

## **E-Commerce Entrepreneurship And E-Marketing In Leather Industry**

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**Abstract:** Leather industry is influenced by the economic crisis in the world as much as and even more than other industries as it is a labor-intensive industry which produces high value added products by using bovine and ovine hide and skin as the raw material input. Consequently, the leather industry reached another milestone together with the latest crisis that affected the entire world. Especially the countries that experience the distress of being depended to a single market such as Turkey endeavor for opening to more dynamic markets and also for increasing their production and promotion activities in the targeted markets. They have begun to attach more importance to branding and promotion issues. It is a fact that the efforts realized in this regard are mostly towards catching up with innovations and cutting edge technologies and in this context, e-commerce entrepreneurship is dwelled upon.

The issues such as the transformation of the leather businesses to automation during the production process, and migration of certain company and product promotions to internet via computers also pave the way for e-commerce ventures. Besides, leather industry cannot be considered as isolated from the development of the information technologies industry which rapidly continues its growth. Moreover, as e-commerce gradually evolves into a more influential form both for domestic and global markets from the outlook of both supply and sales, one would clearly understand that the leather industry should very urgently take actions in this regard.

This study tries to outline the benefits that can be provided by modern information technologies through the employment of electronic commerce methods to accelerate the development of Turkish Leather industry from the perspective of complying with the developing information society mainly for the development of marketing strategies and to bring the industry to the place it deserves in the overall world. The study further considers drawing an e-marketing road map in future plans.

**Keywords:** E-commerce, e-marketing, leather industry, information sciences, innovation, market or road map.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

It has been suggested since 2008 that the global economy of the world may enter into a deeper and longer recession period than actually estimated. As the tight lending conditions continue in the overall world, serious decreases in industrial production and employment are experienced; and the consumption and investment expenditure is narrowing down. This causes to a serious decrease in the global demand. Under these circumstances, the organizations such as IMF, the World Bank and OECD have revised downward their global growth forecasts. As a matter of fact, similar to many other countries, Turkey has also experienced a significant shrinkage. The growth is not expected to rebound at anytime before 2010.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the new economy is interpreted in a different way in terms of peoples', enterprises', institutions' and the government's perspective of information, use of information and approach to information. On the other hand, technology has enabled the formation of new business models especially with the innovations it has brought to the field of communication; the new business models caused to the appearance of a new enterprise culture<sup>6</sup>. E-commerce has taken its place among the new business types that have emerged.

Countries should tend towards e-commerce and be prepared for this new economy also from the point of the leather industry similar to other industries, and outline the required road map to overcome crises. In this context, e-commerce should be considered comprehensively.

## **2. ELECTRONIC COMMERCE**

### **2.1.1. Definition**

The conduct of goods and services purchases and sales transactions on electronic environment via internet brought forward the concept of e-commerce. As a concept, e-commerce is an innovation which has emerged in parallel to the development of communication and computer technologies and facilitated commerce. Although e-commerce is a new concept, it does not only suggest an alternative to the conventional commerce but also acts as a method that currently complements and facilitates commerce. However in the long run these approaches would be convert in favor of e-commerce.

E-commerce has been defined by different people and institutions in different ways. According to World Trade Organization (WTO), e-commerce is the conduct of the production, advertising, sales and distributions of goods and services via telecommunication networks. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), e-commerce is all commercial transactions which are based on the processing and communication of digitalized text, audio and image that concern individuals and organizations. According to the United Nation's Center for Trade

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Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), e-commerce means sharing the business information which is structured or not structured to conduct business, administration and consumption activities between producers, consumers and public organizations as well as other organizations via electronic devices (electronic mail and messages, electronic bulletin panels, www technology, intelligent cards, electronic fund transfer, electronic data exchange, etc.).<sup>6</sup>

According to the law study report of the Electronic Commerce Coordination Board, e-commerce covers the total of commercial transactions that aim to create value and which is based on processing, transmitting and saving digital information such as text, audio and video as accessible by individuals and institutions in open networking environment (internet) or by a limited number of users in closed networking environment (extranet, intranet). Therefore, the transactions performed in electronic environments which bear commercial results or the transactions performed in electronic environments for training, public information, promotion etc. purposes are also considered under the scope of e-commerce.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, the common point of the foregoing definitions is to include all commercial activities conducted with the electronic devices that use communication networks under the scope of e-commerce.

Different definitions have been introduced on electronic commerce concept. According to a definition which would be more or less agreed upon, “e-commerce” means the performance of the transactions that include good and service exchange between two or more parties through electronic devices and techniques.

Electronic commerce includes all transactions performed in electronic environment for commercial efforts on either individual or institutional level. These transactions are based on the foundation of digitalizing and processing text, audio and video; and they are realized mainly on internet and other private and official networks. Nevertheless, electronic commerce mostly connotes the commerce performed on internet.<sup>8</sup> Briefly e-commerce is the way of commerce realized by means of digital media.

The reason of the gradually growing commercial volume and popularity of e-commerce is the benefit it provides for all involved parties. From the point of the consumer, it eliminates the intermediaries such as wholesaler, retailer and carrier in certain cases, and offers exceptionally wide range of options to the buyer. As a result, it provides speed, ease and faster shopping. Electronic commerce is a method of commerce that allows for the individual to supply any quality of goods with the most suitable price among wider alternatives to choose and without even going out of his/her home.<sup>10</sup> From the point of the seller, as it eliminates the issues such as physical place, staff employment and cost of inventories, it is a sales and marketing method that provides dramatic savings.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, with the development of e-commerce, the conducted work and given

services are brought to a standard, and it facilitates and relaxes the business processes such as order and delivery.

These definitions lead to the evaluation of e-commerce as the new opportunities suggested by the electronic environment where the buyer and seller come together.

Electronic commerce can also be defined as the conduct of commercial transactions in and via a network environment of computers connected to each other. Further expansion of retail sales on web environment is the main reason that has caused to speaking more often about the e-commerce concept. Actually, it is possible to say that any kind of transaction that has been realized in electronic environment involving money flow should be considered as a kind of e-commerce.

### **2.1.2. Basic Instruments of Electronic Commerce**

The instruments of electronic commerce can be considered as any kind of technological products which facilitate the commercial transactions of the parties of the commerce such as telephone, fax, television, computer, electronic payment and money transfer systems, electronic data interchange systems (EDI), internet, intranet and wap<sup>14</sup>.

EDI and internet hold a different position in terms of e-commerce compared to the other four classical instruments (telephone, fax, television, radio). EDI systems which ensure document and information interchange between two companies that conduct the commerce without human factor are an important instrument of e-commerce. EDI system is not widespread due to high equipment and connection costs, while it is a network with self-peculiar telecommunication infrastructure.

Among the six basic instruments that have been listed above, internet is considered as the most effective instrument in terms of e-commerce. It is possible to produce, promote, purchase, pay and deliver a service only via internet. Internet is preferred more due to the reasons such as the availability of the opportunity to simultaneously transmit sound, image and a written text in a faster way, and cheaper availability of such operations on internet.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1 – Instruments of Electronic Commerce

<b>Classical Instruments</b>	<b>Contemporary Instruments</b>
Television – Radio	Internet
Telephone	FTP
Fax	Electronic mail
Electronic Payment and Money Systems ATMs, Credit Cards POS Machines	Conference Systems Teleconference Data Conference Video Conference
Intranet: Closed Computer Networks Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)	Global System for Mobile Communication  Technology (GSM)  Short Message Service (SMS)

Source: Güneş İ., Elektronik Ticaret ve Kobiler için Yeni Fırsatlar ,  
[www.bilgiyonetimi.org/cm/pages/mkl\\_gos.php?nt=242](http://www.bilgiyonetimi.org/cm/pages/mkl_gos.php?nt=242) (15. 05. 2009).<sup>18</sup>

The table lists the classical instruments and contemporary instruments for the development of e-commerce. For example the instruments such as TV, radio which emerged with the mass media effect are considered as classical instruments, while the technological instruments and mobile devices and applications that ensure Internet and communication constitute the contemporary instruments.

### **2.1.3. Types of Electronic Commerce**

Electronic commerce can be examined under five sections as electronic commerce between businesses (B2B- Business to Business), electronic commerce between consumers (C2C- Consumer to Consumer), electronic commerce between businesses and consumers (B2C- Business to Consumer), electronic commerce between businesses and government (B2G- Business to Government) and electronic commerce between consumers and the government (C2G – Consumer to Government).

#### **2.1.3.1. Business to Business Electronic Commerce (B2B)**

The economic activities conducted between businesses in electronic environment are called business to business e-commerce. The first model that appeared in electronic environment is B2B model. The purpose of B2B model is to ensure the sales, use and sharing of product, service and information through the integration of automated systems into the units at which shared businesses are conducted (producer company, supplier companies, dealers, stores, departments etc.). It can also be

described from the point of companies as placing orders to suppliers in electronic environment, to obtain the invoices and pay their costs.<sup>15</sup>

Now, the relations between the seller and the customer have quite changed due to the employment of virtual environment in business to business commerce. Relations have lost the foundation of paper and labor; so, businesses gained speed and time by completing the required formalities in very short times.

According to the researches conducted, the share of business to business commerce in the realized E-Commerce is greater than that of business to consumer.<sup>5</sup>

It is possible to say that the biggest B2B website in the world is <http://www.alibaba.com>. A Chinese-origin website, alibaba.com is a web site that internationally works and includes all categories. Many results are obtained when a search is made on this website with the keyword “leather”. The annual income of the website is approximately 1 billion dollar. Gold Member and Trust Pass memberships create its income model. It has more than 35 million members. Meanwhile in Turkey, the biggest B2B website of information technologies sector is <http://arena.com.tr> which opens its gates to 6,500 business partners. On arena.com.tr, 60% of the orders are received via internet.<sup>19</sup>

#### **2.1.3.2. Consumer to Consumer Electronic Commerce (C2C)**

In this model, consumers (individuals, household) communicate with each other and perform economic activities. Buyers, sellers and intermediaries are the parties of this model. The intermediary, business or individual creates the environment by using the internet platform. This environment runs like a virtual operation and therefore, it is named as e-Virtual Operations. The purpose of virtual businesses is to gain members and to receive income from the members they gain. Sellers offer their goods or services for sale in the virtual market created by the virtual company, and the buyers select among the goods and services offered for sale, and conduct business on electronic environment. This model is used in many various ways from second hand goods’ purchase & sales to software marketing.

[www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com) website is noticed as the most successful example of C2C model in the world. With 84 million members all over the world, the realized trade volume of the web site is 60 million dollars. The company also penetrated into the market of Turkey by purchasing the shares of gittigidiyor.com.<sup>19</sup> It is possible to say that compared to other electronic commerce types, the most commonly used type of electronic commerce is consumer to consumer type of electronic commerce.

#### **2.1.3.3. Business to Consumer Electronic Commerce (B2C)**

This is the most well-known type of electronic commerce. With Virtual Store applications, companies have begun to sell many products in the electronic environment from computers to

automobile, and books to food. Together with the widespread GSM use, wap technology has also been developed and turned into a suitable environment where electronic commerce is performed without any restrictions such as place and time.<sup>5</sup>

The world's largest B2C web site <http://www.amazon.com/> is also considered as one of the most successful examples of electronic commerce. The turnover they announced in the first quarter of 2008 is 4.26 billion dollars. Its founder Jeffrey Bezos received the Person of the Year award from Time in 1999. It has 17,000 employees all over the world.<sup>19</sup> Turkey's largest B2C website <http://www.hepsiburada.com/> continues to grow by folding its potential year by year. It has approximately 1,180,000 members. It owns 45% of the electronic commerce market in Turkey. Apart from that, <http://www.yemeksepeti.com/>, <http://www.desa.com.tr/>, <http://www.atasay.com.tr/> addresses can be given as examples from Turkey.

#### **2.1.3.4. Business to Government Electronic Commerce (B2G)**

The first examples of this section which covers the commercial transactions between businesses and the governmental and public organizations are the public tenders issued on internet and the bids placed by companies on electronic environment. Monitoring taxes, social security, statistics and permits on electronic environment, realization of certain customs transactions on internet, announcement of public tenders etc. applications can be given as example to business to government e-commerce.<sup>5</sup> <http://ihalegov.tr/> where public tenders, list of forbidden bidders from tenders and various reports are issued, can be given as an example from Turkey.

#### **2.1.3.5. Consumer to Government E-Commerce (C2G)**

It includes any kind of taxation, medical and legal activities between the consumer and the public administration. In this category, which does not have common spread examples yet, passage to Electronic Government is planned for various applications such as driving license, passport applications, social security premium and tax payments, etc.<sup>16</sup>

<http://www.nvi.gov.tr/> website, the portal of the general directorate of Population and Citizenship affairs as well as <http://www.osym.gov.tr/> website of the Higher Education Council Student Selection and Placement Center can be given as examples from Turkey. Furthermore, some such websites can be established by public organizations and some can be established by consumers. A website directed towards consumer protection and rights ensures creating a benefit by bringing forward the rights of consumers on the one side, and establishing the rules foreseen by the government on the other side.

### **3. LEATHER TRADE IN THE WORLD and ELECTRONIC COMMERCE ATTEMPTS**

Leather is one of the most stylish and also one of the handiest materials of the nature. Weaving the animal and herbal filaments to obtain clothing materials became possible as a result of the production methods that developed in time; nevertheless, leather maintained a prominent place in the field of clothing, furniture, accessories and footwear. Being positioned among luxury products at present, leather has developed much enough to account for an important branch of industry.

Developed countries, which were the leaders of the labor-intensive leather and leather products industry began to abandon this industry in 1980s both due to the reasons such as high cost of labor and environmental pollution, and also because they began to allocate their resources to technology and information-intensive industries that generate higher income. Raw hide industry shifted towards underdeveloped and developing countries.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Block as well as prominence and expansion gain of the free market economy also caused to a shift of balances in leather commerce and industry. The center of leather production, which was previously Europe, gradually shifted towards east. Currently the center of gravity of the world's leather production is Asia.<sup>11</sup>

Although the leather industry shifted towards Asia and South America, the avant-garde of leather clothing in the world and the fashion center is Italy. Leather garment exports of Italy amounted 1.1 billion dollars in 2006. Owing to its enhanced tanning industry, modern accessory manufacturers and innovative designs; with its high-quality, branded and high priced products which reflect the latest fashion, Italy addresses to upper income groups of the world.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to its leadership in fashion, Italy also pioneers for electronic commerce ventures in the leather industry. The most famous Italian leather brands of the world are currently making serious investments towards developing trade through e-commerce.

China has become one of the largest leather manufacturers of the world. Foreign invested ventures in China are continuously increasing leather manufacturing. Quality leather production is rapidly growing in this country.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore -unlike Italy- China is among the most important inexpensive leather garments manufacturers of the world together with Hong Kong, India and Pakistan. Although its exports in 2006 and 2007 respectively decreased by 16% and 11%, China still took the first rank in the world's leather garment exports with 2.6 billion dollars worth leather exports in 2007. This amount accounts for approximately 30% of the total leather garment exports in the world. The low labor cost in China enables this country to make production with low costs.<sup>7</sup> China increases its



potential in exports day by day through [www.alibaba.com](http://www.alibaba.com) web site, which is the biggest electronic commerce B2B web site of the world.

Leather accessory use is popular in Spain and Italy. In European countries, leather garment industry is closely related with fashion. Leather garments represent the stitches of international fashion. In our world where information technologies are gaining further importance in every passing day, Italy and Spain are developing their leather commerce through electronic commerce ventures as the countries that are conscious of the mentioned development and that consider branding process important, and also as the pioneers of fashion creation.

Turkey ranks 9<sup>th</sup> in the global leather garment exports with 2.8% share. The companies which noticed the importance of branding concept in Turkey and proved their qualities, have begun to increase the share they allocate for web design and electronic commerce in their marketing budgets. Desa, among the leading companies of Turkey in leather production, applied to the world's first and only government-supported branding program "Turquality" and proved the importance it attaches to branding, and the company developed its e-store with the support it received, through which it realizes electronic commerce.

Apart from them, Germany is the largest leather garment exporter in the EU. However, the manufacturer companies in Germany are trying to maintain their competitive strength by improving their production technologies, and they are manufacturing expensive and high quality leather garments by using the best raw material. Germany is also the second most important leather garment exporter after Italy among the EU countries. In addition, Germany is also a leading country due to its quality in leather chemicals production.

Shoe industry has continuously developed in the world for the last fifty years. The population increase and improvement of life standards also increased the demand for shoes. Many companies have transferred their productions to developing countries or have gone into cooperation with the manufacturers in those countries. The global leather shoe market is shared among China, Italy, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Germany, Belgium and Spain. In 2007, the export quantity realized for leather shoes is 46.2 billion dollars. Exports increased by 15.7% year on year.<sup>7</sup>

As the time considers an important cost element in our era, most companies with proven qualities have tended to electronic marketing in order to benefit from its advantages and reach more users by increasing their investments in this regard.

Electronic commerce has gradually become widespread as a result of the rapid changes in the latest periods of the last century. Those who gained superiority in international competition are the segments that densely use communication and information technologies. It is quite natural for these segments, which have introduced the results they obtained from scientific researches to economy, also

to have competitive strength in international markets. Timberland can be given as an example to these companies.

#### **4. E-COMMERCE ROAD MAP FOR LEATHER INDUSTRY**

In this section we try to create a simple road map for the leather Industry for guidance to the new e-commerce entrepreneurs. In order to increase the exports potential of Leather industry, the performance of which mostly depends on the potential of exports, initially a countrywide electronic commerce project, which is preferred to be encouraged by the government may be started. After the introduction of the project to the private sector is completed, the applications of the companies that are willing to conduct electronic commerce in this project can be examined, a training program can be set up according to the deficiencies of the company, and as a result of these training programs, the company can be informed on electronic commerce. Among governmental incentives, the conditions such as legal regulations, e-government, e-procurement, visible and invisible incentives, R&D and training supports, the utilization of EU funds, providing flow of information and shopping via internet and other similar methods can be developed to encourage e-commerce. For example, the government may offer tax rebates to the companies which invest in R&D and e-commerce.

On the other hand, creating an infrastructure is also utmost important. In forming an infrastructure, other supporters may also back e-commerce project in addition to the Government. In this regard, private sector organizations themselves, associations, universities, and non-governmental organizations may come into question as the supporters. The technological development of the system, allocation of suitable resources and training of high quality and sufficient number of staff to be employed on the system can be realized as a part of the infrastructure. The map, which has been developed in the macro dimension so far, can be considered in the micro dimension after the infrastructural works are completed. When the work is moved to the company dimension, first a center structure which would facilitate all companies' e-commerce relations can also be formed. Under that, again sector-related various organizations and associations can be included. Then, the vision of the senior management may be developed, and the government may take certain steps to impose the importance of electronic-commerce. Here, also an investment should be made in e-commerce. The harmonization of the internal systems of the company with e-commerce, establishment of certain standards, and making measurements, adoption and implementation of e-commerce in terms of sub-functions are required. According to the conducted commercial practices, the suitable portal structure should be selected and e-commerce portals should be enabled.

In-house or other types of electronic-commerce training programs, intranet, extranet, etc. organizations can be performed in order to building companies' infrastructures. After companies'

infrastructures are prepared and the industry is provided with sufficient information and capacity on electronic commerce, an electronic commerce portal that might accelerate the market researches on leather industry and contribute for the development of export potential in this context can be created. All related organizations and institutions which are acting in the leather industry should be included in this portal.

Finally, an infrastructure to reach customers which covers marketing and sales, after-sales services can be created. The types of the e-commerce could be selected according to the target of the companies and also be diversified. These stages should be considered as the pieces of the road map to be used by the Leather Industry for electronic commerce and follow thoughtfully (see Table 2).

Table 2 - E-Commerce Road Map for Leather Industry



## 5. CONCLUSION

Commerce has existed over thousands of years. However in recent years, the conventional commerce structure has rapidly begun to move together with technology. Due to internet, conventional marketing and business making methods are differentiating, and the marketing activities conducted on electronic environment are gradually increasing. This transformation is realized not with the elimination of the conventional marketing functions but with their radical differentiation. Many operations which are conducted face to face or manually in conventional marketing have begun to be made on electronic environment. Besides, the efforts to make complementary face to face approaches, which may sometimes be lacking in electronic environment or to cover its absence are also ongoing.

In the present-time world where information technologies are gaining further importance in every passing day, leather industry cannot be considered as distant from information technologies industry and the electronic commerce practices which have arisen as a result of the developments in information technologies industry. A budget is allocated for web site designs within the investments of most leather companies that have become brands and proven themselves and the companies that are willing to exist in the sector. Most of the companies are currently building web sites with visual materials, which do not conduct e-commerce in the real sense but promote the collections and for commercial purposes without a monetary cycle. Meanwhile, the companies with a proven record that produce a certain quality of products such as Desa, Derri and Beta in Turkey have slowly begun to tend towards e-commerce, and created e-stores that enable virtual shopping on their web sites.

There are certain issues which threaten the existence of leather industry in the world. The leading among these issues are; the economic crisis in the countries with which foreign trade is conducted, failure to evaluate opportunities due to poor management, rapid increase of short-term debts and failure to consolidate debts, lack of standard products, insufficiency of market and marketing activities, insufficiency of incentives and increasing taxes, failure of banks to make available sufficient commercial loans, insufficient R&D studies and technology, and businesses' loss of capital.<sup>1</sup> For the Leather Sector to resolve these issues, electronic commerce should be evaluated as both an opportunity and an alternative.

All elements that constitute electronic commerce and mainly technological innovations register further progress day by day. Similarly, commerce is also advancing in line with the speed of our era. The pioneers of this progress and development are the companies which produce technology and conduct business.

On the other hand, it is estimated that 20 million new business opportunities will occur within the Community of Europe on the issues related with e-commerce by 2010.<sup>16</sup> This statement and similar examples and explanations indicate how important e-commerce is in the globalizing world.<sup>17</sup>

With regard to the development of leather industry, both business to government and business to business e-commerce should be accentuated and companies should draw a suitable road map for themselves and improve themselves in e-commerce. A short road map has been issued in this study and rather comprehensive and more detailed studies can be conducted in the next step. In this context, the market researches of leather industry can be accelerated and the export potential can be increased day by day. With the implementation of the developments in internet and information technologies to leather industry, the sector's potential to use electronic commerce will be increased; so, customer satisfaction will increase and the industry will be provided with the opportunity to easily reach and expand in new markets.

International organizations and relevant organizations and administrators of the government should be guiding and directing for faster expansion of electronic commerce, increasing its volume and maximizing its benefit; and they should draw the required framework in this respect. Any kind of organization to be made with regard to structural necessities, safety issues and legal issues will contribute to the development and growth of electronic commerce. In this context, the leather industry should also follow the road map in information age step by step, and the means of electronic commerce should be increased day by day, and the preparation of the targets in the leather industry according to this structure should be considered as an important element which can not be neglected.

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