Hong Kong Information Technology Federation

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For the attention of:

Office of the Government Chief Information Officer
20/F, West Wing, Central Government Offices,
2 Tim Mei Avenue,
Tamar, Hong Kong

digital21@ogcio.gov.hk

30th November 2013

Dear Sir,

2014 Digital 21 Strategy Public Consultation

The Hong Kong Information Technology Federation (HKITF) is a non-profit association which has the objective of promoting IT business in Hong Kong. HKITF provides a forum for IT-related businesses in Hong Kong to work together, and also to network with international IT companies. Over the years, HKITF has developed into a dynamic and highly respected organization with over 300 members and works closely with the Government to develop Hong Kong's IT industry. In recent years, HKITF has advised the Government in detail on policy matters, including anti-spam, intellectual propert rights and IT quality. HKITF represents the industry on the Telecommunications Regulatory Affairs & Telecommunications Users and Consumers Advisory Committee of the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA); The Consumer Council and Occupational Safety and Health Council (OSHC) etc.

Please find HKITF's attached comments on the Digital 21 Strategy document. For your ease of use, you will see that these comments have been structured with reference to the Government's own stated four-thrust Strategies.

1.   Empowering Everyone

In HKITF's view, the Government needs to ensure that while we are empowering citizens with greater access to technology, public education on intellectual property (IP) rights should be highlighted. A healthy IP environment is both important to the local ICT industry's development and also to attract investment and technology innovators to Hong Kong. It is therefore vital that copyright law in Hong Kong continues to be updated to stay in line with other international jurisdictions (such as Europe and the US). Together with this, the Government must ensure that IP infringements are properly tackled, and that the relevant law enforcement agencies (such as customs and the police) are properly equipped to deal with infringers. We hope that the Government will ensure that the strengthening of the current legal framework of IP protection is seen as an important goal of the Digital 21 Strategy, and one that is necessary to ensure Hong Kong's long-term ICT future. Besides IP protection, the Government also needs to constantly review Hong Kong law to ensure that it continues to enable businesses to operate in a digital economy.

Talent shortage has been one of the bottlenecks to the healthy development of ICT industry. We are encouraged to see the Government putting programming into every child's education. In addition, we believe that the Government should also invest into building a positive image of the ICT industry. As seen in a study[1] conducted earlier in 2013, secondary students' interest towards an ICT career ranges from 31%-44%. Whereas the actual enrolment in ICT related disciplines in universities are much lower than this percentage. The HKITF suspect that this is largely due to the negative perception towards the prospect of the ICT industry. To counter this perception, we believe the Government should invest into raising public awareness of the diverse career choices in the ICT industry and the important role our industry plays in all other industries.

We would encourage the Government to take further steps in the field of security to assist with eradicating phishing, identity theft, computer viruses and worms. This would increase consumers' and businesses' confidence in transacting online. HKITF recognizes that good security depends upon many factors, including security features in ICT but also how well such features are used and updated. Education as to potential threats also increases security on the basis that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. We therefore advocate a policy of education and guidance for consumers and the industry combined with one of encouraging development of new security features (including support for companies through R&D).

2. Igniting Business Innovation

The HKITF encourages the Government to take further steps to position Hong Kong as an economy where new technologies can thrive, and to cooperate with international ICT developers in this regard. We believe that such an investment would be beneficial to persuade developers to further invest in Hong Kong. When working with the industry on Public Sector Information initiative, the Government should consider publish a roadmap of data to be made public, scope of data and schedule, from different bureaus. This can help facilitate the industry to plan their resources better.

Hong Kong has a world class IT infrastructure which is ideal for cloud service adoption. The HKITF believes that the Government should step up its public education effort to ease community's concern over security and privacy; and encourage cloud service adoption, especially in the SME sector. In addition, cloud service has also transformed how companies invest in IT, namely shifting capital investment to operational expenses. As a result, the Government should review its various funding models and incentive schemes, for SMEs and schools, to ensure such support schemes do not discourage cloud service adoption. Through public education and financial incentives, the HKITF believes that more SMEs and schools will see the benefits of cloud and leverage this opportunity to raise their productivity and competitiveness.

Today, ICT is converging at a rapid rate and there needs to be a clear focus on ensuring that different ICT solutions are interoperable and that there are clear technology standards. However, once again we consider that it is not the role of the Government to set these standards or to ensure interoperability itself. The market will take steps in this direction since it is ultimately in both the industry's and the consumer's interest that this takes place. In addition, it is also important that the Government continues to foster an environment in which the selection of ICT is made according to market forces and is based upon the principle of neutrality. ICT should only ever be selected on its merits. People must be permitted to make the decision that is best for them when considering all pertinent factors, including price, solution and fit. The best thing that any Government can do is to enable as wide a choice of ICT for consumers as possible to ensure that the best solutions always lead the market.

3. Supporting a Thriving ICT Industry

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[1] "「資訊及通訊科技」使用取向及習慣調查" by the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong at http://www.icity.asia/

Startup is an important component of the ICT industry. It would be more efficient if OGCIO, before launching its one-stop platform for startups, can review the various resources, public (such as the www.startmeup.hk portal under InvestHK) and private, currently available and their effectiveness. The Government can further play a facilitator's role, link innovators with industry players and promoting Hong Kong as the Asia hub for technology startups.

4. Transforming and Integrating Public Services

Over the years, the Government has been taking proactive steps in adopting new technologies to improve productivities and efficiency. The results and effectiveness of the past investment varies from bureau to bureau. The HKITF believes that the Government should consider setting up a Technology and Communication Bureau (TCB) to lead and coordinate Government-wide technology investment. This can help propel innovative citizen service across the board, ensure interoperability and best practice sharing. In addition, the Bureau can also play a vital role through working with other bureaus and statutory bodies to ensure that 1) technology is well developed for the needs of other industries and; 2) other industry's guidelines are updated to reflect the changing nature of technology service. An example would be for the Bureau to work with the Hong Kong Monetary Authority on crowd-funding for startups and cloud service adoption guidelines for the financial institutes.

5. Summary of Comments

HKITF has witnessed the Government take some important steps in recent years to ensure that Hong Kong remains in pole position as a digital economy, where its citizens can embrace the full benefits of technology. However, we urge the Government to help Hong Kong develop even further in a structured, yet market-driven way. Only by facilitating collaboration and industry-led developments, will the Government be maximizing Hong Kong's recognized position as the most forward-looking city in Asia.

We are grateful for this opportunity to provide our comments. We hope that you find them useful, and we look forward to receiving your response.

For and on behalf of
Hong Kong Information Technology Federation,

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Francis Fong (FCIS, FCS, FHKCS)
President
Hong Kong Information Technology Federation