

E-Business Possibilities for Homemaker Businesses at Malaysia



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Abstract: The execution of businesses today has been significantly transformed by the Internet technology. Furthermore, in representing the electronic concepts and applications, a lot of terms have been introduced in signifying the revolution of processes and transactions associated with business. E-Business and e-Commerce are among these fairly new coined terms. In the context of Malaysia, the adoption of e-Business can be seen among diverse bodies including large organizations, and small, medium and micro enterprises. For a company, the implementation of e-Business would considerably alter its structure, culture, strategy, procedures and accountabilities as well, which can pose a significant challenge. Still, people remain keen in venturing into this novel concept of business. Accordingly, a mixed-method study was carried out to examine the e-Business prospect of home-based Malaysian micro sized businesses. Business and Homemaker business issues are reviewed, while preliminary study findings are reported in this study.

Index Terms: SDN; 802.11; mobility; Mininet, performance evaluation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The growing Internet and web technology usage has led to the introduction of countless web-based applications and strategies for companies. Amongst these technologies is Electronic Business. At present time, electronic business features a popularly carried out concept amongst leading organizations and among small level to middle size of companies as well. E-Business is indeed a novel way of carrying out a business, and it has indeed transformed the old process of purchasing and selling into a process that is carried out online. The new business models and concepts brought by

e-Business has equally transformed the manner in which individuals perceive their Internet technology investment [1].

The focal point of this study is the prospect of e-Business for micro sized Home-Based Businesses (HBBs). HBB is essentially a business of any size and type, of which the main business activities are executed from home, that is, the office of the business is within the vicinity of a home [2]. HBBs have been initially classed as a commercial enterprise that runs from domestic and normally finished as an element time or part time task, and women have been considered as more appropriate than men to engage in this type of business

[3]. As women have been traditionally viewed as home and family career, they can involve themselves in businesses within the vicinity of their home while also doing their home routine; these women can make dresses for customers at home, or bake cakes at home and sell them. However, the expansion of the Internet technology today has changed these viewpoints. Today, the professional workers can also use the internet with its applications to execute their tasks from domestic homes.[4].

In this research, the prospect of e-Business for the HBBs is explored. There are six sections to this paper as detailed as follows: Section 1 acquaints reader with the subject under scrutiny, Section 2 provides a brief review of the e-business concept with its strategies. Section 3 presents HBBs study, Section 4 highlights the employed methodology in this study, Section 5 presents the initial findings of this study, and Section 6 closes this study [5].

II. E-BUSINESS

Technology speeds up in terms of the transformation of business today, while the birth of the digital environment has fashioned a fresh landscape for companies [6]. Meanwhile, the fundamentals of business activities have been significantly altered by Information Technology (IT) as can be seen in internal communications, internal operations, products and services, customer service, and marketing strategies as well. In activities of business, Internet-based e-business systems are among the prominent IT applications. The late 1990's saw countless of enterprises founded or transformed into e-Commerce. This phenomenon was dubbed as 'dot.com bubble.' However, in 2001, the dot.com bubble burst due to bad investment and business practices, ensuing in the disappearance of a number of 'dot-com' organizations from the market [7].

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Significantly, the upward thrust and fall of limitless 'dot-com' establishments have sparked countless of queries regarding the destiny of e-business and what it requires that allows you to prevail. new enterprise fashions, associated systems and the usage of net as a crucial device of business that that vigorously expands, are many of the effects of

e-business enterprise. Additionally, the phenomenon of 'bubble burst' seems to have generated worldwide cognizance for e-business and e-commerce, main to the great use of e-enterprise[8]. In order to improve their operations of business and their adoption of e-Business, enterprises are consistently searching for a better method [9].

For Micro and Small Medium Enterprises (MSME) in Malaysia, the adoption e-Business is still new. Notably, the acceptance of Malaysian government and society towards e-Business seem to be encouraging, as evidenced by the e-Business programs and conferences held by the Government and business bodies [10]. Nonetheless, the infrastructure of e-Business in this country, especially in regards to the Internet coverage, the convenience of payment method, trust and security level, just to name a few, towards the e-Business implementation is not yet fully established [11].

The concept of e-Business term was created by IBM in 1997 and it was described as the revolution of procedures of key enterprise thru the usage of internet technologies. Based on that, it can be assumed that e-Business an approach that is secure, Bendy and incorporated in the transport of business values through combining the structures and tactics. in addition, e-commercial enterprise also includes the side of buy and that of promoting of e-commerce transactions, further to the imparting effective services to the clients, running along the business partners and appearing digital transactions inside the company whatever the size of the business is. Hence, e-Business can be elaborated as the processes of business carried out with the utilization of Internet technologies that facilitate the improvement of the quality of services and values, particularly in regards to how people perform their tasks, co-operate, and communicate with their stakeholders and business associates. Besides that, e-Business also transforms the structures, strategies, procedures and culture of the company [12].

e-Business is therefore a novel method of doing business and executing the processes of business at any time and place as long as there is internet connection. In other words, with internet connection, the operations business is executable from home or any other places. However, to implement e-Business, the company needs to alter its structure, procedure, strategy, and culture as well. Besides that, the company needs to revise its core aspects of strategies and its models of business.

III. E-BUSINESS STRATEGY

For organizations, the implementation of e-business strategies has been proven to be advantageous. The concept of e-Business was originally for addressing the manner in which the Internet technology can restructure a given business and give it a competitive advantage. However, the correct strategy is needed in order to fully benefit from the internet-based

tools.

The strategy of e-Business addresses how the associated partners, employees, governance, communities, and customers may be electronic enterprise enabled. e-business enabled relates to how the approaches of business are improved with the usage of technology, new management of know-how and abilities of on-line trust [15]. Hence, businesses need to fully comprehend the current processes of business and the needed requirements to adopt e-Business. Further, the relationship among the stakeholders has to be understood as well. This is crucial considering that the e-Business implementation will radically transform the present structure and strategy of the business. Accordingly, there are tiers within the adoption of e-commercial enterprise method: 1) improving the efficiency of the prevailing model and supply processes, and 2) reworking the characteristics of the industries.

For businesses, it is equally crucial to have the awareness of the competencies offered by e-Business and be able to link it to their own business requirements. Amongst small businesses, the implementation of strategies of e-Business positively affect the business performance and its profit as an example, also could the number of customers be increase. Initial findings also show similar effect of e-Business strategies among HBBs.

IV. HOME-BASED BUSINESSES (HBBs)

There exist several concepts that have close linkage to HBBs. These include electronic cottage tele-working or telecommuting, and Small Office Home Office (SOHO). However, it should be noted that the implementation of each concept differs. Focusing on HBBs, its scope is defined using home-worker framework. There are four categories to the framework as shown in next figure. The categories are detailed next.



Fig. 1: Framework of Homeworker

Personnel who are running businesses at home are classed underneath telecommuting. those employees work for a business enterprise and are overseen via their supervisors together with the carrier carriers. similarly, to employees operating at domestic, sub-contractors are noticeably overseen by using the contracting enterprise as properly, except that these sub-contractors are self-employed and therefore the selections flexibility is applied. Professionals, are hired by the organization as well, but they are more flexible and more capable in making nearly all decisions concerning their work. Engineers doing their jobs from home is among such example.



These engineers have no need to report to any supervisors because they are self-managed. Meanwhile, home business is self-managed and run by a self-employed person, meaning that the owner of this business

may have more autonomy in making decision and choices. Nonetheless, the owner is still limited by the necessity in earning a living. Considering that home business is very self-managed, the concern is more with daily business affairs particularly in the engagement of suppliers or promotion the business.

Home business in Malaysia relates to self-employed and home working individuals or individuals that are hired by an organization but execute their tasks at home (Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat (KPWKM)). In essence, the definition covers both the concepts of HBBs and telecommuting. This study focuses on the concept of 'home business' which relates to owners of business who, on their own, manage the business from their home office. KPWKM which is the responsible ministry for this business type, has indeed expansively discussed the concept of HBB or office at home (office @home) with other Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), resulting in two alternatives that enable the citizens of Malaysia to perform their work from home. These alternatives are:

1) to become a virtual worker that furnishes expert services from home or 2) become a tele-worker who would be hired by any organization but the work would be carried out from home to start a business.

Women make up the majority of home business owners and this has been evidenced from both the literature and the observations made on the existing portals and yahoo groups, and the majority of these women had considerable experience in HBB as they had been involved in it for quite a while. For some of these women, it was their hobby and interest that got them start the business. For some, HBBs was their way to earn additional income and the business was operated part time. For these HBB owners.

Additionally, women who have their own businesses appear to have sufficient skills of management and capabilities in their area. In establishing their skills and contacts, some of the participants utilized their experiences from their past work. Still, businesses run by women have been reported to have lower growth as opposed to those run by men. This phenomenon was factored by several limitations faced by women, among which, are the pressure to achieve a balanced business and personal accountabilities, and to put business risks at minimum. For women, their preference is to keep their businesses small, on part time basis and focusing on sectors with low profitability. This is the reason why women tend to be involved in personal services and retails, and HBBs. As evidenced by the literature, the concept of e-Business can be adopted in HBBs because the scale and structure of this type of business is small, and thus has more flexibility in adapting to changes and new technologies.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & RESULTS

The e-Business prospect the Malaysian HBBs is explored in this paper. For the purpose, this study employed the multi-method approach, comprising the quantitative survey

approach and the qualitative case study. The use of both methods in combination strengthens and increases the validity of findings. For the quantitative method, this study employed survey questionnaire in order to obtain the maximum amount of feedbacks, for the purpose of strengthening the findings from the case study approach. Interviews, direct observations, documents analysis and questionnaire feedbacks were the sources to obtain the data. In this study, the case study approach involved three HBBs, one e-HBB company, two government agencies, one financial institution and one business association. All of the cases were located within the region of Klang Valley. However, only the qualitative method is discussed, owing to space constraints.

VI. CASE STUDY APPROACH

The approach of the case study involves an empirical inquiry on an existing occurrence within its actual context, using various sources of evidence. The use of this approach in this study allows the comprehensive investigation of the subject matters. At the same time, the approach allows the researcher to reach the selected cases using different methods (e.g., in-depth interviews, observation and document analysis). With these data, the researcher could gain comprehensive understanding on the case studies. In fact, this approach is appropriate for the discovery of new relationships of realities and the establishment of an understanding in a given study context.

This study explores the prospect of e-Business applications and strategies among the Malaysian HBBs, and therefore, several Malaysian HBB and e-HBB enterprises were employed as the primary case studies. Additionally, based on past studies, observation and feedbacks from HBB enterprises, government agencies, business associations and financial institutions contributed to HBBs in Malaysia, both directly and indirectly, and therefore, they are employed as supporting case studies, to support the main case studies.

Additionally, three of the methods of obtaining information on the e-Business application among HBBs in the Malaysian context are discussed as follows:

A. In-Depth Interview

The researcher carried out in-depth interviews with several enterprises, for the purpose of gaining more comprehensive view concerning the adoption of e-Business among Malaysian HBBs. In order to assure full representation, all parties with linkage to HBBs were included in the interviews, and these include HBBs, e-HBBs, government agencies, business associations and financial institutions. Several documents were arranged for the interview session including profiles for selected companies, a case study protocol, interview questions, and the relevant forms. In fact, several HBBs and e-HBB were already interviewed and some data were already analysed at the time this paper is being completed. In this study, government agencies and business associations was explored in terms of the role they play, existing related policies, infrastructure for supporting e-Business, and also the people's acceptance and readiness towards e-business.

B. Direct Observation

The technique of direct observation can be carried during interview session and on the websites of the company. In this study, the interview sessions took place primarily at the home offices of HBBs. This gave researcher a chance to observe an actual home-based offices setting, in this case, in the context of Malaysia. Before the interview session was carried out, the researcher established an observation rubric which would be filled at the end of the interview session. Meanwhile, during the study period, the researcher would occasionally observe the websites of the companies. This was to ascertain if there were any changes and the improvement in these companies' business. The use of this technique allows the researcher understand how people execute their business from home while also determining the involved parties in this business type.

C. The analysis

This study obtained data from the analyses performed on all documents that relate to the companies under study and this task is called document analysis. Among the documents utilized in this analysis were articles, magazines, newspapers cutting, newsletters, pamphlets, and the websites and portals of companies. This technique helps researcher in preparing the interview questions, and in determining the categories to be observed during the sessions of interview. With the obtained information, the researcher formed a case profile at the initial stage of the case study. Besides that, the obtained information is used in the determination of case study design as well as in the preparation of the tools of data collection such as the interview questions and the direct observation form. The information is also utilized as support and accompaniment to the interview findings

VII. THE HBBs EFFECTED BY E-BUSINESS

The presence of Internet technology and other applications of ICT have allowed small businesses such as HBBs to embrace the e-Business concept and gain benefit from it. Compared to the present day, small businesses in the past could not afford to have computers and other equipment of business as their larger counterparts. However, now that those devices are equally affordable to them and they could also involve in HBBs. Further, the changes and needs were also factored by other stakeholders' demand. These stakeholders include customers and suppliers. Additionally, it is crucial for micro sized enterprises to be able to change their way of communicating with the suppliers and customers. At the same time, in facing the challenges of e-Business, these enterprises also need to have appropriate plan and strategies. It should be noted that even though e-Business has gained good acceptance and popularity in Malaysia, the adoption of e-Business and e-Commerce among the Malaysian MSMEs is still at the beginning stage.

The findings of this study can be observed, HBB in Malaysia involves several bodies including business associations or NGOs, government agencies, business partners, suppliers, and clients. It appears that HBBs in Malaysia are multi-purpose in nature, whereby they can function as an agent or trader, a distributor, service provider,

and retailer as well. It should however be noted that in Malaysia, HBBs are required to registered under a sole proprietor or partnership or limited company, in order to legally operate. Meanwhile, some businesses are required to seek local authority's approval before operating, and among these businesses are tuition centres and salons.

Business grant or fund can also be applied by HBBs for the purpose of expanding their business. Equally, HBBs can partake in trainings and workshops organized by the government agencies. Relevantly, associations of business including Women Entrepreneur Network Association (WENA) offers a conduit for the HBBs to establish or enlarge their business network and relationships, and also provides assistance to members with business opportunities and trainings, among others. As demonstrated by the interview feedbacks and forum discussions, the majority of HBBs are registered with at least one association of business. Not only that, the association also assisted HBBs at the beginning stage of their business operations. For example, the business association would sponsor HBBs in participating in any visits or programs organized by the government.

HBBs also furnish information and specification concerning the products or services to the parties that supply the goods or materials to HBBs. These parties are known as the suppliers. In regards to the clients or customers, the interaction that HBBs have with them is bilateral where the product or services are sold by HBB to the clients, and clients who are satisfied would recommend the particular HBB to others. In the context of Malaysia, HBBs appears to work well via direct relationship with the clients. Business partner, which is another component of HBB is equally important. For the majority of HBBs in Malaysia, most were owned by one person or via collaboration with friends, relatives and spouses, who may offer funding, guide and support.

The availability of the Internet technology and various kinds of web-applications provide opportunity for the Malaysian HBBs to operate as an Electronic-Home-Based Business (e-HBB). e-HBB means the HBB executed via the Internet with the use of technologies and applications based on Internet such as web services, instant messaging, online shopping carts, just to name a few. Hence, via the internet, HBB may provide to customers the information concerning their products and services, in addition to the e-commerce functions including online ordering and online payment. Hence, e-HBB can be described as a business of which its main business activities are executed in a manner that is different from that of a conventionally defined office, and the execution is done via a computer-mediated network and is typically grounded upon virtual structure. From the definition above, there are four main elements relating to HBBs as follows:

A. Conventionally defined office - a workplace which may have an environment of a formal office which includes employees and formal working hours, furniture arrangement, and so forth,

B. Main business activities - buying, selling and ordering which can be executed using a computer-mediated network,

C. Computer-mediated network – web applications and services utilizable at any place, time and pace.

D. Virtual structure - the situation in which virtual resources (e.g., e-community, electronic payment, web and content developers) are utilized in supporting the business.

It should be noted that a third party can provide some of the development process or functionality. Alternatively, the available e-Business solution on the market can also be employed for the purpose. At the beginning stage, HBBs could adopt the e-business utilizing the Internet technology to achieve better communication, efficiency and effectiveness of the business processes just within the bounds of the company. In this regard, the Internet may be employed for market research, for communication with suppliers and customers, and as tools for sales and marketing. Somehow, prior to the transformation into e-HBB, the Malaysian HBBs need to first establish the e-readiness especially in regards to policy, infrastructure, trust, support and recognition from all related bodies.

As mentioned earlier, e-Business adoption among Malaysian HBBs is still in its infancy, but there appear to be improvements especially in regards to communication. In fact, at present time, the communications between the Malaysian HBBs and their suppliers, clients and partners are mostly carried out using email. When information is shared online, the workflow of processes can be improved, and for a small business, this can reduce cost while increasing productivity. Accordingly, the existing process flow of HBB/e-HBB in Malaysia and the manner in which it is executed or could be executed through the technology of the Internet. Accordingly, the initial findings, which means that it may be modified as the study progresses.

The current process flow for e-HBBs in Malaysia involves market research, engaging supplier and future clients, promotion of products or services, selling of products or services, secure contract or payments, delivery of products or services, and testimonial and evaluation. The details are as below:

A. Market research

HBBs/e-HBBs involve the application of the Internet as their tools of research. In particular, these tools allow HBBs/e-HBBs to survey the market and develop materials including a new design of content for their products and/or services. For some, the use of the Internet decreases research time and enhances work quality.

B. Engaging suppliers and future clients

Email and telephone are currently the main tools employed by HBBs/e-HBBs for communicating and discussing with the prospective suppliers and clients and for setting up an appointment for the business meeting. Generally, HBBs/e-HBBs would be required to present the company profiles to the corresponding suppliers or clients in black and white.

C. Promotion of products or services

The Malaysian HBBs/e-HBBs are progressing with the technology and they employ the Internet as a platform for the promotion of their products and services. In this regard, in order to present the company's information, many websites are formed. Notably, the majority of these HBBs/e-HBBs are registered with yahoo groups or mailing lists. This is for promoting and establishing relationship with the future clients. However, some of these businesses employ the old method to sustain the business using viral marketing or restrict it only to certain area.

D. Selling of products or services

Among some HBBs/e-HBBs, the Internet is employed for selling their products and services. An example is Hilyah.com (www.hilyah.com). This website sells women clothing online. However, some of these businesses still employ the traditional way of selling and buying process.

E. Secure contract or payment

In general, securing the contract or payment is still manually done. However, online banking system such as Maybank2u.com is available and employed as well. This assists in speeding up the payment process, as this allows the client to make the payment into the HBB/e-HBB account, online. In this situation, keeping the transfer receipt as a payment proof is the only security control practiced by both the client and the companies.

F. Product or services delivery

The delivery of products or services is dictated by the type of products and services that companies offer. Among the examined HBBs/e-HBBs, some offer their services from home (e.g., home tuition) while some would provide their services at the client's place such as conducting soft skills training. For the delivery of products, some HBBs/e-HBBs employ the method of cash and carry or deliver the goods using postal services. Some HBBs/e-HBBs would deliver their product by hand as well.

G. Testimonial and evaluation

It is common to see reviews or testimonials from past clients being included in HBB/e-HBB's portfolios or profiles. In fact, for the purpose of measuring the level of client satisfaction towards the products or services provided, some HBB/e-HBB would even carry out a customer satisfaction survey.

As can therefore be affirmed, the utilization of the Internet technology as a business tool has somewhat transformed the Malaysian HBBs/e-HBBs especially in regards to their structure, procedure, strategy and culture. In particular, the Internet has considerably changed the business strategy, marketing and other associated processes, of these businesses. Somehow, the transformation is still far from complete, and therefore, there is still time for HBBs to hone their e-Business implementation knowledge and skills.

The complete implementation of e-Business concept allows most of the business processes to be integrated and interconnected. Nonetheless, further research is necessary for this matter.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The models of HBB business have been in use since the past several years. However, in the context of Malaysia, the adoption of e-Business among HBBs and micro enterprises is still new. With the Internet technology, the way businesses are executed has transformed, and in the context of Malaysian HBBs, such transformation appears to have positively affected their growth. Factors that contribute to the adoption of e-Business among HBBs are still under scrutiny. In this regard, among the relevant factors include readiness, barriers and critical success factors. Accordingly, past works on e-Business and e-Business strategy for micro and small businesses were discussed in this paper. The Malaysian HBB structure and process flows as shown by the initial findings were equally discussed. For future works, a number of aspects that can be linked to HBBs including integrated value chain system and online payment method should be explored. Besides that, a wide-ranging framework for e-HBB in the context of Malaysia should be formulated.

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