Mobile Technologies in the New Zealand Real-Estate Industry

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ABSTRACT

The Real Estate industry can be viewed as a prime candidate for using mobile data solutions since it possesses a dispersed workforce as well as intensive and complex information requirements. This paper investigates the perceived value of mobile technologies in the New Zealand Real-Estate industry. It was found that mobile technologies are perceived as a strategic element in the Real-Estate industry. However, the use of data services still is bounded by industry practices and voice remains the most used application among agents. [Article copies are available for purchase from InfoSci-on-Demand.com]

Keywords: Case Study; Mobile Business; Real Estate; Strategic IS

INTRODUCTION

Mobile Business-to-Employee (B2E) applications have the potential to improve business processes and transform entire industries (Scornavacca et al., 2006b, Basole, 2005, Barnes et al., 2006, Wigand et al., 2001, Scornavacca et al., 2006a). A particular industry that is well suited to gain from the potential benefits of mobile technologies is the Real-Estate industry – since it possesses intensive information requirements as well as a distributed workforce (Basole, 2005, Wigand et al., 2001, Crowston et al., 2001, Sun et al., 2006). It is important to understand and to identify the strategic role that

mobile technologies can actually play in this industry (Scornavacca et al., 2006a).

The aim of this paper is to investigate the perceived strategic value of mobile technologies in the New Zealand Real-Estate industry. Through multiple qualitative case study method, six participants from distinct organizations participated in this research - four of them representing Real-Estate agencies, one representing the industry association, and one representing a telecommunication provider. New Zealand offers an excellent opportunity for study as it has a booming house market and enjoys almost total cellular coverage from two different network providers (Barnes et al., 2006,

Scornavacca and McKenzie, 2007, Scornavacca et al., 2006b). In addition, the country has a very high mobile phone penetration – with a population of 4 million people, there are over 3.8 million active mobile phones in the country (Geekzone, 2007).

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The following section will present a brief review of relevant literature. This will be followed by an explanation of the research methodology applied—multiple case study. The results of the research are then provided, along with an analysis. The paper concludes with a discussion of the key research findings, limitations, and suggestions for further research and practice.

M-BUSINESS AND THE NZ REAL-ESTATE INDUSTRY

M-business can be understood as the use of mobile information technologies enabling organizational communication, coordination and management of the firm (Walker et al., 2006, Barnes, 2002). Analysing the value chain, Barnes (2002) identified that connectivity, interactivity, flexibility, location and ubiquity are key characteristics of m–business that define its uniqueness and potential. Furthermore, Folinas et al. (2002) as well as Siau and Shen (2003) identified some additional characteristics of m-business such as personalisation, time sensitivity and reachability.

The current literature is concerned with mobile interactions that are dominantly embedded within the Business-to-Consumer (B2C) relationships (Scornavacca et al., 2006a, Varshney and Vetter, 2000, Siau and Shen, 2003). However, there has been an increasing shift of focus onto the importance and potential of B2E applications (Basole, 2005, Berger et al., 2002, Leem et al., 2004, Oliva, 2002, Scornavacca et al., 2006a, Folinas et al., 2002).

Mobile B2E applications have the greatest value to employees that are constantly working remotely from their base of operations and need the support of information and communications

technologies (ICT) in order to accomplish their specific business tasks in real-time. Employees must be able to update and retrieve information seamlessly (Basole, 2005, Barnes et al., 2006, Oliva, 2002, Walker et al., 2006).

Mobile B2E is known to provide a number of benefits to organizations (Scornavacca et al., 2006b, Basole, 2005, Barnes et al., 2006, Walker et al., 2006). Previous studies examining the impact of mobile B2E applications in New Zealand observed an overall improvement on individual and organizational performance generated by the enhancement of information accuracy and flow (Barnes et al., 2006, Walker et al., 2006). However, these authors also found that the development of mobile solutions has been limited to the improvement of existing processes, and is quite dependent on the performance of mobile networks and bandwidth availability.

The Real-Estate industry plays a significant role in a country's economy (Seiler et al., 2001). Traditionally, the industry has made its contributions through the ability of handling and transferring Estate specific knowledge and information (Crowston et al., 2001). This traditional model is being challenged by the threat of disintermediation, brought on by the emergence of new technologies, like the Internet. As a result, the focus has shifted from sole information handling to providing value adding services in coordination with information transfers (Muhanna and Wolf, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the strategic value of emerging mobile technologies in the New Zealand Real-Estate industry. The study follows multiple qualitative case study method (Benbasat et al., 1987, Creswell, 2003). The selection of case research as the research method is appropriate since this study investigates an area where theories are at formative stages and little research has been completed up to date. In addition, case study is particularly useful in this instance

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