Chapter IX

SMEs Adoption and Implementation Process of Websites in the Presence of Change Agents

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Abstract

E-business, through the exploitation of Internet technologies, is frequently associated in the literature with improvements in business performance and service delivery enhancements particularly apparent for the potential competitive advantage of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Recent research has focused on the benefits gained from adoption and barriers to adoption. This chapter considers a similar aspect, but identifies a gap in the literature, namely, SME implementation practices of a Web presence in the Northwest of the United Kingdom, and the role of perceived change agents in the overall adoption process. It also provides a comparison between
Introduction

On the Internet, the website is the medium of communication between companies and their prospective consumers. A Web presence does not only include the hardware and software through which the two parties communicate, but also involves the cognitive and emotional aspects of the user’s experience and expectations (Laurel, 1995). Web design and development is a complex process and does not stop at defining objectives for the website. It involves defining objectives for usability, development, testing, and ongoing maintenance. However, the plethora of Web development tools (Fraternali, 1998), and the ease by which a Web presence is developed, has encouraged many companies to develop their own Web presence without following any methodological approach. In the case of SMEs, the lack of application of methodology stems from (1) ignorance of the existence of methodologies, and (2) lack of sufficient staff and technical resources to follow a methodology should they be aware of the benefits of adoption. The ease of use of Web development tools makes it easy to make rapid progress. However, the quality of the results of this approach is questionable.

In a commercial environment, where many or most e-commerce sites have design or maintenance flaws, there is a competitive advantage by owning a quality site. Thus, for two companies selling the same product, we would expect the one with the better site to be more competitive and thus more profitable. The problem for many businesses is not only knowing that a well-designed site is an asset, but knowing how to produce one. Designing effective Web pages is therefore a strategic competitive edge and forms a new challenge, as the Web pages refer to the company’s position on consumer minds (Angelides, 1997). This chapter will start by stating the problem of SMEs and Web presence adoption. It then discusses diffusion of new technologies and Web design, followed by the methodology used in capturing primary data using triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The findings provide a comparison in implementation practices between the two main groups of SMEs identified in this research: Need Pull (NP) SMEs that have their own initiative in developing their Web presence, and Technology Push (TP) SMEs that were mainly influenced by efforts of a change agent.

SMEs and Web Presence

This research defines SMEs as small to medium-sized enterprises, from small traders with no employees, to those enterprises with 249 employees. The Department of Trade and
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