Response to the Public Consultation on 2007 Digital 21 Strategy

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1. Hong Kong has been successful in building an advanced digital communications infrastructure and, where it has been necessary, in developing an appropriate and reasonably flexible regulatory regime supported by legislation. Now is the time to shift the general focus of policy towards enabling and facilitating the availability and use of advanced digital services and applications, and encouraging local research and development and the capacity to innovate.

2. For the most part, services, applications and innovation will be market-led. It is notable that in contrast to Singapore, where island-wide initiatives have been very much government-led, the actual success and usage of broadband services seems to be greater in market-led Hong Kong. The conclusion should not be that there is little or no role for government, but that it should be guided by practical considerations, for example, in cases of market failure, and by the positive demonstration and knock-on effects that arise from well designed digital public services and applications, for example in the use of digital and broadband communications to support e-health, e-education, e-welfare, etc. I would like to see more detailed discussion on the range of future possibilities. Such initiatives are a logical next step following government online, e-procurement, etc. In this regard, it would be helpful if '*2007 Digital 21*' could provide an appendix summarizing, and possibly quantifying, the tangible benefits that have accrued to date. This could provide some benchmarks for the private sector, especially for medium-sized companies where the benefits may yet to be realized.

3. I find the major weakness of the proposed '*2007 Digital 21*' to be in the section on education and training, pages 30-32. Most evidence suggests that the supply of suitably qualified people coming out of schools and colleges and out of retraining schemes is insufficient. This issue is not very well addressed. But there is something beyond that. In all industries and sectors of the economy that rely upon the support of digital and broadband communications (which in one way or another is just about everyone) there is a huge gap between the business or commercial side and the technological side. Business managers have little understanding of the technology or the language of their technical staff, while technical staff often lacks a proper understanding of the commercial and business needs that their systems should be designed to support. This creates inefficiencies and failures. The education and training systems need to address this issue, for example by introducing business subjects into engineering and computer courses and IT subjects into business and commercial courses. In some cases university

departments, for example, are edging towards this as a way to make their courses attractive to students, but it is all *ad hoc*. There needs to be a much more orchestrated and comprehensive debate across the manpower, education and training sectors. '*2007 Digital 21*' should address this issue.

4. I find the balance within '*2007 Digital 21*' not quite right. There are (a) general statements regarding digital and broadband, (b) statements reviewing the current situation within Hong Kong and past actions by government, and (c) forward-looking statements. As a useful exercise before the final drafting of '*2007 Digital 21*' I would suggest the beta version starts with (c) statements, considers their adequacy in light of the feedback from the public consultation, and then asks the question: which parts of statements (a) and (b) are really necessary to place the (c) statements into context? This may result in a shorter document (less is better, more is worse, but appendices allow these rules to be broken!) and more importantly a more focused document in which the priorities stand out better.

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