Chapter VII

Portals in Large Enterprises

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Abstract

This chapter discusses two aspects of the use of portals by large corporations: the roles of portals set up by corporations and the use made by corporations of portals other than their own. The purposes for which large enterprises have built Internet portals are identified as: public corporate information, product information, customer service, selling, supply chain management, and business to employee. Each of these types of portals is examined with examples being drawn from a range of Australian and international large corporate Internet sites. The uses of portals by large enterprises provided by other companies are discussed, including: the development and demise of collective procurement portals (corProcure, Cyberlynx, eSteel, MetalSite, and the like) and the slow development of supply chain management portals. A number of directions for further research are suggested, including: large enterprise plans for collective procurement portals in the late 1990s, the potential of supply chain portals that are not dominated by a single buyer, and the potential for increased transparency in the supply chain by development of supply chain management portals.
What Is an “Enterprise Portal”?  

The term “Internet portal” had reasonably wide currency during the “dot-com” boom. The term was often used with a good deal of enthusiasm but with an indeterminate meaning. The enthusiasm was particularly evident among some marketers and managers who had recently “discovered” the Internet but whose grasp of the finer detail of wide area networking was sadly lacking. “Portal” was often associated with such terms as “vortal” and “hortal.” Such people tended to look pityingly on others, particularly “technical types,” who professed to have no knowledge of these words.  

So, what is a portal, especially one that might be used by large corporations? The generic word “portal” evokes ideas of a doorway, a gateway, an opening, or the entrance of a tunnel (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000; Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary, 1998). When applied to an essentially undirected and chaotic entity, like the Internet, the notion develops into that of a guide (one that protects against disorder and that can direct the traveller towards her eventual goal) or a tunnel (something that provides a clear and safe path through chaos to an ultimate destination). The portal is the first port of call that connects the Internet adventurer to the way forward. Thus more recent dictionary definitions of “portal” as applied to the Internet are:

A website considered as an entry point to other websites, often by being or providing access to a search engine. (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000) A web site that aims to be an entry point to the World-Wide Web, typically offering a search engine and/or links to useful pages, and possibly news or other services. These services are usually provided for free in the hope that users will make the site their default home page or at least visit it often. Popular examples are Yahoo and MSN. Most portals on the Internet exist to generate advertising income for their owners, others may be focused on a specific group of users and may be part of an intranet or extranet. Some may just concentrate on one particular subject, say technology or medicine, and are known as a vertical portals. (Free On-line Dictionary, 2003, World Wide Web entry)

The above descriptions of Internet portals appear to have no obvious connection with large corporations.

- Large corporations, as a rule, do not seek to become the first port of call, the “home page,” of every Internet user. Thus they do not seek to become
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