



Kosovo startup branches into online sales



In less than a year, Denis Gafurri, standing and Gentian Lluka have become leaders in their business.

“People started calling us and asking, ‘Can we put our watches on your site?’ Then it was perfume, and toys and TVs,” Gafurri says. “Now we have become a sort of miniature Amazon for Kosovo.”

A traditional catalog merchant has spawned Kosovo’s first major online store, putting thousands of products within a click’s reach of a target population rapidly growing comfortable with the idea of Internet commerce.

Since its launch in December 2011, Smard has become Kosovo’s leading Internet retailer, offering for sale about 4,000 items, including electronics, apparel, jewelry, books and even motor scooters. Delivery comes free, or at nominal cost, within 24 hours of ordering, says Gentian Lluka, 31, co-owner of the company.

The Smard site builds on the firm’s original catalog-based office supply business. USAID, through its Young Entrepreneurs Program, which runs from September 2010 - September 2013, supported the startup and its eight employees with a \$12,000 [10,000 Euro] grant to cover the printing of its biannual print catalog, as well as the purchase of computer equipment used to support its online operations.

“This is the engine that drives our business,” said second co-owner Denis Gafurri, hefting the latest Smard – a contraction of *smart delivery* – catalog. Gafurri and Lluka founded Smard to sell office supplies to business clients. Eventually, Lluka leveraged his experience in establishing telegrafi.com, Kosovo’s leading online news and information portal, to move Smard online. A prominent link on the Telegrafi site soon began driving many of its 125,000 unique daily visitors to Smard.

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Today, nearly 30 companies supply Smard. Popular items are stored within Smard’s on-site warehouse, while others are shipped directly from the suppliers. First year sales were roughly 100,000 Euros – an amount Lluka and Gafurri expect to grow as the firm builds trust with its clients. Smard just began accepting bankcards online, expanding payment options beyond just bank transfers or cash/credit on delivery. Lluka said postal employees have told him hundreds of packages a day arrive at the main post office from just one British retailer alone.

“We have to win over our customers and give them the products they want to buy here,” he says.

USAID’s Young Entrepreneurs Program is designed to assist Kosovo’s new and emerging entrepreneurs, ages 18 – 35. The program recognizes that young entrepreneurs need more than mere training—they need capital and real-time support during the critical early business start-up period. To achieve this, the program provides business start-up matching grants and financing options with practical business training and sustained, hands-on coaching services for fledgling enterprises.