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Electronic Commerce: Implications for University Bookshops

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Abstract

This paper investigates the situation of small university bookshops increasingly experiencing the competitive impact of electronic commerce. It provides an industry structure and a competitor analysis in order to develop measures that university bookshops may take to withstand the competitive pressure.

As Internet-based bookshops are capable of delivering English language textbooks at prices lower than the conventional university bookshops, the latter need to address this challenge by developing an appropriate e-commerce strategy.

Using the example of a medium-size Danish university bookshop, the paper argues that university bookshops should no longer consider themselves solely to be in the market of book retailing.

Simply setting up a virtual storefront may not be good enough in most cases. Instead, in the near future, their competitive advantage comes from their ability to collect information on professors' book recommendations and on the extent to which they can keep this information from their competitors and customers until the sale has been made. We suggest that university bookshops must consider how to properly leverage their e-commerce initiatives by aligning them with existing competencies within the organisation, i.e. contacts and relationships with faculty. Among several recommendations, this paper outlines the opportunity of developing an online community for faculty and student body, which may aid university bookshops in their attempt to find a strategic and sustainable position in the emerging area of electronic commerce.