HKITF and ISOC-HK Comment on New Strategy for E-Government Service Delivery

1. The Hong Kong Information Technology Federation (HKITF) and Internet Society – Hong Kong Chapter (ISOC-HK) would like to take this opportunity for the IT industry and community to jointly comment on the development and proposed implementation of the new strategy for E-Government Service Delivery.

Fundamental Policy Consideration

2. We wish to first emphasize that e-government plays a critical role in the transformation of the act and function of governing itself. It is not merely a manifestation of the means of governing or the methods of service delivery, but should become part of a proactive and core process of reform for the administration system. E-government, therefore, is a critically important tool for improving governance in modern society, in both the administrative and political sense.

Comment on Government Proposal for Next-Generation E-Government Service Delivery

3. We are in general agreement with the approach and course of implementation as recommended by the Administration. We will expand on a few specific points below.

4. As a matter of principle, we are pro-competition in all sense, meaning that we believe allowing adequate competition will be both fair to industry players, technology vendors and service providers, foster market behavior that will be conducive to better service quality and lower cost and prices, and as a result provide an environment of reasonable choices for consumers.

5. Therefore, we have advocated a multiple provider approach since before the Administration provides e-government services to the public. We believe the currently proposed cluster approach is a viable way to provide reasonable choices for the public and shall be beneficial to the formation of a competitive market. It is indeed long overdue.

6. We fully support the Administration's proposal to migrate from the current ESD scheme to the clustering approach in the next wave. While there will always be a risk of a gap in the delivery of service, we believe that as the Administration have taken up the responsibility to handle any contingency, there is no reason to delay and remain with a deficient present system.

7. We are also generally supportive of the concept of One-Stop Portal (OSP). However, we believe the Administration must resolve the current issue of unclear branding between the private operator and government service. This is possibly a direct result of the fact that there is only one service provider at present.

8. We are hopeful that with the cluster approach, multiple providers will have additional motivation to compete to provide better services and generate higher profits, hence resulting in enhanced utilities for the consumer public. We hope that the support for this approach can be confirmed by the legislature.

9. We also support the formation of the E-Government Steering Committee (EGSC), to be chaired by the Financial Secretary, and under it the Service Transformation Sub-Committee (STS), to be chaired by the Government Chief Information Officer, and with the Head of the Efficiency Unit as the vice chair. We hope that genuine joint-up effort can be driven from the top echelon of government, because this is the only way the transformation of governance can take place with e-government, instead of a mere superficial change in the style of service delivery.

Further Recommendations

10. Taking a cue from corporate management, the Administration should avoid organizational impediments that typically facilitate only "component-level innovations," because tasks and responsibilities have only been too well sub-divided in the organization. "Because an organization's structure and how its groups work together may have been established to facilitate the design [and delivery] of its [services], the direction of causality may ultimately reverse itself: The organization's structure and the way its groups learn to work together can then affect the way it can and _cannot_ design new [services]."[1]

11. Hence, we hope that the abovementioned EGSC and STS can function _above_ the constraints imposed by the existing government organization, which may impede innovative e-government services to be created, especially those that are not there before. In other words, e-government service delivery should not be a mere process of providing an additional avenue of services to citizens (e-option), but a process to innovate and create brand new services made possible by electronic means, either within or across bureaus/departments.

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[1] Clayton M. Christensen, "The Innovator's Dilemma: Why Great Companies Can Fail", Chapter 2; Harvard Business

12. Moreover, concerning the concept for e-government service delivery providing an e-option for existing services, we believe that the government should selectively, and where appropriate and practicable, consider, first, providing further incentives for citizens using the e-option (e.g. through discount or other benefits), and second, moving certain services to 100% provide via unmanned, electronic means (e.g. Internet, mobile short messages, interactive voice response systems, etc.).

13. Finally, we also hope that this e-government transformation effort can be expanded and more uniformly coordinated with other major government statutory organizations especially those that have strong ties to the daily lives of our citizens, for instance, the Housing Authority and the Hospital Authority.

About Us

14. Founded in 1980, HKITF is a trade association in Hong Kong representing the IT industry, with over 300 members from the fields of information technology, software, hardware and telecommunications with the mission to act as a forum for industry networking and coordination to improve the core competency of and opportunities for the industry, and to maintain a high level of business practice among its members.

15. ISOC-HK is the local chapter organization of the Internet Society (ISOC), a professional membership society with over 20,000 individual members in over 180 countries, providing leadership in all issues confronting the current and future Internet. ISOC-HK was formed in 2005 by local veteran Internet professionals with the mission to improve the practice of Internet governance and online civil society in Hong Kong.

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