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## The Impact of Internet-Technologies Development on Small Business Success in Russia

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### Abstract

The Internet is an important instrument for small businesses if it is used correctly, otherwise it can be a dangerous problem. Regardless, the Internet has started a process of innovation that is transforming the way people are planning to do business. This essay examines the Internet and its different approaches used within small businesses; it takes into consideration some aspects such as piracy and forgery, social networks, and websites. This paper gives a prospective of this phenomenon in different countries, first in Russia, then in Europe, and finally in the USA. The aim of this essay is to analyze how the Internet can transform the life of small businesses then it examines the possibility of the development of this new market sector. Finally, the essay outlines and considers the benefits of using the Internet in terms of services received, for example with banks or with national institutes rather than only in terms of sales potential and communication with customers.

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### 1. Introduction

During 2015, Sberbank issued more than 120,000 loans for small businesses and 90% of them were online. "The "Online Backup Current Account" Service allows you to get the account number in an average of three minutes. To

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use it, you need to fill out an application on the bank's website, specify the BIN, and fill in contact details. Immediately after, the Sberbank backup account is ready to receive funds in favour of the client.” (Sberbank, 2015). This demonstrates how things work out in Russia regarding the Internet and shows some of the benefits that it may provide to small businesses. In Italy, small businesses can interact directly with the public administration through the Internet to resolve a variety of services such as consulting, payment of taxes, or presentation of certificates or documents. The government of Japan created the web portal “Mirasapo” that aims to give expert counseling and to form a community of managers and experts in the e-commerce sector. Then the social networks VKontakte or Facebook have made it possible for small businesses to advertise on their social network. Today, small and medium-sized businesses can also communicate with customers and ask opinions or introduce a new good into the market.

The Internet is an instrument that has evolved in size and scope over time. It is a controversial phenomenon because it has changed social and economic life for the better. Though at the same time, it has also permitted people to abuse other users and to perpetrate scams or act with false credentials. Fifteen years ago, a website was considered the most innovative arm that a company had to increase its appeal. Today, even if it continues to be an important instrument for small businesses, it is considered too static. Indeed, in some cases, if a small business does not utilize a social network and does not continue to restyle its website, it can result in a drop in the company's reputation.

Examining data on e-commerce usage, for example the small-to-medium sized enterprise's turnover from e-commerce in the EU28, we can see that from 2011 to 2015 there was an increase of only 1% even if there was a greater growth potential. It is important to point out that in 2015 only 18% of small businesses were involved in e-commerce. It is also true for the data sets from Italy. In 2016, 61% of the people who used the Internet (about 31 million Italians) decided to buy on-line, with a total amount of 19 billion Euros spent. Today the significance of the Internet and e-commerce is tracked by the use of data that explains from one side the importance of this sector in economy. And conversely it tries to explain the reasons why the Internet has become an important instrument.

The same happened with piracy and forgery. In the past, money extortion frauds often occurred through common channels, perhaps due to a virus or trap pages. Then professional hackers perpetrated frauds against banks and the electronic systems for cash machines, Activities of spying on public offices continue to happen as before but now there is a new wave of piracy beginning. The illegal downloading of documents under copyright, or real acts of corporate espionage in order to acquire information about rival companies occur. Continuing this overall change in Internet usage, illegal activities evolve and change at the same rate.

## **2. Literature review**

According to Thomas L. Mesenbourg, “Electronic business (e-business) is any process that a business organization conducts over computer-mediated networks. Business organizations include any for-profit or non-profit entity. Examples of major electronic business process categories include online purchasing, selling, production management, logistics, as well as internal communication and support services.”(Mesenbourg, 2001). The SCALES (SCientific AnaLysis of Entrepreneurship and SMEs) Institute conducted the “Research Report H200111” in which a basic model of working of a small business was explained. It further discusses opportunities, resources, and strategies that are fundamental for entrepreneurship continuation and development (Kemp & Verhoeven, 2002). More opportunities mean more customers, and a better reallocation of resources means that advertising on the Internet costs less. In the end, it means that e-commerce costs less for small-to-medium sized businesses.

In the last fifteen years, economists have started to study the phenomenon of Internet and e-commerce connected with globalization and new, innovative forms of marketing. Two major studies of this are Gordon Robert's *Does The "New Economy" Measure Up To The Great Inventions Of The Past?* (2000) and Bruce Kogut's *The Global*

Internet Economy (2004). Both books accurately analyzed how the Internet was transforming social life in this new economic context all around the world. Another important contribution to this study was by Baily Martin and Robert Lawrence in 2001 when they wrote the essay *Do We Have a New E-conomy?* for the “American Economic Review, in which they explained some of the significance of this new mode of doing business. E-commerce is changing not only the society but significantly, how operators are working within the economy. Jim Kelly, CEO and Chairman of the Board for UPS is of the opinion that the business model is changing, and their focus is changing, too. UPS is aware that e-commerce represents the only way to make the company more competitive and attractive for customers who are requiring different services that are more connected with e-commerce (Ross, 2001).

E-commerce originated in the U.S.A. and the diffusion of the Internet and e-commerce was fast, breaking out into a continually inter-connected global community. For this reason, after less than ten years people all around the world understood the importance of this new instrument, not only for society but also for the economy. At the end of previous century, in Russia, R. Tsvylev demonstrated the connection between network economy and a global world; indeed, he thinks that e-commerce, along with the development of information technologies, will be leading to the evolution of modern economies (Tsvylev, 1996). Today e-commerce is changing very quickly because there are new requests from customers and this service must satisfy them. One of the most important questions to consider if a customer were to buy or sell on the Internet, is the problem about the privacy, integrity, and security of online transactions (Duh & Others, 2002).

Connected with the e-commerce phenomenon are two other important questions that are not resolved yet: the first is about the law of the Internet. Today in every nation there is a specific Internet law, so an international company can have some problems when it wants to operate abroad. That is why it is important to create a set of laws governing the Internet that gives the possibility of operating easily in the e-commerce sector (Rustad, 2014). The second point is the method of payment; a recent practice on the Internet is the ability to pay by using bitcoins. A traditional international transaction requires a third party that can be a bank or a financial institution that can operate in the currency market. With the creation of a common virtual coin, like bitcoins, operators will have the ability to conclude economic operations faster, removing a third of the time that would be needed by a traditional exchange (Schroeder J., 2015). Today the metamorphosis of the Internet as the new practice of e-commerce represents an important theme of research in different fields. The definition of e-commerce, for example, includes intracompany functions as marketing, finance, selling and negotiation (Zhou, 2004).

### 3. Methodology

This essay will study e-commerce as a popular new mode to buy and sell products connected with a new innovating mode for SMEs to buy and sell, thereby reducing expenses. E-commerce is a common practice, but it is the level of modernization of small businesses that determines the success of the subject. This essay studies the “Internet” phenomenon in the last ten years, for this reason it is clear that it does not take into consideration how the Internet entered the life of small businesses. Rather, the focus is on how the Internet modifies its role in small business’ life. For this reason, the essay has two macro parts: what should be an advantage or a disadvantage for small businesses when they decide to use Internet. The analysis is as follows, at first it is institutional, especially when the essay compares laws and public regulations with real economic life. Then the essay considers the views of experts including economists and those who are personally committed in a different way in this sector. A. Veselov, organizer of the conference *Internet Sales and Marketing for Small and Medium Businesses*, Moscow, 18th of May 2012 declared that western analysts believe that in just ten years, more than 60% of transactions will take place through the Internet, without the seller (even in the corporate sector). The success of the remaining 40% of transactions will largely depend on the impact of social media (Expert Online, 2012). This helps to explain why it is

so important to study such a phenomenon that is relatively new. This relatively new phenomenon can help researchers better anticipate and understand future unknown factors that influence the life of small businesses.

#### **4. Influence of forgery and piracy in small business' life**

Russian legislation is relatively young, mostly because after Soviet times, the Russian government started a process to adapt the law to a new economical market system. It is continuing to modify its approach to this problem, demonstrating a dynamic system of law that is trying to deal with this problem. Concerning the law on exclusive use of a trademark, Russia made its first law in 1992, called the "Law of the Russian Federation On Trademarks, Service Marks and Appellations of Origin "of 23 September 1992. № 3520-1. As amended by the Federal Law of 11 December 2002. № 166-FZ, which then entered into law on 27.12.2002 ". In this way, article 180 p. 1 of the penal code punishes those who illegally use a trademark of another company. "The illegal use of a trademark, service mark shall be punished by a fine of two hundred to four hundred times the minimum wage or in the amount of wages salary or other income for a period of two to four months, or by compulsory works for a period of one hundred eighty to two hundred forty hours, or correctional labor for up to two years"(Businesspatent). Regarding the import of every kind of good, a Russian company that is buying a product from another country must acquire all certification of a product and documents of shipping and without of proof of purchase, the purchasing company cannot pay and pick up goods (Nesterov, 2001). So, strict control at the borders and an economical system that is not as liberal as in Europe are the most important differences between Russia and the EU.

Piracy of software and intellectual property are also important problems for the Russian Government. According to the Russian Interior Ministry the deficit caused by the turnover of counterfeit products is about 1 billion dollars a year. The state budget loses significant revenue due to concealment of income derived from taxation (Kurkova, 2003). In Russia, piracy is not considered a grave crime by the people, rather it implies people are illegally downloading a CD-ROM or photocopying a book without believing that they are committing a crime. Then there is no real cooperation between cybercrime police and the owner of the pirated object . A study that monitored the Russian consumer market showed that software is "pirated" by 91%, video piracy in the illegal market is 85%, printing and publishing of counterfeit goods is 70%, and the use of unlicensed cable television is 90% (Gemini & Leontiev, 1999). Another problem is the application of law, because even if there is a strong system of law on forgery, articles 146,147, and 180 of the penal code target forgery but not piracy of intellectual property made on the Internet. In this context, it is clear that proliferation of the problem is also because of a lawlessness in this case (Seergev, 1996).

The problem of piracy is also present in Europe and in the U.S.A. In the EU, people don't feel it is as serious of a crime like homicide or a theft. In the U.S.A. there is a phone number and a website with an e-mail address, where companies, freelancers, and normal people, can ask more information about piracy and also report cases of informatics piracy. Maybe for this reason, in the U.S.A. 19% of all business software is unlicensed. The SBA, an association of software alliances, reported this data in 2011.

#### **5. The importance of the Internet**

In the last twenty years Internet technologies represented one of the most important and successful instruments that small businesses use to improve their efficiency and operability. "The development of information technology greatly reduced the cost of collecting and disseminating information. As a result, it is changing the cost structure of individual firms and industries. All this can change the traditional business beyond recognition" (Invest Gazeta, 2010).

The Internet is an important instrument for customers, small businesses, and for public administration. It creates a faster interaction between all agents, a faster interaction that costs less than traditional channels. Moreover, it gives visibility to companies of all size without differences between small or big companies, so it can help to increase the level of meritocracy, and market competitiveness. The Internet can also reduce the length of the product supply chain, making business faster and less expensive for customers and small businesses.

Table 1. Average hours for day of access in Internet.

NATION	Average time of access in Internet	
	Desktop or Laptop	Mobile
BRAZIL	6,1	2,4
S. AFRICA	5,6	2,5
RUSSIA	4,9	1,4
CHINA	4,5	1,9
USA	5,2	2,4
ITALY	4,7	2,0
U.K.	4,2	1,5
JAPAN	3,5	1,0
S. KOREA	3,5	1,6
SAUDI ARABIA	5,0	3,0
ARGENTINA	5,2	3,4

Font: *US census Bureau, InternetWorldStats, CNNIC, 2014*

The word “Internet” is too generic, if it is going to explain a new informatics-economic phenomenon. In the last twenty years, the way companies use the Internet has changed significantly. For example, today if we talk about the Internet in the sales sphere, it is best to talk about e-commerce. In Italy during 2013, 62,5% companies with more than ten people had a website, but in 2012 only 7,6% sold their goods on the Internet (ISTAT, 2014). This data represents a paradox, which at first asks the question of economic value of the Internet. The problem is not about customers, because in Italy 61,7% of people who are from 6 to 74 years old use the Internet, and around 64% families also use it ( Repubblica, 2014). The problem is not about the Internet, because it is perceived as a useful instrument and service. In fact, the quality of services of public Italian administration has increased during 2013 by 40% for customers and 34% for companies (ISTAT, 2013).

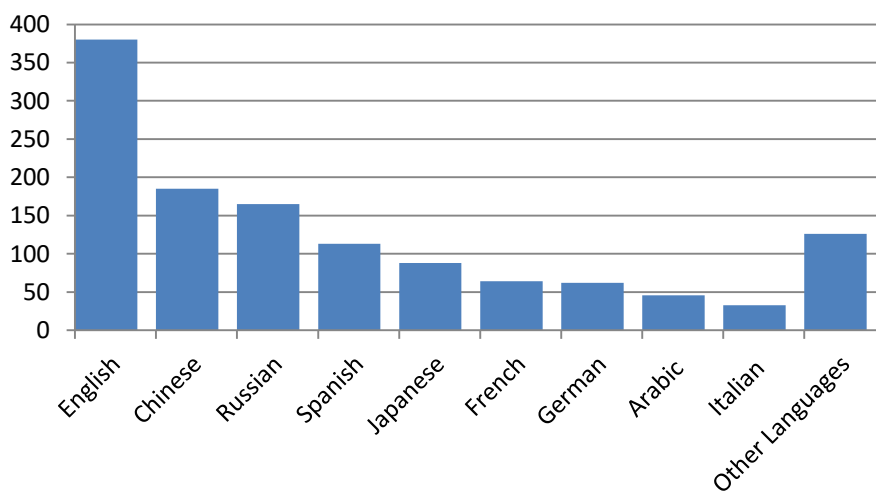


Fig. 1. Most popular languages used on Internet on 2008 (mln. users)

Therefore the problem is within the business policies. The reasons are many but there is one that also explains the

Internet phenomenon. In Russia, on March 2015, the President of Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, met a group of entrepreneurs to talk about their economic projects on the Internet. After speaking with them, Putin then declared that these projects will be supported by the “Internet Initiatives Development Fund.” This initiative is a venture capital fund that invests in technology companies that, today, have helped more than 150 projects (Zvezda, 2015).

## **6. Internet innovation and e-commerce in Russia**

In Russia, even if many companies have a website, most of these websites are used only to show their company and not to sell their goods. The President of “Support of Russia” (OPORA Rossii) Svetlana Nugumanova thinks that this situation is prevalent because for small businesses the first look of commerce is important, as it requires a global coverage. For many, the reason being the index of small businesses that will operate on the Internet will not increase during years. The Internet in Russia is used to show data of a company (in fact, in 2011 82% of small businesses posted their address and contacts on internet), while the most active sectors of the economy using the Internet are restaurant and hotels (51%) and activity of production and industry (45%) (Miranenko, 2011).

While this is optimistic, a recent study conducted by Google is not so thrilling for Russia; indeed only 38% of all small businesses operate actively on the Internet. In Brazil it is 52%, Germany 53% and Ireland 58%. This sector is increasing and positively effecting the larger economy, for example during 2013 volume of affairs increased and now it represents roughly 2,1% of the GDP. Then a study of the Russian Internet business conducted by the Russian Association of Electronic Communications (RAEC) and the Higher School of Economics found the size of the RuNet business segment (online payments, content providers and other services) had increased by 31% in 2013 compared to 2012 (Kozlovsky, 2014).

Maxim Solnez, President of SDM-bank during 2014, published an interesting paper for the economic journal *Vedomosti* on the 12th of December 2014. He deals with the Internet, small and medium businesses, and how they should use the new informatics instruments to improve their businesses. At first he is of the opinion that it is absolutely important to make a good website, which must be interesting, easy to use, and clear. A good website is the first step to having good advertising on the Internet. Then he thinks that companies must use social networks and other tools like them, in line with European and the common mode of thinking of e-commerce experts. Regarding these arguments, Solnez thinks that is important to make an advertising campaign that is in line with what the business sells. The Internet is like a common big market, for this reason a generic advertising campaign will not favor sales. A generic advertising campaign will render all efforts made by company ineffective.

In the larger scheme, social networks and the Internet have helped the process of globalization, creating a common space for all people coming from all around world. Solnez is of the opinion that e-commerce may be more profitable in big cities and zones with high population density; looking at developed countries, except Canada, Russia has the lowest population density, only 8,4 people for every square kilometer (Solnez, 2014). Moreover, the consideration of e-commerce and the Internet in Russia and the European Union is changing; in Italy e-commerce is an instrument to export goods of high quality that do not have a big domestic market. Export is typically done out of the European Union to countries like Russia, China, the U.S.A., and Canada. For this reason, this is a viable model for a small business to increase its sales and income by selling items to customers whose only exposure to the business is through the Internet. For this reason, the geographical context is important in relation to nation and the market segment of a specific product, rather than based on the density of cities, a phenomenon that is correlated with a higher use of the Internet and social networks.

## 7. Online shopping and e-commerce today

According to the Pew Research Center, 79% of Americans shop online and 51% of Americans purchase goods using a cellphone (Smith & Anderson, 2016). This data could be enough to explain that importance that can cover e-commerce for small business, especially in this period of crisis in which it becomes much more difficult for the small business to find new customers and strategic sectors. The Pew Research Center's study also underlines that the global trend of selling on the Internet is continuing to develop. Indeed, the following table shows purchasing trends in the U.S.A. in 2016 relative to age:

Tab. 2. % of American who buy on internet

Age	Always	Sometimes	Never
18-29	53	43	4
30-49	47	45	8
50-64	34	41	24
+65	23	36	34

It is clear that e-commerce, even if is considered a relatively new method of conducting business, is growing up and it is possible to affirm that in the future it will be the most important practice to buying and selling products. Unfortunately, actual statistics in the EU show that SMEs are not ready to sell their products on the Internet and the gap between big and small companies could be a huge problem in the future for those who do not want to enter the e-commerce sector.

Tab. 3. Enterprises with e-sales (%)

	Enterprises with e-sales (%)		
	2011	2013	2015
All enterprises	16	18	20
Large enterprises	39	40	42
Medium enterprises	24	25	28
Small enterprises	16	16	18

Large enterprises are considering e-commerce as an important practice to develop their market sector, but small businesses are not doing enough in this way. In the near future, the problem could be that large enterprises will take the leading position on the Internet as well as in real life. In this way, they will not give enough space for small business enterprises to conduct business and in the end these small businesses will not be able to sell their goods on the Internet. Moreover, this problem could be a particularly interesting theme for nations as a whole. Figure 2 shows that the amount of e-sales in the EU28 varies widely.

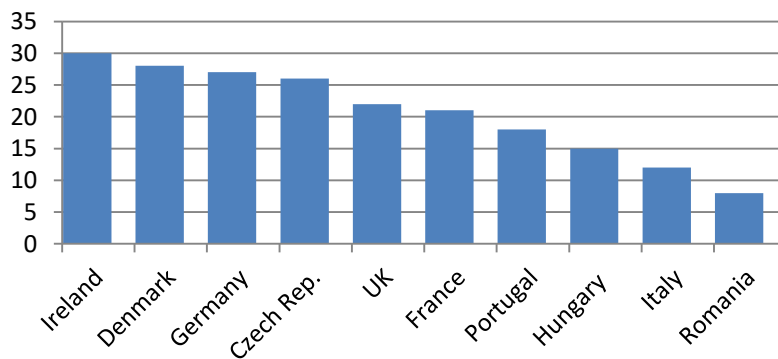


Fig. 2. E-sales share, 2015 (%)

Given this information, it is also important to underline that to sell on the Internet, it is necessary to understand how many people are ready to spend and from which countries. The next table shows how many online shoppers were spending in 2015 around the world.

Tab. 4: “How much online shoppers are spending in 2015?”

NATION	\$
USA	1.804
UK	1.629
SWEDEN	1.446
FRANCE	1.228
GERMANY	1.064
JAPAN	968
SPAIN	849
CHINA	626
RUSSIA	396
BRAZIL	350

The gap between nations is huge, but it is possible to conclude that in developed countries, e-commerce is more popular and people spend more than in developing countries. This is another important factor that must be considered when a SME decides to invest in e-commerce

## 8. Advertising on Internet and Mass-media

Internet and e-commerce are important instruments of support for the sale’s departments of a company. Especially for small businesses because in this setting the difference of popularity, generated by discrepancies in advertising resources, is not so high when compared to “real life”. For example, in Switzerland a campaign for a television spot, viewed on three national channels for a month costs 380000 CHF, as reported by the Guide média di Publisuisse. To produce a spot for television in the same country, the price will be less than 5000 CHF (Switzerland Confederation); vice versa, if a small business asks a web society in Italy to create a professional website for e-commerce, the price is 499 euro (518 CHF). Expenditure for advertising on the Internet is significantly lower and for this reason a company of any size can afford this expenditure on the Internet. As a result, the difference between small and big businesses will be less.

Continuing to talk about expenditures for advertising on the Internet, Solnez underlines the necessity to use social networks in the same way. In fact, for the President of SDM-bank, social networks are cheaper than the traditional advertising methods on the Internet with banners published on web sites. Surely it is important that social networks are at first a powerful instrument to build the relationship based on trust between customers and company, enhance customer loyalty, and it goes further to increase communication between customer and business. But with the new instruments that technology has offered in these years, it is possible for customers and companies to see, to write to and to talk to each other, making this relation almost the same as in real life.

The Internet is an important instrument for all small businesses because it can increase its level of export and it opens new markets easily. This instrument gives more visibility to all companies so it reduces the gap between small and big businesses; that is why, for small businesses it is easier to enter in a specific market. All this is possible because operating costs are less especially when one considers geographical distance that there is with a potential foreign customer.



## 9. Conclusion

The Internet can be a useful instrument for small businesses. The level of usefulness depends on managers who are able to use this instrument. The Internet can be a marketing instrument, or a new mode for transactions, or a new setting in which small business can meet new customers as new suppliers. Today it seems that the Internet changed the World in the same move. It is possible to conclude that the Internet is the most important vehicle of globalization. However, it remains an instrument of the future as a result of a campaign on the Internet or of e-commerce on which small businesses are dependent. In this way it is clear that at first a business must have an interesting website, designed so as not to create questions for those who visit the website. For this reason, it is better to entrust this task to those who are more proficient in this area. Then the duty of enterprise is to make the website visible to the public and the Internet gives a variety of instruments: social networks, mail address, blogs, and forums. These are all tools that increase popularity of enterprises, but only if they are used correctly. For this reason, more enterprises decided to create a specific department within their model that deals solely with Internet presence.

By making the decision to operate on the Internet, a small business must create conditions to achieve success, because the population of those using the Internet will decide the success or failure of the campaign. This is so if the terms of success imply more popularity and more profits, and failure of the campaign implies a bad reputation. Both of these outcomes will have impacts on the real economy. For this reason a manager of a small business cannot forget that even if the Internet does not represent real life (or vice versa), customers and operators on the Internet represent a “bridge” between these two different worlds that are not separate and can communicate with one another.

Managers must remember that the Internet simply represents an instrument, a tool to use, and for this reason it will not resolve all problems such as volume of sales just to make an example. A successful Internet campaign requires investments and a lot of work, then a small business may begin to see expected results after time. For this reason patience is another feature that enterprises must have if they decide to operate on the Internet. Last, but not least, the Internet generates problems for small businesses, including issues with forgery and piracy, but also false identity and frauds. For these reasons, managers must very carefully plan who will be responsible for their web strategy because it is impossible to improvise an economic campaign on the Internet.

In conclusion, the Internet must be considered a precious instrument, because at first it removes some barriers of a “traditional economy”, predominately space and time. It is very good for a small business because it means that since many sectors within the business’s geographical areas are saturated, the Internet offers possibilities of a wider audience base. A clear example can be the artisan Italian sector in which many small companies are having fewer opportunities in the real market in Italy because of crisis, but the Internet gives them the possibility of finding new customers and selling their items abroad. It is a fact that today Italian export is increasing primarily because the Internet creates new possibilities. However, new possibilities will be realized only if the Internet is used correctly, because it simply represents an instrument. For this reason, success is granted only if managers really believe in a new project on Internet, and only if enterprises make investments for a new web presence.

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