics. The

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1. High-growth firms are defined as those that have had an average growth rate greater than 20 percent per year over three consecutive years and that had at least 10 employees at the beginning of the growth period.

2. High-growth firms and intellectual property rights—IPR profile of high-potential SMEs in Europe, EUIPO and EPO, May 2019, ISBN 978-3-89605-228-5, also available at *epo.org/high-growth.*

overall challenge identified was that most business decision makers in SMEs across Europe leave IP to specialists (lawyers, licensing professionals and consultants), instead of seeing it as a top priority in their strategy making and execution. This is regarded as a major obstacle to unlocking the hidden value of IP.

1.2 The LESI Perspective

LESI originated in the U.S.A. It focuses on facilitating IP transactions between enterprises by providing support to executives in the IP rights licensing field to reduce the risk of these entities blocking or attacking each other through costly litigation. Education and capacity building, peer support and establishing standard practices, tools and techniques became the basic pillars of LESI, which currently has 33 national and regional member societies around the world with members from more than 90 countries.

On a global scale, LESI has been very successful at establishing a sound understanding and capacity building for numerous enterprises. For decades the strongest growth in members was in the U.S., but lately growth has shifted to chapters in Europe and Asia. In Germany the main drivers for this growth have been the engagement of members from businesses, whereas in Asia the drivers have been rapid economic development and an increasing awareness of IP as an important factor in the next phase of economic growth. The trends indicate that LESI has contributed to a sustainable situation for industry in the U.S. and Europe. However, there is still huge potential for LESI to serve smaller high-growth technology businesses in a similar way in many other economies.

Interactions within the LESI universe currently take place mostly between IP lawyers, consultants and practitioners in larger enterprises and research organizations. For some time, members of LESI have expressed a desire to expand the network of LESI to include business decision makers of SMEs. This would help put IP on the strategic business agenda within growth-oriented SMEs. The new conference format jointly developed by the EPO and LESI was intended to be the first step in this direction.

1.3 The EPO Perspective

As the external training arm of the European Patent Office, the European Patent Academy (Academy) provides training for patent professionals, judges, national offices, academia and, last but not least, businesses contributing to the ecosystem of innovation in Europe. For businesses—the current and future users of the patent system—the Innovation Support program area of the Academy offers training and training support on IP strategy and management to facilitate the effective use of the patent system by businesses for value creation.

A cornerstone target group are SMEs, especially in the tech and high-growth sectors. Academy training is tailored to the needs of SME executives and staff involved in IP management. To reach innovators effectively and leverage available resources, Innovation Support cooperates internally with the Chief Economist unit and externally with intermediaries (*e.g.,* LESI, IP Helpdesk of the European Commission), national intellectual property offices, EUIPO and multipliers (*e.g.,* business and IP advisers, patent information centers/PATLIBS, chambers of commerce, incubators and clusters).

The Academy engages in a variety of training activities, including online offers, conferences, workshops and seminars. It also provides support for trainers of intermediaries and multipliers in the form of training material and tools. Like LESI, the EPO is highly motivated to increase its impact by not only supporting IP specialists, but also business decision makers from high-growth tech businesses across Europe to move the IP agenda to the business strategy level.

1.4 The High-Growth Technology Business Conference 2019

To set a cornerstone for engaging decision makers of SMEs across Europe with IP, a scoping workshop was held in Dublin in November 2018. This workshop brought together stakeholders like the Center for Intellectual Property (CIP), European IP Helpdesk, the Irish Patents Office, EUIPO and other external advisers with representatives of the EPO and LESI, who were the organizers. The goal was to develop an innovative conference model with the potential to attract the whole stakeholder group around SMEs, with business decision makers at the core of this group. See Figure 1.

In addition, that scoping workshop determined that this conference should become a benchmark for the conference organizers in general, who may also be interested in attracting different audience target groups and providing value to all of them in the most efficient way. The

Figure 1: Stake Holder Groups Around SMEs That Are Important For A Well-Functioning Innovation Ecosystem

3. *epo.org/business-success* (accessed 01.04.2020).

scoping workshop laid the foundation for the first High-Growth Technology Business Conference,[3] held in Dublin in November 2019.

Figure 2 outlines the most significant goals and tools that were the result of the scoping workshop, which became the foundation for 2019.

This article outlines the key goals of the conference framework—(1) inclusion, (2) efficiency, (3) learning, (4) practicability and (5) networking—as well as the innovative tools developed to achieve the best possible outcome for conference participants.

2. Key Conference Goals

Goal 1–Inclusion

In many SMEs, intellectual property topics are often delegated to specialists too soon, and therefore regularly fail to become part of the core strategy of the organization. It is clear that, to support technology-driven SMEs in their quest to generate more value from their IP, it is important to attract IP professionals. Feedback from the market and findings from LESI and the EPO (see 1.2 and 1.3) also suggest that it is crucial to engage business decision makers. Only by broadening the audience to include decision makers within SMEs can the IP message make a sustainable impact on businesses.

In addition, the whole ecosystem must be engaged. This is required for successful technology commercialization. Therefore, representatives of large enterprises, technology market facilitators, strategy and IP advisers, research institutions, and investors with SME interfaces need to be attracted as well (see also Figure 1 under 1.4).

Goal 2–Efficiency

While efficient content delivery is important for any audience, this applies even more when business decision makers are being targeted. IP is not necessarily their top priority. Therefore, the chances of getting them to come to such a conference are greater if their time is used efficiently and the topic of IP is embedded in content of strategic importance to their business and combined with actionable advice.

Goal 3–Learning

Acquiring new knowledge about an area of importance is probably the number one reason people come to conferences. Therefore, the creation of original, up-to-date content from top-notch speakers that provides new aspects or a different view on topics relevant for the audience in an accessible way is an important factor. Content must be provided for each group of the targeted audience (see also Goal 1).

Goal 4–Implementation

As mentioned above, attracting business decision makers is a prerequisite, but the key to the success of the conference is to ensure that the knowledge provided at the conference is packaged so it can be easily shared within and across organizations after the event. Therefore, the conference was intended to not only attract and engage practitioners from different parts of the IP ecosystem (see also Goal 1), but also to make sure that the knowledge and best-practices presented were relevant and practical so that they could be implemented in their organizations by the attendees.

Goal 5–Networking

Since networking is a standard and important element of any conference, the aim was to ensure that the networking possibilities did not suffer from the measures taken to foster the efficiency of the event. A special focus for the conference was to facilitate networking with peers, but also between IP specialists and business decision makers. Thus, it became important to create and test new options for networking not usually seen at conferences.

3. Key Conference Tools and Their Impact

Tool 1–Dual track

If the intention is to cater to sufficiently different audiences in one conference, the best solution is to establish parallel tracks.

Figure 2: Matching Of Goals And Tools Creating The Foundation For The Conference

GOALS	Inclusion	Efficiency	Learning	Implementation	Networking
TOOLS					
Tracks	✔		✔		✔
Conference & training day	✔	✔	✔		
Short & crisp sessions		✔	✔	✔	
Meet the speakers		✔	✔	✔	✔
Summary slides		✔		✔	
Summary videos		✔		✔	
Speed networking	✔	✔			✔
IP Clinics			✔	✔	

3. *epo.org/business-success* (accessed 01.04.2020).

The conference combined a business and an IP track. Since SME business decision makers generally do not put IP at the core of their strategy and usually outsource it to lawyers and IP specialists, it was necessary to have a business track that would target their needs, but also be attractive to other audience groups as well.

From a topic perspective, the IP track was very straightforward, since many of the speakers were used to speaking to this audience.

The business track was much more challenging from a topic and speaker perspective, however. To attract business decision makers, it was important to present topics from a business-strategy and people-management perspective while at the same time demonstrate the role of IP in generating value from day-to-day management all the way to strategic transactions, including alliances, licensing, spin-offs and divestments.

Results:

The two tracks (business and IP) worked well for all target groups. The mix of switching between general plenary sessions and individual track offerings, and the possibility for participants to pick and choose on a session-by-session basis allowed participants to get the most out of the conference.

The two tracks helped with the inclusion and learning goals of the conference. In addition, they also had a positive impact on the networking goal when individuals switched between the tracks and, in doing so, interacted with different audiences.

The IP track was chosen by 55 percent of participants, while the business track was chosen by 45 percent. The initial target to attract at least 20 percent from SMEs was achieved, since around 25 percent of all participants had an SME background. Of the SME participants, 60 percent were business decision makers, as the following breakdown of SME participants shows. See Figures 3 and 4.

Key Challenge:

Encouraging business decision makers and IP specialists to mix and match among both tracks and not get stuck in the track that naturally suits them requires thorough planning, structure and effective implementation of the conference.

Tool 2–Conference and Training Day

Combining a one-day conference (several topics in larger groups but fewer interactions with the audience) with one day of training (fewer topics in smaller groups, but more audience participation) allows for a highly efficient learning experience that participants can take back to their organizations and implement to help them succeed in their work environment.

In 2019, the one-day conference was followed by a day of training. The training day was also divided into two tracks (business and IP) to cater to decision makers and IP specialists. Participants were able to choose either half-day or full-day training courses in the respective tracks. Since the training courses were offered by speakers from the conference day, there was a direct continuation of the topics covered in the conference, providing participants with a truly immersive experience.

Results:

Most participants took advantage of the training day to deepen their knowledge in certain areas. Surprisingly, many decision makers, who were expected to only go to the conference, also decided to take part in some of the training offerings on the second day. Training sessions were split into two full-day training courses and four half-day training courses. The training turned out to be very important for attracting the target audiences to the event.

The conference and training day format helped with the inclusion, efficiency and learning goals of the conference.

Figure 3. Share Of Chief Officers (CXOs), Directors And Founders

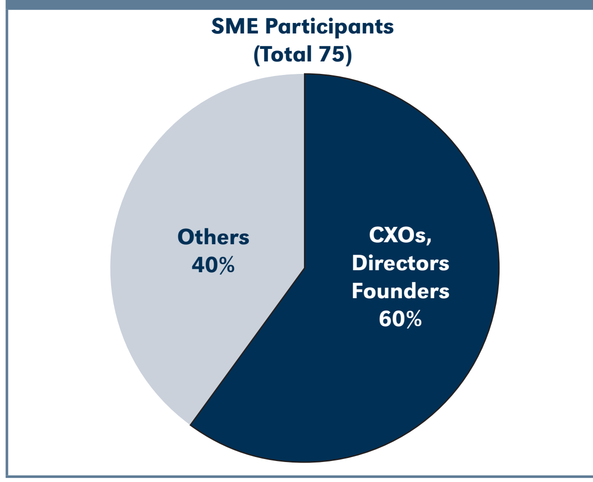
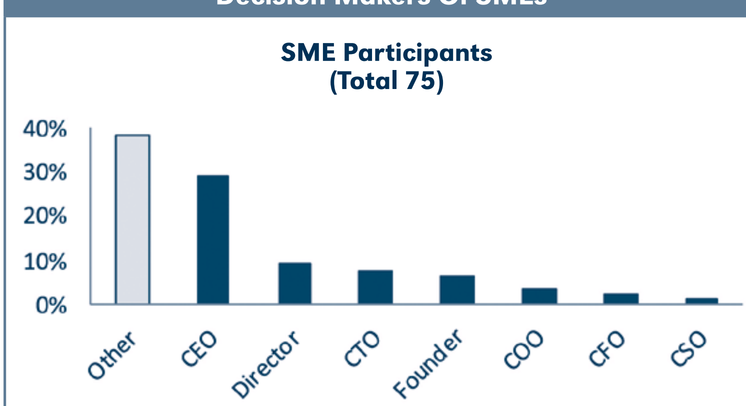


Figure 4. Detailed Breakdown Of Business Decision Makers Of SMEs



Key Challenge:

Offering enough training sessions (focused on smaller groups) for all conference participants is difficult to achieve when scaling this conference format up to more than 500 participants. This is important to maintain, since training sessions are intended for a smaller audience.

Tool 3–Short and Crisp Sessions

Standard two-day conference formats allow for relatively lengthy presentations with a limited number of keynote lectures. For 2019, five keynote speeches were scheduled for the conference day (two back-to-back keynote lectures to start the morning, two back-to-back keynote lectures to start the afternoon and one keynote before dinner). This was made possible by reducing each keynote lecture to 20 minutes. Reducing the duration of sessions requires speakers to focus on the delivery of key points for the audience. This not only helped to condense a two-day format into one day, it also ensured that participants would not struggle to find the key points in the presentations, since they were delivered in an efficient and straightforward manner.

The mini-plenary and breakout sessions, which followed the keynote lecture blocks, were also trimmed for the sake of efficiency, providing a 50-minute time-slot for mini-plenaries and a 40-minute time-slot for breakouts, with three to five speakers each. The whole conference was streamlined, based on short and crisp sessions that provided implementable key messages for participants. Since providing key messages in a short time format is not something conference speakers are used to, an extensive pre-conference review process during the preparation phase with the speakers was implemented.

Results:

Audience feedback regarding the delivery of key messages was overwhelmingly positive. While the speakers enjoyed the outcome of being forced to focus on key messages, many of them stated it was more difficult to prepare for a shorter session than a longer one. However, both speakers and the audience agreed that the results paid off.

The short and crisp sessions helped with the efficiency, learning and implementation goals of the conference.

Key Challenge:

It is not easy to get speakers to compress their key messages into shorter sessions and make sure that none of the main takeaways get lost, all while adhering to the assigned time-slots. Maintaining this discipline requires pre-conference alignment and a well-structured review process.

Tool 4–Meet the speakers

Q&A time at the end of conference sessions (especially keynotes) are often hijacked by participants who want to market themselves. Also, many questions can be irrelevant for the majority of the audience, as they are too specific. Substituting Q&A with meet-the-speaker sessions during the break following the presentations and throughout the conference helped to overcome these problems.

At the conference, Q&A sessions were eliminated from keynote lectures and mini-plenary sessions. Instead, speakers made themselves available for further questions during the next break at specific “meet-the-speaker corners” for interested audience members. Part of the speaker engagement was a requirement to be available throughout the whole conference day for participants and their questions. Furthermore, the moderator repeatedly instructed the audience to interact with the speakers during the breaks.

Results:

Although not everyone who attended the presentation stayed to meet the speakers, the questions asked were very specific to the individual needs of participants. Due to the availability of speakers throughout the day, many more participants were able to ask follow-up questions. Also, the networking aspect of the event, especially between the audience and speakers, was greatly enhanced.

The meet-the-speaker offering helped with the efficiency, learning, implementation and networking goals of the conference.

Key Challenge:

It is important to provide prominent and dedicated spots close to the general audience for participants to meet the speakers. Moreover, participants need to be continuously reminded to make use of these opportunities as this is not usually done at conferences.

Tool 5–Summary slides

The problem for anyone who goes to a great conference is determining which key messages they should try to implement from the hundreds of slides they saw. The requirement for each speaker to provide a single summary slide that contains the implementable take-home messages for the audience is one solution to this problem.

For the conference, speakers were required to provide a one-page take-home slide for the audience with actionable advice. The conference organizing team carefully worked with speakers to make sure that each session would end with this slide. The summary slides were also provided to the participants in a shareable electronic format after the conference.

Results:

The feedback received from the audience was that these summary slides were very useful and enabled them to take these key messages back to their companies and share them with peers. Even individuals that did not attend the session were able to benefit from the summary slides.

The summary slides helped with the efficiency and implementation goals of the conference.

Key Challenge:

It is not easy to get all speakers to provide a summary slide of implementable takeaways. It requires a lot of intervention from the conference organizers. However, this can be partially outsourced to pre-assigned session chairs if there is more than one speaker in a presentation.

Tool 6–Summary Videos

People do not usually want to see the recording of a lengthy presentation. By recording a short, two-to three-minute summary video of key presentations, the content is more likely to be viewed not only by anyone interested that could not attend, but also by attendees once they are back at their organizations.

For the conference, a select number of speakers were chosen to record a two-to three-minute summary video of their presentation ahead of or during the conference. Answers to likely follow-up questions of interest were also recorded, adding more value to the video.

Results:

Summary videos were produced, published online and shared with attendees. An ongoing publication of summary videos can help to keep the community alive and be easily promoted on social media. Moreover, the feedback from participants has been that they would go back to those summary videos for some of their perceived key sessions to get input relevant to some of their day-to-day challenges.

The summary videos helped with the efficiency and implementation goals of the conference.

Key Challenge:

Speaking in front of an audience and recording a crisp, two--minute summary with a camera team are different experiences. Great speakers are not necessarily great in front of a camera. Good preparation, training and patience are needed. A script and Q&A outline prepared by the speakers before the recordings can facilitate the process. Another option is to make a video after the conference. This allows speakers to take on board feedback obtained at the conference and prepare separately for the video.

Tool 7–Speed Networking

Networking is an important part of any conference. However, networking is rarely very efficient, and only a limited number of people can be met. Moreover, some people are better at networking than others. A structured speed networking event where participants meet many people in a short space of time can help.

At HTBC 2019, at the end of the program for day one, attendees could join a speed networking routine. Stand-up tables were set up in a room and two participants were put on opposing sides of each table. When a bell was rung, participants had two minutes to introduce themselves and maybe exchange business cards or social media links. At the end of the two minutes the bell rang again, signaling the participants to move to the next table (like a merry-go-round). Conference participants not at the speed networking could network at their own pace in another room.

Results:

The speed networking had 40 participants meeting each other around 20 stand-up tables. Many used the opportunity to get to know a larger number of participants. It also gave them a foundation for further networking later. Participants provided very positive feedback, including that they had some fun as well.

The speed networking helped with the networking and efficiency goals. It also supported the inclusion goal, since it further encouraged IP specialists to mingle with business decision makers.

Key Challenge:

For logistical reasons, speed networking can only be run for a limited number of participants. To avoid a last-minute rush for the limited spaces provided, it is advisable to have participants sign up for this activity, either during the conference registration procedure or early during the conference day.

Tool 8–IP Clinics

Conferences usually provide a great pool of general know-how and experiences, but getting specific, individual questions answered is very unusual. Adding a training day with smaller group sessions on specific topics and providing meet-the-speaker sessions open for anyone interested can alleviate much of the problem. Providing IP Clinics (one-on-one sessions), where participants and experts meet one-on-one in 30-minute time-slots can add further value for participants.

At HTBC 2019, half-hour time-slots for participants were provided for booking a one-on-one IP Clinic session with an IP expert during the training day. This let participants pose questions on current issues in a more individualized environment and have in-depth conversations on these issues.

Results:

Around 20 percent of conference participants made use of these informal one-on-one meetings with IP experts. Receiving questions from IP Clinic participants ahead of time allowed the special IP Clinics committee to match the participant with the right expert. Also, experts were provided with the questions ahead of time so they could prepare and give useful advice.

The IP Clinics helped with the learning and implementation goals of the conference.

Key Challenge:

The proper matching of participants and experts is important and time-consuming. Also, coordinating 30-minute slots with other activities that a participant might have booked is an organizational and resource-intensive challenge. A digital tool for directly matching participants and experts would be a valuable next step in the process.

4. Conclusion

The EPO-LESI High-growth Technology Business Conference 2019 was a great success on all accounts. The conference attracted about 300 participants from over 30 nations and representatives from all intended audience groups. See Figure 5.

Figure 5. Distribution Of Total Participants By Entity

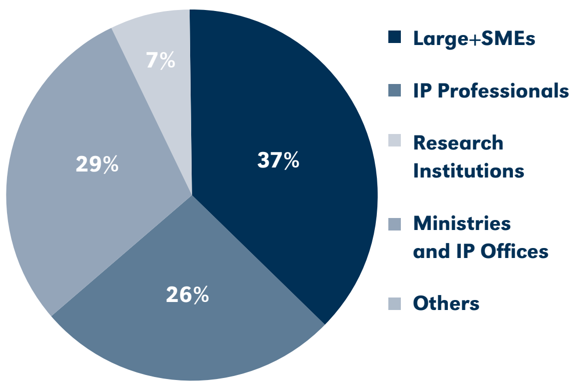
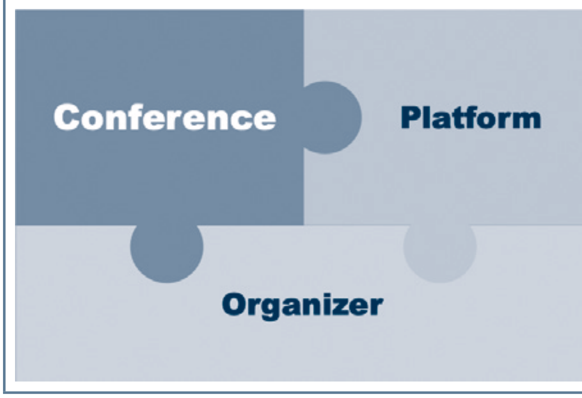


Figure 6. Combination Of Conference With Content Platform And Co-Operation Of Several Organizers



The presence of excellent speakers from three continents was used to produce additional material for post-conference use:

- Shortly after the conference, 26 presentations were shared with all participants, each of them containing a summary slide that outlined the takeaway messages of the session.
- Twelve speakers were selected for videos published on the event's website. These videos provide summaries of the topics, key takeaways and the Q&As.[4]
- The conference content also attracted significant attention on social media.[5] It had over 37,000 views on Twitter with many retweets. On LinkedIn, the content has been seen more than 33,000 times to date and is still being shared. The videos are also online on YouTube and have currently been watched more than 2,500 times.

The intention to create a unique, innovative user experience with the five predetermined goals of inclusion, efficiency, learning, implementation and networking was met in all respects. The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with quite a few frequent conference-goers stating that "this was one of the best conferences I have attended."

5. Outlook

After such a great success, what is next?

The next step is the development of an online platform that combines the conference content, including the follow-up videos and articles, with other closely related material for dissemination not only to participants, but also other SMEs. See Figure 6.

The organizers are currently evaluating if the conference will be continued as a regular event in the EPO's offering. Moreover, there has already been interest by the EPO's conference partner, LESI, to share the content created by this conference through other channels and establish, for instance, a conference spin-off in Asia in the years to come. Whatever path the conference takes, the innovations tested in the conference can serve to help other conference organizers to experience similar success.

LESI and the EPO have jointly established a standing working group to evaluate support measures for high-growth businesses in general so that, in addition to the conference and post-conference publications, accompanying measures can be developed.

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Available at Social Science Research Network (SSRN): *https://ssrn.com/abstract=3584444.*

4. *epo.org/sme-takeaways* (accessed 02.04.2020).
5. Data were extracted 30.03.2020.