

## Preface

With the dawn of the Internet in the last decade of the twentieth century, a structural change in both social and economic spheres was induced. Digital technologies have become an integral part of daily life and their influence on the transfer of information has become ubiquitous. The growing relevance of information technologies has created a new commercial dimension that is characterized by electronic business processes that are conducted over digital data pathways. In addition to the real level of physical processes, products and services, an electronic trade level has evolved.

Enterprises need to attend to both trade levels in equal measure as the customer is present in both online and offline channels. Customers inform themselves in one channel and purchase in another, reflecting their goal to find the best selection, services and prices. The changes in customer behaviour and the technological advance implicate that new instances of multi-channel retailing and innovations like Internet kiosks will continue to change both online and offline environments as companies want to provide customers with the ultimate shopping experience. Integrated business concepts are increasingly becoming a prerequisite for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage.

Traditional enterprises need to utilize the Internet as a new communication, distribution and service channel. Indeed, the Internet has unquestionably also created new businesses that share dynamic, rapidly growing and highly competitive characteristics. Internet start-ups are based on innovative and promising business ideas. Their scope, however, is often limited to online channels. Considering the integration of online and offline activities of both businesses and individuals, enterprises from both worlds inevitably need to approach each other in order to be able to reach all market segments.

Cooperation strategies are a promising way of meeting these requirements in an ideal manner. Alliances between traditional enterprises and Internet-based ventures enable both partners to integrate online and offline business processes without extending themselves beyond their own means or competencies. Against this background, cross-channel cooperation represents a new managerial task that is worthwhile to be examined in more detail.

This book looks into the manifold possibilities of cooperation between ventures equipped with online and offline business models. For the first time, the book conducts

a systematic investigation and classification of cross-channel cooperation strategies. The book provides a conceptual framework to understand the field, as well as practical implications for doing business in a highly competitive environment that is characterized by the coalescence of physical and electronic business processes.

The book is intended for managers and researchers involved in electronic business, innovation and technology management, marketing and distribution, as well as for directors and entrepreneurs of both traditional and Internet-based companies. It is also essential reading for students in business administration and business information systems.

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