

iCEX

ICEX PORTAL SYSTEM

IMPACT EVALUATION

ICEX PORTAL SYSTEM

RESPONSIBLE OF THE EVALUATION
Evaluation Department
Executive Office
ICEX Spain Trade & Investment

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OBJECTIVE OF THE EVALUATION



Ex-post impact evaluation of the ICEX Portal System to gather evidence on its medium- and long-term effectiveness both for users and ICEX itself.

WHAT IS THE ACTIVITY BEING EVALUATED?

The ICEX Portal System is an integrated platform that allows professionals in the field of internationalization to quickly find information they need on international markets or ICEX-related processes. It also provides users with information about ICEX services and support that might interest them.

Due to significant differences in the needs and profiles of each user, separate evaluations were conducted by user type and by the purpose of their visit to the different portals.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF ICEX'S SUPPORT? USERS



Immediate objective: (short-term) to ensure that companies can meet their information or management needs quickly and reliably, while also ensuring they have timely access to all ICEX services relevant to their needs.



Mediate objective: (medium-term) to help companies expand their sources of information, improve the quality of information available for decision-making purposes, and encourage them to use ICEX services to strengthen their internationalization departments.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF ICEX'S SUPPORT? ICEX



Immediate objective: (short-term) to attract new companies and improve ICEX's reputation.



Mediate objective: (medium-term) to increase Spanish companies' loyalty to ICEX internationalization support services while improving understanding of the business landscape and the barriers companies face.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- What types of users use the ICEX portals?
- What motivates these users to visit the ICEX portals?
- How do users typically access the ICEX portals?
- How useful are the portals for users, particularly when it comes to finding solutions to problems that arise during the internationalization process?
- How often do they visit the portals?
- How often do users interact with the portals?
- How reliable and trustworthy are the ICEX portals?
- How aware are users of the portal services?
- What additional products are shown to visitors?

EVALUATION FACT SHEET



TARGET POPULATION

Professionals interested in internationalization.

TIME FRAME
2021.

FIELDWORK
Between January and December 2021.

UNREGISTERED USERS

UNIVERSE
Unknown.

SAMPLE
1,083 users who have visited an ICEX portal. Of these, 349 were actually registered users browsing in open access mode

REGISTERED USERS

UNIVERSE
273,028 unique registered users in the ICEX portals.

SAMPLE
10,072 users who have visited an ICEX portal.

SAMPLING METHOD
Simple random sample.

RESPONSE RATE
3.69%

EVALUATION FACT SHEET



There were no significant differences observed between registered and unregistered users, except that unregistered users appear to share information from ICEX portals more frequently..

TÉCNICA DE ESTIMACION DE IMPACTO

Implicit question (counterfeit counterfactual). Two additional questions, called “benefits” (interpretable as value for money) and “additionality”, have been added to the implicit questions in the questionnaire, which make up the value-added section.

A logistic regression model was constructed to check which impact and outcome variables designed to capture effects on the user after receiving support affect the recognition of additionality and benefits of public intervention.

The analysis was conducted based on user and client type. This analysis consisted of: client impact analysis, analysis of the perceived role and functions of ICEX, analysis of conversion and cross-selling during portal visits, analysis of portal usage preferences, and analysis of how well the portals meet users’ needs.

CLIENT SEGMENTATION

SEGMENTATION TECHNIQUE: Hierarchical clustering based on the characterization variables included in the survey and variables collected from INFORMA D&B.

There are **11 well-defined entity types**. For companies, this classification corresponds to different stages of the internationalization process.

TYPE 1 **Micro-enterprises that have begun internationalization**, devote very few resources to R&D&I and have no awareness of quality management.

TYPE 2 **SMEs**, mainly micro-enterprises, **that have recently entered some markets** but have a low export share. They have no commercial or production presence abroad, devote few resources to R&D&I, and are not aware of quality management.

TYPE 3 **SMEs that are beginning to establish themselves abroad**. They have medium-low turnover, moderate diversification, commercial and production presence abroad, and they devote resources to R&D&I.

CLIENT SEGMENTATION

SEGMENTATION TECHNIQUE: Hierarchical clustering based on the characterization variables included in the survey and variables collected from INFORMA D&B.

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TYPE 4

SMEs continuing with their international expansion. They have average international experience and turn-over, are fairly diversified, but have minimal commercial or production presence abroad. They are starting to use online channels and devote resources to R&D&I.

TYPE 5

Companies with extensive international experience, very high and diversified export share, and moderate commercial and production presence abroad. They devote significant resources to R&D&I and are very aware of quality management.

TYPE 6

Large companies with extensive international experience, a medium-high, highly diversified export share, and substantial commercial and production presence abroad. They devote significant resources to R&D&I and are very aware of quality management.

CLIENT SEGMENTATION

SEGMENTATION TECHNIQUE: Hierarchical clustering based on the characterization variables included in the survey and variables collected from INFORMA D&B.

There are **11 well-defined entity types**. For companies, this classification corresponds to different stages of the internationalization process.

TYPE 7 **Organizations operating at the local level.** For example: Local Chambers of Commerce.

TYPE 8 **Organizations operating at the regional level.** For example: Exporters' associations.

TYPE 9 **Organizations operating at the international level.** For example: ICEX, port authorities.

TYPE 10 **Academic institutions,** mainly teaching and research staff.

TYPE 11 **Civil society,** mainly liberal professionals and volunteers.

USER SEGMENTATION

SEGMENTATION TECHNIQUE: Hierarchical clustering based on the characterization variables included in the survey.

There are **5 well-defined user types**.

- TYPE 1** **Strategic decision-makers** in companies. The majority are men.
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- TYPE 2** **Individuals with purchasing authority** in operational or support areas of companies. The majority are men.
-
- TYPE 3** **Individuals with influence** in companies. There's a higher concentration of women than expected.
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- TYPE 4** **Individuals with prescriptive authority** in operational or support areas of companies. There is a balanced representation of men and women.
-
- TYPE 5** **Individuals that do not have any decision-making power** in government or academia. There's a slightly higher concentration of women than expected.
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SEGMENTATION BY PORTAL USAGE PREFERENCES

SEGMENTATION TECHNIQUE: Multidimensional preference analysis by maximising total variance using the secondary least squares monotonic transformation based on users' ranked preferences for internationalization portals included in the survey.

There are **3 well-defined types of usage preferences.**

TYPE 1 **Knowledge.** Users who primarily seek knowledge, either from ICEX or from other professionals.

TYPE 2 **Interaction.** Users who primarily seek a personal area where they can interact with ICEX or other users, as well as receive recommendations for products and services tailored to their needs.

TYPE 3 **Contracting.** Users who primarily need a virtual platform to contract services and promote international sales through online marketplaces or e-commerce platforms.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ICEX PORTAL SYSTEM

- The metrics for usability, quality, and process streamlining fall within user's expectations for usability and exceed expectations for quality.
- **Only 4 out of 10 users identify ICEX as a purely public entity.** The main functions associated with ICEX are market information, support, statistical data, specialized internationalization consulting, and support for Spanish investment abroad. For business users, functions cluster differently, suggesting varying perceptions of what ICEX offers.
- **Most users consider the information on ICEX webpages to be transparent,** though this percentage drops significantly among users in companies with a larger share of online sales or in international organizations, where expectations are higher. 94% of users report feeling confident that they were on an ICEX page that meet their needs.
- **More than 50% of users who remember why they visited the ICEX Portal System indicate that they were seeking information. Nearly 90% users found the information highly reliable,** 71% say it was easy to find, and 74% consider it useful enough or very useful. Training and education was the second most frequently sought-after category.
- 34% of users needed to find additional information or wanted to submit a query after visiting the portal. Half of these users say it was easy to find how to proceed. About 40% of them contacted ICEX via email and nearly 80% received an immediate or quick response, with 91% reporting that their query was satisfactorily resolved.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ICEX PORTAL SYSTEM

- **In general, two out of three pages visited offered users the option to register for an event, subscribe, or request a product of interest.** Where these options were unavailable, nearly half of the users say they missed them. Where registration and subscription forms were available, half of users utilized them and generally rate the experience as good or very good (fast and trouble-free). For those who did not use the registration and subscription forms, nearly 60% report as a reason that the product or service did not meet their needs.
- **There are niche users who remember discovering services of interest they were not previously aware of** when visiting an ICEX portal. They specifically recall not isolated services, but groups of related services, suggesting that what users actually require mentoring that includes all of these services at once or an approach that encompasses consecutive services.
- **Almost half of the users recognize the added value of visiting a portal.** Users generally recognize added value when the information fully met their needs, except when they were seeking financial advice or partners, in which case added value is only recognized when the information was reliable. Users also commonly recognize the added value when the information was easy to find.

PORTAL SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS BY USER TYPE

- In general, **strategic decision-makers and purchasing decision-makers** do not recognize the added value of the portals unless there is a conversion opportunity on the visited page. This is not the case for users whose primary preference is knowledge, or for those who have recently used multiple services.
- **In companies that are starting to export**, strategic decision-makers recognize added value when there is a conversion opportunity and when they are shown other services of interest to them. Purchasing decision-makers and prescribers recognize added value when they find specific information. Users who have not used any ICEX services yet recognize added value if there is a conversion opportunity and if they find specific information. Users with a knowledge preference recognize added value when they find specific information.
- **In companies that have recently opened a market**, strategic decision-makers recognize added value when there is a conversion opportunity, purchasing decision-makers when they find specific information, and prescribers when they are shown other services of interest to them. Users who have not used our services yet recognize added value if there is a conversion opportunity and they convert also through cross-selling. Those whose preference is knowledge recognize added value when they achieve their objective for the visit and inform themselves during cross-selling, and those whose preference is interaction recognize added value when they convert through cross-selling.

PORTAL SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS BY USER TYPE

- **In companies that are beginning to establish themselves abroad,** those who had stopped using our services recognize added value if there is a conversion opportunity. Users who have not used our services yet recognize added value if they are shown other services of interest to them, as do those whose preference is knowledge. Those whose preference is interaction recognize added value when they convert but not if they postpone informing themselves about cross-selling.
- **In companies continuing their international expansion,** users who have not used our services or who have used them occasionally recognize added value if they find specific information, as do those whose preference is knowledge. Those whose preference is contracting recognize added value if there is a conversion opportunity. CECO users recognize added value if they convert during their visit.
- **In companies with extensive international experience,** strategic decision-makers recognize added value if there is a conversion opportunity. Purchasing decision-makers recognize added value if other services are shown. Prescribers recognize added value if they find specific information and if they informed themselves during cross-selling. Users who have rarely or never used our services recognize added value if they informed themselves during cross-selling. Those who use our services very frequently recognize added value if there is a conversion opportunity. Those seeking knowledge recognize added value if they find specific information, while those seeking interaction or contracting if they inform themselves during or convert through cross-selling.

PORTAL SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS BY USER TYPE

- **In large companies,** strategic decision-makers recognize added value if content is easy to access and if they are shown other services of interest to them. Influencers recognize added value if there are conversion opportunities. Users who have never used our services recognize added value if they inform themselves during cross-selling. Those who make either rare or extensive use of our services recognize added value if they convert through cross-selling. Those seeking knowledge or interaction recognize added value if they convert through cross-selling. Those seeking contracting recognize added value if they inform themselves during cross-selling.

CONVERSION EFFECTIVENESS

Whether or not a conversion occurs during a visit depends mainly on portal usage preference, the purpose of the visit, and the type of user accessing the portal.

- **Financial advisory services.** The highest conversion rates are seen among influencers and prescribers in SMEs or companies in the early stages of internationalization.
- **Education and training.** Conversion tends to be slightly higher among strategic decision-makers, purchasing decision-makers, and influencers.
- **Data sources.** Conversion tends to be higher among purchasing decision-makers.
- **Information.** Conversion tends to be slightly higher among purchasing decision-makers and influencers.
- **Tailor-made services.** Conversion tends to be higher among non-decision makers, prescribers and purchasing decision-makers.
- **Partners.** Conversion tends to be higher among purchasing decision-makers in SMEs that are starting to establish themselves abroad, and among prescribers in companies with extensive international experience.
- **Visiting markets.** Conversion tends to be higher among influencers, strategic decision-makers, and purchasing decision-makers.

CONVERSION EFFECTIVENESS

- **No clear relationship is observed between portal browsing and the contracting or use of ICEX services.** This reflects the poor quality of the navigation data, as identification, characterization, company, and contact information are generally not collected, making it impossible to track the activity of users visiting the portal and its impact on their entities.
- **We could not find any relationship between latent terms in portal content and participation in the corresponding type of activity.**

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE PORTAL SYSTEM

In general, **users request easier ways to search for information.** They request the removal of elements that make navigation difficult or that do not clearly support their business needs.

Strategic decision-makers called for more direct communication with ICEX.

Users who prefer to use the portal as a knowledge source also want more direct communication with ICEX.

Those who rarely use our services request a more personal connection with the company, while those who use them frequently ask for more direct communication with the company.

Only 1 in 10 users considers the information on ICEX portals unreliable. There are clear differences in their reasons:

- Micro-enterprises getting started report that the information does not meet their needs. SMEs that are establishing themselves abroad find the information hard to access. Large companies feel the information is irrelevant or low-quality.
- Strategic decision-makers claim that the information do not meet their needs or is low-quality. Purchasing decision-makers report that the information is either hard to access or does not meet their needs. Prescribers report that the information does not meet their needs or is irrelevant.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Almost all users listed as “natural persons” in the ICEX CRM are actually associated with companies or universities. These “natural persons” represent 70% of registered portal users, indicating a misclassification in this user group. Since the entity they belong to cannot be identified, we cannot provide them with services relevant to their needs. **We recommend that the distinction between natural person and legal entity in portal registration be eliminated, and that users be allowed to associate with one or more entities after registering.** This would make it possible to track contacts, including which entities they are or have been linked to and in what capacity, and to provide contacts with relevant services.

The taxonomy of key terms should be reviewed to attract target audiences to the services of interest to them, which would increase conversion.

To improve the poor quality of navigation data, **the portals should be redesigned to capture relevant information as users move through them,** gradually building their relationship with ICEX through a progressive profiling approach. To specifically optimize data quality and minimize capture errors, **communication with each user should primarily occur via an app.**

We recommend that users be profiled based on their decision-making role and the stage of their company’s internationalization. Using a gamified approach in both portal navigation and in-person interactions with ICEX could help capture relevant information for this profiling.

RECOMENDACIONES

The portal user experience should be personalized using predictive models that take into account the company's revealed or inferred needs, the real effectiveness of the service in meeting those needs, and the likelihood that the company will request the service. This insight, gained from ICEX's analytics and evaluation efforts, allows communication with users to be targeted through the portals themselves. To keep this personalization under control, **the new portal infrastructure should be connected to the analytics system running these predictive evaluation and analysis models.** A model management system should be put in place to monitor the performance of these models in real time across different user groups and prevent degradation, while providing integrated explanations that ensure compliance with ethical AI standards.

Since some users view the ICEX portal as a personal space for interacting with ICEX or other users, **making user-to-user interaction possible on the portal itself is recommended.** This would help build communities both within Spain and with potential partners abroad.

COMPLIANCE WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations set out in this evaluation have been accepted as necessary and feasible by both the organization and those responsible for providing the various ICEX services. The implementation of these recommendations will enable improvements to be made in the provision of services, bearing in mind that the improvement process is ongoing, thanks to other evaluations that are either already underway or will be launched if necessary.

PROCURING INFORMATION

The fieldwork and descriptive analysis were carried out by means of a below-threshold contract awarded to the company **WEBTOOLS, S.L.**

A below-threshold contract was commissioned with **DIMETRICAL, S.L.** to extract texts from the portal for latent class analysis.

Part of the latent class analysis of the portal texts, as well as part of the navigation analysis, was carried out in conjunction with the Complutense University of Madrid under the **ICEX-UCM agreement** for joint research on internationalized Spanish companies, signed in September 2020.

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