Chapter XVI

Developing a Portal to Build a Business Community

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Abstract

In June 2000 the Western Region Economic Development Organisation (WREDO), a not-for-profit organisation sponsored by the six municipalities that make up the western region of Melbourne (Australia), received a government grant for a project to set up a business-to-business portal. This innovative project was to create a horizontal portal, Bizewest, which would enable the whole range of small to medium enterprises in Melbourne’s West to engage in an increased number of e-commerce transactions with each other. Although Bizewest ceased operations in June 2003, the portal project as a whole must be considered to be a considerable success as it produced substantial benefits in compiling a register of businesses in the region, interesting many small to medium enterprises in the benefits of e-commerce and training school students in the design of e-commerce Web pages.
Introduction

Melbourne is a city of about 3.5 million people and is the capital of Victoria, one of the states that make up the Commonwealth of Australia. The Western region of Melbourne contains around 20,000 businesses and is regarded as the manufacturing, transport, and distribution hub of southeastern Australia (Tatnall, Burgess, & Singh, 2004). Traditionally, this region had encompassed much of the industry in metropolitan Melbourne and has consequently been regarded as an area populated by “working-class people”. With the expansion of Melbourne, however, and the desire of many professionals to live close to the central business district of Melbourne, the demographics of this area are changing.

The Western Region Economic Development Organisation (WREDO) is sponsored by the six municipalities (Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley, and Wyndham) that make up the Western region of Melbourne. It is a not-for-profit organisation and is also supported by five major business enterprises operating in the western suburbs: Australian Gas and Light Limited, City West Water, McGregor By Road, Powercor Australia Limited, and the Urban and Regional Land Corporation. WREDO is charged with fostering economic growth and encouraging investment within the Western region of Melbourne and is involved in a variety of regular and one-off initiatives. One of these regular initiatives is a monthly networking breakfast when businesses in the area get to know each other better and listen to a guest speaker. This chapter describes one of WREDO’s one-off initiatives: the Bizewest B-B portal.

The Beginnings of the Bizewest Portal

In February 2000 the Victorian state treasurer issued a press release announcing a new state government initiative known as the Victorian E-commerce Early Movers Scheme (VEEM). The scheme was designed to provide assistance to local government to allow it to encourage small to medium business units operating within their boundaries to use e-commerce for the purpose of expanding business and also to make these trading entities more competitive. A cornerstone of the scheme was the acknowledgement that insufficient numbers of small to medium organisations were using new technology to build business and to enhance competitiveness. This was of concern because
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