

**For discussion
on 10 May 2004**

**Legislative Council Panel on
Information Technology and Broadcasting
Review of the IT Easy Link Services**

Introduction

This paper briefs Members on the review of the IT Easy Link services and our plan to further extend the services for one year starting from July 2004.

Background

2. IT Easy Link is an IT support service jointly organised by the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau (CITB), Information Technology Services Department (ITSD) and Hong Kong Computer Society (HKCS). It provides free advice to members of the community on general problems that they might encounter in using basic IT applications. The objective is to encourage and assist members of the community to adopt IT, so that they can benefit from the development of IT in enhancing quality of life.

3. This service was first launched on 20 June 2002 as a pilot project lasting one year until 30 June 2003. Questions or requests for information/advice can be submitted by phone, fax or e-mail. The telephone hotline service operates from 9:00 am to midnight from Monday to Sunday, including public holidays. A website has also been set up, with frequently asked questions and answers posted on it for reference by the general community. The HKCS is responsible for operating the service.

4. The IT Easy Link service has proved to be very well received by the public during its first year of operation. There were about 430 incoming calls daily. In early 2003, having reviewed the service with HKCS and considering callers' feedback, we decided to extend the service for another year from July 2003 to June 2004 with an expanded service scope covering the out-of-scope questions frequently raised by callers in the first year of operation. The expanded service scope is at Annex A.

5. A dedicated enquiry service for the business sector has also been established to assist businesses, in particular small and medium enterprises (SMEs), starting from July 2003. The scope of the service for businesses, called IT Easy Link for Businesses, is at Annex B. Businesses may make enquiries or requests for information/advice by phone, fax or e-mail.

6. Callers' feedback during the first year of operation also revealed that some SMEs that intended to adopt IT had encountered difficulty in obtaining neutral, credible advisory services on the types of IT solutions to use. To fill this gap and assist SMEs to adopt IT to enhance efficiency and competitiveness, the IT Easy Link for Businesses service also provides free face-to-face advisory service to SMEs that plan to adopt IT for the first time or have encountered difficulty in the initial stage of adoption. The advice rendered ranges from initial planning to business applications selection. The service is provided by IT professionals with extensive experience in business applications on an honorarium basis. HKCS has also worked with the major IT industry bodies to make available for SMEs' reference product literature of the business applications offered by members of the industry bodies.

7. To cope with the expanded service, on top of the 12 full-time staff and 2 part-time staff engaged in the first year, 4 additional staff were recruited in the second year of operation. These include 3 full-time staff to provide the IT Easy Link for Businesses service. As at March 2004, there were 16 full-time and 10 part-time staff providing the IT Easy Link services.

Review of the Service in the Second Year of Operation

8. The IT Easy Link service (i.e. the enquiry service for the general community) continued to be well received by the community. During the period from July 2003 to March 2004, the daily average number of incoming calls was about 480. With more staff support and the experienced gained in the first year of operation, the staff were able to reduce the average daily call abandon rate to about 11% for the period from July 2003 to March 2004, compared with the abandon rate of about 16% for the first year of operation. The average rating given by randomly selected callers on their satisfaction level of the service provided is 8.8 on a 1 to 10 point scale, indicating that callers generally found the service highly satisfactory.

9. As regards the usage of the enquiry service for businesses, the number of incoming calls has been increasing steadily. On average, about 60 calls were received daily for the period from July 2003 to March 2004, and the average daily number of calls increased to 85 in the month of March 2004. From the survey on randomly selected callers, over 60% of the surveyed callers are from small enterprises with less than 10 employees. The surveyed callers gave an average rating of 9 on a 1 to 10 point scale on their satisfactory level of the service provided, indicating that caller generally found the service highly satisfactory.

10. Regarding the IT advisory service for SMEs, as at end March 2004, a total of 41 advisory sessions have been held. About 80% of the users were from companies with less than 10 employees. Over 80% of the users enquired about selection guidelines for products and services and pointers for additional information. The top three industry sectors using the service are import and export, manufacturing, and wholesale and retail. The average rating of the usefulness of the advisory sessions given by users was 4.5 on a 1 to 5 point scale, indicating that users generally found the advice and information provided very useful.

11. We have witnessed picking up of the usage rate of the enquiry and IT advisory services for businesses following a wide range of promotional activities including announcements in the public interest on the television and radio; feature interviews, articles and advertisements in newspapers and publications; and seminars for businesses. HKCS has also conducted a round-table session with SME organizations to collect the feedback on the services and suggestions for improvement. We will continue with our promotion and publicity efforts.

Way Forward

12. In view of the demand for the enquiry and IT advisory services, we intend to extend the services for another year from July 2004 to June 2005. The services will continue to be operated by HKCS, and monitored by a steering committee chaired by CITB and comprising representatives of ITSD, HKCS, and the social service and business sectors. The estimated cost for running the services for one year from July 2004 to June 2005 is \$4.2 million. The funding will be met by CITB within its allocation. In view of the tight budget position of CITB, this extension will be a final one. This notwithstanding, we will continue with our other programmes to encourage wider IT adoption in the business sector and the general community, and work with IT professional and industry bodies to explore other initiatives to bridge the digital divide.

**Communications and Technology Branch,
Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau
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Service Scope of IT Easy Link (for General Community)

1) Using Personal Computer

- ★ Getting started with your personal computer and operating system
- ★ Operating within the desktop environment
- ★ Starting programmes
- ★ Operating the control panel
- ★ Connecting the printer
- ★ Chinese input*
- ★ Computer inter-networking*
- ★ Basic hardware failure recovery*
- ★ Operating system installation, upgrading and troubleshooting*

2) File Management

- ★ Managing and organising files and directories/folders
- ★ Using file search features
- ★ Using simple editing tools and print management facilities
- ★ Restoring corrupted files

3) Word Processing

- ★ Creating and finishing a document
- ★ Inserting and modifying text
- ★ Creating and modifying paragraphs
- ★ Formatting documents
- ★ Creating standard tables, using pictures and images within a document
- ★ Using mail merge tools

* Newly added starting from July 2003.

4) *Spreadsheets*

- ★ Working with cells and cell data
- ★ Managing workbooks
- ★ Formatting and printing worksheets
- ★ Modifying workbooks
- ★ Creating and revising formulae
- ★ Creating and modifying graphics

5) *Presentation*

- ★ Creating and printing a presentation
- ★ Inserting and modifying text
- ★ Inserting and modifying visual elements
- ★ Modifying presentation formats
- ★ Working with data from other sources
- ★ Managing and delivering presentations

6) *General Internet and e-mail Operation*

- ★ Understanding the general Internet operation
- ★ Using modem to connect to Internet services
- ★ Using web browser application
- ★ Using search engine tools
- ★ Using e-mail software for sending and receiving messages
- ★ Using e-mail software for managing address books
- ★ Understanding general virus protection
- ★ Using Internet communication tools*
- ★ Using basic multimedia tools*

7) *Basic Database Management System**

- ★ General use of relational database management system excluding individual product features and administration

* Newly added starting from July 2003.

Scope of Enquiry Service for the Business Sector

The enquiry service for the business sector covers the following in addition to those for the general community as set out in Annex A:

1) Server Based Database Management System

- ★ General use of relational database management system excluding individual product features and administration

2) System Administration

- ★ Access control and management
- ★ Directory services

3) Network Administration

- ★ Designing and installing simple Local Area Network (LAN)
- ★ File and print services

4) System Security

- ★ Introduction to public key infrastructure and certification authority
- ★ Virus protection