E-Services System Acceptance at an Australian University: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This case study is based in a department of a university implementing an e-Services system project. Earlier discussion of the background/context of the case study is to provide a general overview of the department and its business. Analysis of the data provides an insight into Management perceptions about their expectations for the system. Insights on the e-Services project and the factors influencing the implementation are also described. The purpose of analysing the Management’s perspectives about staff use of e-Services is to understand what factors affected the project development.

Keywords: E-Services, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Usage, User Acceptance

1. INTRODUCTION

The interaction with e-Services is based on customer expectations that e-Services will meet their requirements (Zeithaml et al., 2000). A distinguishing feature of e-Services is direct customer interaction with websites. Compared to that in a traditional setting where customers are unable to directly access the systems providing the service and can select service options only indirectly via the trained operator. Whereas in web-enabled e-Services system, customers are empowered to directly influence service choices. The websites form a platform for managing and delivering e-Services (Chen & Li, 2010; Al-Ghaith, 2010; Kelaart-Courtney, 2010; Batlle-Montserrat, 2007; Xue et al., 2004; Featherman & Pavlou, 2002; Ruyter et al., 2001; van Riel et al., 2001).

The implications of using e-Services are significant for business (Xue et al., 2004). Customer participation in and acceptance of e-Services provides them with a broader choice of services that meet their requirements. In some organisations this has led to the overhaul of the service delivery system (Xue et al., 2004). It is therefore important to understand the user roles in e-Services system development. User - e-Services interaction behaviour on websites is unique in the sense that the interface takes place in cyberspace within a short time. It is therefore important for business to understand what influences the use of an e-services system with in that short time frame (Grönroos et al., 2000). With the development of information...
technology allowing user participation in service delivery on websites, customers’ roles in the e-services process have become more important. Therefore, it can be argued that researchers need to pay more attention to customers’ and users’ evaluations of technology-based services (Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000; Chea & Lou, 2008; Chellappan, 2008).

2. DETAIL EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The University is an institution with a good reputation for distance learning in Australia. The Department in the case study operates from the capital city office and provides its services to staff and international students on other campuses. The marketing managers in the Department frequently travel overseas to market university services and recruit international students. The Department also performs other marketing activities such as organising overseas visits, and marketing and advertising for the university. The Department’s primary objective is to increase the overseas student enrolment in the university. The other functions of the Department are to manage customer relationships with new international students, to manage international students’ admission applications and to administer the legal and administrative responsibilities required of the university.

The case study examines the Web Electronic Service framework of the University of Australia (not the real name). The department is in the process of developing and implementing Web-based e-Service system. International students have the option to lodge the admission application through either of any: web-based e-Service system on the World Wide Web, phone, fax, or in person. On receiving the application a decision is made by the staff on the admission status. The department is implementing the electronic delivery of its services on the website. The web electronic service is believed to be in use for approximately last two and half years. The e-Service process involves students making the application and the staff processing application on the website.

The Department Management currently employs 20 full time staff. All administrative communication with international students within the university is filtered through this Department. The structure of the Department Management is displayed in Figure 2. The Executive Director, the top-ranking official in the Department, is assisted by the IT Manager, International Marketing Managers, Admissions Managers, and an outside Consultant. The outside Consultant was hired to assist in the e-Services project. The International Marketing Managers are assisted by the Country Team Leaders.

The Admissions Manager is also supported by the Country Team Leaders, an administration support person, and a receptionist. The International Marketing Managers are responsible for promoting the university in Australia and overseas through marketing and advertising campaigns. They frequently travel overseas for work purposes and have a need to access information when away. The Country Team Leaders process student information and look after the administration. The Admission Manager makes a decision about student admissions based on each student’s academic qualifications. Figure 1 shows the Department’s organisational chart.

The Department’s role in the university structure is as the marketing and recruiting division for international students. It reports to a member of the Senior Executive of the University, the Pro Vice Chancellor (International). The Department plays a significant role in the university as it provides important information for potential overseas student enrolments to the university. The Department has a close working relationship with the different Faculties and regularly consults about course offerings, admission requirements, and on a range of other information. Based on student enrolment information, the Faculties are able to design, plan, and develop courses that are in demand.
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