Editorial Preface:
E-Services Special Issue

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This special issue of *International Journal of E-Business Research* aims at understanding and explaining the emerging paradigm of e-services. Today, the services industry provides the majority of all jobs, and services tend to be delivered more and more using the Internet, thus becoming e-services. Services often are characterized as intangible, perishable, experience-based, and difficult-to-standardize products needing many interactions between customers and providers. Grönroos (2001) identified three basic characteristics of services: (1) services are processed consisting of activities or a series of activities rather than things; (2) services are, at least to some extent, produced and consumed simultaneously; and (3) the customer participants in the service deliver process.

Key characteristics of e-services are the high information content, personalized nature, and the need to apply information and communication technology. E-services can be viewed as a series of activities leading to some observable behavior between providers (intermediaries) and requesters. They are delivered using the Internet and accessible from any place at any time, and they often involve no direct human involvement of the service provider. The term *e-services* typically is used to describe a variety of electronic interactions ranging from basic services, such as the delivery of news and the taking out of an insurance policy, to more complex services, such as the delivery of context-aware, personalized services. The e-service paradigm focuses more and more on creating value by making Web-site visits an experience, which is much more than solely a technological artifact. Customers are viewed as unique entities that have preferences and need to be attracted.

An e-service seldom comes alone and often is offered as a service bundle. Grönroos (2001) defines a bundle as a package of more elementary services offered by multiple suppliers. Organizations previously operating in separate markets have to cooperate to offer a personalized e-service bundle. The challenges of coordinating and managing e-services are overwhelming. Coarse- and fine-grained e-services offered by autonomous organizations having different, sometimes overlapping functionalities need to be integrated into alternative arrangements. Which arrangement has the most advantages or the lowest risk is often unknown.

This special e-services issue of the *International Journal of E-Business Research* consists of five papers from authors who responded to the call-for-papers, but also from a selection of papers presented at the Sixth International Conference on E-Commerce (ICEC05) towards the new services landscape. The first three papers deal with various aspects of e-services in various application domains. The last two papers are
focused on modeling the various aspects of e-services

The paper, “Resource-Based Interdependencies in Value Networks for Mobile E-Services, by Uta Wehn de Montalvo, Els van de Kar, and Carleen Maitland, compares the organizational structure across five different mobile services using the value network framework. The authors first describe value networks and their components, including actors, resources, and activities, and the relationships between those components. The paper compares mobile services for five different types of applications, including content-specific downloading and location finding. Based on their findings, the authors conclude that network operators constitute the most important entity in a value network, because this actor determines the structure and operation of the network. Intermediaries also play a significant role in a value network by coordinating resources and services.

The second paper, “Critical Success Factors of Web-Based E-Service: The Case of E-Insurance,” by Sang M. Lee and Teuta Cata, focuses on the adoption of Web-based applications in the insurance industry. Insurance firms are reconsidering e-services provisioning as a corporate strategy in the Internet era. Successful performance of e-services requires that insurance companies pay closer attention not only to the new technology applied, but also to the integration of it to the internal business processes and consider it as part of the organizational growth and future business prospect. Their study shows that Web site availability, organizational support, customer pressure, degree of business integration, an e-business plan, organization age, and organizational size are critical factors for online performance.

The third paper, “On Personalizing Web Services Using Context,” by Zakaria Maamar, Soraya Kouadri Mostéfaoui, and Qusay H. Mahmoud, presents a context-based approach for e-services personalization. E-services are still unaware of the environment in which they operate. In this paper, personalization is based on the user context, Web service context, and resource context, and a policy-based approach is taken. Preferences are of different types, varying from when the execution of an e-service should start to where the outcome of this execution should be delivered according to user location. Besides user preferences, it is discussed that the computing resources on which the e-services operate have an impact on their personalization.

The fourth and fifth papers of this e-service special issue focus on modeling e-services. Modeling is essential to understanding the processes necessary to offer an e-service and as organizations have to cooperate to offer heterogeneous services as a personalized bundle of services to the customers.

The fourth paper, by Michael Weiss and Daniel Amyot, is titled “Business Process Modeling With User Requirements Notation (URN).” URN combines goals and scenarios in order to help capture and reason about user requirements prior to detailed design. URN also can be used to model the dependencies between services offered by various organizations. URN-based approach will provide usable and useful tools to assist researchers and practitioners with the modeling, analysis, integration, and evolution of e-services.

The fifth paper, “Finding E-Service Offerings by Computer-Supported Customer Need Reasoning,” by Ziv Baida, Jaap Gordijn, Hans Akkermans, Hanne Sæle, and Andrei Z. Morch, proposes a methodology to model and bundle service into packages. Its objective is to support prospective e-service users in defining and buying service bundles that fit their specific needs and demands. Their case study shows that the analysis performed using their approach made it possible for the energy industry to define service bundles for specific groups of customers in such a way
that bundles fit the demands of their respective customers and function properly.

The papers show that there is no uniform definition of what constitutes an e-service. What the papers show is that progress in e-services research requires many disciplines and various types of research. A richness of potential views needs to be integrated. New personalized relationships are characterizing interactions among companies, their customers, suppliers, partners, and competitors. Cooperating between organizations requires modeling to avoid the risk of failure, to personalize e-services, and to create a shared understanding among stakeholders.

E-services represent the next stage in the exploitation of the Web and have the potential to transform fundamentally how individuals, businesses, and governments function. Organizations in the private and public sectors are already starting to explore the potential of e-services. Overall, e-services have much to offer in overcoming previous obstacles faced by traditional services. Future opportunities for revenue lie in creating alternatives to traditional service operations in the form of e-services.

REFERENCES

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