INTRODUCTION

Small businesses around the world face many common challenges in relation to the manner in which they manage their information in the modern environment. Many of them realise the importance of using information technology, but are restricted by resource constraints (available time, capital, and knowledge) from using the technology to its fullest capacity. In some countries, small businesses are further handicapped by a lack of a technical-support infrastructure, communications infrastructure, suitable legal environment, and sophisticated banking systems to enable them to participate in information-technology and electronic-commerce initiatives.

This special issue of the Journal of Global Information Management (JGIM) on information technology and small business allows the editors to bring together a series of articles that investigates research into an important aspect of the use of information technology in small businesses around the world. The coverage of JGIM is international and cross-functional with topics that describe the use of innovative methodologies in international research. Articles that include a comparison of data gathered from multiple countries and cultures are especially encouraged, as are results that attempt to draw conclusions of a cross-cultural nature.

Therefore, the aim of this special issue of the Journal of Global Information Management was to showcase research that examines how information technology and electronic commerce are used by small businesses around the world to enhance their information-management practices. In particular, we were interested in

- research that examined small-business practice in a number of regions,
- small-business practice in one region that was then employed in another region,
- cross-cultural studies that traced the transition of small-business practices from one culture to another, or
- single-nation studies of underrepresented nations where comparisons are made with practices in better represented nations.

We are very pleased to present this special issue of JGIM with a series of excellent articles that bring together the theme of the journal with research in the
area of information technology and small business. The first article, by Robert MacGregor and Lejla Vrazalic, compares small businesses in Sweden and Australia, and investigates the manner in which the membership of strategic alliances can “cushion” the disadvantages arising from e-commerce adoption. The second submission, by Roman Beck, Rolf T. Wigand, and Wolfgang Koenig, analyzes the differences among SMEs (small to medium enterprises) in the manufacturing sectors in four countries (Denmark, France, Germany, and the United States) based on empirical data collected via a survey. In the third article, by Erran Carmel and Brian Nicholson, the authors are surprised that some small firms engage in offshore outsourcing given that they lack the resources that larger firms possess to overcome the difficulties involved. They examine these factors and use field data from small client firms (in the United States and the United Kingdom), intermediaries, and offshore vendors to analyse the mitigation approaches that reduce transaction costs for small firms. The final submission, by Ana Ortiz de Guinea, Helen Kelley, and M. Gordon Hunter, examines the applicability of a model of information-systems effectiveness (developed by researching Singaporean businesses) to small businesses in Canada. Note that each of these studies involves countries on at least two continents.

There is a need for the types of research that are being showcased in this special edition of JGIM. The submissions in this special edition expand the depth of research in this area, and the editors of this special edition commend them to you.

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