This special issue of the *Journal of Electronic Commerce in Organizations* is dedicated to e-services. E-services can be conceptualized as a subset of e-commerce. However, the concept of e-services is relatively new and this special issue tries to highlight some interesting aspects of e-services. This editorial provides a definition of e-services, creates a typology of e-services and presents the main characteristics of e-services. The challenges that e-services are posing for companies, businesses and governments are also briefly discussed.

E-services are a consequence of networked technologies. In fact, 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 (Scupola, 2008). In addition, ICT-networks such as the Internet have created the basis for the development of new types of services. These networks may also change the way customers or users experience service functions. For example, in the case of hospital services “relational times” (person-to-person relations) are increasingly replaced by “technical times” where people are moved from one technical system to another. ICT-networks seem to be a catalyst to a renewed use of services, here called e-services.

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. 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). To guarantee that customers’ demands are best served by the provided services, the level of customer interaction has to be reflected in the innovation management process of the company. This development could lead to a self-service society. Innovative changes may come in customer relations (service encounters and quality), in organisational forms such as the introduction of virtual organisations (Travica, 2007), in competencies developments, and customer driven innovation (Scupola, 2008). As a result service firms, manufacturing firms and governmental organizations might face new challenges and may introduce new business models.

E-services are defined here as services that are produced, provided or consumed through the use of ICT-networks such as Internet-based systems and mobile solutions. However, e-services also include, for example, the online selling of real estate property or the purchasing of physical goods that are then delivered by other means such as a book that is purchased online, but delivered by surface mail to the buyers. E-services can be
produced by consumers, businesses, and govern-
ments and can be accessed via a wide range of
information appliances (Hoffman, 2003, p.53). In
addition, there are three main characteristics
of e-services:

• The service is accessible via the Internet or
other electronic networks
• The service is consumed by a person via the
Internet or other electronic networks
• There might be a fee that the consumer
pays the provider for using the e-service, but
that might not always be the case as, for
example, in some e-services offered by the
government.

Normally the production, provision or con-
sumption of a service requires the interaction
between the service provider and the user of the
service. Traditionally this has been based on per-
sonal interactions, most often face-to-face interac-
tions. In e-services, the production, consumption
or provision of services takes place through the
intermediation of an ICT-network such as Inter-
net-based systems or mobile solutions.

Familiar e-services are online banking or
online retailing (e.g., www.Amazon.com). Other
types of e-services are e-learning such as courses
offered online, e-health such as online medical
advice (e.g., www.netdoktor.com), e-government
(e.g., online government services such as
tax information online), e-libraries providing
electronic access to journal articles or book
chapters and information and location services
(Yee, 2006). As a result, four types of e-services
can be conceptualized:

1. business-to-business
2. business-to-consumer
3. government-to-business or to-consumer
4. consumer-to-consumer

The advent of e-services has raised a number
of challenges for knowledge intensive service
organizations such as consulting companies,
libraries and publishers, as well as for companies
selling physical goods. For example, companies
have to innovate, have to develop strategies and
new business models for the production and
provision of e-services, and acquire or develop
new competencies. This special issue will go in
depth regarding some aspects of e-services. It
concentrates primarily on business models, com-
petences development, e-services evolution, the
digital service encounter and on service delivery
performance in e-government.

This editorial has introduced a definition of
e-services, a typology of e-services, discussed
some of the characteristics of e-services as well
as discussed some of the e-services challenges for
corporations and governmental organizations.

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