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Top technology vendors are hungry for their dollars, but just how well are the 20 million small businesses in North America and Western Europe transitioning to e-business?

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April 01, 2002
By Steve Butler

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(eMarketer) - Small businesses in North America and Europe should brace themselves for a lot more attention in the coming months, as leading technology vendors such as Microsoft, IBM, and Oracle are all looking to help them take their next steps in e-business. There are broadband connections to be deployed, new website features to be added and fax/phone-based trade that can be transferred to the internet.

AMI-Partners, a company that specializes in small business research, estimates that in 2000 there were 8.6 million small and medium size companies in North America and 13.4 million in Western Europe -- a significant market, indeed.

So far, most small businesses by now have a few years of internet experience under their belts. Surveys show that many small businesses already use the internet for online marketing or basic customer service -- typically a website that provides basic information about their business and products. About half of small businesses in the United States, Canada and Europe have used the internet for transactions.

According to results from the Net Impact Study, the majority of small businesses in the United States use the internet for online marketing, while exactly half of small business respondents have implemented e-commerce capabilities of some kind in 2001.

A total of 2,065 small, medium and large businesses in the United States were surveyed for the study, with 71% of all companies having implemented internet-based customer service capabilities and 68% of respondents using

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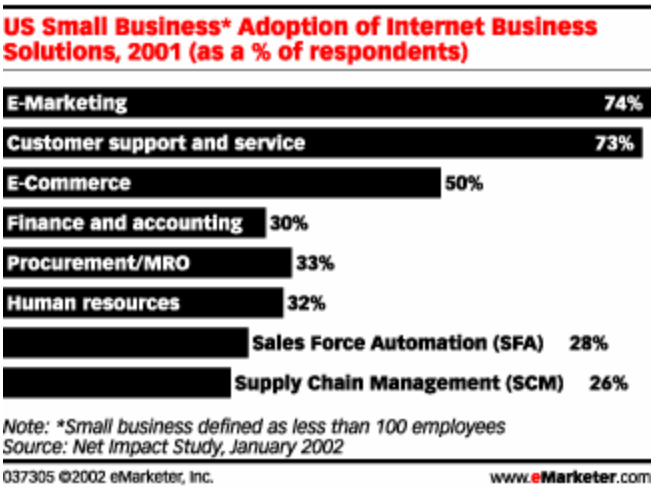
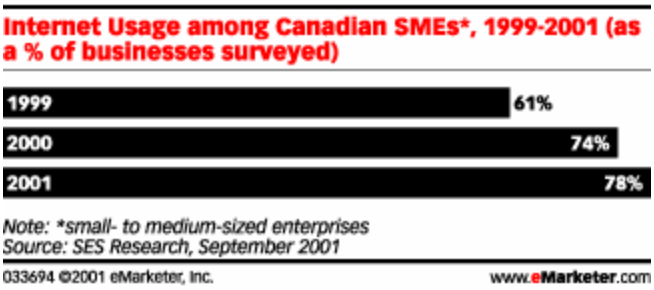
the internet as a marketing tool to reach customers.



In a separate survey of 1,000 Canadian small businesses, SES Canada Research found that 78% of respondents used the internet in 2001. Just under half of respondents, at 46%, said that they had engaged in e-commerce transactions of some kind, either buying or selling online.



When the Net Impact Study looked at companies in the United Kingdom, France and Germany, it found that among small businesses in these countries, customer-facing capabilities were the leading internet-based solutions that they had adopted as well.

Businesses in Europe were not that far behind their American counterparts, either. Compared to American small businesses, the number of small companies in Europe that had implemented e-commerce capabilities trailed by just 7%, while the overall percentage of European businesses that had adopted e-commerce technologies was 42%, versus 52% of all American firms.

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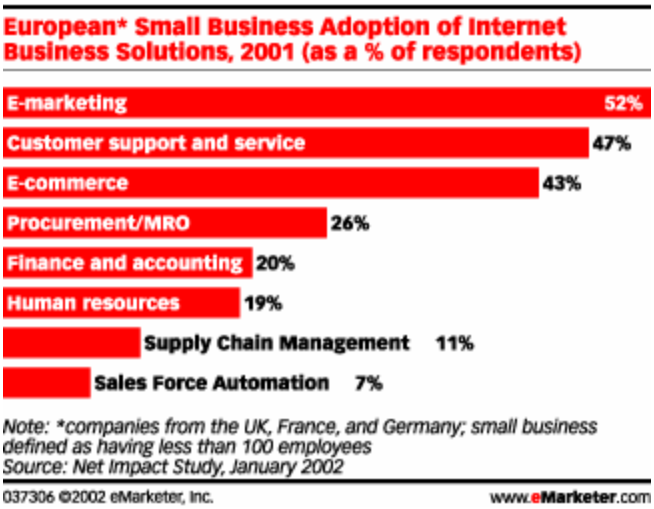

eMarketer has found that although not every small business will need to sell their goods or services online, many companies do find the internet to be a helpful tool for customer service and for improving communication with their trading partners.

With a clearer picture of how they can best use the internet to their own advantage, small businesses are better prepared than they were just one year ago to move on to the next level of e-business. As the recent burst of advertising directed at small businesses shows, large technology partners appear to be better prepared to help small businesses take that step as well.

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