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E-book devices and m-commerce: what might be the impact on organizational learning?

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to explore how e-book devices and m-commerce affect organizational learning.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper examines how e-books are changing the m-commerce industry by encouraging organizations to adopt electronic formats of written material.

Findings – This paper highlights how e-books can make a difference to organizations by being a more cheaper and efficient way to share information and knowledge.

Research limitations/implications – As e-books are a relatively new innovation that organizations are using it is important to understand how people within an organization learn and use e-books.

Practical implications – Organizations need to keep up to date with new technology and e-books provide a unique way for organizations to learn about market developments and encourage information sharing throughout the whole organization.

Social implications – E-books enable people in an organization to share information in a timely and secure manner. However, for society this may mean an increase in unethical conduct such as illegal downloading that organizations need to be aware of.

Originality/value – This paper highlights how e-books are used by individuals within an organizational context and the impact on the market for organizations having e-book devices.

Keyword(s):

Learning; Ethics; Electronic commerce; Technology led strategy; Learning organizations.

E-book devices are changing current organizational practices by providing a source of e-learning, in which organizations and their employees can more easily access information about current business developments that impact on their existing practices. E-book devices (also referred to as e-book readers or e-readers) use electronic ink technology to display written words from books, newspapers, magazines and other documentation. They are portable devices that are the size of a paperback book and are a new technology that has only been mass-marketed to the general population in the past year. Most importantly for an organization is that e-books could transform and will certainly influence their current technology practices and how people communicate and perform their job tasks.

E-books and the m-commerce industry

The technological innovations made possible by m-commerce have totally changed the e-book device industry.

M-commerce is the use of mobile wireless devices to communicate and conduct transactions and send real time messages directly to individuals and forms part of the wider e-commerce industry as commercial transactions are done electronically. This has allowed booksellers and buyers to communicate directly about their products through a technological device rather than through face-to-face transactions. However, this change has created ethical decision-making concerns for online users (McMahon and Cohen, 2009). These ethical issues include people sharing books without paying download fees and people breaking copyright by illegally downloading material.

Impact on the market

The sales of e-books increased 68.4 percent in 2008 and this does not include the millions of books downloaded for free at public libraries (Mui, 2009). Amazon's e-book reader, the Kindle, is the best selling product on its web site (Mui, 2009). However, e-books comprise only 1.5 percent of the \$6.8 billion of sales in books (Mui, 2009). Retail stores like BestBuy in the United States are devoting more space to e-book devices and it is estimated that by the end of 2010, 10 million people will have e-book devices.

Products like the Kindle can hold 1,500 titles and wirelessly download a book in 60 seconds. The Kindle has no monthly fees or annual contract and does not need a wireless hotspot. Instead of wireless technology, Amazon has created its own wireless technology delivery system for Kindle called Whispernet. Whispernet works by using 3GSM technology from the AT&T Global Network to deliver wireless reading material to a Kindle. Borders in the USA is also innovating by working with Kobo, a Canadian digital book company, to create an e-book application that will work in most cell phones. Sony has entered the e-book market by miniaturizing its e-book device, creating the Reader Pocket Edition and Apple introduced a free application, Stanza, to let people read e-books on their i-Phones.

All these developments have resulted in the following usages for e-books by individuals:

- Books can be downloaded and read, which gives people a greater choice of literary material.
- E-book devices allow someone to edit and write comments about a book that can be then sent to other people.
- E-books allow more direct communication from the vendor and gives them the opportunity to personalize messages to link to individual customer's reading preferences.
- E-books allow a person to do their shopping from any location and increases a person's independence to buy and access books at any time or location.
- Personal documents can be uploaded and read on an e-book device via a USB port.

Where e-books can make a difference in organizations

Organizations can use e-book devices in a number of ways. Instead of keeping hard copies of manuals, computer texts and contracts, the e-book device lets organizations free up valuable storage space by storing this information in an e-format. The e-format makes categorizing and access to existing written information that an organization has a lot easier than the paper filing cabinet system. For documents that are security sensitive these can still be accessed via the e-book device but have a password attached to the access of the document.

In addition, e-book devices have additional security features such as tracking the time and place a document was read or accessed that allows organizations to keep up to date with what information is being accessed and who in the organization has access to this information.

As learning is a crucial part of an organization's development and survival, the e-book device provides a novel and time efficient way for employees to get to data that previously would be hard to access or to carry around. For example, some organizations in the courier industry now give employees a e-

book device to keep track of existing shipments and to allow documents to be signed by contractors that can be sent electronically back to the office (McGee and Oleya, 2009).

Overall, the e-book device allows an organization to give employees access to much valuable information whilst at the same time maintaining integrity and ethical standards in how this information is used. L&D professionals would be wise to keep abreast of developments in the technology and explore ways in which it might add value to their own offerings.

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