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Dear Ms Wong

Public Consultation on 2004 Digital 21 Strategy

I refer to your letter of 10 October 2003 in relation to the above. I am indeed impressed with the amount of initiatives that have been implemented in the last five years. Credit must be given to the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau for maintaining Hong Kong's position as the Information Technology hub of Asia.

In terms of my personal views in relation to the consultation paper, I have five areas that I would like to share with you. They are

1. Electronic Transaction Ordinance (Cap. 533);
2. Support for research and development;
3. Hong Kong Trade Development Council;
4. Continuing Professional Development Courses;
5. Hong Kong Internet Registration Corporation.

1. Electronics Transaction Ordinance (Cap. 533)

I believe that the purpose of the Electronic Transaction Ordinance of providing a clear legal framework for the conduct of electronic transactions by giving electronic record and digital signature the same legal recognition as that of their paper based counterparts has been achieved. Although some believe that the Ordinance has been amended on a piece meal basis and would prefer a complete overhaul with an entirely new and up-to-date legislation. In an ideal world this would be the most desirable option however given the complexities and operational constraints as well as the interactions of the various entities involved at present, I believe the Government has handled the matter sensibly in the interest of general public and those stakeholders involved in electronic transactions.

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2. Support for research and development

With Hong Kong moving toward a service oriented environment, support for research and development is vital, if we are to remain competitive. Injected funds will need to be available to those research projects that can be successfully transferred for use in industry which will in the long term benefit the people and businesses of Hong Kong as well as assisting in the development of a potential pool of talent that will be the envy of other Asian countries. On this basis I am delighted that this will continue under the current guidelines.

3. Hong Kong Trade Development Council

Without doubt the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) is the most effective and market orientated medium in which Hong Kong businesses can promote and market their products and services abroad. Their trade portal “tdctrade.com” is one of the most frequently visited website by the public at large. The information on the website is user friendly and it does provide the user with the most up-to-date information on Hong Kong services. With the assistance of the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau, this trade portal could be further developed into the website of which potential investors from all over the world would come to rely when trading in Asia. A global gateway with Hong Kong being its core of wealth and opportunities.

The HKTDC professional service delivery unit is another useful medium in which professional associations can with the assistance of the unit promote their services abroad to potential users.

The HKTDC is an organisation that does add value in promoting Hong Kong. With additional resources, Hong Kong companies could further increase their market share within the global environment.

4. Continuing Professional Development Courses

The Vocational Training Council (VTC) could play a crucial role (if given further scope and resources) in co-ordinating with learned societies with the view of providing a framework suitable for continuing professional development (CPD). There are a variety of CPD courses available on the market place, thus creating confusion as to which CPD course would be recognised by employers and whether the course would indeed enhance one’s skills. A minefield that requires careful thought, indepth analysis together with consultation of all stakeholders involved to ensure that CPD courses meet the needs of industry and professional bodies at large.

5. Hong Kong Internet Registration Corporation

In order to promote the use of the Internet among the local industries, the Hong Kong Internet Registration Corporation (HKIRC) has committed itself to introducing a new category of '.hk' domain name. One very important aspect is the Chinese Domain Name (CDN). CDN was introduced in Taiwan in the Year 2000. By October 2003, the number of Chinese '.tw' domain names stood at 107,648 whereas the number of English '.tw' domain names stood at 128,262. This achievement is the result of many years of research and development, and investment in a number of key technologies. CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center), the body responsible for the administration of '.cn' domain names in China, has also invested a lot of manpower and resources into CDN. HKIRC could learn from them and apply similar technologies in launching Chinese '.hk' domain names. However, I believe that HKIRC does not have the same level of resources to implement the key components of a commercial CDN service. It is vital that funding be made available to HKIRC to implement the CDN service for the benefit of the Hong Kong community, as government statistics do indicate that a large portion of our population communicate in the language of Chinese.

Finally, I understand that the Government is under a lot of pressure to reduce its expenditure and I do appreciate the efforts made. Nevertheless additional sources of revenue should be seriously considered if we are to remain a leader in the Information Technology arena.

I do hope the information can be of assistance to you. If you would like me to elaborate on any issue, please do not hesitate to revert back to me.

Wishing the project – Digital 21 Strategy every success.

Yours sincerely

Christopher To
Secretary General