

# 'e-people for your e-business'

You have just created or acquired your e-business. You had to. The technology revolution, the new competition, the threat to your established business and the increased expectations of your customer base meant that you had to act fast to stay in the race- the race for future survival.

**But what now?** The one stark reality staring you in the face is that you have to make this new e-business work. You have to launch it, resource it, and manage it, and you've never been this way before! Where do you start? How do you ensure its success?

At first sight building an e-business is a highly complex and daunting undertaking. Take a second look at the challenge and it becomes apparent that it is no different to creating any new business initiative. To do this you need to embrace three key roles- the **ENTREPRENEUR**, the **TECHNICIAN**, and the **MANAGER**.

## THE ENTREPRENEUR

Entrepreneurs want to change the status quo. They are by nature agents of change. They see things as they could be, not as they are now. Their passion is to create a vision of the future and make it happen because others haven't seen it and aren't doing it.

They recognise that revenues, profit, and corporate growth flow from customer demands for products and services that others are not providing. Their talent lies in their ability to see opportunities to do this, and their courage to take calculated risks to achieve success.

If you want to succeed in launching an e-business you will first need to think like an entrepreneur. You will at the very least need to:

- Thoroughly research your market
- Accurately identify customers' needs
- Analyse the competition
- Spot the future trends
- Create the product/service which satisfies the growing demands.

Expect to have inadequate information, to receive conflicting messages, and to meet internal resistance.

Your organisation runs on known facts, accurate predictions, and highly developed working practices to optimise short term returns. Championing an e-business requires challenging every area of corporate belief and culture to create the longer term returns. Whilst others around you are working **in** the business you are working **on** the business, and what's more working on the long-term business without any guarantees of quick success.

You must allow the entrepreneur within you to over-rule all your natural instincts for a safe, calculated outcome, which will guarantee you the personal recognition which has become the major arbiter of your success to date.

You need space. You need to be apart from the daily business. You need the permission to experiment, to try, to fail and to find the e-business opportunity which will overtake your competitors.

To do this you will need technical insights.

## THE TECHNICIAN

To launch an e-business you need to understand your business as never before-totally. You will quickly need to educate yourself in:

- Your organisation's products/services
- Its manufacturing processes
- Its distribution channels
- Supply chain management/logistics
- Marketing and sales processes
- Inventory control/management
- Quality controls
- Pricing models
- I.T. systems and their capabilities
- H.R. policies/procedures and their applications
- Procurement strategies
- Management of suppliers.

Use this fact-find to understand every aspect of the business which is key to its success.

You are about to re-engineer the business, or parts of it, into an e-business. You'd better know where you are starting from!

Your technician role is not just about you understanding your business it is about identifying whom you need to put around you when you scope and implement your e-business project.

Use your fact-finding phase as a technician not only to learn afresh about the business but also about the people in it! You will need to rely heavily on their knowledge and expertise in managing the launch of your e-business. Become an expert on identifying people's strengths and weaknesses. Consult with them and embrace their ideas.

## THE MANAGER

The entrepreneur creates the vision; the technician roots it in reality; the manager makes the future happen.

You will need a clearly defined management role and the authority to carry it out. Don't settle for a vague title or a loose brief. Make sure you agree your success measures with your internal customer. Hammer out exactly what the expectations are and how your performance will be assessed. You owe it to yourself and your organisation!

When it comes to managing the launch of the e-business, you will therefore need to have clear success criteria, measurable objectives and defined time-frames. You will need to ensure a fit of the new business to the overall existing vision, objectives and strategies of the core business. They must be complementary.

At this stage become a consultant to yourself. Ask yourself-"Am I clear on and am I convinced by the business case for this new initiative?" Play devil's advocate with yourself. Have others critique your objectives, strategy and plans. Involve your customers. Involve your suppliers. Involve external consultants. Involve your network!

But, as a result, be sure that you can sell a credible business case for your e-business internally. If you can't sell it to yourself, you won't be able to sell it convincingly to others. You must be convinced that it is achievable and you must have the motivation to see the toughest part through.

What is the toughest part? Managing the I.T./H.R. paradox.

By now you will have realised that you are in the midst of two warring parties-the I.T. specialists who believe that e-businesses need to be I.T. driven, and the H.R. specialists who believe that they need to be H.R. driven.

How has this fight for the upper-hand come about?

It has long been recognised that **INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL** and **KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT** are the keys to success in e-business. This involves information flows, and information flows require systems and people.

If you sit in the I.T. 'camp' you believe that these flows are generated primarily by I.T. If you sit in the H.R. 'camp' you believe they are generated primarily by people. Between these two specialist views sit the views of the different functional heads, all with their own ideas, motivations and capacity to sit on the fence!

The truth is that to make an e-business work you need to create **NEW SYSTEMS** and **NEW PEOPLE both** of which are in harmony.

Getting your people to be skilled in using the new systems is one thing; getting them to be effective within new structures, and in a new market-place, is quite another.

E-business puts your products and services in front of potential customers and users more quickly and effectively than possibly any other medium. However the paradox is that your customers, having absorbed much of the essential information for themselves often expect a much higher level of advice than before from your people before completing their purchase.

I.T. can make it extremely easy for customers to effect simple transactions but when they require more information and insights then your staff need a high level of **CONSULTATIVE SELLING** and **PROBLEM-SOLVING** skill. Not only must their **PRODUCT**

**KNOWLEDGE** be second to none, so must their **CONSULTATION SKILLS**.

I.T. can also make it easy for your staff to work independently in remote locations, often on their own for long periods of time. The accompanying loneliness, potential boredom, and lack of people interaction can result in a **REMOTE** and **DEMOTIVATED** workforce. Their performance is monitored by equipment, their feedback is given by numbers, and their recognition in monetary values alone.

Their capacity to feel involved in the business is lost, as are their ideas, the customer information they glean, the big picture they can put together, the competitor knowledge they acquire, and ultimately their sense of belonging and commitment to the business.

Finally I.T. can generate all the necessary management information to help you to manage and control your e-business. What it can't do is to create sustainable long term competitive advantage. Why? Because it can be so quickly copied. Long term competitive advantage can only come from the **CREATIVE, INNOVATIVE AND INTELLIGENT THOUGHTS** of your employees. These can be stimulated, managed and developed by inspirational leaders and managers within your business. People who love the product, love the business, love the customers, and love making a difference!

This is the true challenge in creating your e-business-how to capitalise on the intellectual capital and the **DESIRE OF PEOPLE TO WILLINGLY USE IT**.

To meet this challenge you will need more than the ability to manage I.T., you will need the processes and skills to engage your people in your e-business, in a way which is exciting, refreshing and rewarding for them.

To successfully launch your e-business you will need to create e-people, and that's what will provide your challenge. You will need to tackle the following issues:

- Leading the e-organisation
- Managing e-teams
- Performance Management in an e-world
- Motivating the e-workforce
- Account managing the e-customer
- Career development in an e-structure

**E-people for your e-business-can you handle the issues alone?** The chances are that you will need help. After all you're an entrepreneur, a technician and a manager, but possibly not an H.R. specialist-but we are!