The concept of e-services is relatively new, but it is getting more and more used in academia, society and industry. In addition e-services are posing many challenges for consumers, businesses and governments alike. After the first wave of e-commerce and e-business, we are witnessing a paradigm shift in the way businesses, governments and consumers are using Internet-based technologies and mobile communications to innovate and produce new products and services. This trend is also affected and accelerated by a corporate shift from the provision of goods to the provision of services, with a parallel development of relevant new business models and marketing paradigms. Yet, an e-service paradigm is still not established.

E-services are a consequence of networked technologies as networked ICT technologies such as the Internet or mobile networking are having a dramatic effect on how services and especially knowledge services are innovated, designed, produced and distributed. Some e-services may be provided by the company web site such as e-accounting or e-insurance; other e-services, such as news updates to subscribers, may be sent to your computer. Other e-services such as those functioning as intermediary services and often orchestrating networks of companies will be carried out in the background without the customer’s immediate knowledge.

Classical examples of services that are getting transformed into e-services or self-services are e-banking, e-health such as remote medical advices, e-government (e.g. online tax returns), web-based delivery of after-sales information technology (IT) support services, or the transformation of libraries into e-libraries. In addition ICT-networks such as the Internet have created the basis for the development of new types of services and have made possible the transformation of some types of physical products into digital products that can be now delivered over an electronic network. These can be for example e-newspapers, music that can be downloaded from web sites, electronic airline tickets, e-books, etc.

One feature characteristic of services is that customers are per se more involved in the service delivery process; therefore the service consumption is characterized by a high involvement of the customer or customer interaction. Normally the production, provision or consumption of a service requires the interaction between the service provider and the user of the service. Traditionally this has been based on personal interactions, most often face-to-face interactions. In e-services, the production, consumption and/or provision of services takes place through the intermediation of an ICT-network such as Internet-based systems or mobile solutions. Concerning customer interaction, there are different types of services ranging from customer interaction with less standardized service components to customer interaction with highly standardized service components (self-service). In the new e-service paradigm, new challenges arise in meeting customers’ services and e-services demands. As a result innovative changes may come for example in customer relations (service encounters and quality) or in organisational forms and business models.
The mission of the new International Journal of E-Services and Mobile Applications is to contribute to a comprehensive coverage and understanding of the emerging e-services paradigm both from a theoretical and an empirical point of view. Specifically the objective of this innovative journal is to provide a comprehensive coverage and understanding of all aspects of e-services, self-services and mobile communication including business-to-business, business-to-consumer, government-to-business, government-to-consumer and consumer-to-consumer e-services from different perspectives and different fields as for example marketing, management and MIS.

The articles in this inaugural issue address different aspects of e-services. The first article authored by Vanessa Cooper, Ross Smith, RMIT University and Sharman Lichtenstein, Deakin University entitled Successful Web-Based IT Support Services: Service Provider Perceptions of Stakeholder-Oriented Challenges describes the challenges faced by IT service providers of Web-based self-service systems (WSS) as a result of the involvement of the other firms and their employees (end-users). The paper reports findings from an interpretive study of IT service provider perceptions in six multinational IT service provider firms. The findings highlight that, for IT service providers, it is important to consider and resolve the needs and concerns of other key stakeholders, however significant challenges exist in doing so. The main contribution of the paper is the identification of the key challenges involved.

The second article authored by Roumen Vragov, Baruch College, and entitled Sponsored Search as an E-service uses a version of traditional consumer price search models from economic theory to evaluate the extent to which consumers and advertisers can rely on sponsored search as an effective e-service infomediary. The article also describes steps that the manager of the search engine can take to improve the sponsored search service.

The third article entitled Business to Consumer E-Services: Australian Accounting Practices and their Websites and authored by Stephen Burgess, John Breen, Regina Quiazon from Victoria University, Australia, reports on a study involving analysis of the websites of one hundred accounting practices located in metropolitan Melbourne, and subsequent interviews with twenty practices. The study focuses on identifying the level of e-services that they employ. The findings indicated that the use of computer accounting packages is almost mandatory among clients. The Internet supports an improved delivery of information, and e-mail is now seen as enhancing the provision of traditional face-to-face services; however, there is little evidence of the use of websites for the delivery of automated e-services. Overall, the study suggests that Australian accounting firms currently take a fairly conservative approach to website use.

The fourth article entitled Electronic Intermediaries Managing and Orchestrating Organizational Networks Using E-Services authored by Marijn Janssen, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands, analyzes an intermediary that uses e-services for orchestrating a network in the consumer electronics industry. The empirical results show that the coordination and management of networks requires specific expertise and skills which result in the rise of intermediary specialized in orchestrating such organizational networks. The primary value creation activity of the intermediary is leveraging the products, activities and knowledge of the specialized companies and providing e-services for orchestrating the organizational network to create short lead times, improve customer responsiveness and ensure adaptability.

The fifth article authored by Elissar Toufaily, Naoufel Daghouf & Roy Toffoli, University of Quebec in Montreal and entitled The adoption of “E-Banking” by Lebanese Banks: Success and Critical Factors examines the organizational, structural, and strategic factors that can speed up or slow down the adoption of E-banking innovations by financial institutions in the Lebanese market. The paper develops a conceptual model based on a review of the major innovation adoption theories and other research findings, and tests the model with a survey administered through a census of the population of Lebanese banks. Findings revealed that the organizational variables of bank size, presence of functional divisions, technical staff and infrastructure, as well as the degree of international experience and tolerance of risk of the decision makers exert a significant impact on the adoption of E-banking. Two structural characteristics, the internal technological environment, and relative advantage of the innovations were
also found to impact adoption. The two strategic factors related to the banks’ degree of international operations were also found to positively influence the adoption of E-banking. Finally the paper provides recommendations on ways of accelerating the rate of adoption of E-banking in an important developing Middle Eastern country.

The articles presented in this inaugural issue have demonstrated some of the theoretical and empirical issues of c-services and present some of the most current research in c-services. It is the hope of this journal that it will benefit business people seeking to understand and optimize their c-services investments as well as academics and researchers from the theoretical and empirical discussion of e-services.

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