Market and Website Analysis and empirical Survey of (potential) 3T Customers

Project Partner
RWTH, ITA/3T GmbH, Aachen

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Project Management
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Project Teams
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Figures: Projekt teams with Thomas Baaken und Tobias Kesting

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Initial Situation
The 3T GmbH is a spin-off of the Institute of Textile Technology (ITA) at RWTH Aachen University. It offers innovative and comprehensive problem solutions in research and development along the textile chain. However, there still exists considerable unused customer potential in the border region (Germany – Belgium – the Netherlands) which 3T aims to exploit. For this reason 3T wants to know which are the most attractive customer groups and their specific needs and how they can be addressed adequately.

Objective and Assignment
The project groups took over the tasks of conducting a market analysis, an evaluation of the 3T website and an empirical survey on (potential) customers in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. As a main result, 3T should receive concrete guidelines for acquiring new customers.

Procedure

At first the project teams made excursions to the headquarters of the Institute of Textile Technology (ITA) at Aachen where they had a guided tour and became familiar with the project topics. Project team 1 conducted a basic research on the textile market and developed a questionnaire draft. The group furthermore made a specific market analysis on fibre-reinforced composites and prepared a database with addresses of (potential) 3T customers. Project team 2 focused on online communication for Business-to-Business markets and analysed the current 3T website. This analysis was theory-based and applied 11 evaluation criteria for research supplier websites. A comparison of the 3T website with best practice examples revealed improvement potential regarding structure, design and content. Based on these findings, the team finally proposed a concrete draft (template) for a revised 3T website. In the third step, the empirical survey on (potential) 3T customers was conducted. More than 2,000 companies were contacted. In the end, 193 usable questionnaires could be integrated into the SPSS analysis of the survey.
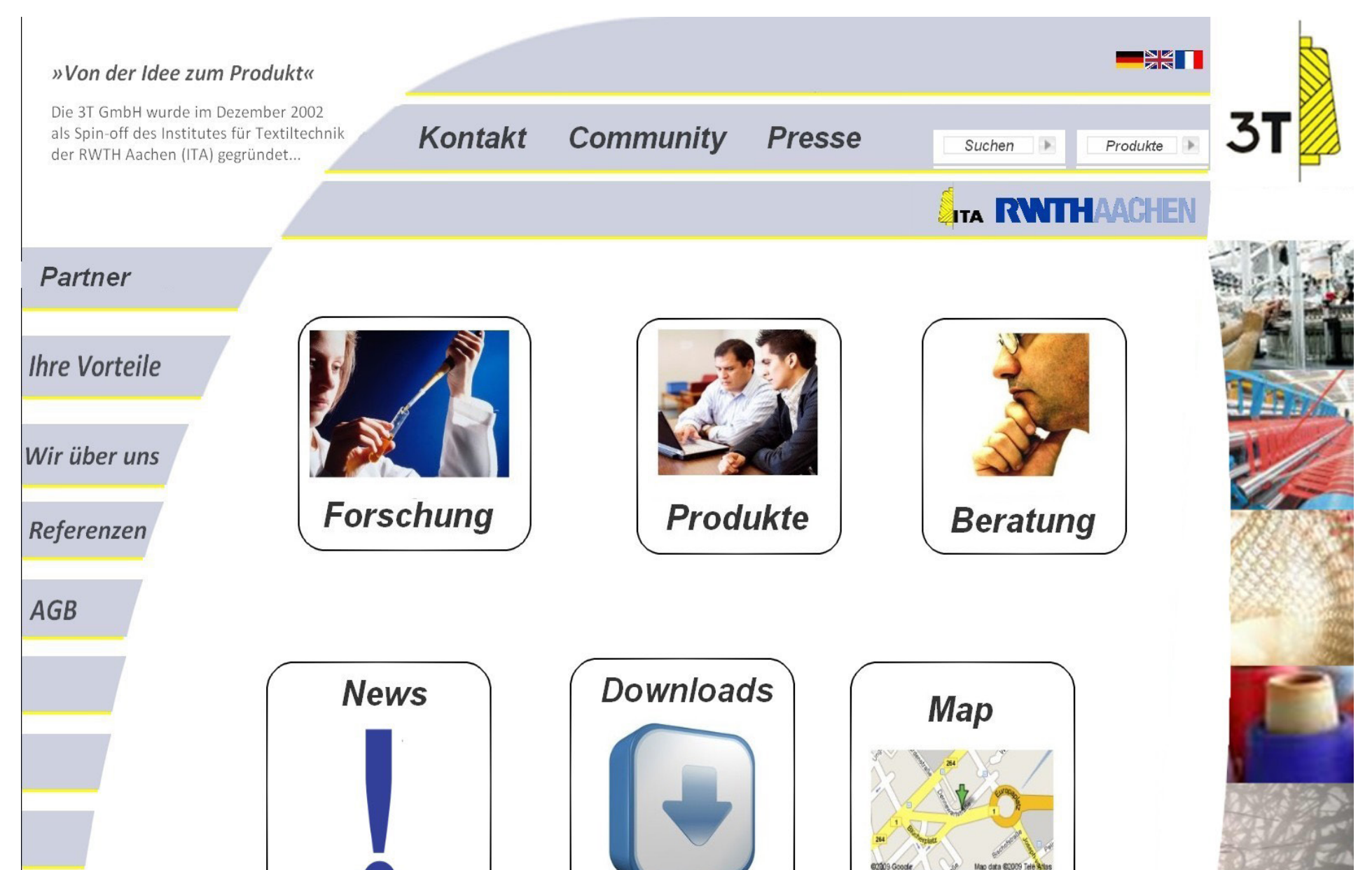
Survey Results
48% of the survey participants state that they already have cooperation experience with external research suppliers. Almost 30% of these companies can be classified as major enterprises regarding the number of employees. More than 50% of them are active in industry textiles. 80% of them conduct own research and development (R&D) activities. 57% also have an own department for this purpose. The first cooperation-related contact between research customers and external research suppliers is most often arranged on behalf of the companies themselves or on behalf of the respective external research supplier. Transfer intermediaries like chambers or associations merely play a marginal role regarding contact initiation.

Trust and reliability are essential factors for research customers concerning the selection of an appropriate supplier. They particularly rate suppliers as credible and innovative.

Based on the benefits derived from cooperation of companies with external research suppliers, the project managers conducted a cluster analysis which revealed three clearly separable clusters. It becomes obvious that cluster 2 has overall high benefit means, cluster 1 medium and cluster 3 relatively low benefit means.

The main managerial implications to be derived from the survey results are as follows:

- (Potential) customer segmentation based on the customer's benefit
- Regular contributions and advertisements in journals for industrial textiles, mechanical engineering and weaving mills
- Company and networking days in the border region