

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to offer my personal views on the HKSAR Government ' s 2007 Digital 21 Strategy, from the perspective of someone who has invested in software and other hi-tech businesses in Hong Kong and elsewhere.

The Internet has certainly brought about business efficiencies as well as lifestyle improvements. The ability to file declarations electronically has reduced the time as well as the amount of paperwork required for local customs clearance while Internet banking has enabled many of us to reduce the frequency of waiting in line at our local bank branches.

However, because it is a shared network accessible by all, certain persons have exploited the Internet unscrupulously, from sending out unsolicited electronic mailings to perpetrating crimes such as frauds and "electronic thefts". I believe that growing concerns about the integrity of communications on this global network - in terms of whether the information reaches the intended party/ies (and no one else) and/or can be illegally accessed while in transit without anyone knowing - and fears of being tricked into providing valuable data (such as credit card information) to parties that turn out to be imposters present very real barriers to broader levels and range of Internet usage.

The HongkongPost ' s e-Cert program should have been the ideal solution to address such concerns, in particular because this program is firmly anchored by the Smart HKID card scheme so that there is virtually no risk of persons being able to use forged identities to obtain e-Certs. The fact that e-Certs have not been widely used up to this point has, in my opinion, been due to the general public's lack of understanding of the benefits of such digital certificates coupled with the complicated process for their installation and deployment. Furthermore, once installed onto a particular PC, an e-Cert cannot currently be "ported" to another device, thus reducing its usefulness in an increasing mobile society where Internet access is available on any computer or PDA.

I believe the way forward should be for the HKSAR Government to work with the private sector to develop e-Government applications that can easily

demonstrate the value of e-Certs: providing security for Internet transactions and having a trusted authority (HongKongPost) vouch for the identity of the counter-party/ies. There is precedent for this: the creation of TradeLink to offer electronic customs declaration and related settlement services.

TradeLink targeted a very specific and niche set of business applications; surely, it is now time for the roll-out of a range of broader business as well as consumer-related services that can highlight the value of e-Certs. Having said that, I do not believe any such roll-out will be successful unless digital certificates can be made (1) easy (and intuitive) to use/deploy, and (2) portable. For example, imagine all of us being able to participate in local elections from any PC anywhere in the world, or to be able to have e-Cert as the mechanism to access our medical data from different locations (e.g., different hospitals or doctors' offices) just as we are currently able to review our bank account details anywhere via Internet banking services.

Lastly, I recognise that much work will need to be done - including the making of possible legislative and/or regulatory changes - to turn what I have proposed into reality. However, if we as a society wish to remain at the forefront of the digital "revolution", then we should be willing to devote sufficient financial and human resources to achieve our objectives. This way forward should also provide a boost to the local IT sector, providing further employment opportunities for those involved in creating and maintaining an entirely new range of Net-based applications and services for Hong Kong and perhaps for other cities/provinces on the Mainland as well.

Yours faithfully,  
Winston Leong