

Preface

The business success and fast expansion of Amazon.com, Dell, travel.com and the like through e-business partnerships reinforce the value of strategic alliances. Corporate e-partnerships will be a crucial factor and play a key role in the future development of e-business activities. In the frenetically changing competitive landscape of today's business world, few organizations can rely only on their internal strengths to gain a competitive advantage in national and/or international markets. Irrespective of their organizational and management structures and styles and communication channels, inter-organizational collaborations, alliances, joint ventures and partnering are gaining unprecedented momentum. For example, to expand and branch into the printer market, Dell, one of the largest computer manufacturers in the world, entered a partnership with Lexmark International Inc. In the storage market, Dell has formed an alliance with EMC Corp. to sell co-branded storage machines (*Business Week*, 2003, p. 61). Today, it is not uncommon to see that many companies have portfolios of 20 or more alliances and partnerships, and some have over a hundred. In fact, it is reported that about 20% to 50% of corporate value has been generated from corporate partnerships (Bamford, Gomes-Casseres, & Robinson, 2003). Even the largest organization's resources are limited in one way or another; therefore, the formation of a business e-partnership is increasingly one of the most popular strategies available to an organization to, on one hand, take advantage of the Internet highway and share risks, capabilities and revenue with partners, on the other.

However, alarmingly, many early e-partnerships failed or did not achieve their goals. This research book aims to provide a practical, insightful and compre-

hensive guide for both brick-and-mortar and dotcom companies to address the challenge of building and managing successful e-partnerships to maximize business profits. The book delivers new insights and substantial recommendations for corporate strategy and action in today's e-business landscape where e-partnership prevails. The specific objectives of the book are:

- To investigate the impact of IT and the Internet on business relationships in e-business;
- To maximize the e-business value chain through the development of effective e-partnerships;
- To explore issues and problems relating to management of e-partnerships;
- To identify and examine best practices in managing e-partnerships through multiple case studies and a cross-case analysis;
- To explore strategies for achieving the best performance and optimal results from e-partnerships;
- To study the interface between entrepreneurship and innovation in vitalizing e-business and the role of e-partnership in the interaction between the two;
- To identify and develop effective and feasible performance metrics to monitor and evaluate the process and outcomes of e-partnership; and
- To speculate future trends of e-business and e-partnership.

A review of the current e-business literature finds that the majority of English language publications have focused upon e-commerce sales and marketing, although some studies have elaborated upon the supply chain dimension of e-business. The e-supply chain relies heavily on effective and efficient partnership from or between virtual enterprises and bricks-and-mortar companies (van Hoek, 2001). In the supply chain, each individual activity services another by focusing on operations across firms' boundaries as opposed to seeking to only optimize internal firm efficiencies (Wagner, Fillis, & Johansson, 2003). The most common supply chain failures in e-business, such as products not delivered on time or are out of stock, are largely caused by poor organization and collaboration of partners in the logistical and supply processes. Inter-organizational partnerships become of central importance to the success and sustainability of e-business and supply chains.

E-partnerships which are driven by the Internet and other electronic technologies open up a whole new range of opportunities. However, these have been largely unexplored in the current e-business literature. This book provides readers with practical solutions for effective e-partnerships through a systematic inquiry into the nature and processes of e-partnering. The book gives a comprehensive introduction of the concept and practice of e-partnership and discusses thoroughly its application in the areas of information flow, procurement, logistics, engineering and manufacturing, marketing, customer services and human resources. Readers will be able to appreciate the key issues involved in the process of e-partnering in e-business after reading the book. In addition, the book is written from an international perspective and presents a contemporary report of e-partnerships between brick-and-mortar and dotcom companies and among dotcom companies. Finally, although the main focus of the book is placed on B2B partnerships, it also concerns business-to-customer partnerships in cyberspace.

The research design for this book follows a case study approach with the dual purposes of enhancing the validity of research findings and achieving the best possible results for the present study. A large number of real-world case studies of e-partnerships are presented in the book. The multiple case studies involve many different dotcom businesses as well as brick-and-mortar companies that have engaged in e-business. The companies profiled encompass a wide range of industry sectors, operating in different nations and cultures, and have different histories, varying in size and length of existence but serve to illustrate the main themes of the book. The case studies rely on both documentary research and extensive interviews with senior e-business managers from both dotcom and brick-and-mortar companies. These interviews focused on how the dotcoms/e-businesses have been managed, how they have succeeded or failed and what lessons can be learned from their experiences. The book provides a large number of real-world snapshots and detailed case studies to inspire active learning and critical thinking. The discussion questions after each case study aim to encourage creative contemplation of, and reflection on, the key issues covered by the case study and the book.

In today's e-business environment, technology, customers, competitors and partners can change frequently and rapidly. Technology can become obsolete in the blink of an eye, and customers can appear and disappear with a keystroke. There are practically no barriers to new market entrants, or competitors, in an e-business world. E-business partnerships and networks can become ephemeral and opportunistic in nature, depending on the interdependencies between partners and the extent to which their objectives have been

achieved (Robbins et al., 2003). In such circumstances, it is crucial that e-business managers have an insightful guide to deal with the complexities of e-partnerships. This book helps e-business managers formulate and implement e-partnership strategy and provides a greater understanding of the crucial issues in cross-firm business processes and inter-organizational partnerships in cyberspace. As the present study is based upon both empirical and theoretical research, the book is also a valuable resource for researchers and students in the study field.

The structure of this book flows from the objectives of the book and has a total of nine chapters. Chapter I provides background information for the entire book and presents an overview of e-partnership, its connotation, evolution and current patterns. The chapter looks at the impact of information technologies and the changing scenario of today's business environment and examines the driving forces behind the rapid growth of e-partnerships.

In order that the operational context of e-partnerships is understood in greater detail, Chapter II explores the recent development of the supply chain, specifically, electronic and e-business supply chain and its interfaces with e-partnerships. The chapter presents a broader and comprehensive view of the landscape in which e-partnership prevails and the role it plays in the e-business arena.

Chapter III is concerned with e-partnership strategy and structure and delineates various worked examples of e-partnerships in today's e-business environment. It guides readers to develop their own strategy and appropriate structure for building and managing e-partnerships.

Chapter IV deals with the technological challenges and issues facing e-partnerships, ranging from technical set-up and support to process and system alignment and integration. The chapter also discusses various information technologies and solutions used for the development and management of e-partnerships.

Chapter V concentrates on people management in e-partnership and network management. Key human and culture issues are discussed, including quality of e-partnerships, ecosystems, commitment, communication and termination of partnership. It especially touches on the issue of trust and information and knowledge management in the context of e-partnership.

Chapter VI presents multiple case studies of seven companies, ranging from big brand name dotcoms like Yahoo! and Google to a small manufacturer that has embraced e-business and e-partnership technologies and practices. The multiple case studies are followed by a cross-case analysis of the main issues

depicted in relation to the development of e-partnerships. The chapter also presents key success factors identified from the successful cases and hard lessons learned from the failures.

Chapter VII seeks to explore the thrust of entrepreneurship and innovation and their implications for e-business and e-partnership success from an integrative perspective. The chapter focuses on the role of e-partnerships in maximizing the value of entrepreneurship and innovation.

Chapter VIII reviews and discusses various concepts, models and issues of performance measurement. On the basis of that, the chapter proposes, by taking a balanced scorecard approach, a new set of performance metrics for managers to assess the process and outcome of e-partnerships in a comprehensive and balanced manner. The chapter also helps e-partners to benchmark against best practices and to determine the future direction and priorities in their e-business partnerships.

Chapter IX, the final chapter, is bifurcated, speculating the future trends of e-business and e-partnerships extrapolated from the current development and formulating overall conclusions based upon the research from the book.

You will find the book extremely helpful if you belong to one of the following groups:

- Managers, entrepreneurs and IT professionals of dotcom companies;
- Managers and IT professionals of brick-and-mortar corporations that plan to embrace, or have engaged in, e-business or e-commerce as an additional business channel;
- Academics (teachers and researchers) and students who study e-business management and/or operations management (including value chain and supply chain management) in e-business or e-commerce; and
- Anyone who is interested in the field.

References

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