



Chapter I

**Information Technology in
Small Business:
Issues and Challenges**

Stephen Burgess
Victoria University, Australia

INTRODUCTION

Research into the use of information technology (IT) in small businesses is extremely diverse. It encompasses the many different characteristics of small businesses, including size, culture, business strategy, attitudes to IT, industry and location, to name a few. The authors in this book have contributed chapters that address many of these characteristics of small businesses. This chapter provides an introduction to many of the areas covered in the book.

**A VIEW ON RESEARCH INTO IT AND SMALL
BUSINESS**

There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that the use of information technology in small businesses has been the subject of an increasing amount of research over the last 10 to 15 years. The 'evidence' often occurs in the form of a general comment at the commencement of a published paper, which mentions the 'explosion' of recent research in the area or 'increased interest' in the area. As one means of examining this, a review of the business article research reference tool, ABI/Inform,¹ was conducted in March 2001. ABI/Inform is a global business

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database that covers areas such as marketing, advertising, economics, human resources, taxation, computers and companies. It contains a large component of mainly full text articles. A count of the number of peer review articles was made under the search topic (Computers or “Information Technology”) for information technology and (“small business” or SME) for small businesses (refer to Table 1). The number of peer-reviewed articles listed that had the combined defined search topics (small business and information technology) listed in the citation or abstract reached its highest level in the three years 1997-1999, with the highest number of 23 articles being in 1999. Whether or not this means that there has been more research in the area is difficult to claim, as it depends upon a number of factors, including the number of journals listed in the service each year. For instance, if there had been an addition to the number of journals being referenced in the service, it may look like there has been an increase in the research output of a number of topics. Perhaps a better comparison is that of the amount of articles listed in the combined research area with the peer-reviewed articles available in each separate area. The number of peer-reviewed articles related to small business and IT has hovered around two-thirds to one percent of the total number of peer-reviewed articles in the general area of IT over the last decade and a half. There has been some weak evidence of an increase in the percentage since 1993. There is no evidence presented to conclude that the number of peer-reviewed articles related to small business and IT has increased at all when compared with those listed for small business in general.

Perhaps then, this idea of an increasing amount of research in the area is more

Table 1: The number of peer-reviewed articles related to small business and information technology listed in ABI/Inform 1986-1999

Year	Number of Peer-Reviewed Articles in the Area of Computing and Small Business	% Related to Peer-Reviewed Articles in the Area of Information Technology	% Related to Peer-Reviewed Articles in the area of Small Business
1999	23	1.35	4.8
1998	12	0.95	2.9
1997	15	0.62	2.1
1996	10	0.64	2.5
1995	11	1.17	3.1
1994	10	0.89	3.2
1993	10	0.95	3.5
1992	6	0.61	2.8
1991	6	0.69	3.9
1990	6	0.82	7.6
1989	8	0.86	7.3
1988	4	0.54	4.3
1987	5	0.81	4.8
1986	5	0.76	6.0

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