

# E-commerce enabling Australia Summit

Donna Reid, Canberra Institute of Technology

The first national conference on electronic commerce was held in Parliament House from 16–17 April. At the close of the conference, participants called for the establishment of an action agenda to prepare business and the community for the use of online services and e-commerce.

A report undertaken by Andersen Consulting (*eCommerce: our future today*) and launched at the Summit proposed five key elements in such an agenda:

- think globally — e-commerce provides opportunities for Australia on a global stage;
- build on Australia's capabilities — take advantage of our history of innovation;
- act now — avoid the cost of being second by taking the risk of being first;
- take a human approach — embrace the concept of 'eLife'; and
- start with demand — enterprise and

investment will follow naturally.

What is e-commerce? In a technological sense, e-commerce broadly includes the Internet, intranets, extranets, EDI and Interactive Voice Response technology. But transformation of business operations, and the way we think about business, is the bottom line, as the many examples from small business, and some not-so-small businesses reported (from the ubiquitous Amazon.com to Pacific Access — the producer of Yellow Pages and White Pages).

Like the introduction of electricity, e-commerce would appear to have unforeseen consequences. With direct marketing opportunities, services and products can be customised to suit the individual, from the manufacturing process down to packaging, delivery and timing. Content can be delivered over the Net (as we well know) but when artists and writers set up their own web sites and handle their own distribution, we could also be looking at the demise of the middle operators, managers and retailers. The impact that

will this have on how we currently think about information, access information, and establish processes for managing, packaging and delivering it?

In his fascinating talk, C Chris O'Hanlon (SPIKE Pty Ltd) asked, 'will cars be sold online, and what are the implications for the local dealer who would only need to provide the test drive if all other aspects are handled online?' The three points Chris left us with were pertinent and timely:

- Things end! This statement postulates that the use of Internet and e-commerce will not only impact on the way business is done, but also on the business itself. (Note that the Andersen survey found that CEOs and government policy makers strongly believe that e-commerce will 'revolutionise' the way they do business, but only fourteen per cent of companies currently have a comprehensive and well-developed e-commerce strategy in place).
- Be chaos-compliant! Nobody has all the answers, so unpredictability will be a strong feature of the way work is undertaken in the future. Rather than working with a known client group, companies will service millions of individual audiences, each consisting of one client.
- Don't interrupt; ask for permission! There are now millions of competitors for our attention (phone, television, telemarketers, door-to-door salespeople). In an online environment, the company that wins initially seeks our attention and gradually gains our permission to intrude and provide a learning experience; it develops a relationship of trust with us, resulting in a change in client behaviour, and eventually leading to a transaction.

The National Office for the Information Economy has the mandate to frame a national approach to electronic commerce and formulate a comprehensive regulatory and legal framework for information and online services. One of its future activities will be a national I-E Day (Information Economy Day) on 5 September, designed to raise community awareness of e-commerce and other technologies. For further information, see their web site: <http://www.noie.gov.au> ■

## Themes to take you *Strait to the future*

Chris Richardson, The 8th Asia-Pacific Specials, Health and Law Librarians Conference  
22-26 August 1999

The program committee are working extremely hard to identify keynote speakers and have developed the themes of the conference culminating in ideas and methods to take the profession *Strait to the future*.

The major themes are:

**Looking forward, looking back** — the roles of information, reading, research and archives — future, present, past; islands: overcoming isolation; innovations: meeting the challenges.

**Information ecology** — the information landscape; knowledge management; transience and permanence, access and ownership; training and education.

**The vision** — technovision: boon or bust; the wired planet: information and IT trends; communication networks; balanced lives on the cutting edge: human resources issues; the specialist niche in cyberspace; experience and visions/invasions and colonization's on the world wide web.

**Strait to the future** — scenarios.

Planning on the Call for papers is also going ahead and they will be sent out in September. Information regarding the program and the call for papers will also be available on the web, so visit our site at <http://www.alia.org.au/conferences/strait/index.html> and keep in touch with what is happening in Hobart in 1999.

