

The Role of Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider under Global Trade Environment*

Lee, Bong Soo**

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** Associate Professor, Department of International Trade, Dankook University.

I. Introduction

In the era of information technology innovation, there has been a strong demand for paperless trading and trade innovation. In particular, the ability to collect trading information and promote a series of trade processes from consultation to signing a contract, shipment and payment has been a key factor for enhancement of competitiveness in trade business. As a result, e-trade has become more important.

A general trading company which had played a pivotal role in Korea's export in the past has lost its driving force. As a necessity to come up with an alternative system for a new export promotion model emerged, the general trading company system was officially abolished on October 23, 2009 with the amendment of Foreign Trade Act. This new specialized trading company having mid-sized export companies as well as conglomerates as its partner will be a key player in expanding the basis for Korea's export and exporting Korean products.

Therefore, a firm named as 'specialized trading company' will be linked with Korea's Small and Mid Sized Enterprise(SMSE) and asked first when there is an opportunity to join a market development unit abroad and participate in a trade show in Korea and abroad. In addition, Korea International Trade Association(KITA) held a trade mediation show to give promising SMSEs and specialized trading companies a chance to meet each other one-on-one and improved the operational effectiveness of the system. As a new era of knowledge information innovation and global competition comes, it's been necessary to make a shift to a new trade paradigm early. As a result, 'Act on Promotion of e-Trade' was amended in December 2005, and the existing e-trade service provider system was incorporated into the e-trade specialized service provider system for the innovative advancement of e-trade. Ultimately, the current e-trade specialized service provider should be correlated with the specialized trading company mentioned above. Furthermore, the specialized trading company's duties should be handled by

the e-trade specialized service provider. Nevertheless, the new e-trade specialized service provider system has not been as successful as expected.

Under these circumstances, this study has attempted to make a contribution to the development of a desirable e-trade policy through analysis on roles from the perspective of the activation of the e-trade specialized service provider designated by Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy(MOTIE). This study is structured as follows: First, how e-trade specialized service provider has developed, and how it has provided services are reviewed. Second, problems are diagnosed. Lastly, e-trade specialized service providers' roles and possibility for activation are suggested. In terms of research method, a literature-centered research method which uses e-trade related books and papers and government-led project-related records as analysis tools is used.

II. Overview of Electronic Trade and Transition of Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider

1. Current Status of Electronic Trade

Korea launched EDI services by establishing KTNET(Korea Trade Network) in June 1991 and has systematically developed electronic trade since then. Since the enactment of 'Comprehensive e-Trade Development Policy' in 2001, web-based electronic trade has been actively promoted. In 2003, core strategies for the e-trade service development project were determined by organizing e-Trade Promotion Committee. In December 2003, a framework for establishment of e-trade platform through the trade process innovation project was proposed, and legal and systematic improvement plans were suggested.

In November 2005, e-L/C distribution services were developed, and a

single window-based electronic trade portal system was established. As a result, integrated user management and personalization and additional functions have been enabled. In December 2006, KTNET was designated as the e-trade business operator, and a certified e-document authority was established for easy management and disposal of e-documents and convenient distribution support and user functions.

In 2009, a five-year master plan for development of e-trade infrastructure and global e-trade system development plan were established.¹⁾

First, information linking between customs clearance and logistics network was promoted. In order to make it possible for companies to get access to all work process and cargo tracing information through a one-time login, u-TradeHub was linked with the information networks of related organizations such as Korea Customs Service and Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs. To eliminate a possibility of misuse of clearance information when the clearance network was linked with the national e-trade system, in addition, publicity was secured among electronic trade-related business operators. Furthermore, work management and supervision plans were established. Second, a knowledge-based trade portal which had great access to information and convenience was developed. After integrating market information, knowledge and public information besides trade-related functions, customized trade analysis information is provided. In addition, the related information which is distributed among public organizations and associations is linked by stage and handled all together through the e-trade portal. Third, a support system was improved to spread e-trade. To make e-trade services available abroad, subordinate statutes of business law were amended, and legal grounds for the digital issuance and distribution of bill of exchange were established. Furthermore, the use of

1) Lee, Bong-Soo, "The Role of Electronic Trade Platform in the Information Technology Era", *The International Commerce and Law Review*, Vol. 52, 2011, pp. 47~71.

commissions is specified with strengthened supervision to provide e-trade services in a stable manner and protect business secret.

2. Changes of Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider

The emergence of an e-trade specialized service provider is not temporary. It has grown through a series of evolutionary processes. However, there have been no clear classifications on its development stages, and duties have been redundant and mixed. Therefore, this study has tried to investigate the words based on their development stages for the convenience of the research activities.

1) e-Marketplace in Electronic Trade

The e-marketplace in e-trade is a field of Business to Business(B2B) aimed to support international e-trade. It can be said that it is a general cyber trade space with the functions to store, read and search information between buyers and sellers. For example, a trade mediation website provides additional functions such as website and catalogue preparation as well as offer registration and search. A user can register sales and purchase offer through the Internet and search offer information uploaded by the counterparty. For SMSEs which are relatively disadvantaged compared to big companies in terms of capital and competitiveness, in particular, e-trade mediation website is very useful.

The advantages of the trade mediate website are as follows: First, SMSE can improve its image by providing useful information to prospective buyers through the Internet. Second, it is able to sign a contact and place an order fast while examining suppliers and issuing an offer, and as a result, time and money can be saved. Third, an offer can be sent to anywhere in the world, and prospective buyers can be produced continuously. Lastly, product quality and ability to provide services become more important than business size and

corporate awareness in the selection of suppliers. Under this kind of system, SMSEs can compete with big businesses.

In e-marketplace of e-trade, trade mediation websites are connected to each other and provide common services, making it possible to get access to a great number of related websites and collect trade mediation information with few websites only. However, services provided by most websites are usually limited to the supply of e-catalogues on trade mediation and products. Therefore, they have failed to provide high value-added information such as information on overseas market and suppliers, which is needed for SMSEs in fulfilling e-trade. In e-marketplace of e-trade, therefore, it's been necessary to develop an integrated information system to strengthen services in marketing before signing a contract.

2) Electronic Trade Metamediary

The concept and characteristics of e-trade metamediary started to emerge when Foreign Trade Act was amended by MOTIE in May 2000 to facilitate e-trade. The government body had announced that it would launch 'e-trade metamediary' which provides various useful services such as authentication of the counterparty's identity, credit information and Electronic Data Interchange(EDI) service in 2001. It aimed to make the e-trade metamediary handle the Internet EDI-based trade automation duties as well as e-trade metamediary-related tasks.

According to the revised Foreign Trade Act in 2001, however, the qualifications for e-trade metamediary are only stipulated. After all, its specific business areas haven't been mentioned since then.²⁾ At that time,

2) The qualifications can be divided as follows : ① Six or longer work experience(still on the job as of the date of application) in trade mediation or transfer of e-trade documents through the IT network, ② facilities enough to fulfill e-trade mediation duties, ③ a program which offers systematic and regular e-trade education and assistance to traders, ④ use of standard e-documents enacted and announced by Korea EDIFACT Committee(KEC) in accordance with Article 23 of Framework Act

there was a review on the designation authority and qualifications only due to recession in IT industry and B2B market(external factor) and absence of revenue model for e-marketplace (internal factor).

Therefore, safe and reliable e-trade services are provided all together by playing the role of 'e-trade missionary' who spreads rapidly changing e-trade trends across trade industry through the e-trade metamediary which have great know-how and experiences in trade and general commercial trades. In addition, it was introduced as a system to make a contribution to the development of information system for SMSEs and promotion of international trade and enhance the competitiveness of global firms and national competitiveness through the reduction of trading expenses and improvement of trading processes by maximizing e-trade. Therefore, e-trade metamediary is an e-trade agency which provides practical information and services to SMSEs, engages in marketing such as overseas market research and supports entire trading processes such as supply of market information and credit data. If e-marketplace and e-trade metamediary are classified depending on the source of revenue, the former which mediates trades between two parties is close to a membership fee or advertisement type. On the contrary, e-trade metamediary which provides trade information, credit inquiry and e-trade services is close to a commission or fee type.

3) Electronic Trade Service Provider

While the conventional e-trade's e-marketplace focused on services until the signing of the contract, e-trade service provider handles overall trade processes(ex: trade mediation among foreign buyers, preparation of e-catalogue and registration of offer, inquiry management, consultation, making a contract and follow-up service) as an agency for SMSEs which are lack of trade marketing using e-trade technologies and infrastructure.

The e-trade has non-face-to-face characteristics in which trade is executed with a doubt on the counterparty's credit, financial capacity and ability to get contract goods because the discovery and selection of business partners, trade negotiation and signing a contract are all done through the Internet and IT system. Therefore, it is necessary to remove any concern on the non-face-to-face trade and build confidence and reliability in order to facilitate e-trade. For this, it is required to confirm the counterparty's identity and resolve all problems which are found in the process of executing e-trade. In addition, there has been a demand for a single e-trade platform which makes it possible to handle all e-trade processes without any disruption in a one-stop manner and a new organization which can enhance work competence through solutions and play as an e-trade missionary. For this, 'e-trade service provider' was introduced.

This kind of e-trade service provider has gone through a series of evolutionary processes from e-marketplace to e-trade metamediary and e-trade service provider. While going through these processes, there were some adjustments on the conceptual definition, role and functions of the organization. However, they have not been clearly classified, and their conceptual definition and duties have been redundant and mixed as well.

While conventional e-marketplace focused on services until signing the contract such as buyer search, e-trade service provider has provided services as an on-off line trade company which copes with overall trade processes from signing the contract to follow-up services(ex: Mediation, consultation, e-catalogue, offer registration, inquiry management, etc.) by proxy using e-trade technologies and infrastructure.

III. Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider System

1. Introduction and Designated Requisite of Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider

From the perspective of national economy which brings innovation in trade structure and process, a key to success for the construction of e-trade infrastructure and e-trade platform may lie in the maximization of the utilization of e-trade. To help SMSEs which are vulnerable to e-trade, therefore, the e-trade metamediary designation system, a basis for e-trade service provider, was introduced through the amendment of Foreign Trade Act on December 29, 2000. In addition, the qualifications were set through the amendment of the Enforcement Ordinance of Foreign Trade act on March 31, 2001. In 2003, in addition, a firm which mostly satisfied the requirements was designed as 'e-trade service provider', and there was assistance to e-trade duties including overseas marketing. In other words, e-trade service provider has made continued efforts to facilitate e-trade with the capability to provide services for e-trade such as trade mediation through the Internet and agency service.

Since 2003, meanwhile, Korea's e-trade recorded low utilization rates despite strenuous efforts by the government and related organizations. In particular, the results were far from satisfying when it came to international e-trade. Therefore, MOTIE concluded that it was needed to develop IT technology and make a shift to a new trade paradigm earlier than expected. To establish the legal and institutional grounds for e-trade, 'Act on Promotion of e-Trade' was fully revised in December 2005, and the conventional e-trade service provider system was incorporated into the e-trade specialized service provider system. Since then, the Enforcement Ordinance of e-Trade Promotion Act was amended in July 2006, and its enforcement regulations were announced on August 23. According to the rules, the service providers were divided into e-trade based service provider and e-trade specialized service provider in consideration of the diversity and professionalism of e-trade related businesses.

The e-Trade specialized service provider was introduced with a goal of creating new business opportunities through the construction an online network with SMSEs. Based on ability to execute new business and extensive

experience on international business, furthermore, it supports international business through joint marketing after assessing the possibility of SMSE's products for export in a fast and precise manner. In particular, e-trade specialized service provider provides services which help import and export agents handle their duties without any inconvenience.

According to Article 22 of Act on Promotion of e-Trade, those who want to be listed as the e-trade specialized service provider, the following conditions should be met : i) Six or longer work experience(still on the job as of the date of application) in trade mediation or transfer of e-trade documents through the IT network, ii) operating system, capital and manpower enough to carry out specialized e-trade services, iii) at least five employees for each project aimed to fulfill specialized e-trade services. If either of intermediate trade in e-trade documents and e-trade service business using the e-trade based facilities should be chosen for a key duty, a contract should be signed with the e-trade based service provider, and it could be accessible to e-trade based facilities by signing an agreement with the e-trade based service provider. In addition, standardized e-documents would be used. The details on the operating system are set and announced by MOTIE, and capital and human resources related details are set by the order of the MOTIE.

2. Main Functions of Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider

Current e-trade specialized service providers include EC21, ECplaza, Readykorea and Matrix2b, and their key functions and roles are as follows.³⁾ First, trade experts in e-trade specialized service provider develop a

3) Chae, Jin-Ik, "A Study on the Problems and Improvements of e-Trade Specialized Service Provider System under e-Trading System", *The e-Business Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2010, pp. 179~200.

comprehensive trade plan and select and analyze export products through market research activities such as overseas marketing trend and current buyers. In addition, there will be education on buyer search techniques and inquiry response plan on the Internet.

Second, it analyzes the counterparty through previous export marketing activities, selects target market according to market segmentation strategy and finds business partners. In addition, it shares catalogue and offer registration through the information system among e-trade specialized service providers and sends a business proposal written in English to the selected buyers. Furthermore, it provides trade fraud preventive consulting, buyer reception and consultation services as well as inquiry receiving, sample sending and credit research services. Third, it negotiates terms and conditions of business and makes a contract using e-mail, Internet phone and Internet fax and promotes opinion exchange among domestic and foreign trading agents. These opinion exchanges are performed on the Internet through a support by the e-trade specialized service provider on a realtime basis. It would also handle a negotiation job for small and mid-sized trading firms. In case of import, for example, it manages overall import related processes including promising overseas exporter and famous brand search, import license agreement and price and terms of agreement negotiation with exporters.

Fourth, import and export tasks are jointly handled by the trade expert in e-trade specialized service provider and manager in the target trading firm. In addition, it supports paper preparations and tasks associated with shipment, insurance, customs clearance and payment.

Fifth, group education and door-to-door education are given through education and follow-up management to help small and mid-sized export firms develop work skills throughout e-trade processes. From the aspect of follow-up management, it helps the development of performance management and mid and long term export support system for individual firms through the monthly report and supports the service to provide a

solution through consultation and legal advices when a dispute occurs in international trade.

IV. Improvement Direction for an Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider System

1. Legal Aspects of Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider

The e-trade metamediary which was stipulated in Foreign Trade Act in December 2000 was amended to the e-trade specialized service provider in accordance with Act on Promotion of e-Trade which originated from Act on the Promotion of Office Automation for Trade in December 2005. However, the scope of duties for the e-trade specialized service provider wasn't specified in the related laws. In particular, it was not far from the scope of business of conventional e-trade metamediary and e-trade mediator. As a result, the profitability of the e-trade specialized service provider hasn't improved significantly so that it would be difficult to get re-investments. In addition, it has been an obstacle in increasing the size of specialized service provider system and creating a new revenue source. Therefore, it is necessary to permit associated business partners to freely enter through the amendment of related regulations and expand and clarify the scope of duties. Meanwhile, there is a possibility of dispute on whether or not the governing law should be applied when a follow-up dispute occurs. Therefore, it is required to set the governing law in advance. In other words, the e-trade specialized service provider should set the related laws(ex: clauses for product sales, offer to sell and purchase, EDI clause, etc.) in accordance with the clear governing law.

There will not be a problem if a mutual consent on jurisdiction exists. Otherwise, a collision of jurisdiction may occur. Even though Korea's

regulations may not be perfect, it is not easy to raise a lawsuit against foreigners. Therefore, this problem should be resolved through international collaborative systems or international organizations such as OECD.

Meanwhile, if an online dispute occurs between e-trade specialized service provider and foreign import and export agent, the government needs to improve the Alternative Dispute Resolution(ADR)⁴⁾ and related legal systems instead of a formal trial system as a quick and convenient measure of relief. In addition, the dispute resolution system is effective in civil reconciliation only while it loses effectiveness in judicial reconciliation. Therefore, it is necessary to come up with a system to secure the effectiveness of the decision. Furthermore, it is important to have a correct perception on dispute resolution through international collaboration in order to overcome differences in the legal effects of the ADR system in each country.

2. Operational Aspects of Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider

In case of e-trade, it is difficult to check the counterparty's credit and product information. In fact, there have been complaints about inability to check the counterparty's credit from many companies. In addition, most trade mediation websites are difficult to use. According to a survey by KITA, a lot of e-trade mediation website users have pointed out a lack of information on how to use the website. Even though it is important to provide higher-quality services, it hasn't been able to come up with a way to use the website easily for users. Except for some leading e-marketplaces, most trade mediation websites have poor contents. In particular, it is difficult

4) Alternative Dispute Resolution(ADR) refers to a system which makes it possible to resolve a dispute over small-size e-trade, which may not be solved by the conventional legal remedies due to complicated procedure and high cost in a prudent and effective manner.

to get the detailed information on products and purchase. Due to a lack of English language data, in addition, it's been difficult to attract foreign buyers.

Therefore, an innovative complement which is connected with the current operating system run by the e-trade specialized service provider, financial institutions of operating website, the customs and international e-trade systems is required. In other words, it is needed to build a perfect system which can handle all trade processes and resolve an obstacle as shown above without any electronic or technical interruption and provide a convenient business space through the user-centered interface after connecting, integrating and simplifying various functional services scattered around.

Meanwhile, many small and mid-sized trade firms need to make great efforts to trade e-trade infrastructure despite some differences depending on current conditions, which is a barrier in utilizing e-trade systems. In terms of the maintenance of technical elements as well, the implementation method and specific techniques for contents integration and development of additional services aren't unified yet.

Therefore, the e-trade specialized service provider should be able to integrate global trade mediation services and play a key role in search of domestic suppliers and export marketing as one of the supports on common areas in addition to logistics and payment. In other words, it is required to provide business support in e-trade by inducing the development of standard technology based on unified and systematic elements and implementation of premium Web Application Service Provider(ASP).⁵⁾

Ultimately, the e-trade specialized service provider should establish a unique operating system after building a systematic collaborative relationship with e-trade based service provider and trade related organizations as well as business partners. It is also important to secure the ground for stable

5) Application Service Provider(ASP) refers to web application hosting service business which lends software through the Internet instead of selling it in a package.

revenue through the development of services for efficient operation of e-trade.

3. Institutional Aspects of Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider

Even though the e-trade specialized service provider system has made a significant contribution to the development of e-trade, its performances haven't been as great as expected. To facilitate e-trade and maximize its effects, therefore, it is required to strengthen the expertise of the e-trade specialized service provider and expand its functions and business areas. For this, it is required to develop the infrastructure to help trade parties handle their duties without any inconvenience by strengthening financial situations and enhancing public trust through the expansion of its size. In other words, it is necessary to develop overseas market, discover buyers, handle trade documents with the counterparty, provide practical trade consulting, intermediation and mediation, agency services and build a user-oriented job information system and program.

In addition, it is needed to play as Certified e-Document Authority (CeDA) and specialized trade company or be integrated with these functions as a way to increase the size of the e-trade specialized service provider system and expand business areas. The CeDA can implement a perfect paperless trade which handles all document lifecycle processes in an electronic manner by making e-documents available broadly. In addition, it would have an innovative effect on industries by simplifying unnecessary processes by granting the distribution and storage of paper documents to the CeDA in connection with the CeDA, companies and organizations.

Meanwhile, most e-trade's e-marketplaces basically support trade deals without commissions. If a commission is only focused while online transaction aren't active yet, however, business has been promoted with the addition of business areas.

The e-trade specialized service provider should also make a profit by handling small and mid-sized promising export firms' trade duties as their agency, but this action may not be enough for existence. Hence, it is required to build a strong ground for revenue production by developing a revenue model based on advantages. Current e-trade specialized service providers have provided paid premium services, but they need to provide member-grading differentiating services. In addition, there could be an attempt to launched paid services through the System Integration(SI) services in which e-trade specialized service providers can handle related tasks(ex: development of website, supply of domain and web mail, etc.) at a time.

V. Conclusion

With changes in international trade environment, there has been a demand for an institutional improvement to come up with a new business model for e-trade and services. For this, 'e-trade mediator' and 'e-trade service provider' systems were introduced to facilitate e-trade and support SMSEs. In December 2005, the word 'trade automation' changed to 'e-trade.' Since then, there have been great efforts to develop the ground for effective e-trade. In particular, it's been attempted to improve environment for e-trade dramatically and support SMSEs by incorporating the e-trade service provider system into the e-trade specialized service provider system according to the innovation of knowledge information and globalization. However, the efforts and policies promoted by the government and related trade organizations against the e-trade specialized service provider have been far from systematic and continuous. In addition, they would be partially redundant. In fact, the concept of e-trade is still new, and few people are aware of the importance of infrastructure for e-trade in Korea. Therefore, e-trade activities have stayed at before-contact stages which include establishment of market information and supplier search because of the

absence of basic infrastructure such as e-trade authentication, legal grounds and use of EDI. To resolve these problems and expand export using e-trade, it is required to define and promote tri-party collaboration (small and mid-sized trade firm, government and related organizations, e-trade specialized service provider).

First of all, the small and mid-sized trade firms need to recognize that the introduction of e-trade is essential, not optional, to stay alive by adapting themselves to the new trade paradigm through the better understanding of e-trade. The government and related organizations need to develop legal systems on e-trade specialized service provider and infrastructure for common trade marketing and establish a budget support plan by stage to facilitate e-trade marketing.

The new e-trade specialized service provider system hasn't been that successful either in terms of practical support on SMSEs and promotion of e-trade. In particular, it has been pretty same with the conventional e-trade service provider in terms of functions and roles. Hence, this study has suggested the following alternatives as a way to facilitate the e-trade specialized service provider system:

First, from the legal aspect, it is necessary to clarify the scope of duties as well as to expand the threshold for entrance and business areas through the amendment of related laws.

Second, from the operating aspect, the e-trade specialized service provider should be able to provide convenient work spaces through user-centered interface by connecting, integrating, automating and simplifying various services scattered around through the establishment of an operating system which can be connected and linked with the business information system and global e-trade service provider's system as well as e-trade-based service provider's system through continued business alliance and development of solution and contents which are needed to build business parties' duties.

Third, from the institutional aspect, trade firms should be able to perform e-trade duties without difficulties by specializing and increasing the size of

the e-trade specialized service provider system and strengthening job competence. For this, it is required to improve legal registration requirements to enhance the reliability of the e-trade specialized service provider system and secure its financial capacity.

It appears that the e-trade specialized service provider system would become more useful by satisfying needs for information which is necessary for SMSEs to carry out e-trade jobs and building the ground for practical business by providing more diverse and valuable information services.

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ABSTRACT

The Role of Electronic Trade Specialized Service Provider under Global Trade Environment

Lee, Bong Soo

This thesis examines the problems faced in the electronic trade specialized service provider for which improvements are necessary, and suggests various ways of overcoming those problems.

First, from the legal aspect, it is necessary to clarify the scope of duties as well as to expand the threshold for entrance and business areas through the amendment of related laws.

Second, from the operating aspect, the e-trade specialized service provider should be able to provide convenient work spaces through user-centered interface by connecting, integrating, automating and simplifying various services scattered around through the establishment of an operating system.

Third, from the institutional aspect, trade firms should be able to perform e-trade duties without difficulties by specializing and increasing the size of the e-trade specialized service provider system and strengthening job competence. For this, it is required to improve legal registration requirements to enhance the reliability of the e-trade specialized service provider system and secure its financial capacity.

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Portal, e-Marketplace