



APPLICATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AS A TOOL FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETENCES AND DEVELOPMENT.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the application of ICT as a tool for entrepreneurship competences and development. It discussed different entrepreneurship opportunities in ICT infrastructures and resources. The paper also looked at integration of ICT in entrepreneurship for competences and optimal service delivery and posited that with ICT infrastructure as a dynamic tool, several strategies can be developed through international knowledge and skills to enhance entrepreneur competences and priority. Epileptic supply of electricity which has render ICT less reliable, depreciation in quality of service by internet service provider which has reduce full functionality of ICT, lack of privacy and also piracy among others are areas of shortcomings of ICT identified with useful suggestions. To cap it all, recommendations such as; encouragement of Entrepreneurs should be taken serious by making fund (loan) available to enable them to start up small scale business, that Government should assists in providing equal opportunities for people in both rural and urban to acquire ICT training, in addition, Government should work with the private sector and civil society to ensure affordable and sustainable access to ICT infrastructure e.t.c were postulated.

INTRODUCTION

Challenges are faced by many people in an effort to start and sustain their own business(s). Sources of information that are crucial and can be of help to an entrepreneur are brought into focus. If the wealth of information available on ICT (information communication technology) are to be utilized, prospective and engaged entrepreneurs will have greater social and economic opportunities towards closing the gap between technologically empowered and technologically excluded. This paper also spell-out lot of gains, one stand to benefit from ICT infrastructure, directly and indirectly, for purpose of entrepreneurship, indicating the need to fill the gaps in ICT knowledge and application. An entrepreneur should not be deterred in the quest of seeking the legitimate path, which leads to prosperity. For one to build up wealth, one has to be smart, hardworking, alert and an apt information user.

Who is an entrepreneur

An entrepreneur is simply a person who attempts to make money with his/her initiatives, by taking risks and ultimately becoming a robust business owner. About entrepreneurship, Steven(2000) says, it is the process whereby individuals become aware of business ownership as an option or viable alternative, develop ideas for business, learn the process of becoming an entrepreneur and undertake the initiation and development business.

Information and communication technology

Information and communication technology (ICT) represents the convergence of information technology and communication technology. Edafiogho (2007) outlines and explained the following basic terms in ICT.

Information technology (IT) is a term used to describe the items of equipment (Hardware) and computer programs (Software) that allow us to access, retrieve, store, organize, manipulate and present information by electronic means. Personal computers, scanners and digital cameras fit into the hardware category.

Communication technology (CT) is a term used to describe telecommunications equipment through which information can be sought, sent and accessed for examples, phones, faxes, modems and computers.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is therefore the combination of networks, hardware and software as well as the means of communication, collaboration and engagement that enable the processing, management and exchange of data, information, idea and knowledge. In order words, ICT includes the use of GSM Mobile phones, personal computer (PC) and internets which have been central tools that gave impetus to the most radical changes know today. Bill Gates, America's IT Tycoon, said that business will change more within the next ten years than it has in the last fifty years as a result of development in ICT (Akanbi 2007). This fact is already obvious within all sectors of Nigeria's economy.

Entrepreneur challenges for beginners.

Below are challenges that may likely be faced by an entrepreneur

1. Restricted access to institutional capital like Bank loans, Government credit facilities etc.
2. Restricted access to lucrative markets.
3. Poor branding and marketing.

4. Poor planning.
5. Business management skills and abilities.
6. Record keeping.
7. Business support.
8. Relating with regulatory bodies e.t.c.

ICT Relevance: ICT is about information and the time frame needed for various decision making process to be achieved and made available through the chosen medium. The challenges enumerated above can be overcome tactically with the availability of relevant information, because information is the eye of management, which is why availability of information is very important. What people lack is information; otherwise, everybody is the same if there is common access to information. Today information exists in unlimited scope in various disciplines meant to enhance validity in decision-making of an individual entrepreneur's process as no accurate or meaningful formulation of decision can be made without facts. Take for instance in the emerging technology (ICT), one can access any organization of his choice in another country in the world within seconds and in some minutes, get the required information at ease just from the computer on your desk. Thus offer individual to have business interaction with other entrepreneurs and companies across the world thereby expanding his/her scope of knowledge about career opportunities and likes. (to think globally even when one is acting locally).

Experiences worldwide suggests that if a business is not doing well, the problem may not be with the kind of business itself; perhaps, it is as a result of wrong business strides- a phenomenon ICT seeks to address. For instance, in Nigeria context, information provided by the Nigeria Law organization on companies Act, Nigeria Enterprise and promotion Act, insolvency Act and host of others are available on the internet as authority for information seekers in that capacity and application of such knowledge as a by-product go a long way to develop and promote whatever endeavour one is into. Unfortunately, most entrepreneur embark on business without having the necessary information for solving their problems especially at short up and continuity stage due to lack of proper knowledge of ICT usage to generate relevant information (Osunbo 2003).

Entrepreneurship in ICT

1. Telephone operation-based services

The availability of mobile phone network in the country opens up many opportunities for people. One common option is to purchase a mobile phone through a micro credit program to earn income by providing low cost phone calls to others.

2. Information intermediaries:

The wide spread use of English on the internet has created the need for local content and applications to enable non-English speakers to make effective use of it. For the poor in particular, the vast amount of information on the internet requires an intermediary to sift through it to identify what is relevant and then interpret it in the light of the local context and publish it as book or organize seminars for a fee.

Other alternative means can be through communication media like radio, television e.t.c. where one will need to buy air time and make it an unavoidable programme that would attract different sponsors and organizations to bid for placement of their adverts within the time frame of the program.

3. Opportunities for a commerce based entrepreneurship in remote communities.

Organizing centre that offers an internet connection health facility like telemedicine a classroom completer with distance learning equipment and business centers through which traditional cultural products can be sold via the internet. Traditional art, music, photography, legends and storytelling in small villages can be recorded and brought to global markets through the internet.

4. Income generation through cable television.

Another related opportunity for ICT generated entrepreneurship for people is through the purchase of satellite antennas to provide fellow villagers with paid access to cable television. Cable television system (government authorized or otherwise) have been installed in many developing regions to provide access to television channels (typically from a satellite) where people can watch different latest movies, football matches, wrestles, world news etc.

5. Telecom centers as entrepreneurship

This is a way of opening a business centre (telecom centre) where people are offered services of internet access and international calls for a fee. For instance, mini-telecom centers can be established in both remote and city areas to meet the pressing global demand and need for everyone to be ICT literate (Haag and Keen 1996).

ICT as a tool for entrepreneurship

1. E-advert as business tool for entrepreneurship to promote their goods and services to global audience i.e ICT offer entrepreneurs the opportunity to place their goods and services on internet for advertisement so as to be accessed by millions of potentials consumers who daily visit the internet for shopping.
2. Electronic mail(e-mail) : is a utility for sharing information and is said to be one of the most important productivity packages around, many entrepreneurs are using e-mails to maintain good communication rapor with their numerous customers and also as a means of exchanging data and document with their counterparts around the world which is critical to the task of re-engineering their business procedures.
3. Electronic conferencing (e-conferencing): small and large business institution use the internet for voice and video conferencing and others forms of communication that enable people to telecommute (work away from the office using computer) This offer the prospective entrepreneurs within and outside the country opportunity to dialogue on various pressing and technical issue regarding their business without being in the same location.
4. Electronic commerce (e-commerce): These are trade that take place via the internet. It is a global commerce conducted via the internet. For instance, a customer who wants a particular products services browse through the internet for the make, model, and price of the product and concludes the transactions right there. In addition to that, entrepreneurs use the internet for business transactions such as exchange on financial information and accessing complex database.
5. Entrepreneurs also normally explore internet resource to sought for information as a source of price quotation for their goods and services.
6. Online chat: This allows entrepreneurs to carry a discussion using written text for immediate response. Instant messages enable entrepreneurs to exchange text messages in real time.

Problems of ICT.

1. Electric power failure: In Nigeria, epileptic supply of electricity is still an apparent feature in all major cities and this has rendered ICT equipment less reliable, you may have a train load of crucial information in it, but as long as there is no

electricity there is no way out for one to carry out any operation on the net. The alternative for power failure is to get a generator. And that means additional cost.

2. **Computer viruses:** Recent times have witnessed a surge in the propagation of viruses and malicious codes (like ad ware and spy ware) The web is now a fertile route for spreading havoc created by known and unknown people, whose work may destroy precious information, or even render your PC useless. Viruses appearing monthly range between 300 to 1000 which means you are constantly under serious threats. Although there is more general awareness and safeguards available against this epidemic, the bad news is that virus and malicious code writers are always a step ahead and there must be victims before remedy can be created.
3. **Privacy and Piracy:** This is increasingly a major challenge in the IT world. How secure is the average user, with all those hackers on the loose? Is someone not spying on you? Because of the information sharing nature of the internet, it is now very easy for other people to get information about you without you knowing or giving your consent. Yet when you tender precious pieces of information you worked for, it is very easy for someone else to get hold of it and make the money (you should have been making) with it! Millions of Naira are lost daily to pirates. The use of pornographic materials also discourages open cultural acceptance of the web.
4. **Quality of service:** (Internet Service Provider ISP) depreciate in the quality of their service due to congestion of the information highway. Like any express way, when many people are on the network go-slow reduce the full functionality of ICTs (Laszlo and Castro 1995).

Useful Tips for entrepreneurs on ICT usage

1. Never be caught unaware, be wise and always backup the precious content of your personal computer (PC). You can use flash, diskettes, CD RWS, CD ROMs e.t.c
2. When new techniques fail, we turn to old ones. But don't wait for the new one to fail you, as this may be devastating . try to document on paper those indispensable things on your PC.
3. Check every new file and your entire system for virus, if you are online always update virus definitions of your Antivirus software to prevent the latest viruses.
4. Make it a habit not to download unknown, or suspicious files.

5. Get the latest system guards against intruders. Some software go for free on the web and you may have to buy some.
6. Create a virgin system, if you have sacred information on your PC it may be worthy to have an extra (virgin) system. Be the only person who uses it and keep it out of any kind of exchange link. Also keep its level of security very tight.
7. Cost cutting : find out easy way, through which you can cut your expenses with the services provided on the web.
8. Sales promotion/ Advertisement that is sending e-mail to regular and prospective customers. Must be carried out with caution.
9. Build and develop your own web designs and launch them on fee web sites.

Conclusion

Integrating ICT across prospective entrepreneurship; investing on ICT training and education for all and sundry and improve the impact of those investment, provision of adequate fund either informs of loans or otherwise to encourage entrepreneurship and availabilities of adequate ICT infrastructure at affordable prices among others will ensure effective Entrepreneurship competences and development through ICT.

Recommendations.

-) The federal state and local government should make funds available to entrepreneurs to enable them begin small-scale business. This is strongly supported by Akanbi (2007) where he opined that the usual start off point of any person venturing to become self-employed is to have a business idea with starting grant.|
-) Due to enormous benefits that one stands to gain by using ICT, all entrepreneurs should be ICT literate and government should provide equal opportunities for people in both rural and urban to acquire ICT literacy, technical skills in ICT and to look to ICT industries to provide employment or entrepreneurial opportunities for people.|
-) ICT education should be included in the school curriculum.|
-) Government are encouraged to use infrastructure development and appreciate trade and fiscal policies and legislature frameworks to create an enabling environment for ICT diffusion.|

-) Government are also exhorted to make greater use of both new and traditional information and communication technologies as a tools for development and close the ICT gender gap in terms of access to ICT.]
-) In addition, government should work with the private sector to ensure affordable and sustainable access to ICT infrastructure.]
-) Already engaged entrepreneurs should remain undeterred on the face of challenges especially at the early stage of business formation because that stage would soon be overcome.]

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