

Lessons Learned  
March Cluster - Spring 1999

by

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A paper submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
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An Abstract of a Paper Submitted to Nova Southeastern University  
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The instructor and students attending the March Cluster for DISS 790/890 - Electronic Commerce on the Internet brought with them a wealth of diverse experience. Their knowledge covered most areas of information systems, current business practices, and technology in general. Discussions proved to be more informative than the required reading. In the following pages, four of the lessons learned during the cluster weekend were discussed. These included the personal impact of electronic commerce, the definition of electronic commerce, four levels of web sites, and "being digital."

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The instructor and students attending the March Cluster for DISS 790/890 - Electronic Commerce on the Internet brought with them a wealth of diverse experience. Their knowledge covered most areas of information systems, current business practices, and technology in general. Discussions proved to be more informative than the required reading. It was interesting to hear the opinions of the class as they pertained to electronic commerce and its effect on their lives and their company's business practices. In the following pages, four of the lessons learned during the cluster weekend are discussed. These include the personal impact of electronic commerce, the definition of electronic commerce, four levels of web sites, and "being digital."

### Lesson One - Personal Impact of E-commerce

As the weekend discussions progressed, the author began looking at the impact of electronic commerce on his personal life. At home, high-speed access to electronic commerce on the Internet enables him to simplify his life. Sites such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) allow him to quickly and easily order and receive all books required for the Nova Program. As a Ph.D. student and computer hobbyist, the author is continuously ordering computer hardware and software using price comparison sites on the Internet (e.g. [www.computershopper.com](http://www.computershopper.com)). Also, the use of online banking (i.e. Microsoft Money and [www.fcmbd.com](http://www.fcmbd.com)) in his household provides the family with a mechanism to report and control expenditures. These online financial tools are in many ways superior to those employed by many corporations.

Even more significant to the author than the purchase of goods and services over the Internet is the ability to search and retrieve information on the Web. Before making most purchases (either off or online), the author researches the product or service using the Internet. For example, before entering the dealership to purchase a new vehicle last month, the author was well prepared with information provided by sites such as [www.autobytel.com](http://www.autobytel.com), [www.carpoint.msn.com](http://www.carpoint.msn.com), [www.daimlerchrysler.com](http://www.daimlerchrysler.com), and [www.gmbuyer.com](http://www.gmbuyer.com).

During the course of his Ph.D. studies, the author obtains a significant amount of the required reference material via the Internet. References in the form of full text articles are retrieved online from services such as [www.gartner.com](http://www.gartner.com), [www.forrester.com](http://www.forrester.com), [www.spectrum.ieee.org/spectrum/search/ssearch.html](http://www.spectrum.ieee.org/spectrum/search/ssearch.html), [www.umi.com/proquest](http://www.umi.com/proquest), and [www.acm.org/dl/Search.html](http://www.acm.org/dl/Search.html). In addition to these premium database services, articles from various trade journals and magazines are gathered using Copernic 99 Plus. This is an intelligent search agent available at [www.copernic.com](http://www.copernic.com).

### Lesson Two - Definition of Electronic Commerce

One of discussions held during the Cluster focused on the definition of electronic commerce. There was considerable debate concerning how narrow or broad a focus

should be applied to the definition. Listed below are samples gathered using Copernic 99 Plus over the Internet. The first was provided on the Infopulse corporate web site [www.infopulse.net](http://www.infopulse.net). Infopulse describes itself as a young and innovative company involved in electronic commerce (i.e. telebanking and electronic transaction systems). Infopulse defines electronic commerce as: "The application of communication and information sharing tools among trading partners to the pursuit of business objectives. Three distinct types of electronic commerce exist: information access, shopping services, and virtual enterprises (Infopulse, 1999)."

The Computer Desktop Encyclopedia (available in print, online, and on CD) defines electronic commerce as: "Doing business online. Also called e-business and e-tailing, it typically implies purchasing products via the Web. It also covers electronic data interchange (EDI), in which one company's computer queries and transmits purchase orders to another company's computer (Freedman, 1999)."

The Ministry of Commerce in New Zealand goes further to define electronic commerce as: "All commercial transactions based on the electronic processing and transmission of data, including text, sound, and image. It includes traditional forms of electronic commerce such as, EFTPOS, and other forms of electronic banking, Internet commerce - consumer to business, business to business and intra-business, digital cash and other electronic payment systems, 0800 mail order, and smart or stored value cards (New Zealand, 1998)."

Considering the definitions discussed in the Cluster and those given above, the simple definition provided by the Computer Desktop Encyclopedia may be the most appropriate in light of the rapid change surrounding electronic commerce. Electronic commerce is "doing business online."

### Lesson Three - Four Levels of Web Sites

Another topic of discussion concerned the four levels of web sites. These included static billboards, dynamic billboards, database driven, and storefronts. American Axle and Manufacturing, the company the author works for, began its web presence with a static billboard site at [www.aam.com](http://www.aam.com) in 1997. The company's initial site did little more than inform potential customers about the company's employees, organizational structure, products, and manufacturing facilities.

In 1998, the site took on a dynamic quality with the addition of guestbook and sales contact forms. Last month, the company added database functionality to the "job postings" page on the site. Jobs posted on this page are updated interactively from database records that reside on the [www.monsterboard.com](http://www.monsterboard.com) web site. In the future, American Axle's web site will begin to take on some of the business-to-business storefront qualities that currently exist on the GM ([www.gmsupplier.com](http://www.gmsupplier.com)) and Ford ([web.supplier.ford.com](http://web.supplier.ford.com)) supplier sites. The launch of the ANX (Automotive Network Exchange - [www.anxo.com](http://www.anxo.com)) late last year will expedite the implementation of similar supplier storefronts.

## Lesson Four - Being Digital

In the syllabus provided at Cluster, Nicholas Negroponte's book *Being Digital* was listed as recommended reading. The author chose not to read but to listen to the audiocassette version of this book. The book was read by Penn Jillette of Penn and Teller fame ([www.sincity.com](http://www.sincity.com)) and was quite appropriate to the course and the Cluster. On the tape, Negroponte relates the history of media technology. In the beginning, he describes the evolution of HDTV, multimedia, CDs, hypermedia, hypermedia-linking. At the end, Negroponte offers his insight into what "being digital" means to us in the future.

Throughout the tape, Negroponte discusses the "analog" or "old way" of performing a task now performed in a digital manner. For example, at the cluster the instructor took photographs of each of the students with a standard film-based (analog) camera. Once developed, the pictures would to be scanned and posted on her Nova web site. While part of this process is digital (i.e. posting images on a web site), Negroponte would argue that the class was not truly "being digital" unless the images were initially captured in some form of digital memory.

This weekend the author was able to experiment with a Sony digital camera borrowed from a friend at work. Negroponte's point is well taken and became apparent to the author after using the camera for only a few minutes. A growing e-business segment on the Internet are sites that provide free photo web sites. A few examples are [www.clubphoto.com](http://www.clubphoto.com), [www.photopoint.com](http://www.photopoint.com), [www.photoloft.com](http://www.photoloft.com), and [www.album4u.com](http://www.album4u.com). These sites allow users to create their own online photo albums. Links to these albums can be emailed to family, friends, and classmates worldwide for viewing with a standard web browser.

The author will be experimenting with one of these sites and will provide a link to his online photo album in the near future. In addition, if he is able to convince his wife to purchase a digital camera, they should be able to take pictures of everyone at the June Cluster. One of the best features of the Sony line of cameras is that they store the pictures directly on a standard floppy disc in JPEG file format. This would allow students to take copies of the pictures with them. Information about the next generation of digital cameras is available at [www.dcforum.com/dc/resources/new\\_models/new\\_models.shtml](http://www.dcforum.com/dc/resources/new_models/new_models.shtml).

### Conclusion

In summary, the March Cluster gave a brief overview of the essential elements of electronic commerce as it exists today. The lecture and discussions were fast paced, lively, and quite interesting. The time seemed fly. Perhaps the most important lesson learned by the author during the March Cluster was that there is a vast amount of information to be covered related to electronic commerce.

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