Chapter 17
Two Examples of the Development and Use of Portals: Australia and Bangladesh

Arthur Tatnall
Victoria University, Australia

Stephen Burgess
Victoria University, Australia

ABSTRACT

In this chapter we revisit some portal research we conducted in Bangladesh and in Australia, the data collection of which was conducted in the early 2000s. We then investigate the evolution of these different types of web portal and how they compare ten years later. The concept of a web portal has been around for some time, but in the last few years the portal concept has gained considerably in importance as new types of portal are developed and new uses found for portal technology. This chapter begins with a brief classification of the types of portals in use today. Developed and developing countries experience different problems in making use of e-commerce and see the advantages and problems of using portals rather differently. In the chapter we examine and compare case studies of a Horizontal Business-Business Industry Portal in Melbourne, Australia, and a Vertical Industry Portal in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines several different types of web portals used by small to medium enterprises (SME), and compares and contrasts the development and evolution over several years of two of these portals: one in a developed country – Australia, and the other in a developing country – Bangladesh. In both instances, data was drawn
from interviews conducted with stakeholders concerned with operation of the portal.

A simple definition of a portal sees it as a special Web (or intranet) site designed to act as a gateway to give convenient access to other related sites (Davison, Burgess, & Tatnall, 2008). Unrelated to computers or the Internet, the Concise Oxford Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 1964) describes a portal as a doorway or a gateway. More specific definitions of portals will sometimes show them as sites that offer personalised content to the user (Pearlson, 2001) or that offer a broad range of services rather than necessarily redirecting users elsewhere (Zikmund & d’Amico, 2001:76). Some portals offer a range of services including trading facilities as banks look to partner them (Internet.com, 1999).

There is no definitive categorisation of the types of portal, but Davison et al. (Davison, et al., 2008) offers the following list: General Portals, Vertical Industry Portals, Horizontal Industry Portals, Community Portals, Enterprise Information Portals, e-Marketplace Portals, Personal/Mobile Portals, Information Portals and Niche Portals. Unfortunately as the categories are not mutually exclusive some portals fit into more than one category while others do not fit well into any of these categories. To further complicate any attempt at categorisation, some implementations can span several different portal-types blended into some form of hybrid solution. In this article we use examples of two of these: Horizontal Industry Portals and Vertical Industry Portals, so we will now briefly discuss each of these types.

Horizontal Portals are utilised by a broad base of users across a horizontal market (Lynch, 1998) and are typically based around a group of industries or a local area. One Australian example was the Bizewest B-B portal (Burgess, Bingley, & Tatnall, 2005; Burgess & Tatnall, 2007; Tatnall & Tatnall, 2007; Tatnall & Burgess, 2002; Tatnall & Pliskin, 2007), which was designed to enable small and medium enterprises in Melbourne’s West to engage in e-commerce transactions with each other. Vertical Industry Portals are usually based around specific industry areas and are designed to serve the needs of these industries (Chowdhury, Burgess, & Tatnall, 2003). They aim to aggregate information relevant to specific groups or online trading communities of closely related industries to facilitate the exchange of goods and services in a particular market as part of a value chain. Vertical industry portals often specialise in business commodities and materials, services or particular interest areas.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter reports on two cases studies involving an investigation of the use of portals in Australia and Bangladesh, firstly in the early 2000s and then now (Tatnall & Burgess, 2009). In our analysis we made some use of actor-network theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1986, 1996) which takes due regard of the contributions of both human and non-human actors to the adoption and use of new technologies.

In Australia, the selected portal was Bizewest, a horizontal portal created by 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). Interviews were conducted from late 2001 to mid 2003 with various stakeholders involved in the project, including the project manager, software designers and programmers, and some businesses that were using the portal.

In Bangladesh, interviews were conducted in relation to the operation of the vertical portal of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer Exporter Association (BGMEA). All interviews were conducted in May 2002. In order to gain an understanding of any limitations placed upon e-commerce by the banking system in Bangladesh, interviews were conducted with a wider range of interested parties, including the Deputy Director of the Bangladesh Bank, the Systems Analyst of...
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