

Guidelines on Dissemination of Information through Government Websites

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I. Introduction

The Government is committed to using information and communication technology in disseminating information and delivering services to the public, taking advantage of the Internet's ability to host a massive repository of dynamic information to be made available to everyone anywhere at any time. All Government bureaux and departments ("B/Ds") now have their own websites in English, as well as in traditional and simplified Chinese.

2. The Government's objectives are that websites of B/Ds should provide relevant information in an efficient and effective manner and in a format that encourages access by the local and international communities.

3. These guidelines state the Government's Internet information dissemination strategies, and serve as a practical guide and useful information for producing and developing websites for B/Ds. They will be revised from time to time to reflect the rapid changes in the Internet medium.

4. B/Ds should observe these guidelines in developing and revamping their websites. Detailed technical notes for Government website issued by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) are available at the following location:

http://www.ogcio.gov.hk/en/community/web_accessibility/doc/technical_notes.pdf

Additional guidelines can be located through the useful links set out at the Annex.

II. Internet Information Dissemination Strategies

(A) To Build Websites on Clear Objectives and a Client-centric Design

5. A clear objective is vital for a well-structured website. With clear objectives, B/Ds can be more effective in identifying target groups of users and in designing content and presentation of their websites. The objectives of the website should be closely related to the missions and visions of B/Ds.

6. The structure of websites should develop on the information needs of target users: a client-centric design. A thorough analysis will be needed to define clear objectives and understand the requirements of the target users in order to create client-centric websites. In addition to an initial analysis of requirements, on-going traffic monitoring will ensure that websites continually meet the expectations of the target users (see also para. 18 below).

7. The main topics in a client-centric website should be categorised in such a way that Internet users can generally locate the required information with ease. In most situations, such client-centric websites should be topic based. Websites which categorise information simply according to the structure of B/Ds will turn Internet users away as it may take a lot of efforts to locate the information wanted. Indeed, the structure of B/Ds should best be shown in the organisation charts.

(B) To Make Use of Government Websites as an Efficient Means of Disseminating Information

8. With an exponential increase in global Internet population, a website is an efficient and powerful tool in disseminating information. Government information, in brief or in detail, can be brought before a wide spectrum of local or overseas users in the shortest possible time at minimal efforts.

9. B/Ds should make full use of their websites to disseminate information. Information dissemination on the Internet and in other media should generally be simultaneous. Major public announcements should be made available on the website as soon as possible. Apart from improving services, B/Ds maintaining websites can also expect a reduction in printing costs and staff costs for manning enquiry lines.

10. The following should in particular be observed in disseminating information on Government websites:

- (a) Uploading as many printed materials as possible on websites. Information in printed materials such as reports, publicity leaflets, and consultation papers, is part of the useful information the general public is looking for in the cyber space. It should

always be borne in mind during the preparatory stage of the materials that an Internet version is a required format. This helps to avoid problems in conversion of file formats at the later stage; and

- (b) Providing press releases on important issues in the websites of B/Ds. Press releases are an important information source carrying the most updated Government news. Via a computer system, all government press releases are automatically uploaded onto the Internet at <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/> minutes after their dissemination to the media. It is a convenient way for the public to look for specific press releases in the websites of B/Ds. This can be done simply by providing a press release web page in departmental websites and creating links to the press releases concerned.

(C) Document Attachments

11. When documents are uploaded to the websites, we should indicate the file size of a large document to give users an idea about the time required for downloading. Larger files may be cumbersome to download with slow Internet connections. It is useful to provide an email link, telephone or fax contact to enable users to request a hard or soft copy of the document if required.

12. Please refer to the Technical Notes on Website Development and Maintenance issued by the OGCIO at http://www.ogcio.gov.hk/en/community/web_accessibility/doc/technical_notes.pdf for other points to note.

Remove all “track changes” features from downloadable word documents. It is not Government’s intention to show previous revisions to the document.

(D) To Promote Electronic Services to the Public

13. To promote electronic services to the public, information about such services should prominently feature in the websites. A complete list of electronic services with description of such services should be provided. The pre-requisites for using the electronic services, e.g. digital certificate, PIN, browser version, should also be explicitly stated. Policy bureaux should also list electronic services provided by the departments under their purview.

III. Internet Resource Centre

14. The Internet Resource Centre (“IRC”) has been set up since March 1997 under the Information Services Department to provide assistance to B/Ds that wish to set up or improve their own websites. Correspondence to IRC can be sent to irc@isd.gov.hk.

15. With the setting up of both English and Chinese websites by B/Ds, IRC has fulfilled its mission in the initial development of Government websites. IRC now assumes the role of monitoring Government websites and advising B/Ds on effective use of websites in information dissemination.

16. Most Government websites are hosted in the Central Internet Gateway (“CIG”) System supported by the CIG Support Team. Services provided include:

- (a) Architectural design, development and enhancement of the system;
- (b) System maintenance and daily operation support;
- (c) Technical advice and consultancy services for B/Ds on web projects;
- (d) Internet domain name hosting services for Government websites; and
- (e) Testing environment before websites are launched.

The email contact of the CIG is enquiry@scig.gov.hk. Updated information is available in Infostation at <http://www.itginfo.gov.hk> and Central Cyber Government Office (“CCGO”) at <http://portal.cngo.hksarg>.

17. In addition, OGCIO provides the following services for all Government websites hosted in CIG or externally:

- (a) Statistics on visitors to their websites (<http://webstat.cis.gov.hk>); and
- (b) Search service for information in their websites.

IV. Content of Websites

(A) Defining Web Content

18. Developing client-centric content begins with ensuring that the content is aligned with the requirements of the target users and the site objectives. According to a consultancy study comparing local and overseas websites of governments and related organisations, the following content categories are regarded as necessary for “best practice”:

- (a) Providing a clear indication of the target users and the site objectives to allow a user to quickly determine if the site should be explored;
- (b) Providing a site map to outline the content of a website;
- (c) Providing report summaries, press releases and other “core” information with embedded links that allow users to easily navigate through the information;
- (d) Highlighting any recent updates or providing a “What’s New” section for recently updated information to facilitate repeated users;
- (e) Providing links to related external sites and encouraging other sites to provide links into your site as far as B/Ds deem appropriate;
- (f) Providing an index of downloadable materials, such as reports, bibliographies, glossaries, appendices of information;
- (g) Listing frequently asked questions to reduce the number of direct users’ enquiries; and
- (h) Providing contact information, including email, telephone number, fax number and mail address.

19. Government websites should be available in English, as well as in traditional and simplified Chinese (unless there is a strong reason for not doing so) and the writing style should be consistent with the language (i.e. avoid a direct translation). The use of jargons or abbreviations should be avoided.

(B) Essential and Useful Information

20. The information categories and their suggested content are as follows:

1. Essential information

Essential Information Category	Suggested Content
(a) Organisation details	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organisation chart, including names of officers filling the directorate posts and telephone numbers of all posts shown in the chart.• Responsibilities of individual divisions.
(b) Public service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Description of main services or functions of the organisation.• Information on services introduced or changed. User-friendly features include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A “how to” guide for accessing services;• Key documents/forms required for accessing services; and• On-line access to services.
(c) Performance pledges and success	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statements of performance pledges.• Statistics measuring fulfilment of pledges.
(d) List of records by category	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• List of categorised records which the public may have access to.
(e) List of available information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Categorised list of information (either published or otherwise) made available, whether free or on payment. User-friendly features include:

- Softcopy of documents available for download; and
 - Procedures and charges for accessing/purchasing available information.
- (f) Procedures and charges for access to information not routinely published
- Description of the process for obtaining information.
 - Standard photocopying charges.
 - Application form for Access to Information.
 - Contact information of Access to Information Officer, including name, email, telephone number, fax number and mail address for related enquiries.
- (g) Consultation papers
- Consultation papers in HTML format with internal links if feasible.
(Note: Subsequent references to HTML in this document also applies to XHTML, and for simplicity sake, “HTML” will be used as the abbreviated version.)
 - An audio version of the summary or the full text should be provided to allow users to choose their preferred media.
 - Softcopy of documents (e.g. PDF file) available for download.
(Note: Please ensure all “track changes” features are removed for word processing document files.)
 - Feedback channel for collecting views on consultation papers, i.e. email access for submitting response, and postal contact details.
- (h) Electronic services
- List of services that can be accessed online. Policy bureaux should also list electronic services provided by the departments under their purview.
- (i) Public forms

2. Useful information

Useful Information Category	Suggested Content
(a) Site objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This provides Internet users with a concise description of the content of the site, enabling them to quickly assess the site's relevance to their needs.
(b) Vision, mission and value statement of bureau/ department	
(c) Code on access to information	
(d) Survey results and statistics of public interest	
(e) Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• e.g. Policy Objective.
(f) LegCo briefs and bills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The documents should be uploaded after their release to legislators.
(g) Notices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• e.g. tender notices and recruitment advertisements.
(h) Annual reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summaries of reports should also be made available.
(i) Publications and papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• e.g. reports, publicity leaflets, consultation papers, fact sheets.
(j) Information unique to bureau/ department	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• e.g. membership and terms of reference of advisory boards and committees related to the bureau/department.
(k) Channels to access services (where and how)	

- | | |
|---|---|
| (l) Frequently asked questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They should be categorised and indexed to facilitate easy access. ● They are valuable in reducing enquiries for frontline staff. |
| (m) What's New section | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This facilitates frequent users to access and B/Ds to publicise the most recent information. ● The section should not be maintained as an archive of information in chronological order. Such practice prompts users to doubt whether the websites are updated. ● A separate section of "What was new in (month)(year)" should meet the purpose. A "new" tag is useful to mark small updates in a site map or web pages. ● The section may also serve as an advance announcement for planned items, such as soon to be released consultation papers. |
| (n) Major press releases and speeches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is valuable to provide an archive of news related information by date and topic. B/Ds should create an index page of the press releases with each item linked to individual press releases (see also paras. 8 to 10 above). |
| (o) Events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing event calendar, event descriptions and on-line registration for events (if feasible) is an inexpensive way to promote Government or social events to the general public. |
| (p) Relevant external information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● e.g. Hong Kong Laws on the Internet. (Note: It is a good practice to inform the department concerned before creating links.) |
| (q) Links to related Government departments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Links to other departments and to related boards and committees (with regard to terms of reference and membership lists). |

- (r) Links to related external sites
- Through use of links to additional related external sites, the breadth of content can be easily expanded to better meet the content requirements of target users (see also para. 44 below).
 - Bearing in mind that the website addresses may change from time to time, the external links should be checked regularly to ensure that they still work.

V. Editing Content for the Web

21. Although basically the content formats of printed and Internet versions look the same, B/Ds are reminded to pay attention to the following features of web pages and expectation of Internet users in editing content for web pages:

- (a) Conventional paper publications are vertically orientated, quite unlike the horizontal rectangular shape, small size and relatively low resolution of most computer screens. The traditional layouts are larger than the size of computer screens and hence users are required to continually scroll down (or horizontally) without ever seeing the whole page. The content should be edited accordingly prior to uploading.
- (b) An outstanding feature of web pages is the provision of hypertext links enabling users to skip “unnecessary” information and go direct to relevant information. Because of this, the structure of content in a web page may be quite different from conventional paper documents. It is useful to keep the main points in the first page, while keeping content of secondary importance in subsequent pages which can easily be accessed by users via links.
- (c) Internet users in general do not expect to read lengthy documents on the computer screen. In editing web content, the paragraphs should be kept to a shorter length as far as practicable.
- (d) If a lengthy document is unavoidable, it is advisable to list the titles of the sections at the top of the page and provide links from titles to the relevant content underneath. Such practice enables Internet users to have an overview of a lengthy document and access the information they are interested in. Provision of navigation icons or text links such as “next”, “previous”, “top” are good user-friendly features.

VI. Updating of Information

22. It is the responsibility of B/Ds to ensure that information put on the Internet is up-to-date. B/Ds should determine, in respect of each document uploaded onto its websites, the frequency in respect of which the document should be updated.

23. A work schedule, containing a comprehensive list of updating frequencies thus determined, should be compiled for follow-up by all staff involved in the updating of the websites. The work schedule should provide for the continuous updating of any information expected by the public to be 100% up-to-date. Examples of such information are organisation charts, holders of specific posts and telephone numbers. In general, B/Ds should review and update their websites at least once a year.

24. To facilitate Internet users, B/Ds should post on each page a last revision date (修訂日期). The ‘What’s New’ section should be updated regularly. Some information may require less frequent updating (e.g. fact sheets). In that case, some form of indication, e.g. last review date (覆檢日期), should be included to show that the information is still up-to-date. Either “Last revision date” or “Last review date”, whichever is the later, is to be used on each page. Outdated web content should be removed from the website as soon as they are no longer applicable. Besides, for web pages dedicated for historical information, B/Ds should remark that the content will not have further update.

25. There have been criticisms that the Government does not upload quickly enough onto its websites useful information relating to unexpected issues. Apart from the continuous updating of existing information, B/Ds should be prepared to respond efficiently to those issues by uploading necessary related information swiftly. Links to related websites should be checked frequently to make sure that they are valid. Similarly, all relevant hyperlinks should be updated before any removal of web pages, graphics files, topics, promotion icons etc. from the site. If there is any known external hyperlink pointing to these web pages, the webmasters of the “referring” websites should be informed of the update as well.

26. If webmasters are planning to take down a website temporarily by removing the web pages in question, webmasters should post a maintenance page with relevant information like reason of maintenance, time of resumption, etc., to inform users about the status.

27. Any out-dated or obsolete web pages should be removed from the production site. If these “orphan” pages are still retained on-line, they may be accessible through the search results from search engines though no navigation path to the obsolete page is available. This may result in users getting incorrect or outdated information from the website. If the website is maintained and hosted by an external web-hosting company, the B/D concerned should ensure that all web pages are removed from the server of the company at the end of service contract or upon contract termination, as appropriate. Any obsolete domain names should also be de-registered as soon as they are not applicable.

28. Any remark statements in the source of web pages or script used during the development process or revision marks in documents should be removed before the website goes production. Any such information if not removed may open up opportunity for malicious attack. Test programme or script should also be removed from the production site since malicious attackers may make use of any vulnerability in these test programmes or scripts to compromise the website.

Online Forms

29. The online forms must be current. Receipt of the form should be acknowledged if reply email addresses are provided. It is also desirable to make clear to the users the expected response time of the requested service.

VII. Ensuring Content Accessibility

30. The usefulness of a website is largely enhanced if its messages can reach the widest possible audience. Ensure that web contents are delivered in an accessible form, taking into account the needs of persons with visual, mobility, hearing and cognitive impairments. In line with Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Government will take appropriate measures to promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet, to enable them to live independently and participate in all aspects of life.

31. Some typical examples of web accessibility issues for persons with disabilities include —

- websites with non-text elements such as graphics, pictures and images which cannot be transcribed into Braille or speech for the visually impaired;
- small text sizes and insufficient contrast between foreground and background colours may present difficulties for people with restricted vision and colour blindness;
- audio and visual content without text description may be difficult for those with hearing impairment to follow;
- people with mobility impairments may lack the dexterity or hand-eye coordination to use a mouse and they have to rely on the keyboard or some form of assistance device; and
- people with cognitive or learning difficulties such as dyslexia or attention deficit disorder require a logical order for content, simple and clear sentences, and graphical icons to aid navigation.

(A) Web Content Accessibility Standard

32. To ensure web accessibility, Government adopts the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (Version 2.0) (WCAG 2.0) promulgated by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). There are three levels of conformance —

- Level A provides basic accessibility for most Internet users;
- Level AA would generally enable persons with disabilities to use the website; and
- Level AAA provides the highest standards of accessibility.

Taking into account web impact and design, we believe that Level AA conformance should achieve the best balance for Government websites.

Nonetheless, we encourage B/Ds to incorporate enhancements as necessary to further improve the quality of accessibility having regard to the target audience of their websites. With effect from 1 January 2013, all government websites, except archive materials, must validate to W3C WCAG 2.0 Level AA conformance. Exceptions must be justified and explained in the website concerned.

The W3C WCAG 2.0 is based on four principles of accessibility, as follows —

- (a) **Perceivable:** information and user controls must be presented to users in ways they can perceive;
- (b) **Operable:** user control components and navigation must be operable by users;
- (c) **Understandable:** information and the operation of user interface must be understandable; and
- (d) **Robust:** content must be robust enough for reliable interpretation by a wide variety of web browsers, media players, and assistive technologies.

There are elaborate guidelines and criteria under each of these four principles. The complete list is available at <http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>. The following provides a gist of the key points.

Principle 1: Perceivable

- (a) **Text Alternatives:** Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element. This enables visually impaired persons to use assistive technologies to read the text alternatives, and hearing impaired persons to read the text alternatives to understand the audio content.
- (b) **Time-based Audio and Video Media:** Provide captions, transcripts and other alternatives for multimedia to enable understanding of the media content.
- (c) **Adaptable:** Create content that can be perceived in different ways and by assistive technologies without losing meaning, e.g. information conveyed through colours should also be available in text to facilitate people with colour-blindness.
- (d) **Distinguishable:** Make it easier for users to see and hear content, e.g. for visual presentations, this involves providing a sufficient colour contrast between the content and its background; and for audio presentations, a control of the background sound volume should be provided.

Principle 2: Operable

- (e) **Keyboard Accessible:** Make all functionality operable through a keyboard to facilitate persons who cannot use devices such as mouse but can operate keyboards through assistive technologies;
- (f) **Enough Time:** Provide users with enough time to read and use the content;
- (g) **Seizures:** Do not create content that flashes more than thrice in one second, as this may trigger seizure for some users;
- (h) **Navigable:** Help users navigate, find content and keep track of their locations within the website to minimise the amount of keystrokes required for locating the specific content they need.

Principle 3: Understandable

- (i) **Readable:** Make text content readable and understandable. Use proper grammar. Avoid unusual words, abbreviations, idioms, technical jargons or symbols which cannot be easily understood or identified by assistive technologies;
- (j) **Predictable:** Make content appear and operate in predictable ways;
- (k) **Input Assistance:** Help users avoid and correct mistakes as persons with disabilities may have difficulties in creating error-free input. This can be achieved by, for example, pre-empting errors through proper design, ensuring errors are easily noticed by users, and helping users understand how to correct the errors.

Principle 4: Robust

- (l) **Compatible:** As technologies change quickly and some assistive technology cannot always keep pace, maximise compatibility with all kinds and generations of common web browsers, media players and assistive technologies.

33. The GovHK website serves as a very good reference on accessibility as its design takes into account the needs of users of assistive tools such as screen readers or screen magnifying software for visually impaired people. B/Ds are encouraged to make reference to the relevant design considerations of GovHK webpage (<http://www.gov.hk/en/about/accessibility/>) and adopt relevant practices for their websites where appropriate.

(B) Portable Document Format File

34. Ensure that PDF files are also accessible to assistive technologies, such as screen reader and magnifying software. Produce a PDF file from a text-based source document so that it is readable by Braille devices used by people with visual impairment.

VIII. Presentation

35. The presentation of a website includes the site design, the use of different content formats and the assurance of site visibility. The appropriate use of technologies also plays a critical role in the presentation of web pages. Consistent website design through branding and navigation and site visibility should be ensured. Specific notes in producing and developing websites are provided in section IX.

(A) Common Look and Feel for Government Websites

36. In order to project the online brand image of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (“HKSARG”), to improve the navigability and usability of Government websites and to provide a consistent and user-friendly experience to web users, the Government announced in March 2003 the adoption of Common Look and Feel (“CLF”) for Government websites. For detailed specifications and guidelines on CLF, please see <http://itginfo.ccg.hksarg/content/clf/index.htm> (only for government internal access).

(B) Ensuring Site Visibility to Potential Users

37. A website needs to be visible to potential end users in order to be successful. Given the exponential growth in the number of websites and the diversity of potential users, techniques to ensure site visibility should be employed. Internally, the site should be configured to maximise its exposure in popular search engines. This requires the proper choice of meta data keywords and regular registration with the search engines.

(C) Providing Interactive Content

38. Stepping into the 21st century, providing interactive online service is a major trend in the delivery of public services. B/Ds should strengthen the interactive elements in their websites.

39. Apart from electronic services, such as filing of forms, renewal of licences and payment of bills, Government websites can also be interactive in information dissemination. In general, an interactive website is a client-centric site allowing users to find out easily the particular piece of information they ask for, instead of reading through the static information provided. There are various means to make a website interactive with the aid of new computer programmes. Some examples of interactive applications include those that allow users to set filters, those that present information according to users’ preference (e.g. selecting the preferred sections only in a web page), and those that can notify users (say via email) of information they are interested in.

40. While interactive content can improve upon traditional forms of “one-way” customer service, access to interactive content is dependent on the capabilities of the browser in use, and therefore may not be accessible to all users. To ensure accessibility to web content, a site should always provide alternatives for interactive services such as email links or phone numbers to make the service available through other non-interactive channels.

IX. Specific Notes in Producing and Developing Websites

1. Statements for collecting personal data online

41. There is increasing concern on the part of Internet users about the collection of their personal data without their knowledge when they are browsing Government websites. To address this concern and to secure users' confidence when accessing Government websites, B/Ds should include in their websites a prominent hotlink to their Privacy Policy Statement whenever personal data are collected. The statements should explicitly state whether "cookies" will be used to collect personal data of users. Policies on how the personal data are handled, including the purposes for which such data will be used following collection; the types of organisations to whom such data may be disclosed, etc. should also be included. Details about Personal Information Collection Statement and the Privacy Policy Statement can be found in the website of the Privacy Commissioner's Office at http://www.pcpd.org.hk/english/publications/files/pic_pps_e.pdf.

42. Even if the website does not collect personal data, Internet users may be concerned that the website could be collecting personally identifiable information about them without their knowledge. To allay such fears, the website needs to publish a privacy policy statement that explicitly states that no such information is collected.

43. The privacy policy statement should be on a page separate from the "Important Notices". B/Ds can make reference to the privacy policy of GovHK (www.gov.hk/en/about/privacy.htm). The privacy policy statement should also include a security statement. For example, if an online service uses encryption for transmission of sensitive data, include information on this in the statements.

2. Links to other websites

44. To boost visits to Government websites, it is advisable to accept creation of links from other websites provided such links will not degrade the public image of B/Ds or involve commercial gains. As for building up links from Government websites to other websites, B/Ds should be discreet and consider whether it may wrongly imply a closer relation with certain organisations, especially those commercial ones. In addition, a conscious policy is needed as more requests from similar sites may arise. When linking to non-government websites, it is advisable to display a disclaimer notice before the links are entered or clarify in the 'Important Notices' section that the links are for users' convenience and the information provided is the responsibility of that external source.

3. Links to Brand Hong Kong logo

45. B/Ds should also include a Brand Hong Kong logo with hyperlink to its websites (www.brandhk.gov.hk) to promote the visual identity of Hong Kong. The application guidelines of the Brand are available at the website.

4. Use of national and regional flags and emblems

46. If national and regional flags and emblems are used in the website design, please ensure compliance with the specifications set out in law. More details about the proper use of national and regional flags and emblems are available at the national and regional flags and emblems website at <http://www.protocol.gov.hk/flags/index.html>.

47. For the use of other flags and logos which have protocol implications, the Director of Protocol should be consulted.

5. Disclaimer

48. A disclaimer should contain the following general clauses and essential elements:

- (a) The information provided in the website is for reference only;
- (b) The Government gives no express or implied warranty to the accuracy of the information provided in the websites;
- (c) Should there be links from other websites to the Government website or if the present Government website will provide links to third parties' websites, the Government will not be responsible for the content of such websites;
- (d) The current website may contain information provided by other parties, and the Government has not approved nor endorsed the accuracy of such information;
- (e) Express denial of responsibility and liability for any loss or damage arising from contract, tort or any cause in connection with the Government website; and
- (f) Users/information seekers are encouraged to verify the authenticity of the information or seek independent advice before relying on the information.

6. Chat room and discussion groups

49. Although the provision of chat room and discussion groups may invite constructive ideas and create open discussion atmosphere among members of the public, it could also become a medium for the dissemination of obscene and indecent messages, foul words or even libellous statements. Such objectionable materials may be harmful to young users. Although B/Ds could filter out a list of objectionable wordings, it is by no means exhaustive. It is the responsibility of B/Ds to monitor their chat rooms and discussion groups very closely to prevent the dissemination of any objectionable materials in their websites. It is not advisable to leave the chat room and discussion groups unattended. The rules for posting should be clearly stated and there must be arrangements to delete postings which contravene the rules promptly. Before providing chat service in the websites, B/Ds should therefore balance the benefits that it can bring against the possible negative impact on the management of the websites.

7. Selecting contractors

50. B/Ds may consider setting up a selection panel for choosing a suitable contractor for designing websites. The panel should draw up a marking scheme to select the contractor that is likely able to produce web pages at a reasonable production cost and of required quality. The selection criteria should include design concepts to meet the requirements, relevant experience in designing websites and dedicated production team for the project. Generally speaking, B/Ds should:

- (a) Prepare invitation brief that clearly states services required;
- (b) Invite prospective contractors to present their design ideas and show relevant web pages before the selection panel; and
- (c) Conduct thorough discussion at the panel according to the marking scheme.

The selection should follow procedures in the procurement of services, and assistance from Supplies Officers would be useful.

X. Management of Government Websites

(A) Establishment of Working Group

51. Well-organised management of a website is one important factor contributing to its success. B/Ds are encouraged to set up a working group to contribute ideas on the content and to monitor the updating of the website.

(B) Duties of Working Group

52. The working group should meet regularly to deal with the following:

- (a) Identifying the target users;
- (b) Assessing the overall effectiveness of the websites;
- (c) Considering new interactive service and information;
- (d) Collecting and analysing users' feedback;
- (e) Ensuring timely updating; and
- (f) Developing an overall identity and specific themes and topics.

(C) Responding to Users' Feedback and Analysing Traffic Information

53. Users' feedback and traffic information provide site management with the information required for maintaining user relationship, ensuring that the site remains client-centric and technically efficient, and can support management decisions.

54. For B/Ds which have adopted the "CLF" design, the email address should be placed at the welcome page and the content page. For others that have not adopted CLF, the email address should be placed at the index page unless a page on Comments and Feedback is available. A form-type or mail-to-type interface should be incorporated. B/Ds with technically complex web pages may wish to provide different email addresses for email from the public seeking information, and communication of a technical nature intended for their webmasters. The full email addresses should be explicitly stated to facilitate users who wish to send messages via their own email application at a later time. B/Ds should implement measures to prevent harvesting of email addresses by spammers, e.g. use JavaScript to compose the email addresses for display and invoking the mail-to feature, while facilitating the visual-impaired users to read the email addresses.

55. B/Ds should have an email box to receive opinions or complaints and the email box should be checked frequently. B/Ds should alert Internet users to the fact that the emails they send are vulnerable to third-party interception. They should also inform Internet users of the mail address and fax number so that Internet users may choose to send messages by post or by fax. Letters sent by email should carry the same weight as those sent by mail or by fax. Complaints through email should therefore be treated in the same manner as those received from other channels. It is important that B/Ds should respond to emails expeditiously. B/Ds are encouraged to turn on the auto-reply function in email accounts to acknowledge the receipt of message if manual reply is not possible within a short period. Logistic arrangements should be put in place to ensure that email boxes are checked regularly and the emails be directed to the appropriate subject officers for action promptly. B/Ds should prevent their email boxes from being full and should consider not to apply anti-spamming measures to the email accounts for receiving public emails. B/Ds should consider forwarding the emails to internal email systems for storage and processing. If possible, a dedicated officer should be appointed to co-ordinate response to users' queries. Frequently asked questions and their answers should also be posted to minimise repeated enquiries on similar issues.

56. Capturing traffic statistics is essential for maintaining an up-to-date site that continually meets the needs of the users. The collection and analysis of these statistics would, among others, help:

- (a) Identify the most frequently accessed files and/or pages for consideration of additional information on the subject(s); and
- (b) Update users' profiles for drawing up more client-centric content.

(D) Training

57. The Civil Service Training and Development Institute of the Civil Service Bureau arranges training courses for officers, especially webmasters, to acquaint themselves with the Internet and basic skills in updating websites.

XI. Adoption of Latest Technologies

(A) Mobile Technology

58. Due to the increasing popularity of using mobile devices like mobile phones to access the Internet, B/Ds should consider developing websites with mobile versions in addition to the traditional desktop versions. This would facilitate the public to access Government information at any time ubiquitously.

(B) Internet Protocol version 6 (IPv6)

59. With the rapid growth of Internet usage, the address space of Internet Protocol version 4 (IPv4) will run out in the near future. IPv6 has emerged to address this problem and there is a need for Government websites to cater for both IPv4 and IPv6 users. Enhancement, revamping and development of websites should take this into account. B/Ds should consider the support of IPv6 in addition to the commonly used IPv4 when developing or revamping their websites.

XII. Copyright Issues on the Internet

60. B/Ds are reminded to observe copyright issues on the Internet and may approach the Intellectual Properties Department for advice.

Useful Links

The detailed technical guidelines on various aspects of website development and maintenance are available through the following links. Webmasters should make reference to the requirements in developing, managing and maintaining their websites.

- (a) Technical Notes on Website Development and Maintenance
http://www.ogcio.gov.hk/en/community/web_accessibility/doc/technical_notes.pdf
- (b) Flags and Emblems
<http://www.protocol.gov.hk/flags>
- (c) GovHK
<http://www.gov.hk/en/about/accessibility/>
http://www.gov.hk/en/about/os_residents.htm
<http://www.gov.hk/en/about/privacy.htm>
- (d) Guidelines for use of BrandHK
<http://www.brandhk.gov.hk/en/#/en/about/guidelines.html>
- (e) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Overview
<http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag.php>

The following links are only for government internal access –

- (f) Common Look and Feel (CLF)
<http://itginfo.ccgo.hksarg/content/clf/>
- (g) GovHK
<http://itginfo.ccgo.hksarg/content/ns/index.asp>