Preface

This edited book is timed to coincide with recent global electronic commerce/business (e-commerce) research in small- to medium-sized enterprise (SMEs). The editor’s first book (Al-Qirim, 2004) attempted to initiate, scan and to explore different issues (theories, factors, business and social implications, clusters, value/supply chain, developed/developing countries, technology vendors, etc.) concerning e-commerce in SMEs in different countries in the world and raised the importance of addressing these issues in order for e-commerce to succeed in SMEs. In the second book (Corbitt & Al-Qirim, 2004) however, an attempt was made to look at a specific focus and the book called for a more proactive role to be played by the different governments in the world to assist their SMEs in crossing the e-commerce chasm.

Thus, it is very important at this stage to monitor and to reflect on the progress of the e-commerce phenomenon in SMEs in different parts in the world, at a specific time and place. This is what this edited book is trying to achieve. This edited book contends that the e-commerce phenomenon in SMEs needs to be addressed at a more global level amongst professionals, policymakers and researchers. Such intertwined roles and initiatives (SMEs and their countries [policymakers, professionals and researchers]) at a more global level should generate further momentum for such SMEs to move in the right direction toward assessing the importance of e-commerce to their businesses.

In the following paragraphs, the editor provides an overview of the different contributions in the edited book.
Contributions in this Edited Book

Section I: E-Commerce in SMEs: A Global Phenomenon

The introductory chapter (Chapter I), by the editor of this book, provides relevant literature about the progress of e-commerce research in SMEs and accordingly, raises the importance of addressing the e-commerce phenomenon at a more global level. The editor highlights the importance of this conjuncture in order to further assist the SMEs sector in bridging the e-commerce divide.

Section II: Web Initiatives in SMEs

The chapters in the second section look into various strategic Web site initiatives and investigates developmental and managerial practices in SMEs in different parts of the world.

Chapter II criticizes the current approaches in explaining the evolution of SMEs Web sites over time and proposes an alternative framework that combines three different dimensions of organizational change (process, content and drivers). The chapter describes the different approaches (monitoring, content analysis and telephone interviews) and the characteristics of changes on the Web sites of 192 SMEs in the UK over ten months period. This is important to shed more insights into the adoption and the progression of e-commerce in SMEs.

Chapter III addresses issues pertaining to setting objectives as a priori to any other marketing campaign planning and evaluation tasks concerning Web site planning and evaluation in Australian SMEs. The results highlight interesting insights and classifications of these objectives. Reasons behind taxonomies and the characteristics of SMEs in each classification are described and explained.

In a similar vein, Chapter IV addresses the lack of strategic planning in e-commerce and subsequently e-business adoption within SMEs in the UK. The chapter aims to explore the various Web site development and management practices that have a direct underlying influence on e-commerce implementation within SMEs. The findings in this chapter reflect the difference in development and management practices of Web presence across two main types of SMEs. This chapter depicts the issues that hinder SMEs, particularly in micro and small, in moving beyond Web site adoption.

Similarly, Chapter V examines the Web site development and usage practices of urban and rural small and medium tourism businesses (SMTEs) in Australia. A list of barriers and motivators to the successful use of information and commu-
nations technologies (ICTs) in small business are examined, and a profile of Internet usage practices in Australian small businesses in general and SMTEs in particular is provided. A number of planning models are examined, with one (Burgess, 2002) selected for comparison with the activities of SMTEs. The chapter provides interesting insights pertaining to SMTEs and to variations between urban and rural SMTEs with respect to Web site implementations.

More interestingly, Chapter VI reports on a study investigating the impact of a community Web site (online business directory) on SMEs in a UK village community. The chapter looks into the benefits that SMEs derive from their participation in the directory, the problems they have encountered through their participation, and the effects their involvement is having on their wider Internet adoption strategy and decisions. The chapter sheds interesting insights concerning the value of such community-based Web sites for SMEs.

Section III: E-Commerce Across the Supply Chain in SMEs

Chapter VII looks into the use of e-commerce across the value chains of several SMEs in Europe by investigating two forms of supply chain: buyer groups in the consumer goods sector and dynamic networks in the manufacturing sector. The chapter looks into the types of electronic links between SMEs and their business partners, the value chain itself and the way in which business processes are carried out. The chapter attempts to substantiate that by introducing e-commerce in value activities across companies, the role of the current players in the supply chain is changing.

Section IV: The Role of Government in E-Commerce Adoption in SMEs

Chapter VIII attempts to investigate the role of government in the adoption and diffusion of e-commerce in SMEs in Italy. The chapter uses an existing institutional framework to analyze what is the types of government intervention presently offered to SMEs, how much these SMEs know about them and what SMEs would like to be done regarding government intervention to foster the adoption and diffusion of e-commerce.

Chapter IX examines a number of government projects and policy initiatives introduced during the five-year period 1999-2004, and measures their success against the experience of seven UK SME case studies that have successfully managed the adoption and implementation of e-business. The direct effect on these case studies, if any, of policies introduced during this period is reported in
this chapter. The chapter aims to develop rich insights pertaining to the UK government policies and initiatives directed towards SMEs. The purposes of such an endeavour is to instruct feasible changes in policymaking, in order to render the process and outcome more relevant to SMEs.

**Section V: Web Initiatives and Shopping Agents in SMEs**

In addition to above government push chapter, Chapter X introduces comparison-shopping as an emerging channel to increase Web visibility for SME. Comparison-shopping services are those Web-based services (by comparison-shopping services (CSP) that can collect product and service information—especially price-related information—from multiple online vendors, aggregate them, and then process them into value-added information for online shoppers to assist their online shopping. This chapter analyses two business models of CSPs and attempted, through data collected from 60 CSPs in a U.S. setting, to validate which model dominate. The chapter then attempts to examine the feasibility of using comparison-shopping to increase Web visibility for SMEs taking into consideration its impact on consumers and on the disintermediary effect of comparison-shopping on under-developed and developed economies.

**Section VI: E-Commerce and Knowledge Management in SMEs**

Chapter XI introduces the concepts of knowledge management and discusses seven peculiarities about knowledge management practices in 25 SMEs in the U.S. Successful SMEs are those who can leverage their knowledge in an effective and efficient manner, so as to make up for deficiencies in traditional resources, like land, labor, and capital. The chapter produces interesting insights and comparisons about knowledge management practices across large and small organizations.

**Section VII: E-Commerce Adoption and Benefit Realization in SMEs**

In order to address the issue of expected and actual (realized) benefits of e-commerce, Chapter XII investigates e-commerce adoption and benefit-realization, using a large survey research, in regional SMEs in Sweden. The chapter examines the correlations between determinants of adoption and the expected
benefits of e-commerce as well as the correlations between the actual benefits and whether more insights could be generated pertaining to such interrelationships. The chapter validates whether the direct mapping of criteria and benefits is still possible.

Section VIII: E-Commerce in SMEs in Developing Countries

Chapter XIII envisages e-commerce adoption in SMEs in Brunei Darussalam. There research found significant difference of e-commerce adoption among small- and medium-sized enterprises. Their study also discussed the reasons why 29% of the SMEs in their research did not adopt e-commerce. For example, the most common reasons of not adopting e-commerce included: high cost of internet service provider, a major time wasting activity for the staff, and lack of overall staff computer literacy. Accordingly, they suggested some recommendations to the policy makers and relevant authorities in Brunei Darussalam for devising and implementing a strategic plan to enhance the e-commerce adoption among SMEs.

Empirical evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) regarding the factors that affect the adoption of e-business is scarce. Chapter XIV attempts to fill the research gap between developed and developing countries with respect to e-commerce adoption research by using an exploratory research targeting SMEs in Nigeria. The chapter investigates different organizational, external and technological contexts to examine the adoption phenomenon in SMEs in Nigeria. The chapter report findings across three Nigerian cities using survey research.

Section IX: E-Commerce Outsourcing in SMEs

Chapter XV explores application service provision (ASP) in SMEs. The chapter investigates this phenomenon using five exploratory case studies among UK SMEs. The chapter illustrate that SMEs are aware of the ASP concept and its potential. The chapter introduces a framework to map the ASP sourcing decision process for SMEs, highlighting the issues and challenges that SMEs face when evaluating whether to source IS through the ASP renting model rather than building a solution in-house or buying it off the shelf.