

OPTIMIZATION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH E-SERVICES

Anthony John

Abstract

Ndi Osoafia an Ibo description of the activities of people whose operation lies between the middlemen or retailers and the customers in the market place, these men have the know-how on the location and existence of the desired wares that customers seek. This study is an effort to dignify their *modus operandi* by a migration of their manual operation to the internet through E-services. The web site presented a front of perceived wares for their business operation. This work used the restaurant to demonstrate the practicability of *Osoafia* service concept and serves as a model for future deployment to other businesses, with minor modifications. The entrepreneur operates within a virtual office environment that is devoid of the paraphernalia of office, the application of e-services in entrepreneurship practice will help to minimise the huge capital involved in starting a business for the prospective entrepreneur possible for the unemployed and make the attainment of vision 2020 more realistic and attainable.

Introduction

Self-employment, particularly to most Nigerian graduates is only a last resort after years of failed effort to be engaged in the organized public or private sector of the economy. It is obvious that the challenges of inertia particularly in the area of finance are key factors to such entertained fear in the mind of the would-be business starter, variety is the spice of life they say; therefore, an alternative form of business operation and an initial small capital base to jump-start businesses are worth pursuing.

An **e-service** is an electronic service made available via the Internet to drive new revenue streams or create new efficiencies. E-Services or "eServices" is a highly general/generic term usually referring to the provision of services via the *Internet* (the prefix 'e' standing for "electronic", as it does in many other uses). It is a true Web jargon, meaning just about anything done online. E-services provide this alternative largely; where e-services, warehouses exist abstractly on web pages with its far-reaching participatory audience. The paraphernalia of office is replaced by the web technology, for example, official records are sent, stored, queried, calculated and analyzed within the technology. The automation e-services provide through this technology accounts for its low financial involvement when compared to the existing business system that e-services can alternate.

Timmons (1983) defined Entrepreneurship as creating and building something of value from practically nothing, creation and distribution of something of value and of benefits to individual groups, organization and society. Towards a broad definition, Utomi (2002) says "Entrepreneurship concerns, the pursuit of opportunity to create wealth through innovative creation of a product to create service that meets customers needs, using scarce resources in a way that results in the growth of enterprises which satisfy the expectation of stakeholders, whose roles sustain the business".

Chijoke (2004) sees "A Computer an electronic machine, operating under the control of instruction stored in its own memory unit which can accept and store data, perform arithmetic and logical operations upon the data without human intervention and produce output from the processing.

Eyitayo et al (1999) defined a computer as any machine or device, which, under the control of stored program, can accept data in a prescribed form; process the data and supply the result as information in a specified form.

Okoro F et al, (2002) opines that “It is note worthy that developing nations must entirely participate in the information age to remain competitive and to be part of the international order.

Haag et al (2002) says “E – Commerce – is commerce, but it is commerce accelerated and enhanced by IT, in particular the internet. It enables customers, consumers and companies to form new powerful relationship that would not be possible without the enabling technologies. The Internet facilities commerce by its awesome ability to move digital information at low cost.

Statement of the Problem

The technology race which e-services is a child of, is all about cutting cost; with the advent of e-services, businesses can be tailored in their different forms as models of operational system at minimal operational and logistic cost. The compliment of piloting such models via the internet is equivalent to gaining “cheap” popularity and accessibility. Enumerated below are some of the problems that exist with the former system.

- i. The huge infrastructural cost of establishing a business from scratch particularly for a school leaver
- ii. A poor reach of product and services.
- iii. A static infrastructure in terms of location of business that gives no room for customers’ convenience

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to design a workable model of business operations that is capable of sensitizing a section of entrepreneurs particularly those constrained due to insufficient capital to establish businesses and to embrace an alternative form of business operation using the technology on ground. The objective of the study includes:

- i. To provide a platform that can be used to initiate a Restaurant business through the internet; (E-restaurant).
- ii. To provide a workstation to the operators that has a degree of automation to run the outfit.
- iii. To provide superior customer and firm interaction through IT.
- iv. To work within an environment that provides analysis through queries for business intelligence and competitive advantage.

Purpose of the Study

1. To demonstrate e-services application using known and common business environment; the Restaurant.
2. Microsoft access, a database management system stored information received from the patronizing customers.

Significance of the Study

This study is meaningful to any entrepreneurial-minded fellow with small capital to initiate business. It is service at customer’s convenience; the developed website in this case, will enable

customers order for their meal online and could be delivered to them at their doorsteps as specified in their order list without necessarily moving physically to the restaurant.

The demonstration and final deployment (or concept) of E-restaurant from e-service (an original contribution) can be transferred to other service oriented businesses.

Delimitations and Limitations

The case study is Home Touch, located at Palm groove, Lagos. This study is delimited to the supply of African dishes to customers at designated addresses. The study further confines itself to the service of food and not its preparation. Although Home Touch is being used as our case study, food can be sourced from some other eateries such as Mr. Biggs, Chicken Republic, and munches. Only registered persons or organizations are regarded as customers in the system. The analyses sought on the Data Base Management System (DBMS) are purely through Structured Query Language (SQL) commands. This design can function appropriately within a range of fifty daily customers; increase in customer ratio would require an improvement on the design functionality.

The facilities offered by this study are limited to the elite class, thus is the range of its customers. Microsoft Access as a DMBS has a limiting number of entities it can hold and the security of other DBMS like the ORACLE can be considered for improved security software systems.

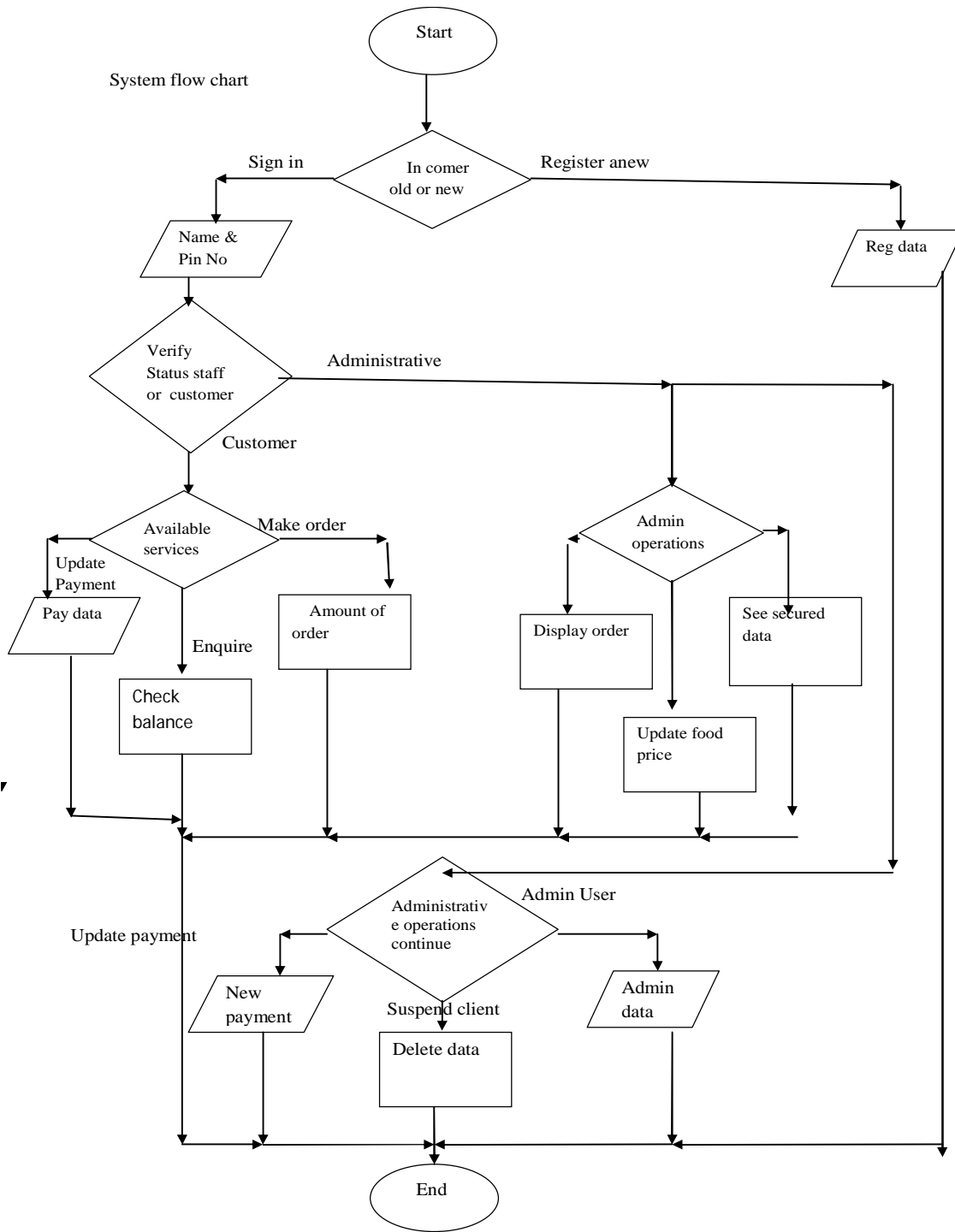
The Osoafia Service Concept

Osoafia is a visible practice in our market places, particularly, at the Onitsha main market, which involves individual's conversing novice customers for goods mainly, that they are not in immediate possession of; some will call them middlemen. Now the point of interest here is not the existing practice but the concept. In physics, we say energy is not destroyed but instead transferred from one form to another. In like manner, the Osoafia service concept sees knowledge as energy that can be converted to other forms, mostly financial benefit to profit the operator(s). The vehicle of conversion is through the rendering of services only; with this, it is possible to start a business with little or no capital.

This concept is best explained with an illustration and it is applicable and transferable to other business areas. Let's consider a young man that has great interest in cars. When he describes any car, it sounds credible and romantic, complimenting it with all its technical and in-built functionalities, and to this vast knowledge, he is informed as to where and how these cars can be purchased within and outside the country. Now when this reservoir of knowledge is merchandised in the market place, this young man poses as the key sales representative of the dealers; that is the concept. The concept of wealth creation by knowledge transformed to value-added services is the Osoafia service concept. The Osoafia man can be further fortified with a computer system that has multi-media based representations of the products, and a web presence can be included. The Osoafia man then registers his company and becomes the Director and transits to an office befitting his new status and business acumen

System Flowchart

The system flowchart below is a diagrammatic view of the operations of the entire project in a glance. Here an old visitor to the site, sign's in; the system automatically verifies status, if a staff or not. If staff, all possible areas of operation within the level of authorization is viewed and if not the customer is exposed to all available services the business offers. For new visitors, registration is required to obtain the sign in numbers.



Conclusions

E-service, a subset of E-commerce through ICT information and communication technology infrastructure is an existing and on ground technology in Nigeria to drive new and innovative revenue streams of business efficiencies, that Government and the individual alike must cash-on to achieve the national objectives of vision 2020 in Nigeria, in order to gain relevance in the global market, furthermore, its inclusion in our ICT educational policy will not only help boost our national entrepreneurship drive, but will also aid a sustainable attainment of vision 2020 and make our education functional.

Recommendations

The Following recommendations though not exhaustive will help optimize the benefit e-services provide to an entrepreneur.

1. This research work has converted the individual knowledge base, into a working office, that is blown up in image with perceptions on the part of the patronizing customers; bring about possibilities and empowerment on the part of the unemployed or the under employed. This is a hard knock on unemployment, because a crude and irritating observation in the market place has been turned into a refined business delight in this study; this further buttresses the powerful tool of observation in research methodology.
2. Awareness of online businesses and interactions should be internalized by institutions of public concern as means of a new world order; for example the recent directives of banks to customers to use their ATM card within certain range of cash transactions.
3. 'E' whatever either in services, marketing, banking, commerce etc can not strive without the enabling environment; electric power. Hence Government should speed-up and conclude its rural electrification plan to increase accessibility and reduce cost on the part of both the operators and users of this technology.

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