

“EEPLE: the Board Engine”

Helping a young startup expand their ability to innovate.

Social networking sites are all the rage.

Melty.fr, a social networking site attracting over one million users each month, offers the media content, chat and news that you would expect from a good social platform. This website has been harnessed by a fast-growing startup company working with a team of 25 young entrepreneurs. Eeple was founded in 2005 by Alexandre Malsch a 24-year-old student then at EPITECH, a French IT university. A member of BizSpark, a Microsoft program that provides software, support and visibility for Software Startups and the French IDEES project, Eeple has quickly become an expert in implementing Microsoft Silverlight Technology and SAAS models.

As a company focused on innovation and software development, Eeple is continuously looking at improving the features offered on Melty.fr and the online experience it gives to its users. That's what motivated them to work on a new web interface last year.

Their ambition was to create more flexible internet tools for users and to shorten the time it takes to create new websites. To help them achieve both of these goals, Eeple created the “Board Engine” project, a web tool designed to facilitate the publication of new Rich Internet Applications (RIA) on Melty.fr when high definition content and interactive tools can enrich the user experience. Built on Microsoft Silverlight technology, the “Board Engine” concept provides a framework for developing RIA websites faster and more cost-effectively.

Today, the creation of a complex RIA website requires the collaboration of multiple web agencies over a long period, and this can quickly become prohibitively expensive. What Silverlight Technology brings to the table is the ability to cut time and costs without compromising on the quality of the content or limiting the creativity of web designers. This opens up a new avenue for more effective agency collaboration and as a result generating new ergonomic web solutions to the market.

Recognising this ambitious endeavour, Eeple was included in the 25 startup companies selected for the Microsoft IDEES program. This program provides Eeple with integrated support ranging from product development to venture capital funding access. This acknowledgement has also drawn other supporters, among them the French venture capitalist Bouygues Telecom Investment who has become a key strategic investor in Eeple.

Participation in IDEES has additionally given Eeple access to the European Union Grants Advisor programme (EUGA), an initiative led by Microsoft, HP, Intel and other partners to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to increase their awareness and understanding of EU and national funding opportunities, and help them with the application process. EUGA's goal is stimulate growth, employability and innovation thus, enhancing business and helping to grow competitive and dynamic local economies.

A EUGA Consultant assisted Eeple in identifying the French government grant “WEB INNOVANT 2.0” as the most appropriate source of funding for the Board Engine project. This

grant comes under the auspices of the French Stimulus Package, which has been tailored to support and strengthen the Digital Economy with a special focus on Internet WEB 2.0 technology. Calling for proposals named “WEB INNOVANT 2.0”, the French government dedicated €35M to funding development in this field. The funds have been shared among 44 projects, of which Board Engine received €80 000, thanks in part to the assistance and support provided by the EUGA infrastructure.

Support from Microsoft in such a wide range of areas has been a significant facilitator of Eeple’s success and rapid growth, and everyone involved felt that Microsoft’s collaboration with Eeple and the technological support provided by the Microsoft development team played a key role. Speaking of the assistance provided by EUGA, Eeple told us that *“we knew that working on such grant application was time consuming and a strain on resources which a start-up like Eeple could not afford. With EUGA, we worked with a professional experienced consultant who was able to set limits and to identify strength and weaknesses of the project. Finally, Microsoft, by attesting to the high quality of the ‘Board Engine’ project, has provided the credibility we needed to succeed in our application”*.

For more information on EUGA, see <http://www.eugrantsadvisor.com/>