

Chapter I

Introduction

PREAMBLE

Over the last decade there has been a great deal of research into the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in small businesses. More recently, this research has centred on the use of Internet technologies in small businesses, particularly their use of Websites for the purposes of ‘e-business’ or ‘e-commerce’. Much of this research has examined the adoption of these technologies, including the drivers and barriers that small businesses face. Other studies have investigated models or frameworks that might help to guide small businesses to take full advantage of these technologies, particularly Websites for the purpose of conducting e-business. A great deal of this research has been admirable in that it has contributed to the body of work available in the area. Simultaneously, there has been a body of research that has focused on specific aspects of establishing a Website. These aspects can be technical in nature, addressing issues such as how to design a Website or how to identify hosting options, or business orientated, involving the identification of aspects of Website promotion and publishing. However, given the diversity of research being reported, we feel that there is a major gap in that small businesses are left without guidance in relation to how to approach *all aspects* of setting up and maintaining their Websites. The components are out there, but there is little available in relation to how a small business might access these, or even piece them all together. In fact, a little further on in this book we will suggest that these days, with the presence of many of Web services such as portals available, a small business Web presence may be even more than just a Website.

THIS BOOK

In this book we will cover the major areas that a small business needs to address to be able to appropriately establish and maintaining its Web presence. The book also provides a structured approach for small businesses that leads them through the process of:

- Determining their business strategy and the commensurate alignment of this strategy with their Web presence.
- Deciding what Website features are required according to their Web presence strategy.
- Determining how best to host the Web presence, and if required, how to design a Website for maximum effectiveness.
- Understanding some governance and technical (for instance, security) aspects related to the Web presence.
- Knowing how to promote the Web presence.
- Understanding the importance of evaluating their Web presence.

Most of the chapters in this book outline some background in relation to each of these areas, as well as the results of our own, and others', small business research. More importantly, we summarise the chapters' salient points in a series of *tenets* to guide small businesses through each part of the process. The following section provides some background for material in the rest of the book.

Small Business Definitions

One of the authors published an edited book (Burgess 2002) that examined the challenges facing small businesses in their use of ICTs. At the time the observation was made that it was extremely difficult to compare and contrast different small business studies that had been carried out over time due to the varying definitions of 'small business' encountered around the world.

In 2003, the IRMA Special Research Cluster on Small Business and Information Technology examined the notion of a universal definition for small business amongst its members. Definitions for the terms 'micro business', 'small business', 'medium-sized business' and 'small and medium sized business' were found to differ amongst respondents from around the world (Australia, New Zealand, North America and Europe were involved in the investigation). Definitions tended to focus on the number of people employed by a business as a primary grouping metric, however, some countries also took into account a hybrid approach to categorising

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