

Knee-jerk reaction to e-commerce is not the way forward, say UK business managers

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Organisations do not want to take a piecemeal or reactive approach to e-commerce, but want to develop coherent e-commerce strategies based on a sound business case. Due to current inexperience and lack of understanding on the part of senior management, the approach to e-commerce in organisations can sometimes be fragmented, and so direction is needed.

These are amongst the findings of a recent survey conducted at Cranfield School of Management* amongst business and IT managers from a range of medium and large organisations. Managers were asked what issues they face currently in e-commerce, and which issues they felt needed further research, and the results will be used to inform a new research project on e-commerce, due to begin in a few weeks' time.

Managers questioned identified the following issues as top of their e-commerce agenda:

- Human, financial and technical resources (developing the necessary skills within the organisation, securing adequate investment, development and support of the new services).
- The challenges of using a new channel of communication and distribution (understanding and matching customer needs and expectations, and managing the integration with existing channels).
- Overcoming resistance to change in the workforce and the development of new business processes and working practices.
- Integrating e-commerce developments with existing IT systems, or integrating the separate 'islands' of electronic commerce that are increasingly appearing.

The following issues were specifically identified as ones where further research and practical guidance is needed:

- Understanding the real value of e-commerce for both customers and suppliers in order to drive uptake.
- Developing an e-commerce strategy and the building of a business case.
- Raising the awareness and understanding of e-commerce within the organisation, particularly at senior management level.

The findings of the survey will be used as a basis for further research

The scope of the new e-commerce research project, which commences on 1 October 1999, will address the issues identified in this survey. Organisations sponsoring the research will increase their knowledge and understanding of e-commerce. They will also receive practical guidance in developing their own e-commerce strategies.

Cranfield is still welcoming new sponsors from medium and large organisations. An outline of the research project proposal, 'Effective Strategies for Electronic Commerce' is available for organisations interested in participating in the research. Enquiries should be directed to Dr Elizabeth Daniel of the Information Systems Research Centre at Cranfield School of Management, who will be leading the project.

* The survey was completed by 59 delegates at a half-day workshop entitled 'Effective Strategies for Electronic Commerce' held at Cranfield School of Management on 23 July 1999.

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