Are you being (electronically) served?

e-government

services

GovHK is a one-stop-shop for online government services

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Fuji Xerox a distinguished history

Ranked No.1 in Hong Kong colour document management systems for 10 consecutive years.

Apeos represents Fuji Xerox’s vision of creating a virtual open office that links mission-critical data with paper-based systems seamlessly. In Apeos, users can freely share, collaborate and utilise knowledge, data and information from both intra- and inter-office networks - all in a highly secure environment.

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*IDC Asia/Pacific Semiannual Copier Tracker, 2H 2002; IDC Asia/Pacific Quarterly Laser MFP Tracker, Q4 2006

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Check: www.cw.com.hk for daily news and online features.
Steampunk’d in ‘08

Every new technology has its own adoption-curve. Early adopters start speaking a language few understand—while they try to snare venture capital. Then a few enterprises deploy the technology as part of their business processes. If “critical mass” is achieved, the tech receives mainstream acceptance.

All technology was new and unproven at some point. When I started using email in 1994, few businesses (even in Silicon Valley) viewed it as a business tool. BBSs (bulletin board services) were the precursor to Usenet forums, which preceded today’s blogs and forums. Every technology you take for granted was unproven at some point in time, and plagued with detractors and naysayers.

This includes the electric power grid. In the early 20th century, many enterprises had a CxO-level employee whose job was to monitor electrical power and liaise with authorities to ensure a consistent supply. Nowadays we just plug in our gear and expect it to work. But there was a point where captains of industry argued over whether AC or DC would become the standard, and whether a steady supply of electrical power would ever be trustworthy.

Which brings me to “steampunk.” If, like me (or my colleague John Tanner), you’re a regular reader of boingboing.net, you know about this cultural phenomenon: a melding of pre-electric Victorian-era “steam-powered” technology with an edgy modern ethos. People have modified laptops, desktops and iPods with “steampunk” styling: brass fittings, aged wood-effects, welded metal-pipe accents.

Steampunk is an aesthetic, not a functionality, so perhaps, but never dull.

of living in interesting times. Good and bad by turns. Forgive me for my view of a “future-past,” we enjoy the luxury of looking at IT security today.

We at CWHK wish all our readers a smooth ride upfront
SWISS SEES RELIABILITY SOAR WITH WINDOWS SERVER, CHECKS RED HAT AT GATE

Global Airline’s Migration Yields 99.95% Reliability

BY MICHAEL BETTENDORY

ZURICH—Swiss International Air Lines (SWISS), Switzerland’s national airline, serves 70 destinations around the world with 6,500 employees in 105 branch offices. Today, 14% of SWISS’s total ticket sales are processed through its online flight booking system at Swiss.com, with volume increasing by 30% per year. 24x7 operations are critical for this site because of its importance to the airline’s business, but the original Red Hat Linux-based booking system was not meeting SWISS’s requirements. So the airline began its search for a more reliable platform.

Reliability also drives market perception in the airline industry, according to SWISS CIO Frank Meyer, “In our business, having a plane in the maintenance hangar is not good for our image. It is the same for our online service—people expect it to be up and running,” says Meyer.

After an intensive evaluation, Meyer and his team chose Windows Server 2003 and .NET. Since migrating the online booking system to Windows Server, SWISS has seen reliability rise to 99.95%. In addition, while the previous Red Hat Linux-based system could only handle 250 concurrent users, the new system can now handle significantly more traffic than that. Meyer is confident about the effect of these changes: “Moving uptime to 99.95% while increasing performance to handle a greater number of users enables our team to easily handle the 30% growth we are seeing in our online sales.”

For the full Swiss story, plus other case studies and independent research findings on the reliability of Windows Server versus Linux, visit www.microsoft.com/reliable.

STUDY: Side effects of reliability can include smiling, calmness

A study released today shows significant mood improvement in IT executives such as Frank Meyer (left) when they experience Windows Server reliability.

"Windows Server has given us the reliability to grow our online services and differentiate ourselves from the competition. With Linux, we didn’t get the reliability or flexibility we needed.”

— Frank Meyer, CIO, SWISS
Asia IT market set to power forward, says Springboard Research

Leading Asian economies like China and India are likely to maintain growth momentum in 2008 despite the ongoing credit crisis in the US, said IT market research firm Springboard Research in its recently released “2008 Asia Pacific IT Predictions” executive brief.

The executive brief is based on interviews with CIOs and IT decision makers at leading organizations in the region.

“In contrast to the ongoing credit crisis in the U.S. and the upward swing in energy prices there, leading Asian economies in countries like China and India, are likely to maintain their growth momentum in 2008. Other economies in the region, such as in Australia, Singapore and Korea, are also likely to maintain their current momentum,” said Dane Anderson, CEO & EVP of Research at Springboard Research.

“Springboard Research believes that Asian organizations will continue to significantly invest in technology products and services,” added Anderson.

According to the executive brief, other key predictions for 2008 also include:

- Virtualization will make steady headway in both large and mid-sized companies;
- Cost savings will drive green IT investments;
- Business organizations become more appreciative of consumer-driven technologies and applications;
- Skill shortages will hit vendors, IT management and the investment plans of many organizations;
- IT governance and risk management will be critical issues in IT organizations in 2008;
- Unified communications will steadily gain traction;
- Consolidation in the software industry will continue; and
- India emerges as a lucrative IT outsourcing market.

“Asia’s likely to maintain its growth momentum. China’s likely to maintain IT growth momentum. A substantial portion of Asian IT investments will be new investments and will come from organizations scaling up their IT systems or building entirely new ones to drive business,” said Ravi Shekhar Pandey, senior market analyst for Springboard Research.

“On a macro level, there are several factors driving IT investment, it is on the micro level where we are seeing the real action. In 2008, CIOs will be concerned with challenges like reducing the cost of IT operations, improving business application performance, finding and retaining skilled technical people, and identifying technologies that integrate closely with the enterprise’s business goals,” Pandey added.

Google still has a long way to go in the enterprise

While Google continues to clean up in the search engine market on the Web, far outpacing its closest rivals—the enterprise search market is a much different story, according to analysts, who said Google has a lot to learn about bringing its search technology into large enterprises.

In the consumer search market, the Internet company’s dominance couldn’t be more pronounced. Recent numbers by Hitwise, a research firm that measures search engine audiences, showed that Google continues its chokehold on the consumer search market, accounting for 65 percent of all searches in the United States last month. The nearest rival, Yahoo, trailed Google with 21 percent, followed by MSN.com (7 percent) and Ask.com (4 percent).

Google showed a 5 percent increase over last year, while Yahoo grew by 1 percent.

But search experts said Google’s dominance on the consumer search market won’t translate into significant market share among business users until it customizes its search appliance to meet the needs of old legacy systems and complex IT infrastructures.

According to analysts, Google’s Search Appliance lacks good administration features for corporate IT departments as they try to ensure that the tool connects properly with back-end databases that have been around for years (or, in some cases, decades).

“You can’t just plug it in and have it work,” said Sue Feldman, an IDC analyst who specializes in search. Feldman estimated that the Google search appliance for businesses accounts for only 1 percent (or less) of the company’s overall revenue of US$10 billion.

Meanwhile, Chris Sherman, president of consultancy Searchwise, said that other players in the corporate search market, such as Verity, Autonomy and Fast, have worked at perfecting customized user interfaces and strong back-end support to capitalize on Google’s weaknesses.

“Google allows tweaks to its user interface, but they don’t give you anywhere near the customization that others [enterprise search companies] do,” he said.

—Compiled by CWHK staff

NetApp to purchase US-based Onaro
NetApp has signed a definitive merger agreement with US-based private company Onaro. The combination of NetApp and Onaro will help enterprise organizations increase data center and storage network efficiencies by proactively managing and optimizing storage service levels for availability and performance in dynamic data center environments.

Nortel powers unified communications at Hilton Beijing
Nortel has brought the benefits of unified communications to guests and staff at Hilton Beijing, integrating the hotel’s in-house phone system, front-desk management system and broadband Internet services anywhere, anytime. The new network simplifies personalized communications services for individual or groups with voicemail, wakeup calls and advanced information services that can be self-configured by guests from touch-screen IP phones in their rooms.

Blue Coat wins Gammon contract
Gammon Construction, one of Asia’s top construction contractors, has deployed Blue Coat Systems’ ProxySG and ProxyAV appliances at its Hong Kong headquarters and its regional offices in China, Singapore, and Macau. The new implementation is designed to accelerate business applications and secure Web communications across the wide area network and distributed Internet gateway connection points for the company.
Macau hosts e-governance conference

The 1st International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV2007) took place in Macao during 10-13 December 2007. ICEGOV2007 was co-organized by the Center for Electronic Governance at United Nations University-International Institute for Software Technology (UNU-IIST-EGOV) and other organizations. The conference was attended by about 200 participants from 50 countries. Practitioners, developers and researchers from government, academia, industry NGOs shared findings in the theory and practice of electronic governance in the conference, through invited talks, tutorial-workshop events, panel discussions and paper sessions.

According to Dr Tomasz Janowski, head of the Centre for Electronic Governance, UNU-IIST-EGOV, Macau, the Institute was set up in Macau in 1992. Its mission: to help developing countries’ software industry building and use of IT, focusing on e-governance, training and collaboration across governments and academia. The organization has collaborated with Macau government on an online project since 2004—www.emacao.gov.mo—aimed at assisting the Macau government in software infrastructure, organization improvement and IT training.

Dr Janowski said that Macao’s e-governance readiness assessment is high (the main Macau government portal can be seen at: http://www.gov.mo/egi/Portal/rkw/public/view/sitemap.jsp). He added that e-governance is not just about providing online government services, but about improving internal governmental organization.

Macau to launch light transit system in 2011

The Macau government published a final plan to build its long-awaited light rail network in October. The first phase is expected to start in the second half of 2008 and complete in 2011 at a cost of HK$4.2 billion.

The 20km line will run along the eastern and southern edges of the Macau peninsula and onto Taipa Island through a bridge, starting from the Border Gate checkpoint and ending at the Taipa Ferry Terminal. The route passes through the populous northern district to the Hong Kong-Macao Ferry Terminal, central commercial district, and Macau Airport and terminates at the Cotai Strip. The plan include 23 stations with a planned capacity of 16,000 passengers per hour.

The proposed system is driverless and runs on rubber tires, similar to the Singapore Light Rapid Transit system. The tracks will be a mix of elevated guideways and underground tunnels. The government has also reserved conditions for the light rail to link up with the PRD (Pearl River Delta) cross-city light rail in the foreseeable future.

—Compiled by Swallow Xu

Local e-payment cards flourish in Macau

Macau’s first stored-value smart card, the Macau Pass, is now in use on buses and at convenience stores and beverage vendor machines in the city. The card is issued and managed by Macau Pass S.A, which aims to expand its use into supermarkets and car parks in Macau, and into Shenzhen through cooperation with Union Pay (China). Meanwhile, Portugal-based MediaCard (http://www.mediacard-pt.com/ingles/index.html) is reportedly in negotiations with several of Macau’s gaming operators to offer an electronic method of payment at casinos.

Ericsson selected by CTM as telco-provider for the Venetian

In November 2007, Ericsson was selected by Macau’s leading telco CTM (Companhia de Telecomunicações de Macau) as the end-to-end integrator of indoor coverage to the Venetian Macao-Resort-Hotel. Ericsson’s turnkey in-building solution will enable seamless coverage across 2G and 3G networks for both commercial GSM/EDGE/WCDMA and CDMA, said Ericsson in a statement. The Swedish firm supplied the telecommunications backbone for all event participants and exhibitors of the Mobile Asia Congress (www.ericsson.com/ericsson/events/mobile_asia_congress/index.shtml), held at the Venetian November 12-15.

Crown Macau uses progress software to integrate gaming applications and business Processes

Last August, Crown Macau, a major project of gaming giant Melco PBL Entertainment, selected Progress Software Corporation, a leading provider of application infrastructure software, to develop, deploy, integrate and manage business applications, to integrate the management of its various gaming and other service systems with the hotel’s corporate enterprise and applications. Progress Software solutions enable Crown Macau, to integrate its business applications, including Crown Macau Casino’s gaming management system and other customer service operations, to deliver a unique standard of service to its patrons.

Bank of China Macau and CTM jointly launch New IT’s Mobile Banking

In January, a service called New IT’s Mobile Banking Service was launched by Bank of China Macau. It enables customers to perform banking transactions and investment activities, bill payments, fund transfers or investments through CTM’s WeWap mobile Internet portal. Apart from general banking transactions and forex trading, New IT’s new service also provides instant stock quotations and stock-trading, enabling customers to learn about the latest market trends and investment opportunities. The new service pledges more security as it is only accessible by pre-registered SIM cards.
The mega event of the information and communications technology (ICT) industry, the awards presentation ceremony of the Hong Kong ICT Awards 2007, was held on January 21, 2008 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. The Financial Secretary, The Honourable John C. Tsang, JP, officiated at this remarkable event as the Guest-of-Honour and presented the trophies to all winners of the grand awards. Mr. Tsang also presented the “Award of the Year” to the most outstanding contender of this year.

The Awards received great support from the industry, and attracted numerous applications. The competition was intensive; the Judging Panels had to pick the winners of each category from 330 entries. With Grand Award Winners of each category received their trophies and blessing, it marked the completion of the Hong Kong ICT Awards 2007.

The Hong Kong ICT Awards were established in 2006 as a collaborative effort among the industry support organisations, ICT professionals, academia and the Government, with the aim to building a large scale and internationally recognised branding of ICT awards of Hong Kong. The Awards aim to recognise, promote and commend the excellent achievements to which Hong Kong ICT professionals and organisations contribute. The Awards also encourage local practitioners to develop innovative and creative ICT solutions, which will uplift the image of Hong Kong ICT sectors, both locally and internationally.

The Hong Kong ICT Awards 2007 is supported by The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, HKSAR, and co-organised by seven local ICT industry-related organisations. There is one Grand Award in each award category and an “Award of the Year” is selected among the seven Grand Awards by the Grand Judging Panel. The seven participating organisations and their award categories are: Hong Kong Computer Society’s Best Business Award, Hong Kong Council of Social Service’s Best Digital Inclusion Award, Hong Kong Digital Entertainment Association’s Best Digital Entertainment Award, Hong Kong Information Technology Federation’s Best Lifestyle Award, Hong Kong Institution of Engineers – IT Division’s Best Public Service Application Award, Hong Kong Wireless Technology Industry Association’s Best Ubiquitous Networking Award, and Internet Professional Association’s Best Innovation & Research Award.

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www.hkictawards.hk
PCCW Limited

Mobile services are continually undergoing rapid evolution and at the forefront of this dynamic change is Hong Kong’s PCCW mobile. Often seen as complex and confusing, mobile service plans involving multimedia have not always been so well received by consumers and professionals but PCCW mobile has introduced the industry’s first fully integrated bundled service offering a complete mobile infotainment service.

Key services include the world’s first real-time TV broadcast service via a 3G network and also the largest mobile music library in Hong Kong. “NOW Sports on mobile” service is the first to provide full live big-league football match coverage on, while “MOOV on mobile” provides more than 100,000 local and international songs and music videos via streaming technology, without the need for downloading.

This ground-breaking platform enables subscribers to tailor their own lifestyles with a rich mix of innovative mobile services, such as real-time TV, streamed digital music, shared viewing of photos and video clips, remote monitoring, ticketing, push email and an integrated fixed/mobile office communications solution.
Two heads better than one

Why you need more than one software vendor

The conventional wisdom is that it’s always better to have fewer software vendors—or even a single vendor—to manage than it is to use multiple vendors. Now that, according to a recent Forrester Research report, there are only 17 large independent software vendors left, it’s a good time to reevaluate this closely held belief.

CIOs who subscribe to the “one-throat-to choke” approach to vendor management typically think about it in one of two ways: Either they want to get the various company departments that run different tools to agree to a single provider or they want to forestall deployment of new tools until their big enterprise vendor supplies them. The goal is to, one way or the other, achieve a standard platform and make running IT easier.

Why vendor standardization is wrong

At the core of the desire for standardization has always been the desire to optimize IT at the expense of business constituents who prefer (or believe they need) a variety of different tools to do their jobs. By reducing the number of software products to support, limiting the number of vendors to call with a problem and minimizing potential behind-the-scenes data complexity, the IT job will be easier and overall support costs will be reduced. This optimization may, however, engender substantial employee frustration during a switch to IT’s preferred tool.

Another questionable justification for standardization has always been that integrating products from multiple vendors along with the data from multiple systems costs much more than standardizing on fewer vendors. Unfortunately, few IT departments compare the potential costs of integration with the costs of dependency on one vendor’s product. With fewer vendors in the IT portfolio, CIOs limit their negotiating leverage; vendors won’t budge on terms if they don’t think they have competition.

Meanwhile, standardization produces unfortunate side effects. Business constituents wait endlessly for that elusive next version or conversion. Resentment of the IT department bubbles and boils as end users’ favorite tools are retired or new tools lack functionality that users want.

Five ways to reverse a flawed strategy

Given the downsides to the one-throat-to-choke approach, should IT organizations abandon it? In some cases, such as in prime contractor service vendor relationships (where a single consulting firm manages relationships with smaller subcontractors), it may be useful. But in the world of software, having one throat to choke has virtually no benefit. Enterprises need leverage with vendors to manage and maintain costs that can get out of hand as their organizations grow and the software market shrinks. Here are five ways to maintain your leverage.

1. Prioritize a common data model over common software. Sometimes IT migrates to a single software vendor but doesn’t get around to running identical application versions, or worse, enables users to enter nonstandard data. Making data usable is more important than having a standard version or vendor. Getting agreement on the data model is more difficult than decrewing a software standard, but the business results are more compelling than the number of vendors you use.

2. Retain more than one vendor in every important category. Even though it may be tempting to reduce IT support costs by limiting vendors to one, maintaining multiple products in a strategic software category protects your future leverage. Even if switching costs are high, you should keep vendors guessing by continually reminding them of their competitors’ unique and state-of-the-art product and service benefits.

3. Maintain your balance of power with competitive or reference bids. Vendors know that if you are fully dependent on their products, you will have difficulty eliminating them. Keep them guessing about how much you need them. One mid-market CIO I know attends the user conferences held by his current vendor’s competition, meets with the competitor’s salespeople, solicits bids from them, and considers their products for new deployments and at upgrade time.

4. Support third-party vendors. The struggles of third-party ERP maintenance provider Tomorrow Now (which competed with, then was bought by and is now being sold by SAP) raises the question of why more CIOs don’t support independent maintenance providers. Are CIOs so dependent on a vendor’s feature upgrades in subsequent product versions that they give in to vendors’ threats to withhold them if maintenance is canceled? Think about whether you really want those upgrades. IT execs can band together to find the capital to fund third-party services and products they need to sustain their independence and leverage.

5. Assess your portfolio for acquisition probability. Finally, take a close look at your portfolio to identify your greatest vulnerabilities. Figure out which software products are likely to be acquired-putting future product innovation at risk—and specify contractually any code escrow terms that preserve your options.

The end result? Those business constituents will be happy to hear that you will leave them alone to use Cognos or Hyperion or whatever application they want. Now, if only they will agree on the proposed standard definition of a customer name and address.

Laurie M Orlov does research and consulting on business and technology strategy. She is a former vice president and principal analyst at Forrester Research.
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The insider

Bruce Schneier, founder and CTO of Counterpane, outlines the cybercrime landscape enterprises face today. He explains to CWHK’s Stefan Hammond that insiders are a problem, managed security services are a solution, and a determined crew with a chainsaw and a truck is a big problem

CWHK: Computer security never seems to get better, only worse. Why?

Bruce Schneier: Because security is fundamentally not a technology problem—it’s a people problem. And while the technology continues to improve, increasing complexity makes the problem worse.

It’s war. But it’s much more interesting, and it’s always pervasive.

CWHK: It used to be “script-kiddies” writing goofy viruses, but it’s more dangerous nowadays.

BS: Starting about five years ago, hacking shifted from a hobbyist activity to a criminal professional activity. We see that in the structure of current viruses and worms, and in the rise of spam, identity theft and fraud. Current threats represent criminal pursuit—it is a for-profit venture. And criminals are far more dangerous than hackers.

They are also far more professional. Large-scale cybercrime is difficult. Stealing the money is only the first step. Then you have to move the money into a dummy account, probably offshore, and then convert it into something you can withdraw and use. So there’s an entire financial background that has to be built in order to make this work.

So this crime is moving upmarket. We’re seeing organized-crime gangs using identity theft and other online fraud as a way to make serious money. They’re mostly coming out of Russia and eastern Europe.

CWHK: Why those areas?

BS: Because of the lack of serious law enforcement. Russia/eastern Europe is the primary breeding ground for this kind of criminal activity. Asia is second. Then sub-Saharan Africa and South America. Basically, you’re looking for a place with ineffective computer crime laws, bribable police forces, and no extradition treaties. So you look for places where the police aren’t going to bother. After all, if you’re stealing from banks outside their country, why should they bother?

CWHK: How much do you estimate is currently being stolen by cybercriminals?

BS: We have no idea. So much isn’t even reported, and there are many instances where the victims don’t even know they’re being attacked.

CWHK: Do you see any progress in enforcement?

BS: Not really. It comes down to where the “push” is. The US government has terrorism as its highest priority, so they’re pushing ID cards and focusing on airport security. Meanwhile the media industries are pushing Digital Rights Management for music and movies. No one’s pushing cybercrime—it’s not “sexy.”

To help with enforcement, we really need good information-sharing—for example, on Interpol. We need unified laws and ways to prosecute across borders. But our fear of this terrorism is sucking up the energy that would have gone into fighting cybercrime.

CWHK: OK, but we’re talking about a lot of money that’s being systematically stolen.

BS: It’s systematic and it could greatly affect the future of the Internet. We’re not yet at the point where people are saying: “this e-commerce thing is dangerous.” But it could happen. How many more basis-points do we have to lose before people start to seriously question the safety of Internet commerce, before everyone’s got a story about a friend of theirs who lost a lot of money? We’re at the cusp of what could be a serious crisis of confidence, and the Net’s moving faster than a lot of our existing processes.

CWHK: Law enforcement tends to move slower than Net speed, but do want to catch the bad guys. What should they be doing that they’re not?

BS: We need to get better at prosecuting. Security comes from deterrence, and that means higher conviction rates and better sentences. How you get those is through better crime laws, a better conviction-rate, and more savvy police. It’s an economic problem; we need to raise the cost, and risk, of being a criminal.

CWHK: On an enterprise-level, what can an individual enterprise do to help “lock things down”?

BS: The same thing you do in a world where you can’t trust the police: you have to do it yourself. You hire private security. On the Internet, that means buying firewalls, IDSs, and hopefully hiring Counterpane to monitor them. You have to take charge of doing your own security, because you can’t rely on greater society doing it for you.

CWHK: In-house or outsourced?

BS: Either is fine. The trend now is towards outsourcing, which makes sense for many reasons. But even if it’s something as simple as putting in a firewall, you can’t rely on society—you must purchase security.

CWHK: We read reports of online gaming being targeted for extortion.
BS: Yes. Online gaming, online gambling, online porn: the “fringe” industries. Those are the main targets right now.

There’s no publicity on this, but it is moving mainstream. It’s not the biggest companies that get hit. The huge multinationals—the ones with their names on top of the buildings—they’re not gonna fall for it. But the medium-sized companies are likely to write the check. It’s an interesting crime-niche that we’re seeing a lot more frequently now, but no one will speak on the record—victims don’t want to draw attention to themselves.

CWHK: But people will pay.

BS: Oh yes, definitely. People have paid.

CWHK: But doesn’t that give incentive to the criminals to go out and find new targets?

BS: It gives them the incentive to find somebody else. If you’re a criminal, and I can make you attack some other party, I win. It’s a classic “prisoner’s dilemma” problem: individual interests are contrary to group interests.

CWHK: How does that work?

BS: The way it works is that the amount is low enough, so you pay up and the bad guys leave you alone. It’s a protection racket. The incentive for governmental bodies may be to get rid of the crime, but the incentive for the company is to deflect it. If I’m a store running a security system, and a burglar attacks the store next door, that’s a win. But if I’m a police department, that’s a failure—I haven’t reduced the crime rate. So a lot of people who succumb to the extortion are really saying to the bad guys: here’s some money, go away and attack somebody else. Preferably my competitors.

To break this cycle, government needs to step in with greater deterrence measures.

CWHK: We’re talking about cybersecurity, but of course physical security is part of the equation.

BS: I just blogged about an incident: somebody broke into a datacenter and stole a lot of data. And they did it with a chainsaw and a truck.

They cut a hole in the wall and stole ten servers. Of course the data was unencrypted because the servers were live online. It’s probably an inside job: someone knew what to take, where the cameras were, and what wall to cut through.

CWHK: More and more, insiders are coming under scrutiny as cybercrime risks.

BS: Sure, but that’s been true forever. For enterprises, the weakest link is often the insider problem. Your people can cause havoc within your organization, so you have to hire trustworthy people, you have to minimize the amount that you trust them, and you do some education on good practices.

CWHK: Which are?

BS: Don’t take work home, choose good passwords...but you must assume that’s all going to fail. Do it anyway. But when the bid is due in 24 hours, all the security practices go out the window, and you’re going to take your work home if you have to. And nobody will say you did wrong, even if you broke security. Because when security fights with business functionality, security loses.

CWHK: On a macro scale as well.

BS: Yes. You can’t say: “I’m sorry sir, you can’t have a JV with this Malaysian company, Malaysia’s not cybersecure!” Your bosses will say: “Shut up, we’re making millions of dollars.” And they’ll be right. You can’t tell Amazon they can’t accept orders without SSL, of course they can! The job of security is to do your best with what you have, and they’re not going to win by banning Blackberrys or thumb-drives or saying “no, you can’t do that.”

It’s hard because technology moves so fast. It moves faster than our human ability to internalize it. And once you’ve figured it out, it will have changed. We’re getting to the point where you can’t rely on people to have good intuition, because we don’t have the time to develop that intuition.

CWHK: Based on IT reportage, the majority of malware seems to affect the Windows operating system. Some say it’s because of market-share, others say the OS is inherently less secure. What’s your opinion?

BS: The answer is: we don’t know. But it’s probably some of both.

Windows has made a lot of bad security choices over the decades that [Microsoft] is trying desperately to undo, and it’s a slow and ugly process. Mac has made better security choices—they seem to be on a better footing.

But if you’re a bad guy writing a virus, and you write it for Windows, you have ten times the potential targets. The economies of malware means you’re going to target that platform. But to the user it doesn’t matter—my wife has a Mac and she laughs every time there’s a [Windows-based] security problem. Is it because the Mac [OS] is better, or because nobody’s targeting the Mac? She doesn’t care. She’s safer. She’s more secure.

CWHK: What do you use?

BS: I use Windows. It’s been a corporate standard for years, and it’s just easier to use the platform my company supports.

CWHK: What about desktop Linux?

BS: Like the Mac, it’s a much less vulnerable platform—certainly a combination of [an OS that’s] more secure out of the box, and far fewer people writing vulnerabilities for it.

People who succumb to extortion are saying to the bad guys: here’s some money, go away and attack somebody else. Preferably my competitors.
Are you being (electronically) served?

Bottom Line:
- The HKSAR government now has a “one-stop-shop” portal for services
- But Web 2.0 technologies are not fully leveraged at present
- As private sector online services evolve, so too must their governmental equivalents

Hong Kong’s strong private enterprises make effective e-government a challenge, but GovHK is a one-stop-shop for online government services. By Stefan Hammond
Governments have delivered services to citizens for centuries, but Net-delivered services are new. The concept of “e-government” comprises traditional government services delivered in new ways, but like all things Net, offers the promise of new services as well.

Hong Kong’s unique urbanscape means that online-service planners in the HKSAR must work to a different standard compared to other urban environments. In the urban areas of Hong Kong, you’re never more than a hundred meters or so from an ATM, and most Hong Kong ATMs allow you to transfer funds to other accounts, pay utility bills and even pay your income tax.

This is different from North America or Europe, where ATMs are basically cash-dispensers and once bankers’ hours are over, your only recourse is online (and in some areas of North America, the nearest bank may be dozens of kilometers distant). Most Hong Kong retailers offer EPS (Electronic Payment System) which allows buyers to settle their bills with a handheld terminal that performs the ATM-like function of deducting the purchase-amount from a savings account without additional charge. The ease-of-use we enjoy in conventional banking in Hong Kong lessens motivation towards creation of online services.

And so it is in the public sector. With services like Urbtix or the facilities-booking-offices of the LCSD (Leisure and Cultural Services Department), Hong Kong’s citizens can book tickets for cultural events or sports facilities at

GovHK will become the single entry portal for all government information and services

— The OGCIO

Exit Dickson, enter...the new GCIO

“It’s been a blast,” said outgoing GCIO Howard Dickson, whose three-year term as head of the OGCIO ended January 31st.

“Hong Kong is a fantastic place full of energetic, competent people.”

Dickson, whose lengthy career in technology governance included stints as the first CIO of Canada’s Department of National Defence and Assistant Deputy Minister, Information Management from 1999-2004, waxed positive about his Hong Kong staff in an interview conducted shortly before he left the post. “Never once in Hong Kong have I had a staff member come to me to complain about another staff member,” he said, “and that’s unique. Hong Kongers know how to work together.”

On the tech side, Dickson stressed that online privacy issues would be a focal point in the future, and a weak link in privacy is social networking (as exemplified by Facebook and similar sites). “We [in the government] need more understanding of those media, and what action options people want us to implement,” he said. “We need to know where we need to advise, and where we need to write a law.”

Dickson predicted that HKSAR government tech regulations would evolve towards social networking issues over the next few years.

As for the present, Dickson said that while the digital divide still exists in Hong Kong—particularly among small and medium enterprises—”you don’t solve it by dropping a bunch of PCs on the landscape. We hope to do better by helping educate [them] on the use of technology, and we want to encourage more discussion on issues like spam, DRM [digital rights management] and intellectual property.” He added that consolidating health records online was important for Hong Kong and should be a priority.

Although a successor has yet to be named, Dickson suggested that the role would be better served by a Cantonese speaker, saying that while much business communication is formal, the informal banter that helps form bonds between officials is also important. And he mentioned that there would be “growing interaction north of the border,” suggesting that familiarity with Putonghua would also be a plus.

Advice for his successor? “Move towards getting Hong Kong citizens’ records online, especially health records...this will also generate secondary business. Social networking may also become politically relevant.”

“We must keep our finger on the pulse and understand what our industry peers must formulate,” he said. “If we manage that, we can bring a bigger role in building effective online services for Hong Kong.”

As we bid farewell to Hong Kong’s first GCIO, we at Computerworld Hong Kong wish Mr Dickson all the best.
nearby outlets, without the need for a computer. Hong Kong’s dedication to convenience, ironically, is a stumbling block in our drive to improve online delivery of government services.

But the younger generation is accustomed to the Net, and as we consign our dusty beige fax machines to the recycle-pile, we fire up our laptops and expect to access government services online. And the Hong Kong government is delivering: the last few years have seen the creation of the OGCIO (Office of the Government CIO) and the consolidation of various online government services into a single portal.

Enter GovHK

The new site, GovHK (www.gov.hk), was soft-launched in September 2006 with a full launch and ceremony in August 2007. Addressing the ceremony, then-Acting Financial Secretary Frederick Ma (currently secretary for commerce and economic development), said the launch of GovHK was “a new milestone in the development of e-government services in Hong Kong, marking a new citizen-centric approach in public service delivery.”

Ma, who maintains an English-language blog on e-govt issues (http://blog.digital21.gov.hk/en/en_index.php) added that the user-friendly interface allowed different information and services to be grouped into clusters or subjects for easy access by various user groups—see sidebar, The HKSAR’s main e-gov portal.

Developed and managed by the OGCIO, GovHK’s service clustering approach is aimed at helping the public access both government information, and approximately 1,200 e-government services for all, promote professionalism and excellence in leisure pursuits and cultural services, promote synergy with sports, cultural and community organizations in enhancing the development of the arts and sport in the territory, preserve cultural heritage, and beautify the environment through tree planting,” among other things.

You can book public sports facilities, access the Hong Kong Film Archive database, book tickets through Urbtix, check the Hong Kong public library catalog, or sign up for the LCSD newsletter at:


The sitemap is here:


And there’s a thorough description of Hong Kong’s vital Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance here:


The OGCIO added that the Government Information Centre (www.info.gov.hk) was absorbed by GovHK in May, while the online Government services previously offered by the ESDlife website migrated to GovHK upon the expiry of the Government’s contract with the operator in January 2008. “After the full migration,” said the OGCIO, “GovHK will become the single entry portal for all government information and services.”
Continued improvement

The government conducted a user satisfaction survey after the soft launch of GovHK in September last year. The survey reflected that 87% of the respondents considered it easy to find the information and services they needed in GovHK, while 79% said they would recommend it to others. The government plans to continue to improve the content of GovHK having regard to users’ feedback.

Satisfaction with US e-govt sites slips among users

The federal government sector got a 72.9 on the ACSI’s 100-point scale, down 0.5% from the last quarter, and the lowest score since the second quarter of 2005, according to the quarterly study. The report, which measures the online performance of 100 federal websites, is produced by the University of Michigan.

“There haven’t been any widespread innovations in these sectors that help diverse segments of site visitors navigate through vast amounts of information quickly and easily,” said Larry Freed, president and CEO of ACSI sponsor ForeSee Results, in a statement. “Private-sector e-commerce, on the other hand, is doing a better job of innovating and setting higher standards for the Web experience, and ultimately that influences citizens’ perceptions of their e-government experiences as well.”

E-business websites scored 75.2, down 1.7% from last year, and e-commerce scored 80, up 0.5%, Freed said in a statement. According to the study, e-commerce is defined as buying and selling over the Internet, while e-business is defined as buying and selling, as well as serving customers and collaborating with business partners.

Freed said most citizens still prefer to interact with the government via the Web, but the decline in online satisfaction means that the government is probably falling behind in boosting citizens’ perceptions of public-sector services.

Two Social Security Administration websites continue to lead all e-government sites: Internet Social Security Benefits Application, with a score of 88 and Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs, with a score of 87.

The other top performing e-government websites, those that scored 80 or higher, perform at the same level as their private-sector counterparts, Freed said. And more than half of the top performing e-government sites are health-related, showing that the federal government has succeeded in becoming a credible source of health information online, Freed said.

“Improving satisfaction with federal websites will drive more citizens to use the channel, which has the beneficial effect of making them more satisfied with government overall,” said Claes Fornell, founder of ACSI at the University of Michigan, in a statement. “The benefits of improving customer satisfaction accrue in the long run, so government should take action today to turn around this distressing e-government trend and to leverage the potential of the Web to improve the quality of service to citizens.”

—IDG
In December 2007, the Hong Kong Housing Society became the first non-profit organization in Hong Kong to achieve certification to ISO 20000, the international standard for IT Services Management.

The Housing Society is a non government organization dedicated to providing management, maintenance and redevelopment services on a self-financed basis, to promote housing quality in Hong Kong.

The IT Section, with a headcount of 39, serves the staff of 1,040 users with 900 PCs. A primary goal is to satisfy user requirements, but in 2006, the Head of IT, Peter Miao, was not content with the progress made. “Over the last four years, our surveys showed that the importance of IT was rising, but the users’ level of satisfaction was measured at only about 3.5 out of a maximum of 5 overall. We needed a better management framework.”

After a thorough assessment, the IT Section recommended the new standard to the Housing Society’s main board, which quickly endorsed the program. Mrs. Margaret Chan, Director of Corporate Services, comments: “Our mission is to improve housing for the Hong Kong community and we strive for continuous improvement. IT services are increasingly important to our operations. Achieving ISO 20000 certification means that we have institutionalized a structured framework to improve IT in serving our operation needs.”

The previous year had seen the publication of ISO 20000, an important new international standard for IT services management. It incorporates both a specification for services management and a code of practice to help users comply. ISO 20000 is aligned with the well-known IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL), and is also compatible with ISO 9000, ISO 27001 and other quality disciplines, such as Six Sigma and CMMI (Capability Maturity Model Integration).

Objective of ISO 20000 certification

The plan to seek ISO 20000 accreditation was based on clearly agreed and objective goals that will support the Housing Society’s primary mission of service to the community.

“Our primary objective is to help our colleagues utilize IT more effectively in their daily work and we measure our success by taking surveys,” said Miao. “We need to establish an IT service culture within the organization and to adopt ITIL best practices. This in turn requires a phased approach in which the underlying management processes are initiated and improved. An example of a best practice is the replacement of our conventional HEAT (Helpdesk Expert Automation Tool) by a much more comprehensive Service Desk complied with ISO 20000 requirements.

Another important goal is to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of IT and, in the long run, reduce its cost. In order to achieve these goals, it is first necessary to establish a knowledge management framework and to implement suitable tools for the IT services management processes.

Implementation in phases

The Housing Society implemented the many processes required for certification to ISO 20000 between April 2006 and November 2007. Project Leader for the certification process was Simon Ko. “We adopted ITIL two years ago, but that standard tells users what to do, it has less to say about how to do it. The ISO 20000 standard is a major step forward, because it provides a methodology to achieve best practice. With the aid of experienced consultants, we have been able to improve our performance against benchmarks, and that provides the baseline for continual improvement,” said Ko.

The IT Section retained Quint, a European based global consultant with a good knowledge of the ISO standard. Preparation for certification was accomplished in five phases, starting with the support services for users, including the creating of the Services Desk, together with the procedures for incident and problem management. “Prioritizing user needs is a way of getting quick wins, which helps drive the process,” said Miao.
Congratulations to
Hong Kong Housing Society

With the compliments of

Microsoft

Congratulations to the
Hong Kong Housing Society
for obtaining the
ISO 20000 Accreditation

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www.itchannel.com.hk
The second phase related to software, comprising change management, release management and configuration management. Relationship management is an element in the next two phases. “The third phase included service levels, business relation management and configuration management,” said Miao, “While the fourth phase focused on customers and suppliers, management of IT service continuity and availability, financial management and more configuration management.”

Phase five was certification, including pre-assessment and closing final gaps before the certification process.

**New management applications**

The Housing Society used a leading IT services vendor, CA, to supply and implement the specialized applications needed to manage the ISO 20000 processes. The software tools required to comply with the ISO 20000 specification were mostly grouped under the umbrella name Unicenter IT Service & Asset Management.

The service desk provides comprehensive assistance to users. A knowledge base was set up to store and retrieve every kind of information relating to the way the IT infrastructure functions. This means that solutions to problems generated by the IT Section will remain available indefinitely as a resource. A dashboard was set up to monitor the IT infrastructure and ensure that all essential performance levels are maintained.

**Benefits of certification**

During the implementation of ISO 20000, the Hong Kong Quality Assurance Agency, as the certification body, carried out assessments of 13 key IT processes. In March 2006, most scores obtained were lower than required, especially for problem management and service level management. But by December 2007, all the scores obtained were at or above the required level of 3.5 necessary for certification. A key achievement was the reduction of 45% in IT incidents reported by users.

“ISO 20000 is about managing people as well as IT processes, technologies and key deliverables. We have substantially improved both our service levels and our relationships, and we are now well equipped to deal with any weaknesses, using the ISO continual improvement quality circle,” said Miao.

Implementation required close collaboration with users, said Ko: “At the start, users did not see what benefits they would get from the project, but as our performance improved, they experienced a faster response to incident calls. Our surveys and quarterly reviews show the majority of users are satisfied. Also, the feedback we get from meetings is more positive and users are more customer-focused.”

Miao intends to institutionalize the ISO framework and process in his Section, paying more attention to the areas where improvements have been identified, such as supplier management, release management and information security.

**ISO 20000 in the AP region**

Following the success of the Housing Society in adopting ISO 20000, Miao has no hesitation in recommending this standard to local companies: “We are promoting the standard in Hong Kong through the ITSMF (IT Services Management Forum). There are several major organizations that are implementing the standard, or planning to do so, including the MTRC,” said Miao.

“There may be a case for government agencies to become more proactive in supporting the certification process,” continued Miao. “I believe that European industry has benefited considerably from adopting standards for IT services. The Asian Pacific region needs to follow the same route, but Hong Kong is still lagging behind Taiwan, Korea and Japan in implementing these standards. ISO 20000 provides an excellent opportunity for local organizations to upgrade their IT services with a single cost-effective certification process.”
Congratulations to
Hong Kong Housing Society

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By combining ITIL best practice with CA’s holistic approach to Enterprise IT Management (EITM), the Hong Kong Housing Society has been able to transform its approach to IT service delivery. This has helped to unify core service functions, such as Network & Voice Management, Service Availability Management, Change & Configuration Management and Incident & Problem Management, which are essential for ensuring the availability and performance of the organization’s IT infrastructure. By enabling the housing society to take advantage of automated root cause analysis, intelligent capacity planning and knowledge sharing, CA’s solutions have helped to halve the number of IT incidents.

By improving IT service delivery, the Hong Kong Housing Society has been able to achieve much more than just greater operational efficiency. The new approach to IT service management has also:

- Encouraged innovation
- Provided faster responses to user requests
- Increased user satisfaction and productivity

All these results help Hong Kong Housing Society meets its ultimate goals of providing a quality service without eroding its cash reserves.

CA is proud to be the consultant and technology provider for the ISO20000 project of the Hong Kong Housing Society.

Call CA at **2587 1388** for details.
Three pitfalls of corporate social networking

As the social networking bandwagon gains pace, IT organizations increasingly try to determine whether Net-based social networking sites like Facebook or MySpace are a security risk to be managed or an inevitability to be accepted. But enterprise products can bridge the gap. Corporate social networking tools like IBM’s Lotus Connections or BEA Systems’ Aqualogic Pathways offer the functional capability of a subset of existing Internet-based social networking sites, but can be deployed behind an organization’s firewall.

This appeals to IT departments seeking to internalize these networking processes. But Net-based social networking sites are free-of-charge and corporate social networking tools are not. So before IT departments invest in the latter, they must consider whether the “outside-in” pattern of technologies like instant messaging and VoIP is valid in the case of social networking.

Social networking is a more intricate form of collaboration than IM or VoIP. There’s no guarantee that deployment of corporate social networking will succeed, even with a solid base of Facebook-users in the organization. Three human-centric pitfalls must be considered before an investment is made in a corporate social networking product.

Pitfall 1: the desire to protect “personal intellectual property”

Knowledge-workers are aware that what they create and contribute to as part of their employment is the property of their employer (it’s spelled out in most employment contracts today). But while the intellectual property rights of an employer are explicitly defined, the intellectual property of the employee is implicit. All knowledge-workers are engaged in a balancing act, ensuring they adhere to the terms of the employment contract while at the same time ensuring they retain and develop the skills, credentials, connections and reputation necessary to secure employment in a fluid labor market.

If knowledge-workers use a corporate social networking solution for social profiles and connections, wiki entries, blogs and tags, this information becomes an employer’s explicit intellectual property—because it’s been created through the corporate IT system. If their employment status changes, they’ll permanently lose access to these critical data.

Knowledge-workers who understand this won’t use corporate social networking solutions, as Net-based services provide the same benefits without the loss of what they perceive as their personal intellectual property.

While the intellectual property rights of an employer are explicitly defined, the intellectual property of the employee is implicit

Pitfall 2: the need to maintain external professional networks

IT departments must realize that their users don’t see a sustainable distinction between internal and external social networking. Knowledge-workers maintain connections with individuals from their organizations’ customers, suppliers and partners—plus former colleagues and other contacts—which, combined with their internal connections, form their professional networks.

The more seriously knowledge-workers take social networking, the less likely they are to accept usage limitations. But organizations likely won’t fund licenses for all external connections (a requirement of using corporate social networking solutions), nor enforce policies governing license grants for external use. Faced with maintaining two social networking environments, users with many external connections won’t choose the internal system.

Pitfall 3: social networking meme needs maturing

IT departments shouldn’t interpret the hype surrounding social networking to mean that a social networking meme has matured to the point of being a critical business requirement.

Prior to the explosive growth of Facebook in the work environment, the dominant social networking tool was LinkedIn. The scope of LinkedIn is limited—it acts more like a hosted multidimensional address book than Facebook’s profile-based, shared experience style of social networking. But simply accepting a Facebook invitation doesn’t mean the user understands or adoption of its approach to social networking for professional purposes.

Social networking in the working environment is far from a collaboration toolset. How does Facebook-style social networking support work outcomes? And the first wave of third-party extensions adds little value to professional networks, although a second wave of more-substantial business-oriented applications should appear during the next 12-18 months.

To mature effectively, usage patterns must evolve in relation to current collaboration tools—particularly email. For example: have email blasts been supplanted by blog entries linked to communities of interest and distributed through Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds?

Think before you leap

Corporate social networking products can offer security advantages over Net-based social networking sites. But IT departments should understand that the value of social networking resides in content, not in code. As corporate social networking incurs licensing fees, IT departments must tread carefully—to ensure they’re not committing to expensive social networking that will ultimately prove unsuccessful.
Consultants find rough going in Hong Kong

Recent closures of consulting businesses raises questions over the role of IT consultants in Hong Kong, yet demand is high and opportunities remain, say players in the market  By Chee Sing Chan

Hong Kong is a mature technology market with no shortage of hardened businesses looking for an edge over rivals. The market for IT consultants here should be thriving.

But not if you’re Gartner or PA Consulting. Both firms offer executive advisory services and consulting expertise to CIOs and IT heads, but both shuttered consulting operations in Hong Kong, Australia and Asia by the end of 2007.

Gartner ceased operations in May when its consulting arm was closed in Hong Kong and Australia following the earlier closure of its Singapore operation. This did not affect its lucrative market intelligence and research business, but did indicate upheaval in Asia’s consulting market.

Sources close to Gartner in Hong Kong said the decision was inevitable as Gartner in the US had previously made clear that Asia Pacific was no longer a focus and had stopped investing in resources here.

A former Gartner consultant believes that the mix of cultures and markets in Asia and Australia flummoxed management, who had been attempting to run their Asian operations in the same way as the US business units.

Hefty fees

UK-headquartered PA Consulting’s withdrawal from Hong Kong and Asia was even more surprising given its healthy government contracts. The HKSAR government had appointed PA Consulting to help devise its IT outsourcing strategy, while in Australia PA Consulting had been engaged in the government’s ID card scheme.

The decision to close the Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia offices dovetailed with a fall in business at the firm’s core markets in Europe and the UK. According to former PA Consulting staffer Kevin Moore, “PA had got ahead of itself with large government contracts in the UK, and when those deals ended or wound down, the board reviewed costs and found it made no sense to continue Asian operations.”

Moore added that a last-ditch plan by an Australian consulting firm to buy out parts of the Asian operation of PA Consulting fell through.

Despite the demise of Gartner and PA, Moore—now CEO of Hong Kong’s Agile8 Consulting—believes the consulting market is no more difficult here than elsewhere.

“Clients here can be a little more discerning,” he said. “They want the optimum solution at all times and many feel they already have the expertise in-house.” The employment market in HK, particularly in IT, is geared to larger in-house teams given the preference for full-time work over contract-based employment. UK and Europe have well developed contract employment markets while Hong Kong is less mature.

According to Patrick Slesinger, director and CIO at shipping firm Wallem Services, there is also a cultural obstacle for consultants here. “Some IT managers may feel it would be a loss of face in the eyes of management if they admitted they had to find an expert to provide knowledge unavailable in-house,” said Slesinger.

Other CIOs have commented on the high price of consulting here in Hong Kong not being representative of delivered value. Some say that while US rates are applied in Asia, the quality of service delivery by local consultants doesn’t match expectations.

Moore noted that a few years ago the lowest fees were in excess of US$2,000+ per day which is uneconomic for most firms. Today rates are more reasonable at around $1,200-1,500 per day.

Local shortages

Slesinger said that consulting firms often
base quality staff in Asia, but soon the work is insufficient to support these “A-list” employees full-time, so they’re rotated back overseas and local staff is employed to keep offices occupied. Under this model, customers often find that the experts serving them are flown in, adding to the cost.

“In such cases,” said Slesinger, “I feel it’s only fair the consulting firm pays part of the cost of flying in domain experts as it’s their problem that they don’t have those resources here in Hong Kong.”

The Wallem CIO added that there is an overall lack of quality local technology deployment expertise. “We want people who can provide optimized deployments,” he said, “not simply expertise. ‘We want people who can provide the system.”

Often consultants are also brought in when it is too late, said Slesinger—to rectify problems or resolve crises that are often too late to salvage. “I don’t think there’s a culture of bringing in consultants in at a strategic level,” he added.

**Big Blue still thriving**

Meanwhile the dominant IT services player in the market, IBM, claims it’s actively hiring for its consulting division.

Vincent Wong, partner and head, Hong Kong Practice, Global Business Services, IBM, said that demand is rising, leading to active recruitment of consultants. “Clients have become more demanding,” said Wong. “They want providers who can transform their business with a complete package of services and technology.”

IBM’s progress in this area derives mainly from the growth of multinational businesses here in Hong Kong who require consistent deployments in Hong Kong or China. But Wong noted that some growing SMBs seeking to expand beyond Hong Kong shores work with IBM to determine how to enter other markets.

He believes there are clear opportunities but customers today want a full suite of strategy, process and systems deployment, and downstream maintenance.

However, Agile8’s Moore believes that IBM still leaves some customers with questions of credibility from the consulting arm’s link to Big Blue’s hardware and software divisions. “I still believe there will be market potential for the smaller consulting firms who are fleet of foot, more flexible and able to deliver quickly,” said Moore. “But it’s not as easy as it used to be,” he admitted.

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**Key items CIOs should know about IT consulting and contracting**

Consultants and contractors can provide specialized technical or business expertise, additional bodies to help lift an IT project’s immense weight or—at worst—another bucket to bail water out of a sinking ship. However, most CIOs and IT managers have horror stories about consultants gone bad: consultants who didn’t deliver what they promised on time, gave bad advice, fought with (or fraternized with) full-time employees. Usually, these problems result from a lack of understanding between the two parties and their divergent business interests. Surely, someone has advice to share about how to get the most out of consultants and contractors?

1. **Be aware of—and honest about—the reasons you’re bringing someone in.**

Many managers imagine that their motivation in calling a consultant is purely technical: the application’s broken, the server’s hiccupping, the project’s late. Savvy managers—and experienced consultants—know better.

“Almost every problem that I’ve been asked to solve has, at the core, been a people problem, not a technology problem,” said David Moskowitz, principal consultant at Productivity Solutions in the US.

IT service providers advise IT leaders to get clear on the problem at hand, why they’re bringing in consultants, and what kind of consultants they need. Independent consultant David Cressey said CIOs must understand the difference between seeking a contractor or consultant for staff augmentation versus adding expertise that isn’t part of the company’s core knowledge set.

There are legitimate reasons for both endeavors. But, cautions Cressey, the two situations affect the way you vet the agency and the individual consultant, the terms and conditions you should seek, and the amount you should expect to pay. “If you don’t know which you are doing, you are likely to either pay too much, or hire a person or an agency that just isn’t up to meeting your needs,” he said.

2. **Few consultants generate wisdom the first day.**

Your company probably has an orientation process for new employees. They’re added to the All_Developers e-mail distribution; they’re introduced to people in other departments whom they might need to rely upon, and so on.

Consultant Brian Marick said it’s impossible to hit the ground running when no one has planned for your arrival. “The first half day or more of my week at their company is spent discovering that there’s no meeting room for an introductory session, no place to pair, a key person is out for a dentist appointment, no one’s downloaded tools yet...I’m not the only person whose time is being wasted,” he said.

Clients need to organize an onboarding process for consultants that’s similar to the experience for new employees. Plus, the more transparent you are about your business with your consultant, the better able she’ll be to create more reusable, more versatile code, and the better equipped she’ll be to contribute to the creative process of helping your business model flourish. The more information the consultants have about your field, the easier it is for them to draw on their experience with tried and tested parallels in other fields. This will save you time and money on testing and prototype phase development and get you a better solution faster.

3. **If you hire a subject matter expert, pay attention to her advice.**

Managers who don’t understand basic technologies are a nightmare for consultants to work with because they can’t articulate the problem that needs to be solved or the work that needs to be done. Everyone is best served when the IT manager has a teensy-weensy idea about the subject the consultant is hired to address.

If you don’t know the knowledge domain, consultants urge, don’t try to insist on the right way to solve a problem, shove a solution down the specialist’s throat or decide how long the project should take. Don’t make pronouncements and estimations based on what may be very optimistic—or uneducated—assumptions. They’ll only come back to haunt you.

—By IDG staff
Altai chalks up niche Wi-Fi market success

Smaller tech firms can fly high in the right market segments, says Lin Chi Hung, president of Altai Technologies, a Hong Kong-based firm that designs, develops, and markets outdoor wireless broadband products. By Teresa Leung

Lin Chi Hung: When I and some of my like-minded friends returned to Hong Kong from North America six or seven years ago, we believed mobility’s the way to go—not only locally but also globally. Think about the development of the Internet in the last 20 years. Today, the Internet has become a lifestyle. Users want Internet connections not just in front of computers in their offices and homes, but also when they are on the go. We have 3G networks, but they aren’t fast enough. We need wireless broadband networks to enable speedy on-the-go connections.

CWHK: Why does Altai focus on wireless? It seems to me the firm is the only local vendor that does Wi-Fi hardware.

LC: Altai Technologies targets different users who need strong wireless network coverage for huge areas of outdoor space that they occupy. In a container terminal environment, for instance, things are never static. Wireless network signal must be strong enough to cover the moving containers and machines at work.

I understand procurement people have a preference for well-established brands like Cisco and Aruba, but we have shown to them that our products provide the coverage they need for their special environments. Our customers include container terminals in Hong Kong, China, and the Netherlands. We also provide Wi-Fi networks in Cambodia’s Siem Reap (where tourist attraction Angkor Wat is located), as well as Washington Square Park and Bryant Park in New York City.

CWHK: What new opportunities do you see?

LC: I believe in meeting users’ needs with technologies that work. It doesn’t matter to me whether it’s Wi-Fi or WiMax. Today we use Wi-Fi because it’s inexpensive and devices like notebook PCs are Wi-Fi enabled. People won’t throw away their Wi-Fi enabled tools immediately just because WiMax is a new and more advanced technology.

CWHK: Do you think local companies are sophisticated wireless users? Why or why not?

LC: They don’t use Wi-Fi as much as foreign firms because we have outstanding, robust wired infrastructure in Hong Kong that has boosted Internet penetration to over 90%. Local enterprises use Wi-Fi just to add convenience, rather than as a necessity. That’s also an issue for local vendors. We can’t afford R&D if we focus only on the small home market.

CWHK: What do you foresee as the “buzz apps” for wireless in Hong Kong and other markets?

LC: A lot of apps will be generated when there’s city-wide wireless coverage, which isn’t the case in Hong Kong. The government’s hotspot project isn’t city-wide in nature because it intends only to cover its own facilities.

Useful apps I can think of include those related to metering reading for utilities, public safety, e-education for remote areas in developing countries, emergency and rescue for coal mines in China, home monitoring, and mobile advertising.

CWHK: Where have you set up offices? How big is your team now?

LC: We have 33 people in the Hong Kong office and more than 10 at our Shenzhen location. There are also sales representatives working for us in the US and Europe.

CWHK: You have already established presence in overseas Wi-Fi markets. But how do you compete with players like Cisco and Aruba?

LC: Altai Technologies targets different users who need strong wireless network coverage for huge areas of outdoor space that they occupy. In a container terminal environment, for instance, things are never static. Wireless network signal must be strong enough to cover the moving containers and machines at work.

I understand procurement people have a preference for well-established brands like Cisco and Aruba, but we have shown to them that our products provide the coverage they need for their special environments. Our customers include container terminals in Hong Kong, China, and the Netherlands. We also provide Wi-Fi networks in Cambodia’s Siem Reap (where tourist attraction Angkor Wat is located), as well as Washington Square Park and Bryant Park in New York City.

CWHK: What about VolP-over-WLAN?

LC: The technology has become mature, but regulations in different countries exist to protect local telecom operators, thus preventing VolP-over-WLAN from widespread adoption.
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MTRC boosts HR system, expedites manpower decisions

Upgrade aimed at speedier decisions, improving HR strategy for both Hong Kong and mainland operation  By Teresa Leung

I f you think human resources (HR) applications only provide companies with basic functions such as payroll and employee records management, think again.

MTR Corporation (the MTRC) has used Oracle’s PeopleSoft Enterprise Human Capital Management (HCM) software since 2001 when the firm had to meet the local Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) requirements. At that time, the firm’s employees could already use the application’s employee self-service function to access services like a paperless annual leave application-and-approval process. The system also helped the HR department manage salary administration and records related to leave, qualification and employee performance evaluation.

But the public transportation company wanted more than just increased productivity resulting from automated HR processes.

Vincent Luk, general manager of Human Resources at the MTRC, said that the firm’s 12,000 employees are the company’s most important asset, which should be deployed strategically and effectively.

The MTRC spent about eight months in upgrading the HCM software to its newer version 8.9, which went live last April. During those eight months, configuration works such as those related to local employment ordinance were done, said Daniel Lai, head of Information Technology at the MTRC. Hong Kong’s sole rail service provider opted to add the competency and skill modules and the web-based employee self-service feature onto its system to enhance functionality.

Quick info on employee skills

According to Lai, the competency and skill module, combined with other employee data, allows the firm to devise effective manpower strategy. “We can now retrieve information quickly—for example, how many employees are familiar with signaling systems and how many of that sample will retire five years from now,” said Lai. “Before, we had to dig out such information manually, a time-consuming process.”

The system helps the MTRC make faster, better decisions on which employees should be picked to manage overseas projects

—Lai from MTRC

The information also enables the MTRC to plan training at the right time, ensuring that an optimal number of employees equipped with skills needed by the company will be available, he added.

Leveraging mainland opportunities

In addition, the MTRC relies on the system to plan for internationalization. The firm has ventured outside Hong Kong—projects in progress include Beijing Metro Line 4, Shenzhen Metro Line 4, and Shanghai Metro Line 9.

Lai said the system helps the firm make faster, better decisions on which employees should be picked to manage projects outside Hong Kong. “The system, for example, identifies employees who speak fluent Putonghua or have China experience as possible candidates to work for our mainland projects,” said Lai.

According to Luk, about 100 MTRC employees have been selected for relocation to help in those projects.

The new version of the HCM system also allows employee access for various purposes whenever they are connected to the Internet with a browser.

“Our previous employee self-service system was inside the LAN which only allowed access from office computers,” said Lai. “Now employees can log on to the system from anywhere to check for instance days of annual leaves available, apply for annual leaves, or change their addresses.”

The MTRC has also brought the newer version of the HR system to its Beijing joint venture. Lai said the firm has plans to deploy it in other operations outside Hong Kong too. “We want to have one system to support our different operations,” said Lai.
**FCC approves Verizon’s US-China submarine cable system**

By Brad Reed  
Network World (US)

Verizon Business announced in January that it has gained final approval from the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to activate and operate a trans-Pacific cable system that directly links the United States with mainland China.

According to Verizon Business, the FCC has granted the company a landing license that will provide it with “final authority” to run its trans-Pacific cable system. The cable system, which will run from Oregon through South Korea, Taiwan, China and other East Asian countries, will eventually be able “to support the equivalent of 62 million simultaneous phone calls, more than 60 times the overall capacity of the existing cable directly linking the US and China,” the company said. Additionally, the company said that Verizon Business customers will be able to access the cable system at wavelengths of up to 10Gbps.

Verizon first announced its intention to construct the cable system, known as the Trans-Pacific Express, in December 2006. At the time, Verizon Business said the system would cost US$500 million to construct and would initially provide capacity of up to 1.28Tbps, with the eventual goal of having design capacity of up to 5.12Tbps. The goal of the cable system, said Verizon, is to meet bandwidth demand for IP, data and voice business services between the US and Asia-Pacific.

“This next-generation undersea system... will provide our multinational customers doing business in the fast-growing Asia-Pacific region with data services that operate at faster speeds, with even more reliability,” said Verizon Business President John Killian.

Construction for the system began last September when the first cables for the submarine network were laid off the Korean coast. According to Verizon, the cable system is due to be completed by August of 2008 and will eventually total 17,000 kilometers of cable.

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**Yahoo China loses music copyright appeal but Baidu wins**

By Peter Sayer, IDG News Service  
(Paris Bureau)

Beijing court has rejected Yahoo China’s appeal against a fine of 210,000 yuan (US$28,400) for infringing a 2006 copyright law.

The suit, filed in January by the 11 members of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), accused Yahoo China of infringing copyright by deep linking, through its music search engine, to MP3 files distributed by third party websites without the copyright holders’ permission.

The Beijing No. 2 Intermediate People’s Court found Yahoo China guilty on April 24, imposing the 210,000 yuan fine—far less than the 5.5 million yuan sought by IFPI—and Yahoo China promptly appealed. The Beijing Higher People’s Court rejected that appeal on Thursday.

Yahoo China is wholly owned by Chinese company Alibaba.com, in which Yahoo owns a 44 percent stake. The offending music search engine allowed visitors to Yahoo China’s site to find and play copyright music tracks without leaving the Yahoo site, according to the IFPI.

IFPI blames such sites for what it said is an abnormally low level of music sales in China: around $76 million in 2006, representing less than one percent of global recorded music sales, according to the group. It estimates that 99 percent of music downloads in China infringe copyright.

A separate suit filed by IFPI against Chinese search engine Baidu.com in September 2005 resulted in an acquittal for Baidu. IFPI appealed the ruling, but its appeal too was rejected Thursday, leaving Baidu in the clear, said IFPI spokesman Alex Jacob.

“The Baidu case was judged on the old copyright law, so our appeal was rejected,” Jacob said.
ICT sports day draws 5,000-strong crowd

IT professionals showed off their sporting prowess in front of colleagues, friends and family in celebration of the 2008 Beijing Olympics

By Chee Sing Chan

In a show of Olympian spirit, IT professionals, movie stars, dancers and showbiz celebrities converged at the Sham Shui Po Sports Ground in Kowloon on a fresh January Sunday to put on a display of physical prowess and light-hearted entertainment at the first-ever Hong Kong ICT Sports & Fun Day.

A hugely successful day was supported by 23 sponsors from the vendor and user community and attended by almost 5,000 people who crowded into the stands to witness an array of sporting activities.

The Open Ceremony of ICT Sports & Fun Day kicked off the main proceedings: more than 1,000 people involved in a parade of the 20 participating teams around the stadium. Made up of IT vendors, end user organizations and industry associations, the parade dazzled the crowd with an array of displays and performances. Among the high-octane dancing, skits and Olympics-themed shows, Towngas walked off with the “Best Performance at the March-in” award.

The decision was made by the guests of honor which included: Frederick Ma Si-hang, secretary for Commerce and Economic Development; Pan Yong Hua, director general of the Education, Science & Technology Department, Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government in the Hong Kong SAR; Connie Ho Ka Lai, veteran fencing player; Cheng Ka Ho, international nanquan champion; Yu Chun Lai, National Games for the Disabled silver medalist; Jenny Fung Ma Kit Han, BBS, chairperson, Hong Kong Para-Olympic Committee & Sports Association for the Physically Disabled; Sunny Lee Wai Kwong, president, Hong Kong Computer Society; and Raymond Chu Cheuk Lun, chairperson, ICT Sports & Fun Day 2008 Organizing Committee.

Star turnout

Other highlights of the day included the much-hyped football match between a select ICT team and the Hong Kong Movie Star football team captained by Alan Tam and featuring fellow star Nat Chan. The entertaining game was a closely fought affair with the Movie Stars triumphing by a solitary goal struck three minutes from the end. Numerous other chances by the movie star team went astray, most notably a penalty miss by captain Tam.

The crowd was reminded of Tam’s musical achievements when TV celebrity Gill Mohindeepaul Singh (better known as “Bobo”) did a rendition of some of Tam’s hit records, which drew amused looks from Tam and his fellow stars. Starlet Jolie Chan Yat Suen (formerly known as Chan Yuen Kei) also hit the stage with a few songs to warm the crowd as they sat in the wind-beaten stands.

The Hong Kong Para-Olympic Committee & Sports Association for the Physically Disabled was also recognized for its long and successful track record of helping the disabled make the most of their physical capabilities through organizing, planning and promoting various kinds of sports activities. The Organizing Committee of the ICT Sports & Fun Day 2008 donated HK$100,000 for further training of the disabled sportspersons in Hong Kong and supporting them to represent Hong Kong SAR in various local, regional and international sports competitions.
ICT Sports & Fun Day 2008

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- Microwave Limited

Towngas’ team of riders scoop “Best Parade Performance” prize
Web 2.0: miracle or disaster?

When Friends Reunited was launched just a few years ago, it was viewed as a healthy and useful application of the Internet. For many, it provided an opportunity to re-open conversations interrupted by relocation or adulthood.

Nowadays the phenomenon is called “social networking”—a subset of Web 2.0. Social networks, now led by Facebook, allow users to set up profile pages and customize them by adding photos and personal details such as age, family details, contact info and employment history. Users are encouraged to develop their network by inviting other people to join their network or group.

Privacy is a victim of Facebook’s success

Groups can be personal or centered around an institution, workplace or theme. And these themes can, of course, be derogatory.

Online privacy 2.0

Online social networks are big business, yet many who enter these networks don’t understand the extent of exposure of their personal information and the risks to themselves and their employer’s reputations.

Privacy is a victim of Facebook’s success. Its large subscription base acts like a centrifuge, drawing more and more members in. Although Facebook has yet to achieve hegemony in terms of online networking tools, many who receive requests to join other networks like MySpace or LinkedIn think twice before accepting. It seems likely that few suppliers will prevail, and these will naturally expand. More people—and potentially more businesses—will have access to the personal information of unwary users.

Traps for the unwary individual

Facebook allows subscribers control over their privacy settings (although their advertising program, Beacon, has been called intrusive in its tracking of users’ actions in affiliated sites). A problem arises when users do not think through the choices made or ignored when they set up their account.

The default position is that a user’s profile is visible to both the user’s friends and anyone in the user’s group or network. But users can instead choose to be visible only to “friends,” or to everyone on the service. Given that the “London” network now has over 900,000 members, the simple default setting opens members of that group to almost a million Facebook users.

No one has a million friends. It’s easy to imagine burglars profiling individuals through Facebook, and discovering impending holidays when the target’s residential address may be unoccupied.

There’s also a rise in the insidious practice of viral marketing: “friends” are enlisted by marketers to recommend products to their networked users.

It’s spam, but it’s also more difficult to label as contrary to Hong Kong’s Unsolicited Electronic Messages Ordinance.

Traps for the unwary employer

Most enjoy gossiping about their employer or past employer. Some are more discreet than others, but most of us have at some time said something that we know we shouldn’t have. But after initial concern that the matter might be reported to our bosses, the reality dawns that allegation of a spoken misdemeanor is seldom a serious charge.

Not so with a written gaffe distributed via the Net. It might as well be written in indelible ink. Many Facebook networks revolve around workplaces. Careless postings along the lines of “I hate it here,” are damaging to the individual and may hurt the morale of other staff. And posting “I hate it here because they cut corners on safety” creates significant issues for the employer’s reputation.

Employers are rightly concerned about the over-use and abuse of social networking sites by staff members. The practice can harm productivity and waste system resources—photos and videos absorb bandwidth and storage. And IT managers are rightly concerned that users are opening a back door to malware and/or hackers.

A survey of more than 300 HR professionals found that half of them have encountered or have had to discipline employees for wasting time on the Internet. Two-thirds said their firms access to social networking sites. Forty percent of HR managers said their companies’ Internet usage policy covered the use of social networking sites.

What to do?

If the correct advice were that all employers should unquestioningly block access, then life would be simple. However, business leaders in Hong Kong understand the blurring of social and professional networks. The generation just now coming into the workforce are “digital natives” of Web 2.0. Businesses are rightly eager to court them, but they are so attuned to using social networking as a medium of expression and maximizing the benefits of the technology that they are likely to brush aside the disadvantages of the post-privacy age as a necessary evil.

The future workforce won’t be able to realize their full potential without the use of social networking tools. It is likely that employers, particularly in professional services business, will need to leave these sites unblocked and roll with the punches, while curbing excesses through policies and education.
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EMC will replace some disks with solid-state drives

EMC plans to introduce a line of solid-state drives using flash memory as an option to replace some disk drives in the company’s high-end Symmetrix storage arrays, a company spokesman said in mid-January.

EMC will offer solid-state drives with capacities of 73GB and 146GB, said Abhrajit Bhattacharjee, an EMC spokesman in Singapore. The drives, which will ship this quarter, will only be available as an option with Symmetrix storage arrays, and will not be available with other products, he said.

Pricing for the solid-state drives wasn’t immediately available, but using four 73GB solid-state drives to replace four of the 146GB hard disk drives in a Symmetrix 100-disk array would increase the cost by less than 10 percent compared to a comparable system using only hard disk drives, Bhattacharjee said.

Solid-state drives use memory chips instead of magnetic platters to store information. These types of drives are generally faster and consume less power than traditional disk drives, but they are also significantly more expensive.

The solid-state drives are aimed at customers willing to pay a premium for the significantly faster response times these drives offer, Bhattacharjee said.

EMC plans to use single-cell flash memory in its solid-state drives, which will allow for higher performance but costs more than multihit flash memory.

Single-cell flash memory stores one bit of information in each memory cell, while multicell flash memory stores two. The greater density of multicell flash makes it perfect for music players and digital cameras. But multicell flash is significantly slower, making single-cell flash more suitable for high-performance applications such as solid-state drives. Single-cell flash memory is also more durable that multicell flash. Each cell on a multicell flash chip is generally good for 10,000 write/erase cycles, while the cells on single-cell chips can last for 100,000 write/erase cycles. The durability of a flash memory chip can be increased with the use of wear leveling, a technique that writes data equally to all of the memory cells on a chip instead of using the same cells repeatedly.

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AMD delays 2 Phenom chips, moves up energy-saving quad-core

AMD is pushing back the release of two Phenom processors just as it speeds up the release of what it’s calling an energy-efficient quad-core chip.

In November, AMD announced that its upcoming Phenom 9700 and 9900 processors would ship in the first quarter of this year. John Taylor, a spokesman for AMD, told Computerworld US last month that they’re being pushed back to a second-quarter delivery.

At the same time, Taylor said that the company is picking up the pace in delivering its 9100E processor. The 9100E, which reportedly uses a third less power than regular Phenom chips, had been slated on in-house road maps of the highly anticipated Barcelona chips. The errata—a bug also affects Phenom processors, which are based on the same architecture.

With the delayed Barcelona chips weighing down AMD, which had its fair share of financial struggles last year, there was quick online chatter about what this new delay will mean for the company. Taylor was adamant, though, in saying that the delay is part of a rearranging of priorities rather than a major problem with the chips.

“No, no. It’s much more a matter of prioritization and resources than any problems with the processors themselves,” he added. “Our focus is on the energy-efficient products and triple-core products.”

Taylor said AMD’s plan to ship a triple-core processor in the first quarter is still on track. “[Resellers] want triple-core as fast as they can because it gives them differentiation and it hits a sweet spot in the market,” he added. That means AMD should be releasing the energy-efficient 9100E processor during this quarter, along with the triple-core and long-awaited Barcelona chips.

Free email search tool from IBM

IBM has released a free email search engine that does fuzzy searches, using “advanced algorithms that can interpret incomplete queries and find information such as phone numbers, people, meetings, presentations, documents, images and more.” The idea, IBM said, is to help people find information in their Lotus Notes email databases by identifying the most relevant information in a search query and extrapolating what the user is trying to find.

Enabling the green IT revolution

Standard Performance Evaluation Corp (SPEC), which creates performance benchmarks for servers, has introduced a test suite that is designed to let server buyers compare and shop on the basis of energy efficiency. While SPEC’s benchmark covers only one kind of server workload now, having real, measured data is already seen as a huge step forward.

Facebook invades the enterprise

WorkLight, a Web 2.0 application developer, has developed WorkBook, a Facebook overlay targeted to Facebook users in a corporate environment. WorkBook uses the Facebook application to facilitate corporate communications and knowledge-sharing in a secure environment. The Facebook application appears along with the list of other third-party Facebook applications. But after a user clicks on WorkBook, the organization knows who the user is and gives the user all of his or her access controls and roles.

Apple unveils fastest Macs

Apple has unveiled a retooled Mac Pro desktop machine and a new Xserve server, which it said are the fastest Macintoshes ever. Based on the new 45-nanometer quad-core Xeon processor from Intel, the top-end Mac Pro also features Advanced Micro Devices’ ATI Radeon HD 2600 XT graphics card with 256MB of memory standard. It can be equipped with up to 32GB of RAM and as much as 4TB of internal storage.

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Hong Kong firms score multiple APLICTA 2007 awards

HK-based IT firms lauded for tech efforts ranging from social video provisioning to immigration clearance-streamlining

By Stefan Hammond

This year APLICTA 2007 (the Asia Pacific ICT Awards 2007) ceremony was held in Singapore on November 27-29, and hosted by the Singapore Infoomm Technology Federation concurrently with the ASO-CIO ICT Summit 2007. Hong Kong’s innovation was validated by the voting committee as Hong Kong-based IT firms earned 3 Grand Awards and 2 Merits.

APLICTA Merit Awards are not typical runner-up prizes—they are awarded only to entries that score within 5% of the winner’s total. In all other cases there is only one award per category, so an APLICTA Merit is more significant than just second place in most other award schemes.

Hong Kong, a member economy of APLICTA and represented by the HKCS in its Executive Committee, has been an active participant of APLICTA from 2002, said the HKTDC (Hong Kong’s Trade Development Council) in a statement. Competing entries from Hong Kong, recommended and coordinated by the HKCS (Hong Kong Computer Society), have consistently won recognition at this annual event, and for the last two years Hong Kong has won more awards in APLICTA than any other APLICTA member economy, said the TDC.

This year the HKCS recommended and entered 28 entries for APLICTA 2007, most of which are finalists in the HK ICT Awards 2007—the entries competed in 14 of the 15 APLICTA award categories. Here is a list of Hong Kong’s wins (Table 1).

### Social video provision

“Social media presents a rather attractive business proposition: provide your users with social services and let them generate content, traffic, and exposure for you,” said Ibrahim El-Mouelhy, director of marketing and corporate communications, Outblaze. “OutblazeVideo has been adding value to Sanriotown (www.sanriotown.com) for well over a year now... we are the official social video providers for Hello Kitty, and users seem to be enjoying the service.”

El-Mouelhy added that his firm is also deploying OutblazeVideo for “several other clients, including media companies, publishers, and various consumer services,” but couldn’t mention names due to non-disclosure. “When the users provide the content, the service provider need not invest as much time, effort, and money providing original material with which to capture the audience,” he said. “This allows a provider to skip own content provision entirely, or to focus on lower-frequency but higher-quality content that sits alongside the user-generated material.”

“OutblazeVideo is a full suite of multi-media creation, editing and sharing tools offered in one turnkey web-based service, and is ideal for clients who wish to leverage the growing popularity of social media,” said Outblaze in a statement. “With support for most major image and video formats, a customizable interface, search capabilities, sharing tools, and multilevel metadata indexing...the service is customized to the look and feel of the client’s brand and can be easily integrated with other messaging and communication tools in the Outblaze product suite...OutblazeVideo is operated, maintained, and upgraded by Outblaze, but controlled by the client.”

APLICTA is a network of 16 Asian and Australasian countries and economies whose common goal is to increase awareness of informa-
tion & communication technologies, stimulate ICT innovation and creativity, promote economic and trade relations [and] facilitate technology transfer,” said El-Mouelhy. “Their yearly awards are among the most coveted by all manner of IT firms in the Eastern hemisphere.”

The PCCW “eye”
“Complete with a video call capability, the versatile PCCW eye fixed-line multimedia innovation is the first interactive digital infotainment and multi-functional service designed for Hong Kong households,” said PCCW in a statement. The Grand Award winner in the Media & Entertainment category is described by PCCW as an “always-on device with a 4.3-inch screen and stereo sound [that] enables family members to make voice or video calls, watch TV, enjoy music, shop from home, pay bills and more,” using PCCW’s broadband Internet service.

Besides digital TV, music and other entertainment and educational options, the device “enables householders to pay bills, select cinema seats and buy tickets, shop from home and retrieve useful information,” said PCCW.

As far as tech specs, the PCCW eye is “a Linux-based broadband phone supporting multimedia applications [with] a web browser and MPEG-4 media player for supporting multicast and unicast streaming as well as for video phone calls with PCCW eye and PCCW mobile (3G).” PCCW added that “two USB interfaces are provisioned for accessories.”

An easy-pass through Immigration
Outblaze’s El-Mouelhy raved about Hong Kong’s third Grand Award recipient on his blog: “The winner in the E-Government category was the electronic passport system of the Hong Kong Immigration Department, which is not surprising in all my travels I have never come across such an efficient and pleasant immigration department (and I realize that “efficient” and “pleasant” are not words normally used to describe anything related to immigration procedures).”

I agree. Hong Kong’s “e-channel” is one of the highlights of returning to Hong Kong from a trip abroad. Insert your SIM-embedded HKSAR ID card into a slot, it reads the info, returns it to you and a set of doors open. You step forward and press your thumb against a biometric reader that verifies your identity, a second set of doors open and you’re back in Hong Kong. The entire process takes about 90 seconds, if there’s a queue. Normally you’re through in less than a minute. It’s one of those rare tech deployments that seem like magic.

APICTA: stiff competition
“APICTA veterans from Hong Kong all agreed that, with the overall quality of APICTA entries of Hong Kong and other member economies consistently improving over the past years, and the significant participation this year of Australia which has a strong ICT industry, the APICTA competition is increasing keener and tougher,” said APICTA in their statement.

APICTA said the Hong Kong delegation was led by Stephen Lau, VP of the HKCS and the elected Chairman of APICTA for 2007-2009, and “supported by our four HK-appointed judges, Mrs Agnes Mak, Professor Jimmy Lee, Mr John Chiu and Mr Nick Yang, who are all well recognized ICT professionals in our community...as in past APICTAs, both the HK government and HKTDC have provided significant support to this event.”

APICTA added that “the HK government, in addition to providing a financial subsidy for the event through OGCIO, was amply represented by Mrs Rita Lau, permanent secretary for commerce and economic development (communications and technology), and Mr Stephen Mak, deputy government CIO.”
CIOs: manage those expectations!

Managing the differing levels of user-expectation within an organization is key for a CIO

By Teresa Leung

Cost-control, business-alignment and ROI increases are all responsibilities of modern-day CIOs, but a tougher role that these top folks are playing today is “user expectation-manager.”

According to Suk-Wah Kwok, CIO of AON Hong Kong, IT systems proliferated in the past two decades because of users’ requests for tailor-made tools. “That isn’t the way to go any longer,” she said. “To strike a balance between cost-savings and (giving users) functionalities, I believe in giving them a predominantly standardized IT system that allows some room for creating minimal tailor-made features for improving productivity.”

The Blackberry handheld device is a good example, Kwok added. “There are different smart phones that can send emails,” she said. “But we need to standardize on one platform for cost-effective support and the benefits of the entire company.”

Stretch your communication skills

Having been with AON for almost seven years, Kwok said the firm is always undergoing various levels of IT service standardization.

What’s key in this process is communications with users at different levels.

As not all users are the same, the skills required to communicate with them differ, said Kwok. “Non-management users care less about changes at the back-end,” she noted. “We just have to make sure those changes don’t cause them too much inconvenience.”

When it comes to business unit heads, Kwok stressed the need to ensure that they understand how standardized tools still fulfill most of their needs in a cost-effective manner. At the C-level, a CIO must secure support from these top folks on issues like budgets for the provision of IT services. “One of my major tasks is to explain to C-level executives how an IT service standardization strategy benefits the company and its shareholders,” she said.

Asked if it’s a challenge to get C-level execs to understand IT as strategically important, Kwok said that’s much easier today. “I have worked with CEOs of different ages,” Kwok said. “The good news is today’s C-level people are younger and grew up using technology in their daily life.” Kwok believes many of the CEOs today understand that the IT team is their strategic partner.

She advised that it’s helpful to do peer research both locally and globally when bringing about tech changes in an organization. “I talk with other CIOs to see what they are doing in their companies,” Kwok said. “And I let management and users know what we are doing is in line with major trends rather than something out of the ordinary. That’s a kind of ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ mentality.”

Communications aside, choosing vendors to provide standardized systems and services is another challenge.

“For a firm like AON that has offices in multiple Asian markets, it’s difficult to pick cost-effective standardized products that work well for every country,” said Kwok. Telco service is a good example. “A telco that’s strong in some of the Asian markets might not have presence in some others,” said Kwok. “My job is to select the better ones and minimize the number of vendors.”

The future of the CIO

Having been in IT for almost two decades, Kwok believes CIOs will remain an important but evolving role within an organization. “My role has kept expanding and evolving during my time at AON,” said Kwok. “I think CIOs working for companies that embrace internationalization see the same trend.”

She is as passionate about technology now as when she was a student studying IT. “While many CIOs’ next career move is to start their own businesses providing tech products or consultancy services, I am more interested in the CIO role within an organization,” said Kwok. “I am also keen to share my knowledge and experience with young, passionate IT pros. Teaching is definitely an option for me when I retire.”
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SOME COURSE MODULES HAVE BEEN INCLUDED IN THE LIST OF REIMBURSABLE COURSES FOR THE CONTINUING EDUCATION FUND PURPOSES.
China investors need a Plan C

Our Beijing-based correspondent reports that Chinese ministries are cutting video-sharing websites out of the Olympics loop

By Robert Clark

The new rules on online video, unveiled last December, go straight to the China contradiction: a communist society buttting heads with 21st-century communications technology.

Unlike the Soviets—with their abysmal suits and poor-quality products—the Chinese have tried to create an advanced economy inside their one-party state.

That works when we’re talking low-end factory production requiring large inputs at cheap prices. That’s been the mode of economic development in China the past 30 years, as it was in Japan and Korea previously.

But to emulate those economies at the top end of the value chain requires a different approach.

Misguided scheme

Success in biotech, IT, media, telecoms and clean energy requires more than cash and a well-furnished laboratory. Those are the areas targeted under the current 11th five-year economic plan under the theme of “independent innovation”—the aim being to reduce dependence on foreign technology by lavishing state funds on local boondoggles.

Nothing warms the cockles of a patriotic official’s heart more than the thought of weaning his compatriots away from wasteful foreign technology. At mainland conferences and online forums, attendees experience a ritual cursing of those evil foreign licensing fees. Why pay IPR fees to foreign DVD makers or wireless firms when China can make its own? Easier said than done.

If you think business innovation led by a communist party’s five-year plan is a contradiction in terms, you are right. At the Beijing Olympics this August—the PRC’s coming-out party to applaud three decades of growth—China will achieve the somewhat implausible feat of not welcoming visitors with a 3G network.

That’s a technology that was available elsewhere in the world six years ago. Thanks to the “independent innovation” program, visitors must purchase a handset that connects to the TD-SCDMA “trial” network. At this international celebration of the brotherhood of humankind, only Chinese technology is welcome.

“Catastrophic”

Which brings us back to the Internet video regulations. The MII and SARFT (the telecom and broadcast ministries, respectively) have declared this segment out of bounds to all except China state-owned entities, beginning from February 1.

However, ministry bosses have been astonished to learn that private enterprises are supported by investors, some of them foreign. China’s two largest video-sharing sites, Youku and Tudou, have collected more than US$40 million cash from foreign VCs in the past 12 months.

The new rules would have a “catastrophic effect” on the video industry, an analyst told the China Business News. The paper quoted one VC manager saying the company had carried out a risk assessment and scenario planning in its due diligence, “but we didn’t anticipate this.”

This unfriendly reaction created a problem for the bureaucracy, for while it is hostile to the menace of foreign technology, it is alert to the uses of foreign cash.

State to state

Thankfully, the MII and SARFT apparatchiks were ready with a bit of independent innovation of their own. They are willing to recognize as “state-controlled” those entities that are merely 51% owned by a government enterprise.

In this arrangement, a natural partner for a budding YouTube might, say, be a state-owned ISP or media company. By an amazing coincidence, these are firms belonging exclusively to the MII or SARFT.

At this point we see that with grand plans for “innovation,” politics and economics blur into each other. Having created the world’s most complex content filtering system across print, electronic media, film and the Internet, the state discovers that only it is capable of leading the charge into “independent innovation.” Patriotic enterprises owned by these ministries are more than happy to lend a hand.

If you’re not ready to cede control to a government business, then too bad. Someone else will. This applies to the always-sensitive content sectors as well as the “strategic pillars” such as telecom, energy, aerospace and IT.

The lesson? Mainland investors need a Plan C as well as a Plan B. Innovators would do well to take their IPR elsewhere.

Success in biotech, IT, media, telecoms and clean energy requires more than cash and a well-furnished laboratory

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- HK datacenter crisis
- Data management—backup & restore
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Robert Clark is a Beijing-based technology journalist. Email him at rclark@commschina.com
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