Appendix

What Led us Here?

INTRODUCTION

This Appendix provides a brief overview of our PhDs - all of which involved research into small business adoption and use of ICT and Internet technologies. In effect, we felt that this appendix might provide some insights into how this book has evolved and the way that the various chapters have been ordered.

In the case of Stephen and Stan’s PhDs, they particularly targeted small businesses, whilst Carmine’s PhD involved research into wineries in Australia – and involved a heavy emphasis on SMEs. More importantly, each of our PhDs involved the development of frameworks which have informed the outline of chapters in this book, and significant background material which have contributed the book’s contents. Each of us will discuss a little of how the PhD has lead us to where we are today.

OUR PHDS

Stephen Burgess

I studied my PhD at Monash University, in Melbourne, Australia between 1998 and 2002. Although I studied part-time for the most part, I was able to complete within that time as I already had been doing some research (and teaching) in relevant areas and I was fortunate enough to get two useful sabbaticals – in 1999 I had six months leave to conduct a round of data collection. In 2001 I was granted a a similar period to write up the thesis. My supervisor was Professor Don Schauder,
a member of the then School of Information Management and Systems. I had been researching and presenting conference papers in the area of small business use of ICTs since the mind 1990s, so was interested in pursuing that topic. I also knew I wanted to do something about small business use of the Internet, as the use of the Internet in business had captured my attention in teaching and research. After quite a few meetings with Don trying to work out a topic, he came up with a suggestion that sparked my interest – to examine the ‘value added’ aspects of Internet use by small business. For years I had been teaching about different approaches that businesses could take in employing ICTs to add value to their offerings. The models that I championed in class, encouraging businesses to match their ICT use to their business strategy and to take a strategic approach to ICT in general - became a theoretical foundation that I could use as a basis for my PhD. The next few sections briefly describe how this turned out. Even now, the influences of this can be seen in this book with the early emphasis on business investigation and strategy before considering the more technical aspects of implementing a Web presence.

PhD Summary

The aim of my thesis was to develop a practical model that would assist small businesses to use the Internet to interact with customers - specifically through their Website. In the thesis I classified any business with one to twenty employees as being ‘small’. In developing the model, the intention was to take into account the specific characteristics of small businesses and to use common steps that had been identified in previous strategic ICT models as a basis for the development of the model.

When looking at the specific characteristics of small businesses, it is important to note how they differ from larger businesses, especially in their use of ICTs. Some of these ways are the lack of formal planning and control procedures when implementing ICTs, the lack of available resources (money and time) to devote to assessing ICT investments and the general lack of formal ICT training.

At the time, I noted that the use of ICTs by small businesses was usually based around administrative and operational applications (or as a reaction to something a competitor has done) rather than strategic or proactive applications. Small business attitudes to e-commerce were similar to their attitudes to ICTs in general. Small businesses had concerns about available resources and expertise to realize the advantages of e-commerce. They needed to be able to address the technical needs required to set up and maintain an Internet presence. The reasons that small business adopted electronic commerce were not that different from their reasons for using any type of information technology: that is, reduced costs, they were reacting to another organization’s advantage or they were forced to by a larger partner.
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