

Comments on Public Consultation Paper 2004 Digital 21 Strategy

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Hong Kong government's digital strategy should use Information technology (IT) as an enabler for delivery of services to the public. The starting point in the e-government drive should always be to identify what the customer wants, and then look into how to use IT, be it hardware or software, to achieve this economically and effectively.

In order to achieve the above objectives, the government's digital programme should enable the users to achieve the following benefits:

1. Increased Productivity – better output in terms of the quantity and quality of traditional results, or the performance of previously impossible tasks;
2. Cost effectiveness – due to reduction in time duration, complexity or possible repetition/duplication of tasks;
3. Improved Service Delivery – offering equal access to government services, more and better information, choice of level/quality of services and guaranteed standards (including privacy), remedies for failures and, ultimately, value for money.

Based on these measurable values, government can determine whether or not to invest in any given IT project or programme. IT should not be acquired or funded if it does not achieve all aspects as depicted.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

Success of the e-government initiatives is underpinned by the following areas:

1. Interoperability – government IT systems (including networks, platforms, applications and data) must be able to 'talk' to each other, allowing for automatic sharing and exchange of electronic messages and documents, collaborative applications, distributed data processing and seamless transaction services.
2. IT Security – government must be able to operate in an environment where both electronic documents/data and IT systems are protected from unauthorized access, virus attacks and denial-of-service attacks;
3. Economies-Of-Scale – Hong Kong is a very small and competitive place. More often than not, it is difficult for products and services to achieve critical mass. In order to attract more investment from business sector as well as helping the

development of local IT industry, HK government is recommended to jointly promote interoperability standard with its neighborhood regions and markets so as to achieve the desirable economies of scale. If such standard is established and recognized by regional government bodies, then the target market of e-commerce and m-commerce will no longer be bound by HK region alone.

4. Human Resources - Development of local IT skills that are crucial to e-government initiatives, such as development of interoperability standards, should be encouraged through the government's IT fund.
5. Eliminate Duplication – government must abolish unnecessary duplication of similar IT functions, projects and resources (including collection, processing and archiving of the same data), as well as practices of "re-inventing the wheel".
 - (i) The government must not confuse its role as market maker and not market taker; for example, TDC is conducting similar business against private sector while using government resources. This will pose a significant threat to the local industry due to different business psychology, as government department might not be as cost conscious, while private company must generate profit for each business decision.
 - (ii) Privatizing government departments (e.g ITSD) should be on the agenda. This will not only better position government in co-ordination and monitoring role, but also leverage the business experience to create opportunity and employment. However, a percentage of the privatized company's profit should be used in funding R&D, thereby maintaining a continuing contribution towards the nurturing of the local IT industry.