

# Foreword

Most of us who are connected with the rapidly expanding field of small business research feel privileged to engage the opportunities and challenges provided by the Internet and related information and communication technologies (ICTs). Indeed, these are extraordinary times in the working lives of small business owner/managers, their supporters, suppliers, and customers as well as the researchers that focus on this exciting topic of academic endeavour.

During the last decade, we have witnessed the emergence of the World Wide Web (WWW) and the birth of electronic commerce (e-commerce), events that have radically altered the economic activities of most small, medium, and large organisations as well as the purchasing habits of their customers, both private and corporate. No aspect or strata of the socio-economic and political structure of our society escaped untouched by these relatively recent developments. Even the most conservative bastions of government and politics have now yielded to the influence, connectivity, and efficiencies afforded by the Internet.

In the context of small business economic activity, e-commerce has provided owner/managers with a wide range of online, innovative, and collaborative approaches to product manufacturing, service provision, and knowledge sharing. The ongoing e-commerce revolution in this important sector of economic activity reflects the accelerating pace of change that is currently affecting the market place at local, regional, national, and international levels. Furthermore, a wide spectrum of evolutionary and revolutionary innovations and technological developments have opened new market places and radically altered existing ones. At the same time, long-standing, traditional local and national entrepreneurial outlets have been increasingly replaced by global *e*-Markets, which bring geographically dispersed producers and consumers into close, cost-efficient, and mutually beneficial proximity. Typically, such innovations also reduced significantly the barriers that have traditionally affected market performance,

including imperfect information relating to the willingness and ability to supply or purchase, at a given price, a vast portfolio of goods and services. As a result, a variety of collaborative strategies have emerged to assist small business owner/managers in their efforts to achieve and maintain sustainable competitive advantage. Nevertheless, and despite the burgeoning mass of related research and dissemination, the full strategic impact of e-commerce upon small business operation and competitiveness is yet to be fully investigated. In this context, this book goes a long way toward redressing the knowledge imbalances that plague most research that focuses specifically upon e-commerce in small businesses.

During the last few years, as the editor of the *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development (JSBED)*, I have assisted and encouraged the authors to disseminate the results of their internationally acclaimed research. This book incorporates the results of three of their large international studies (Sweden, Australia, and the USA) and provides an in-depth analysis of the most important and relevant aspects of e-commerce in smaller firms. In addition to a comprehensive and critical literature review and analysis of existing knowledge, the authors outline the main criteria for the adoption of e-commerce, and its advantages and disadvantages to small business owner/managers. There are also chapters relevant to e-commerce adoption barriers and strategic alliances as well as the role of gender and education upon the implementation of related strategies. Importantly, the authors compare and contrast issues related to e-commerce adoption in small businesses across the three international locations, setting the groundwork for valuable comparative and regional research in an international context.

There is no doubt in my mind that this book represents a valuable and timely contribution to a pertinent aspect of small business research and development. As such, I would recommend it as compulsory reading to all the stakeholders that are interested in supporting and facilitating a thriving small business sector, at both micro- and macro-economic levels. Similarly, I would recommend it as a core, research-based text for the growing population of undergraduate and postgraduate students involved in small business and entrepreneurship education. Researchers all over the world would benefit considerably from the mass of knowledge and experience encapsulated in this empirically rigorous book. I congratulate the authors for their expert work and unfailing commitment to the international small business community, and the publishers for facilitating the publication of relevant and cutting edge knowledge.

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