Dear Sir/Madam,

Being a member of the Hong Kong IT sector, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my personal thoughts on the HKSAR Government's Digital 21 Strategy.

Although a strong supporter of this strategy, I do not believe that the "big picture" vision has so far been implemented in a coordinated and timely manner. Take for example, Hongkong Post's e-Cert program. Digital certificates of authenticity should be the foundation stones for ALL Internet-based interactions because they seek to ensure security of data transmissions across public networks and make use of a trusted third party (in our case, Hongkong Post) to "guarantee" the identity of each counter-party. However, and in spite of the offer of one year's free subscription at the time of receiving our new smart HKID cards, it is my perception that actual usage of e-Certs has remained very limited. And without wide adoption and usage digital certificates among the general public, it would not be practicable (or even possible) to launch a wide variety of e-Government (and e-commerce) services that (a) involve transmission of confidential information and/or (b) require the id
 entity of at least one of the participants in the data exchange to be independently verifiable.

If we in Hong Kong wish to become a more "digital" society, we would first need to solve this issue of low e-Cert adoption. I believe this can be done by (a) making e-Certs portable and much more simple to install/deploy, and (b) offering new applications illustrating the benefits of such certificates that the general public can relate to. We in the software sector have at times made the mistake of seeking to describe our products in too much detail when "keeping it simple" has inevitably been the best approach. For example, people do not need to be told how the new automated immigration "gates" at the airport, ferry terminals and Lowu work technically: all they need to understand is that they can complete their exit or entry procedure by using their smart HKID cards and thumb prints.

Lastly, my submission will not be complete without a mention of the Mainland. As you know, Beijing passed the Digital Signature Law in April 2005 and has to date licensed, I believe, more than a dozen entities to issue

nationally-recognised digital certificates. Also, various provincial-level e-Government applications have been launched over the past 12-15 months. However, we in Hong Kong still have a window of opportunity to influence the direction of the PRC's digital strategy - if we proceed in a coordinated and more timely manner - because we have one critical element that does not yet exist on the Mainland: the new smart HKID card program, which effectively eliminates the risk that e-Cert identities could be forged.

In both my personal as well as professional capacities, I very much hope that the Digital 21 vision will come to fruition.

Yours faithfully,
Jessica Chau