

HONG KONG COMPUTER SOCIETY

POSITION PAPER

ON DIGITAL DIVIDE IN HONG KONG

Introduction

Hong Kong has been very successful in the past years, such as banking and financing. In the recent 10 years, information technology has become more and more important, no matter it is in Hong Kong or overseas. In order to create a competitive edge in the new information era, a leverage of the Information Infrastructure becomes a must.

The popularity of using Internet in Hong Kong has widened the Digital Divide, such as ESD, e-banking, etc. These services provide a significant advantage in time and convenience, which could assist Hong Kong to maintain its competitive advantage among Asian countries such as Singapore, but on the other hand, these services also widen the Digital Divide, because these services requires users have a certain degree of I.T. literacy and devices to access, such as computers, internet access lines. Disadvantaged groups have generally lesser chances to access to the services provided through information technology.

Present Situation of Digital Divide

In 2000, the Census and Statistics Department of the HKSAR compiled the Thematic Household Survey Report No. 2 which indicated a snapshot o the magnitude of Digital Divide in Hong Kong.

From Appendix 1, the percentage keeps increasing with higher income brackets. For households with monthly household income of more than \$50,000, 82.2% have computers at home. On the other hand, only 15.3% have computers at home among all households with monthly household income below \$10,000. The statistics demonstrated people with lower income tend to have a lower percentage of having computers at home, and that is understandable, it is not easily for those lower income household to

afford buying a computer at home plus those monthly subscription payments on internet services and telephone lines.

Moreover, those elders, less educated and the economically inactive are also found to have a much lower percentage than other groups. (Appendix 2-4).

In addition, there is no statistics on groups like disabilities in using computers and Internet, but it is expected to have a low percentage, since it is not easy to find appropriate equipments in Hong Kong to facilitate those groups of people in touching with information technology.

Suggestions to tackle Digital Divide

We believe that the government should acknowledge there is an urgent need to solve the Digital Divide problems, since it is likely to turn into one of the social problems soon. No-barrier to access to information technology and the popular use of internet should be one of the important agenda in the planning of the overall information technology polices of the government.

Professional bodies, non-government organizations, community and volunteers organizations, internet, telecommunications and information technology services providers could be acted as driving forces to support and help improving the Digital Divide.

Series of programmes and promotions should be organized to create the awareness to all citizens of Hong Kong about the Digital Divide, since it is likely to be one of the very serious social problems, all citizens especially I.T. related professionals should have the mission to facilitate and support the initiative in narrowing the Digital Divide.

A task force should be set up including I.T. professional bodies, I.T. / Telecommunications/ Internet service providers, community service organizations and government representatives to develop both long-term and short-term plans and initiatives, with the focus on those disadvantaged groups including elderly, disabilities, lower income families on Digital Divide.

Besides, the followings are also some of the suggested initiatives :

1. More information infrastructure should be developed such as “Cyber-points” for more people to access internet.
2. Ongoing recycling computer projects such as “CompuAid”, so that more lower income groups have chances to install computers at home
3. Internet / Telecommunications service providers should offer more economic service packages, government could subsidize on those service packages
4. Government could offer either loans or subsidize those disadvantaged groups to purchase computers at home
5. Extend I.T. in Education to those disadvantaged groups instead of just secondary and primary students, such as on-line learning
6. “Train the trainers”, provide more I.T. literacy trainings to more volunteer and community organizations, NGOs helpers, so as to enlarge the number of task force to provide I.T. literacy to those disadvantaged groups

APPENDIX 1 :

– Households with Personal Computer at Home by Monthly Household Income

Monthly household income (HK\$)	No. of households ('000)	%	Rate*
<10,000	81.4	7.7	15.3
10,000 – 19,999	274.4	26.1	45.9
20,000 – 29,999	255.3	24.3	62.8
30,000 – 39,999	163.1	15.5	70.7
40,000 – 49,999	90.7	8.6	74.2
>= 50,000	186.2	17.7	82.8
Overall	1,051.1	100.0	49.7

Median monthly household income (HK\$) 27,500

* As a percentage of all households in the respective monthly household income groups. For example, among all households with monthly household income of less than \$10,000, 15.3% had PCs at home.

Source: Thematic Household Survey Report No. 2, page 23

APPENDIX 2 :

Persons aged 10 and over who had used personal computer in the past 12 months by age and sex

Age group	<u>Male</u>			<u>Female</u>			<u>Overall</u>		
	No. of persons ('000)	%	Rate*	No. of persons ('000)	%	Rate*	No. of persons ('000)	%	Rate*
10 – 14	155.8	11.6	73.0	147.8	11.4	72.6	303.6	11.5	72.8
15 – 24	339.2	25.2	76.1	374.8	29.0	81.7	713.9	27.0	78.9
25 – 34	348.2	25.8	63.6	407.1	31.5	66.2	755.3	28.6	65.0
35 – 44	347.1	25.8	48.6	286.0	22.1	40.4	633.0	24.0	44.5
45 – 54	127.5	9.5	25.2	66.8	5.2	14.6	194.4	7.4	20.2
55 – 64	25.9	1.9	9.1	9.1	0.7	3.7	35.0	1.3	6.6
>= 65	3.6	0.3	1.0	0.8	0.1	0.2	4.4	0.2	0.6
Overall	1,347.3	100.0	44.1	1,292.4	100.0	42.0	2,639.7	100.0	43.1

* As a percentage of all persons in the respective age and sex sub-groups. For example, among all males aged 10-14, 73.0% had used PC in the past twelve months.

Source: Thematic Household Survey Report No. 2, page 46

APPENDIX 3 :

– Persons aged 10 and over who had used personal computer in the past 12 months by educational attainment

<u>Educational attainment</u>	No. of persons ('000)	%	Rate*
No schooling/kindergarten/primary	166.8	6.3	8.4
Secondary/matriculation	1,727.0	65.4	52.3
Tertiary	745.9	28.3	89.5
Overall	2,639.7	100.0	43.1

* As a percentage of all persons aged 10 and over in the respective educational attainment groups. For example, among all persons with tertiary educational attainment, 89.5% had used PC in the past twelve months.

Source: Thematic Household Survey Report No. 2, page 47

APPENDIX 4 :

– Persons aged 10 and over who had used personal computer in the past 12 months by activity status

Activity status	No. of persons (‘000)	%	Rate*
Economically active	1,795.4	68.0	51.1
Economically inactive	844.3	32.0	32.3
Students	714.3	27.1	81.6
Retired persons	13.0	4.2	1.6
Home-makers	110.1	0.5	12.4
Others	7.0	0.3	15.4
Overall	2,639.7	100.0	43.1

* As a percentage of all persons aged 10 and over in the respective activity status groups. For example, among all economically active persons, 51.1% had used PC in the past twelve months.