

Foreword

Commerce has always been connected with networks. For thousands of years, transportation networks determined where commerce happened. Traders congregated where they could ford rivers, paddle or sail their boats into protected waters, or where paths crossed. Transportation networks are required to exchange goods, but business always has an information component, and information is almost always exchanged before goods change hands. Postal systems, which are over 2,500 years old, enabled traders to exchange information prior to a transaction. However, a postal system, a cousin of transportation networks, is controlled by the same geography.

When electronic networks emerged, starting with the telegraph in 1833, traders could begin to interact from a distance with speeds far exceeding those of a postal system, and the first shackles of the tyranny of distance were rattled and loosened. We are now seeing the results of nearly two centuries of extension and reinvention of the original telegraph. The Internet gave us the first glimpse of the potential of massive public electronic networks to transform commerce. In the last decades, many industries have been transformed, new businesses emerged, and consumers' habits have been changed on many dimensions. The Internet, however, has its limitations. The typical Internet connection, a computer, is rather large, even when a laptop and its geographic location are imprecise. Furthermore, several people might share the same computer, and even the same account. In terms of the four fundamental information drives, namely ubiquity, uniqueness, universality, and unison (Junglas & Watson, 2006), the Internet is quite constrained. In particular, it lacks ubiquity because customers need to find an access point, fixed or wireless, to conduct commerce. It lacks uniqueness because a computer is not linked to a particular person.

M-commerce, based on the mobile phone network, loosens the shackles of commerce a stage further because consumers now carry their access points with them, and almost always can connect to the network (air and sea being an exception). Phones are rarely shared and thus owners are identified. In particular, GSM has a subscriber identity module (SIM) card to enable owners to easily transfer their identities between phones. Furthermore, current technology enables the location of many mobile phones to be identified within a few meters. Consequently, a business can know who the customer is and where they are. In terms of the information drivers, m-commerce is a step up from e-commerce because it offers higher levels of ubiquity and uniqueness. The next generation of commerce, u-commerce (Watson, Pitt, Berthon, & Zinkhan, 2002), will escape the confines of a particular network and ubiquity will be further enhanced, along with the other information drives.

As you read this book, with its extensive and deep examination of m-commerce, try to keep in mind the greater picture and overall path of commerce. Look back, by asking yourself what opportunities are created by m-commerce that did not exist with e-commerce, which in turn created ventures not feasible with geographic networks. Look forward by asking yourself what opportunities will be created by the transition from m-commerce to u-commerce. I hope this forward looking foreword will help you see the future more vividly and thus enable you to understand more clearly the current and next stages of commerce.

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