Chapter V

An Investigation of SMTE Web Site Usage in Australia: Implications for E-Commerce Adoption and Planning Processes*

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Abstract

This chapter examines the Web site development and usage practices of Australian small and medium tourism businesses (SMTEs). A list of barriers and motivators to the successful use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in small business are examined, and a profile of Internet usage practices in Australian small businesses in general and SMTEs in particular is provided. One particular barrier that is not matched by a motivator is the lack of effective planning by small businesses. A number of planning models are examined, with one (Burgess, 2002)
selected for comparison with the activities of SMTEs in selected parts of urban and rural Australia. Some 59 SMTEs were interviewed for the purpose of assessing their Web site development. In general, SMTEs generally performed a little better than we expected—but not all of them and even those that did had room for improvement. There were some variations between urban and rural SMTEs, but not as many as we expected. The main outcome of this investigation is that, although SMTEs performed slightly better than we would have expected in relation to the planning model, there is still a great deal of scope for those that have performed adequately to perform better and still a great number of SMTEs that do very little planning at all for their Web site implementations.

Introduction

This chapter examines the Web site development and usage practices of Australian small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs) in relation to how they “performed” against a defined Web site planning process. The chapter begins by examining a list of barriers to the successful use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in small business and briefly provides a profile of Internet usage practices in Australian small businesses in general and SMTEs in particular. Models for the implementation and use of Web sites by small businesses are introduced, and one is selected (Burgess, 2002b) to use to classify the activities of Australian SMTEs. Interviews were carried out in late 2004 with 59 Australian SMTEs in urban areas (Melbourne and Sydney) and a rural area (Bendigo). Results of the interviews were contrasted against the Burgess model to see how small businesses performed in planning for and implementing their Web sites.

Background

Small Businesses and ICTs

There is now a fairly well accepted list of “barriers” to the successful implementation of ICTs in small businesses. Both Burgess (2002a) and Faggiani (2005) have provided a compilation of the lists of these barriers (or “inhibitors”) from the research of other authors dating back to 1993. These inhibitors include: