

The Evolving E-Business Landscape in Ontario

About the study

Launched in 1996, EKOS' Rethinking the Information Highway study grew out of a need to better understand how information technologies were reshaping the environment governments and companies were operating within.

Now in its seventh edition and more than 20 surveys later, the study is one of the largest and longest running studies in this area in Canada today. Given its big-picture focus on the full range of issues relating to technology usage, such as the interaction between traditional and electronic service delivery channels and privacy and security-related issues, Rethinking the Information Highway remains one of the most relied upon sources for senior decision makers who are tasked with guiding their organization through what continues to be a rapidly changing environment.

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Overview

The current environment

The Internet is widely considered to be an effective avenue for doing business, both with other companies and governments.

Ontario businesses continue to strongly agree that governments and banks would not offer businesses the choice of doing activities over the Internet unless it was safe to do so, although a higher level of trust is reported in relation to banks.

A growing number of Ontario businesses feel broadband Internet access and e-business strategies are very important for their company's overall success. A much smaller proportion of businesses place the same level of importance on e-commerce.

Implementing e-services

The proportion of Ontario businesses with e-business strategies has remained largely stable over the past few years. Those without an e-business strategy report that they are unlikely to implement one in the near future. Those with existing e-business strategies have various motivations for their implementation, including to broaden market potential and improve communications.

While a clear plurality of Ontario companies report that e-business strategies have met their expectations, this is down significantly since 2006. The perceived benefits of e-business strategies have also decreased somewhat over the past few years.

Technology usage

Internet usage continues to grow: more than 9 in 10 Ontario businesses now report that their company uses the Internet. However, those few Ontario businesses that do not currently use the Internet indicate it is unlikely they will start using the Internet within the next year.

Results also reveal continued growth in high-speed Internet access: nearly 9 in 10 Ontario businesses now say they have high-speed access. Those few businesses without high-speed Internet access point to lack of availability as the main barrier.

The number of Ontario companies with a website is relatively unchanged from last year. Those with websites signal some need for improvements in relation to updating information online and enhancing the general usefulness of the information posted.

Results also reveal that the majority of Ontario businesses do not have IT staff responsible for maintaining the content posted online. Having this dedicated function tends to be common only in large businesses.

The e-marketplace

Findings reveal that the proportion of Ontario businesses buying online is steadily increasing: currently 2 in 3 indicate they use the Internet to purchase goods and services. A majority of these businesses also continue to buy online on a regular basis: more than 8 in 10 say they purchase online at least once a month.

There has been little change in the proportion of businesses saying they offer their goods to be purchased online.

Results also reveal continued growth in Internet banking: almost 6 in 10 Ontario businesses now say they bank online. The number of businesses that now provide online billing to their customers is also increasing.

Government and service delivery

Ontario businesses remain generally unfamiliar with online services offered by both the federal and provincial government, although there has been some improvement in familiarity with online services offered by the provincial government.

Findings also reveal that a majority of Ontario businesses turn to government websites to begin their searches for information about government programs and services.

A majority of the companies surveyed say they are visiting Government of Canada websites and successfully locating relevant information for their purposes.

Results also reveal that online channels continue to be the preferred service channel for Ontario businesses when interacting with governments (although a significant minority continue to prefer telephone).

