Telecentres and Their Impact on Information Technology Investment for Small Business

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Abstract

This study is evaluating the effective use of telecentres by small business owners. The world has changed and new ways of accessing information and obtaining knowledge is around. Telecentres can therefore play an effective role in facilitating communication between customers and small business owners. Telecentres will enable customers to access information such as services, prices, statements, information regarding a product, missed payments, history of credit supplied, etc. The study used a questionnaire to collect data. The study comes up with some recommendations that can be used by small business owners to improve their use of ICTs and telecentres.
Introduction

Telecentres have been hailed as a solution to small business development problems because of their ability to provide access to ICTs (Gómez & Hunt, 1999). It will also be a solution to the IT investment problems experienced by their bigger brothers. Telecentres can therefore play a role by providing small business owners access to information and communication. It will be a tool to communicate with their customers, suppliers, and administration.

The researchers have identified the following problems:

- Small business owners are unable to access help after hours or weekends.
- Most of the normal support is not able to offer similar telecentre support unless they appoint somebody to do so.
- The costs of owning infrastructures (i.e., telephone and Internet cost) are high and might be reduced by the use of telecentres.

An Introduction to Telecentres

IDRC (2003) notes that the information and knowledge age has been characterized by economic globalisation and a new approach to ICTs. Telecentres are a response to this globalisation aiming to provide access to ICTs where people do not have access (e.g., rural areas, etc.). A number of such centres have been implemented by various government and development agencies across the globe (Oestmann & Dymond, 2001).

Telecentres have been initiated in at least 21 developing countries (Gómez & Hunt, 1999b) and may be defined as a shared site providing access to ICTs for everybody. The primary goal of a telecentre is the provision of tools and skills to enhance communication and the sharing of information (IDRC, 2003).

According to the IDRC, the telecentre movement on the African continent is young (the earliest telecentres opened their doors in 1998). The nature and functions of African telecentres vary slightly but they are becoming the fastest tool for the delivery of information, knowledge, and education. Telecentres also have the potential to narrow the “digital divide” in remote, rural, and otherwise disadvantaged communities. They can also be useful in helping developing countries to increase access to the information, education, government information, healthcare, and other services and help develop communities socially and economically.
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