

КУРС ЭЛЕКТРОННОЙ КОММЕРЦИИ С ФОКУСОМ НА УПРАВЛЕНИИ РАЗВИТИЯ И ЭКСПЛУАТАЦИИ ВЕБ-САЙТА ДЛЯ МАЛЫХ И СРЕДНИХ ПРЕДПРИЯТИЙ

A GRADUATE COURSE IN E-COMMERCE THAT FOCUSES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF A WEBSITE FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SME)

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Аннотация

Эта статья описывает курс, предназначенный для оснащения и расширения прав и возможностей руководителей малого и среднего бизнеса, для осуществления управления развитием и деятельностью сайта электронной коммерции. Курс дает практический опыт в разработке веб-сервиса, который включает в себя маркетинг, списки продуктов, интернет-покупку и оплаты, отслеживание выполнения заказов и послепродажное обслуживание. Курс также охватывает темы, связанные с управлением веб-проектами, обработкой данных, безопасностью и развитием сообщества пользователей. Благодаря этому менеджеры будут получать практический опыт в ведении бизнеса через Интернет.

Annotation

This paper describes a graduate course designed to equip and empower managers of SME to be able to manage the development and operations of an e-commerce website. The course provides hands on experience in developing a web-based service that includes marketing, product listings, online shopping and payment, order fulfillment tracking, and after sales service. The course also covers related topics such as web project management, data handling and security and user community development in order that managers will gain practical experience doing business online.

Ключевые слова:*практическое обучение управлению электронной коммерцией для малого и среднего бизнеса, управление разработкой веб-сайта, управление деятельностью бизнеса на web-основе*

Keywords:*practical e-commerce management training for SME, management of website development, management of web-based business operations.*

Introduction

The nature of electronic commerce or e-commerce has been evolving ever since the explosion of web development during in the mid 1990's made doing business on the Internet both possible and popular. The early years were like a gold rush as small teams of developers and entrepreneurs rushed to develop web-based applications that exploited new global market opportunities made possible by the Internet. The prevailing objectives and goals for e-commerce of that time were recorded in popular books with titles like *Unleashing the Killer App*[1] and *Business @ The Speed of thought*[2]. The emphasis was on creating online applications that would quickly dominate the market and alter the way business is conducted. However, many early investments in dot-com companies were based more on speculation in the technology than on

the robustness of the proposed business. In March 2000, the American stock market crashed as many online companies were unable to deliver and went bankrupt. However, companies like Amazon weathered the recession and went on to generate unprecedented record high revenues.[5]

At the same time, the numbers of both customers and businesses online grew exponentially, making the World Wide Web (WWW) a new and indispensable channel to global markets. E-commerce continued to evolve as an instrument for augmenting businesses of all sizes, providing business communication links to partners, clients and investors. By 2000, significant improvements in bandwidth, capabilities of graphic displays and expectations of internet users made Web 2.0 providing a higher level of interaction between consumers and vendors. Consumer behavior shifted to a tendency to purchase from websites that posted reviews by other consumers. This integration of consumer feedback into the online marketing of products and services has taken branding and customer loyalty to new heights. With the release of the iPhone in 2007 followed quickly by the iPad and an assortment of smart mobile devices, tech savvy businesses currently have access to a global online market of over 2.5 billion people, a number which is expected to double in the next 2 years.[3]

The teaching of e-commerce within business schools world-wide has also undergone an evolution of its own. In the early days the emphasis was on wealth creation by removing the dependence on brick and mortar business locations. Then in an era of business integration and optimization, the focus switched to leveraging the web as a means to support distant partnerships which led to downsizing of traditional industries. This was followed by recognition of the web as a tool for supporting both globalization and glocalization. Today, modern e-commerce courses also include discussion of the value of social networks, the support of social enterprises, and the impact of smart mobile devices on consumer behavior.[7] Because mobile social networks make it convenient for consumers world-wide to use brick and mortar shops as mere showrooms to help them decide what to buy online, managers of the future will need to learn new strategies to keep SMEs cost-effective.[6]

The impact of E-Commerce is also felt in business schools within developing countries.[4] At the International College (IC) at Payap University, our mission is to equip individuals to become brokers and developers who link communities and markets within and to the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). To this end, the IC conducts research, development, and academic programs under the 3 main pillars shown in Figure 1. In each pillar, the Internet plays a key supporting role.

A 3 credit elective course in electronic commerce is offered as part of the Masters degree in

this course is to provide skills and experience needed to manage e-commerce activities of local SMEs. Like other MBA graduates world-wide, our graduates need to understand e-commerce enough to be able to harness its potential for linking organizations and firms to markets both

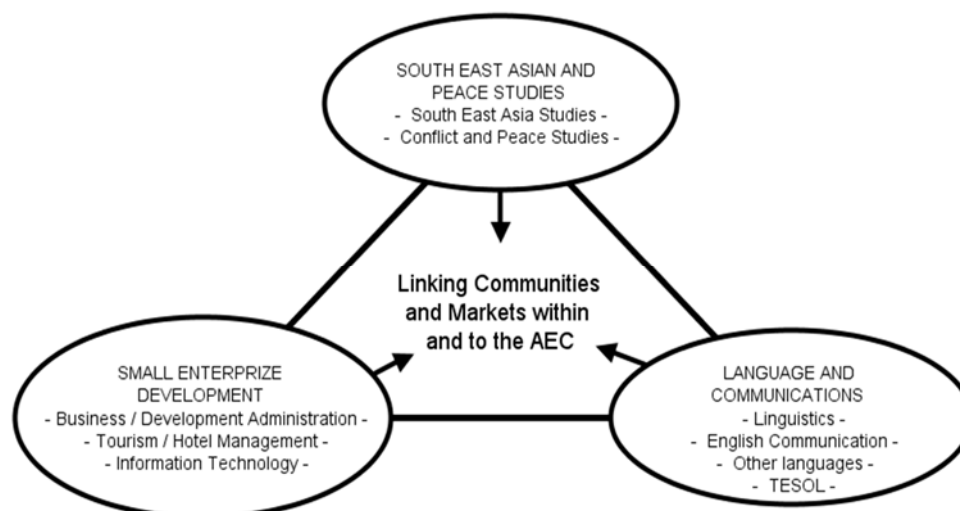


Figure 1The structure and mission of the International College at Payap University in Chiang Mai

local and world-wide. However, unlike MBA graduates working in the States or Europe, they will need to build their online business activities with little venture capital investment, limited options for delivering goods, lack of legal support for online business, and highly restricted online payment systems. The limitations imposed by these constraints require different strategies for developing e-commerce and impacts the contents of instruction accordingly. This paper describes our attempt to meet this challenge with a new graduate course in e-commerce with the hope of stimulating an exchange of ideas between business schools in developing countries to better equip local managers of e-commerce.

Course Description and Objectives

The graduate E-Commerce course offered by Payap University IC is part of a syllabus accredited by the Ministry of University Affairs of Thailand. This course is designated BA742 E-Commerce and has a course description and aims which are common to e-commerce courses found in many graduate business schools around the world:

Description: *Role and importance of electronic commerce on business operations, types, design process, development of electronic commerce, analysis of management problems, the impact of information technology on business and society, ethics of electronic commerce.*

Aims of this Course: On completion of this course the students will be able to:

- 1) *define the key concepts and strategies of Electronic Commerce,*
- 2) *recognize the role of Electronic Commerce in business operations*
- 3) *develop a practical working knowledge of the technology so as to effectively manage the development of electronic commerce solutions.*
- 4) *articulate the goals, needs and interactions appropriate to effective e-commerce web-sites*
- 5) *integrate web-based operations together with other business processes.*

While this description provides a good basis for developing familiarity with e-commerce, students who took this course in previous terms have commented that they felt inadequate to manage e-commerce activities. In addition, it was apparent that the case studies, examples and

exercises used to teach this course needed to be changed to better address issues and trends relevant to SMEs in Thailand. The resulting course meets the basic requirements for accreditation while equipping our students to meet the needs of SMEs. In particular, this course teaches e-commerce from a SME managerial perspective and explores management of web operations given the constraints of working in a developing country. The goal of these changes is to better equip and empower future managers of e-commerce.

The course is taught by a Computer Science instructor with over 2 decades of experience in assisting various organizations to use web technology. The motivation and inspiration for this teacher comes from discovering that the majority of his web projects that involved SMEs had managers who lacked 3 key qualities for managing a web project, namely: 1) the ability to articulate their needs and business processes, 2) the organizational skill to manage a development project, and 3) the confidence to manage personnel with technical skills. As a result, he added a new dimension to the course by dividing the students into teams of 2 or 3 to undertake the design and implementation of a prototype website for a non-profit social enterprise. The goal is not to train them as webmasters but to give them experience to be able to effectively manage webmasters. Through guided exercises, students are led through the process of design, development, operation and maintenance of an electronic commerce solution, acquiring valuable and practical, hands-on experience along the way.

The course content is taught in 7 modules. Each module is 6 hours of classroom instruction which progressively builds vocabulary and familiarity with the nature and potential of various aspects of e-commerce. The theme of each module is listed below:

1. *Introduction to E-commerce: an overview the subject.*
2. *The anatomy of a website: a role and function of the basic components within an e-commerce solution.*
3. *Managing web projects: Avoiding dangerous trends and exploiting on golden opportunities.*
4. *Business integration: Integration of web-based services into the overall SME business model.*
5. *Sustainable development of e-commerce: Balancing and managing expectations of customers, technologists, investors, and managers during development:*
6. *Customer loyalty: Building sustainable branding and online community.*
7. *Measure the impact of e-commerce: Evaluating the value and impact of an online service.*

Each week students are assigned a series of video clips and readings to provide background for the lecture. Students are tested at the beginning of class on the materials they have reviewed. This is followed by discussion of the material and aspects of these topics that effect the practice of e-commerce in Thailand. After a break, teams of students work through a series of guided exercises to develop a prototype of an e-commerce solution for local social enterprise. All course materials are distributed online using Moodle as the learning management system.

The key themes of the weekly exercises are listed below:

1. *Who are all the users of a website? Identifying stakeholders of a project and the requirements for their website.*
2. *How does a website work? The basic anatomy and operations of a website.*
3. *How to implement the web service? Exploring the options.*
4. *How do we best use web technology to enhance business operations? Harnessing the technology for the business.*
5. *How should we organize and schedule the work to be done? Planning the development.*
6. *How can we encourage visitors become regular users of the online service? Building a community.*

7. *How do we grow the online business? Achieving sustainable growth.*

Summary

A mini version of this course was attempted in the form of a seminar. Participants of the seminar evaluated this seminar a very favorably and a few of them even registered for this course to learn more. Some colleagues have found the principles and technique shared in the seminar immediately useful for their own development projects. Since then, students and colleagues have shown interest in this course because it covers e-commerce not as a series of academic lectures but as a series of issues to be developed and managed. The skill set developed by this course is in high demand among local SMEs and NGOs, but this is the first term that the new version of this course is being taught. We look forward to tracking how students of this course to determine how they use these skills when they return to the work force as managers after graduation. Those interested in obtaining the course materials for this course are welcome to direct their inquiries to the author.

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