

Business as usual



Boriana Rukanova

E-commerce after the Internet bubble is more or less 'business as usual', using advanced tools the Internet has to offer. Business was always done between people, based on many implicit signals while communicating.

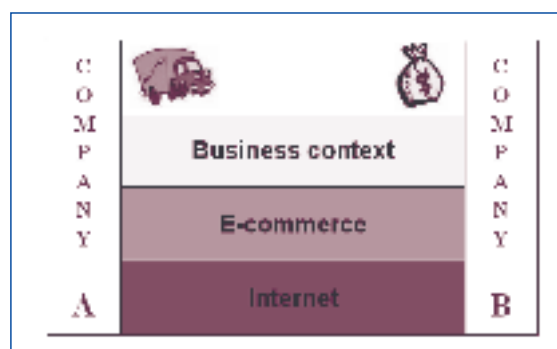
Boriana Rukanova is trying to find out what a 'real-life' business transaction is all about, to be able to introduce e-business not merely from a technical, but from a business point of view.

"We recently had a discussion that was very illustrative. Researchers within the EPIC programme, or Electronic Process Interaction and Commerce, discussed how they personally define a business transaction. Scientists from Law, Business and Information Systems joined the meeting. They have definitions that all differ greatly. 'OK, let's start from scratch then and formulate a new definition', we decided. That was very fruitful, because it enabled us to come to an agreement about the best path to choose. In that respect, it is really a good thing to have mixed backgrounds in a project like this, within CTIT. It only works with multiple disciplines involved."

"Until now, e-business systems and standards have often been introduced within an organisation based on technical requirements and not on business requirements. You cannot just blame the technical people for that, those at management levels in an organisation seem to think: "That's something the network guys will solve". In their view, it is not part of management or business. In that way, a merely technical solution is ultimately found; people are focusing on building a system as such. Apart from that, what we often hear is "Using XML, you will see all barriers vanish". For us XML is no more than syntax, it really doesn't standardise anything! In that respect, it really is no e-business standard at all. E-business is done by organisations with a shared context, and so it is domain-specific by definition. Business needs standards that are able to capture this context, that's our conviction."

Examples of current projects:

- KINX: Knowledge Integration and Network Expertise (EU / FP5)
- Electronic contract management
- Evolutionary implement of groupwaresystems
- Managing enterprise resource planning packages implementation projects



“What I want to do, therefore, is case studies of two business contexts that are quite different: the health sector and the financial sector. The health sector is already working on some kind of standardisation. I want to look over the shoulder of people doing the actual transactions. That’s one reason why it is hard to find good cases: I really want to know everything that is going on in a transaction - why should they tell me? Whenever two people do business face-to-face, they use implicit ways of communicating. They know more of each other’s way of working than a system would ever know. I try to make these mechanisms more explicit: what signals are sent, and what do they really want? I’m going to observe this in organisations that are starting to implement e-business at the same time.”

“Electronic Data Interchange, as an early stage in e-commerce, was much too expensive for small and medium-sized enterprises to implement. They couldn’t afford an infrastructure of their own, for example. With Internet applications, this has changed radically. But still, for small and medium-sized enterprises, systems must be truly ‘plug and play’. Which parts can be standardised for a whole range of sectors? Which parts are context-specific? Those are the questions we want to answer.”

“Coming from Bulgaria, I really like the way the Dutch work. Doing research here has also given me the opportunity to earn a Master’s degree in Educational Design and Management.”

