

CHAPTER FOUR

HONG KONG: *DIGITAL 21*

Introduction

As a highly developed country with a vibrant economy, Hong Kong is a good example to study in the Asian region. Hong Kong was chosen as an area because it has been effectively using IT within government for a number of years. The focus in this chapter is on the electronic delivery of services as opposed to the use of new information technologies for eGovernance in general or stimulating the economy. Following is a snapshot of recent developments in service delivery and planned implementations.

Hong Kong is a bilingual society and offers services and information in both official languages (English and Chinese). Their unique position is that they are able to use English to communicate with, and obtain information from, most places in the digital world. Hong Kong is also capable of co-operating with other Chinese communities, and acting as a digital intermediary in linking the Mainland of China with the rest of the world. Hong Kong is also a free and market-based economy allowing the free flow of information. This is a key important factor in a world where knowledge drives economic growth.

Information Technology Strategy Overall: *Digital 21*

Digital 21 is Hong Kong's strategy for the implementation of Information Technology (IT) strategy. In 1997 and 1998, Hong Kong's Chief Executive, in his policy address to the Legislative Council, stated his vision to make Hong Kong a leader in the information world. His strategy was to encourage and assist the private sector in a move towards electronic commerce (eCommerce). He perceived that Hong Kong was falling behind in this regard, and saw the importance of using IT to help Hong Kong retain its competitive edge.

The result was the setting up of the Information and Technology Broadcasting Bureau (ITTB). The goal of the ITTB is to lead and co-ordinate the work of all those in the government involved in IT and the related areas of broadcasting and telecommunications. To assist ITBB, an

Infrastructure Advisory Committee (IIAC) was established in August 1998.²⁹

The ITTB, in Digital 21, “*have set out their vision, initiatives and targets of how government, business, industry and academia can work together to make Hong Kong a leading digital city in a globally connected world.*”³⁰ Their all encompassing strategy is based on four enabling factors:

- ❑ Developing a high capacity communications infrastructure;
- ❑ Stabilising an open and secure common interface for electronic transactions;
- ❑ Empowering people with the know-how to use information technology (IT); and
- ❑ Nurturing a culture which stimulates creativity and welcomes advances in the use of IT.

The focus here is on the work of the ITTB in setting up their electronic service delivery programs. For a full analysis of the Hong Kong’s overall information technology strategy see: Digital 21, [HYPERLINK “http://www.info.gov.hk/itbb http://www.info.gov.hk/itbb”](http://www.info.gov.hk/itbb)

Electronic Service Delivery

The ITTB plans to roll out some very specific **electronic service delivery** programs by October 2000 to ten (10) agencies of the Hong Kong government. The Electronic Service Delivery infrastructure is being developed with private sector participation. A contractual arrangement was made with private sector firms in December, 1999. The features of the infrastructure are described below:

It will enable *the public to obtain services through various channels*, including but not limited to the personal computer, interactive public pay-phone or television. (As of January, 2000 citizens of Hong Kong can pay their bills to a number of government agencies over the telephone: see “<http://www.info.gov.hk/>” under the interactive directory. Arrangements have been made with financial institutions for the payment of the bills).

The facilities will be interoperable, secure and reliable. Using the facilities to be provided and following the interface standards, one can use diverse access means to obtain services provided by different agencies. The public will find a more efficient and effective alternative to the con-

ventional form of public service delivery. The new modes of transaction will be as secure and reliable as the conventional paper-based form.

The interface standards used in the infrastructure will be open market-based standards. The use interface of this infrastructure will be bilingual.

The overarching policy of IT implementation in Hong Kong is to realise the following:

- ☐ Improve efficiency and quality of service; and
- ☐ Contribute to the development of eCommerce in Hong Kong.

Interactive Government Directory

The interactive government directory provides a broad range of services, including local transportation services with maps and videos. For example, one service offered on the web page is maps, which will show a citizen arriving at the airport the best route home. The interactive service site has proven to be quite popular and contains over 100,000 web pages. Electronic services through the web site are possible as there are over 700,000 Internet accounts (as of October, 1999). It is estimated that there are over a million users. The population of Hong Kong is just over 6 million people so the on-line public represents one fifth of the population. There is a 34% penetration rate of households with PCs which means that to offer widespread services there is a need for alternate means of access to government web sites. This has resulted in the setting up of computers in public places to allow wider public access such as in libraries and other similar spaces.

The popularity of the web site is due to the fact that the ITBB recognised early on that there had to be substantive content on an attractive and useful web site for it to be used by the citizen. But apart from web access to electronic services there will also be information kiosks in places such as in shopping malls or supermarkets. The ITBB is very conscious of the need to have enough channels to deliver electronic services even if members of the public do not have computers at home.³¹

Based on the premise that for the citizen to use the service it must be useful, the electronic services to be offered in late 2000 are envisaged to include:

- ☐ Registration and renewal of motor vehicle licenses;

- ☐ Registration and renewal of driver's license;
- ☐ Transportation information;
- ☐ Financial advice;
- ☐ Employment opportunities (job seeking database); and
- ☐ Submission of tax payments and tax returns.

Each of these agencies will allow the citizen to conduct the transaction on-line. In turn, each of the departments provide its own content, while the ITBB acts as the middleman in setting up the system. The EDS hardware is set up and run by a private sector company, but the entire process is overseen by the government. The overall web site is operated and managed by the government itself who ensures that the content is kept updated. There is the awareness that as soon as a web site becomes outdated it loses its effectiveness and usefulness. For example, the phone numbers of government officials can be found on their on-line directory. It is important for this to be kept up to date to provide good service to the citizen.

These are the more popular services to be offered in the interim. In the future the ITBB will work out more services that can be delivered by electronic means. Hong Kong has also implemented key legislative and policy initiatives to ensure secure networks and trust by the citizen in engaging in on-line activities. Hong Kong passed and *implemented a Data Protection Law in 1996* which is in alignment with the European Commission's Data Protection Directive. The government has also *initiated a public key infrastructure* which is set to roll out during 2000.