Cool Vendors in France, 2015

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Our first Cool Vendors in France report offers evidence that less-known French technology companies are worth taking seriously. We highlight socially oriented consumer solutions and business productivity offerings for enterprise information leaders and anybody looking to improve meeting efficiency.

Key Findings

- We see more France-based, interesting small companies at international events and in Gartner vendor briefings.

- Notable French innovation cuts across consumer and business markets and enterprise functions.

- France is a promising source for technology companies and solutions. French consumers are some of the most discerning in the world, and the small-business environment one of the most challenging. Companies that stand out in France may do so elsewhere, too.

Recommendations

- Consider this research to be, above all, an examination of French innovation. We had to cut out many compelling companies to pick the five companies featured here.

- Enterprise information leaders and information architects would benefit from taking a look at Antidot's agile information management offering.

- Transport industry strategists should pay attention to BlaBlaCar's transport network alternative.

- European B2B sales and marketing leaders would be well-advised to consider IKO System's predictive analytics.

- Consumer brand marketeers may find a new way to interact with customers, using Running Heroes as a model.

- Anybody looking to improve meeting efficiency could be a customer candidate for Wisembly.

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Analysis

This research does not constitute an exhaustive list of vendors in any given technology area, but rather is designed to highlight interesting, new and innovative vendors, products and services. Gartner disclaims all warranties, express or implied, with respect to this research, including any warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose.

What You Need to Know

Gartner produces annual reports on Cool Vendors across a range of technologies, services and regions. This is our first iteration of Cool Vendors in France. The world's most-visited country is perhaps not as well-known for its small, innovative technology companies or its small-business friendliness.

However, the French government is focused on fostering innovation and making it more visible internationally. The country has 71 internationally open "innovation clusters" that mix companies, educational institutions and laboratories to work on "market-oriented projects and prototypes." A Paris-based innovation cluster was ranked in top eight of global innovation clusters by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2013. In January 2015, Business France was established by the French government to foster export growth by French businesses and to promote and facilitate international investment in France. It exhibited at the Mobile World Congress. We have also seen more French presence in the Consumer Electronics Show (CES).

The differentiated solutions of many smaller French companies caught the interest of Gartner's France-based and global analyst team during the past year. We compiled a shortlist and evaluated the "coolness" of these companies. We also had one of our top French candidates allocated to a solution-focused Gartner Cool Vendors report, rather than this geography-focused report.

Four out of our top five cool vendors are based out of Paris, and one is Lyon-born. We are highlighting two consumer-oriented companies, as well as three business solution companies:

- Antidot's information management solution covers different data types and enables metadata capture and enrichment when the data is being loaded.

- BlaBlaCar is a people-powered transport network that is flexible, economical and ecological.

- IKO System is a specialist for Western Europe B2B sales predictive analytics.

- Running Heroes is an advertising-free motivational community of connected runners.

- Wisembly makes meetings better with integrated feedback and engagement analysis.

Antidot

Lyon, France (www.antidot.net)

Analysis by Roxane Edjlali

Why Cool: Antidot's Antidot Information Factory (AIF) is unique in its ability to address a variety of data types and to capture and enrich metadata at the time it is being loaded. This will be of particular importance to organizations adopting data lakes, where large volumes of data of varied types are collected in support of current and upcoming big data projects.

Antidot supports enterprise information management (EIM) initiatives by allowing enterprises to easily relate, classify and enrich information across the organization, be it structured or unstructured. Antidot Information Factory offers a complete set of capabilities: automatic categorization and classification of data, text mining, entity extraction, geotagging, and data cleansing. AIF offers also a wide list of connectors for sources internal to your organization — such as relational databases, content management systems, and enterprise applications — as well as data external to your organization. It can deal with data of varied data types, including XML and JavaScript Object Notation (JSON), but also complex file formats, such as video or audio.

Antidot Information Factory has more than 40 clients actively running the product across various sectors, including e-commerce and media.

Challenges: Despite the progress made by organizations in understanding that information is an asset, only a few have established the corresponding discipline for EIM and enterprise metadata management (EMM). However, with the emergence of digital business and big data, information will be everywhere, and managing information assets inside and outside the organization will become crucial. As a result, the ability for Antidot to position itself in the big data ecosystem and describe its value proposition will be crucial to its success, given the limited market maturity.

Who Should Care: Enterprise information leaders and information architects looking at harvesting, relating and managing information assets across the organization to support new information-driven initiatives. Consider AIF to facilitate the discovery, organization and sharing of information across multiple projects.

BlaBlaCar

Paris, France (http://www.blablacar.com)

Analysis by Stéphanie Baghdassarian

Why Cool: BlaBlaCar is cool because it has created a people-powered transport network that's often more flexible than public transportation, while being both more economical and more ecological. A responsive moderating and member service, a well-designed platform (both the website and the app), and a fast-growing community of users are all contributing to its success and growth.

BlaBlaCar falls right into the shared economy, with a long-distance ride-sharing marketplace that connects drivers with empty seats to passengers looking for a ride. It was initially launched in France in 2006 under the covoiturage.fr brand. Since then, it has expanded in 18 countries, and comes both as a website and a mobile app. It has reached 10 million members, of which 2 million use it every month. Scale is what makes it successful, as the offer and demand are large enough to satisfy each other.

BlaBlaCar allows drivers to detail their journey (time, route, possible stops or loops), their car and car equipment, and how many seats they have to offer. It allows passengers to ask questions directly in the app and comment in more detail, so future users know more about their potential driver. Drivers and passengers can rate each other to build a trusted community. Additionally, BlaBlaCar checks the driver's phone number and email address, and accepts Facebook Connect. It also has a team of moderators who actively vet all exchanges and feedback, so they can ensure all the community members are trustworthy and respectful. Finally, the app suggests a price per passenger to charge for the journey, while letting drivers adjust it within a range of 50%, and handles credit card payments (in France). In France, where the company is most established, BlaBlaCar makes money by taking a commission on each seat booked.

Compared with Uber, one major difference for BlaBlaCar's drivers is that they are not driving to make a profit, but rather to allow passengers to share the costs of their rides. This keeps BlaBlaCar clear of some regulatory issues Uber is having in various markets. Also, where Uber focuses on short inner-city rides, BlaBlaCar's offering is mostly on longer rides: intercity or even across countries in Europe, with the average trip being 330 kilometers (km), or 205 miles.

Challenges: There are two main challenges to a company like BlaBlaCar:

- As with any community, the size and engagement of the member base are crucial to success. So any new country BlaBlaCar launches into is a new challenge to develop the large-enough, trustworthy member base to fill empty car seats and to offer a good selection of trips.

- BlaBlaCar has the first-mover advantage in several of its markets, having been around for several years already. Its challenge is to remain the first, and develop its offering either through new functionalities — for example, allowing people who have shared a car together to easily be able to set it up again — or by adapting the current solution to short, recurring journeys, such as home-to-office commutes, which have in the past proven rather complex to sort out.

Who Should Care: The transport industry strategists and product marketing teams — from public transport to car rental companies — should consider the increasing impact of the sharing economy expanding into transportation, and tailor responses to this new competition. With Airbnb and BlaBlaCar as successful examples of the sharing economy, it becomes clear that other types of assets could benefit from these new business models, whether it is office space or even consumer

products, such as specific equipment that consumers don't use on a daily basis and could share (state-of-the-art camera, lawn mower, etc.).

IKO System

Paris, France (www.iko-system.com)

Analysis by Todd Berkowitz

Why Cool: IKO System uses predictive analytics to help B2B salespeople and marketers identify high-quality, net-new prospects in their territories, based upon their propensity to turn into actual deals. While the market for software as a service (SaaS)-based predictive analytics applications for B2B salespeople and marketers is heating up, most vendors have focused their attention on North America. IKO System has carved out a niche by focusing higher in the sales funnel than many of the competing solutions, and are exclusively targeting companies in Western Europe. They now boast more than 200 customers, both local companies and European branches of multinational companies, and have an attractively priced offering for small and midsize businesses (SMBs) as well.

IKO System's predictive models look at internal data, as well as more than 60,000 sources of external data (many of them specific to Europe), to recommend prospects to target in a specific territory. Since many vendors in the market use similar data science techniques, differentiation is often tied to the data and how it's incorporated into models. IKO System takes a unique approach to the inputs they use for their models: Customers define their targets and segments, and identify competitors and partners. The model then returns a prioritized, ready-to-call list of prospects. For leads that are already in the database, IKO System scores them based on propensity to buy. To streamline the process between scored leads and funnel follow-up, IKO System uses connectors with Salesforce, as well as with Marketo and HubSpot.

Challenges: The market for predictive analytics applications for B2B sales and marketing is very immature in Europe, and there is less attention being paid to it than in North America. Several vendors in other countries that used to focus on predictive prospecting have placed more attention of late around predictive lead scoring, because enterprises could easily acquire their own lists of prospect contacts. While IKO System has predictive lead-scoring capabilities, they will need to continue investing in this area to match the capabilities of North American companies that will likely enter the European market in 2015.

Who Should Care: B2B sales and marketing leaders in Europe should consider IKO System if they want to improve the effectiveness of their outbound sales and marketing activities by targeting prospects that have the greatest propensity to purchase their solutions.

Running Heroes

Paris, France (https://runningheroes.com)

Analysis by Stéphanie Baghdassarian

Why Cool: Running Heroes is cool because it has built a motivating, advertising-free community of connected runners. Users have a choice of rewards based on their running activity. Coming is a version 2 of the platform that will bring new features to users, such as tracking friends, finding running buddies based on location and running profiles, and organizing collective runs.

Running Heroes launched in France in March 2014. Runners log on to the site and pair their accounts with one (or more) of eight running apps and devices supported by the community, including those from Nike+, Endomondo, Garmin and Polar. Each time a runner logs a run, the information about distance, time and elevation feeds to Running Heroes, where an algorithm combines these data points with age, weight, height and gender information to award a certain amount of points. Runners accumulate these points and can redeem them at one of the company's 150 commercial partners, which include organic food stores, sports brands, running apps and domestic services.

The Running Heroes business model is one of a media company. The platform offers marketing campaigns with commercial partners that want more visibility, either in the long run or on specific occasions, and drives new sales and higher returns on existing customers. Running Heroes uses the data it collects about users internally — it does not sell it to third parties — to tailor the best communication and offers to individuals.

To boost motivation and usage, Running Heroes and its commercial partners also organize challenges, whereby runners have to run a certain amount of kilometers in a given time to take part in a drawing for yet more rewards, often free and/or exclusive, such as a free bib number for running competitions that are officially closed for registration.

Future roll-out plans include launching the Running Heroes platform abroad, starting with the U.K., and launching a sister community targeting cyclists.

Challenges: After about a year in business, Running Heroes has over 130,000 active runners in its community. There are two main challenges to the type of service it offers:

- The community has to reach critical mass to be attractive to commercial partners that are paying for media campaigns. Expanding the community is therefore key.

- For Running Heroes to increase visibility and sales, the community has to be engaged and interact with the service very regularly to pick up on the various rewards that will make those consumers potential new customers (or more loyal ones) to the brands using the community. Frequency of usage is therefore a key metric to track and aim to increase.

Who Should Care: Marketing executives of consumer brands looking at new ways to interact with potential customers, or to keep existing customers loyal, should investigate Running Heroes as a partner. Sports and fitness app developers should also reach out to Running Heroes to cultivate pairing between the app and the site. Additionally, organizations looking at building consumer communities should investigate the Running Heroes approach.

Wisembly

Paris, France (www.wisembly.com)

Analysis by Adam Preset and Helen Poitevin

Why Cool: Wisembly is cool because it delivers interactive solutions to make meetings and training sessions better. It offers integrated regular feedback from participants into the process of team meetings; and interaction analysis that allows the organizers of larger meetings to visualize the level of engagement and help determine what worked well, what did not and how to improve the next event.

Wisembly's meeting tool can be used for face-to-face meetings, offering a structured approach to scheduling, agendas and document sharing that help improve the prework. It captures votes and tracks decisions and action items, making it useful for managing work items within the meeting itself and for ensuring follow-up. Wisembly's platform is appropriate for regular in-person meetings in agile development teams, highly formal executive team meetings or special large team events. It can also be used for meetings with virtual attendees or for remote training sessions, adding moderation, polling and Q&A features to foster better remote participation. Badly run meetings can be painful, but great meetings can empower workers and generate productive results.

Wisembly is also branching out with a new invitation-only offering, Solid, a Web application that includes key features for meeting agendas, shared note-taking and action items, meeting feedback, and reporting. Solid will appeal to organizers who crave a simpler, streamlined experience.

Challenges: The space for meeting productivity tools is crowded by a spectrum of options. There are free tools and templates along with many general-purpose collaboration suites that include file sharing, document collaboration, task tracking and calendar tools. In addition, solutions like Wisembly are often bought and tested at the level of a single department or event. Few organizations have invested in a specialized solution for meetings to be rolled out to the whole organization.

Who Should Care: Business executives, line-of-business leaders, project management professionals, HR leaders, training organizers and IT can benefit from tools and services that improve meeting efficiency. Wisembly's offerings might be adopted by small teams or workgroups, but CIOs and digital workplace leaders working cooperatively with business teams may decide to scale it more broadly. Organizationwide adoption of a software tool that promotes the same structured methodology for handling meetings can influence consistent positive behaviors and an improved corporate culture and climate. Use of Wisembly could be particularly helpful at the instantiation of new lines of business, or in the kickoff for new projects, by introducing collaborative techniques and structured meetings into the mindset and team culture at the outset.

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