The E-Factor: Advancing Women Entrepreneurs in the Digital Economy

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This paper reports the results of a study conducted in 2005 across APEC economies on women-owned uptake of e-business. As reported in the APEC report, there are few statistics available on the adoption of ICT by women small business owners. Australia, for one, does not have gender disaggregated data on ICT adoption. Of the APEC economies where data is available, data is based on small samples and its generalisability to all women-owned businesses in the economy is suspect. Canada and Mexico have high percentages of women using the Internet (57% and 46% respectively). In Mexico, this is considerably higher than the percentage of total business using the Internet, which is only 7.9%, indicating the danger of a small, specialised sample (Wright, 2006). From this study it has also become evident that there has not been any attention paid in e-business policies to addressing adoption of ICT by women entrepreneurs nor to women entrepreneurs related business needs.

It is proposed in this paper that women entrepreneurship, and in particular e-entrepreneurship requires an enabling environment to goes beyond e-business capacity building. We have known for some time that women are concentrated in micro and small enterprises. Many are sole proprietors and many more than men are in home-based businesses. Extensive research on women entrepreneurship has shown that women face numerous obstacles (e.g., access to finance; juggling family care and business) when venturing into business. Yet no data is available on whether this is true for e-business or not, but past experience tells us it is likely to be so. The paper introduces a coordinated and holistic empowerment model to build e-business capacity for women entrepreneurs and concludes with e-business policy implications.

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