Chapter 6.14
How E–Entrepreneurs Operate in the Context of Open Source Software

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ABSTRACT

The Internet has become an integral part of our everyday lives and it is often difficult to imagine how we ever functioned without it. This chapter presents experiences of two entrepreneurial companies, one of which has survived the 'dot-com bubble burst.' The chapter identifies current and future online business environments especially in light of open source software (OSS) being accepted globally. Unlike proprietary software (such as Windows), OSS comes with its internal implementation details (source code) visible both to its developers and users, along with the freedom to change and redistribute this source. The significant implications of this unique style of software distribution for e-entrepreneurs are examined. Having a flexible strategic plan; possessing management skills; providing excellent service; and having patience are some of the recommendations provided by interviewed e-entrepreneurs. When made part of the decision-making process, these recommendations would enhance current and future e-entrepreneurs in sustaining their business.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to explore the usage of OSS in e-entrepreneurship and to identify the attributes and skills necessary for an e-entrepre-

neur. **E-entrepreneurship** is defined as the notion which principally uses the Internet to strategically and competitively achieve vision, business goals, and objectives. **E-entrepreneurs** use the World Wide Web (WWW) to interact and complete virtual transactions both with other businesses (B2B) and their consumers/customers (B2C).

The notion of an e-entrepreneur has recently gained recognition amongst both academics and practitioners. An e-entrepreneur has many similarities with that of an 'entrepreneur,' especially with respect to the attributes and traits required to be successful. Concurrently, the major differences between the two are primarily in the resources (such as infrastructure and setup costs) required to start the business.

Over the last two decades, most businesses have experienced substantial change brought about as a result of globalisation and the Internet. Maintaining a competitive advantage to simply survive is a continued battle for many businesses. The Internet, however, has provided companies with numerous opportunities irrespective of the nature of the products and services offered to customers. Many companies now make use of the Internet and provide customers through their Web site information such as store opening hours, store locations, contact details, and listing of their products and services. However, for a majority of these businesses a large proportion of the sales revenue is still generated through activities conducted at the physical stores. One example is **Telstra**, which in addition to having nationwide physical stores also does sales and online billing (Telstra, 2004).

The number of companies performing their business activities through the Internet is increasing rapidly while still maintaining a physical store presence to enable customers to 'see and feel' their products before making a purchasing decision. Satisfying the needs of conventional customers who prefer to complete 'face-to-face' transactions is recognised by many businesses. One example

being the Borders bookstores (Borders, 2004). Then, there also are companies who only have a virtual presence and complete all their advertising, marketing, and transactions through the Internet. Amazon.com (Amazon.com, 2004) is a perfect example of this type of organisation. Brand recognition, customer service, and customer satisfaction are the main ingredients for any company, whether operating solely as 'bricks and mortar,' 'online,' or a mix of the two (Mottl, 2000).

The concept of '**entrepreneurship**' has been in existence and researched by academics for some time. Due to the lack of literature in the area of e-entrepreneurship, the authors have sought guidance and direction from the entrepreneurship literature to realise the following objectives:

- Identify attributes of e-entrepreneurs.
- Identify the similarities and differences between entrepreneurship and e- entrepreneurship.
- Identify if being an e-entrepreneur is more advantageous than simply being an entrepreneur.
- Examine open source software in the context of e-entrepreneurship.

Chief executives of two e-entrepreneurial organisations were interviewed to obtain insights into the concept of e-entrepreneurship. Some of the issues explored in the interviews included:

- attributes of an e-entrepreneur,
- role played by **open source software (OSS)** in the information technology sector,
- impact of OSS on existing and future e-entrepreneurs, and
- role played (if any) by government in supporting e-entrepreneurs.

The next section presents an overview of the literature examining the dot-com crash, entrepreneurship, and open source software (OSS). This is

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