



Asian Forum on Information and Communication Technology Policies and e-Strategies

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Thailand – Country Report



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ICT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COUNTRY

Information infrastructure in Thailand has been developed tremendously in recent years. Firstly, the teledensity (the fixed telephone line per 100 population) has now reached 13.1 percent of the population in the first quarter of 2003. Moreover, the country has witnessed the rapid growth of mobile phone. As of May 2003, it is estimated that the mobile penetration was approximately 30 percent.

Computer is also increasingly widespread in the country as the government policy has stimulated the application of ICT in every sector, particularly in the public sector. Furthermore, the recent initiative of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) on the provision of low cost PC, has stimulated demand in computer greatly. Complementary initiatives to induce the affordable software were soon follow.

The popularity of Internet usage in Thailand has soared during the period 1999-2003, with the average annual growth in Internet usage stood at 58.3 percent. The latest survey by National Statistical Office (NSO) reveals that there are around 6.03 million Internet users in Thailand, equaled to 10.4 percent of the population.

Despite the impressive growth of ICT penetration in the country, there is a wide gap between people in the city, particularly in the capital, and the rest of the country regarding accessibility. For instance, while there are around 26 Internet users per 100 inhabitants in Bangkok, the respective figure for the Northeastern is only 5.59. Besides, around 33 percent of Internet users are located in Bangkok.

ICT POLICY DEVELOPMENT

In March 2002, the cabinet endorsed a policy framework for Thailand ICT development for the year 2001-2010, viz. *IT 2010*. *IT2010* has set the key development objectives to exploit the benefits of information and communications technology to move Thailand to the “Knowledge-Based Society and Economy



(KBS/KBE)”. The development is therefore not on focusing on “technology” *per se*, but rather, on the good use of ICT that would drive overall national economic and social development. Three cross-cutting principles to support the “ICT for KBE/KBS” framework are to build a knowledge-based human capital, to promote innovation, and to invest in information infrastructure and promote the information industry. The five main flagships, the application of ICT in major sectors, in IT 2010 include *e-Society, e-Education, e-Government, e-Commerce, and e-Industry*.

Following the IT 2010, the mid-term plan, *National ICT Master Plan 2002-2006*, was developed, devising seven strategies as follows:

- Strategy 1: The development of the ICT industry into a regional leader, with the focus on the development of software industry and the IT human resources.
- Strategy 2: The utilization of ICT to enhance the quality of life and society, emphasising on the development and application of the equitable information infrastructure for areas such as education, rural community.
- Strategy 3: Reform and enhancement of the capacity on ICT research and development, which public and private sectors as well as educational joint force to restructure the direction of R&D.
- Strategy 4: Social Capacity Leverage for Future Competition, focusing on awareness creation and understanding of ICT within the society.
- Strategy 5: Development of entrepreneur capacity for the expansion of international markets, which targets at the manufacturing sectors
- Strategy 6: The utilization of ICT in SMEs, aiming to encourage the SMEs to employ ICT in their business so as to boost their competitiveness.
- Strategy 7: The utilization of ICT in government administration and services, so as to drive government administration efficiency as well as to transform government services to the citizen, moving towards the e-Government.

The Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, established in October 2002, is responsible for the implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation of the plan.



WTO AND GLOBALIZATION

As liberalization and globalization bring about both threat and opportunity for the local industries, Thailand is taking a gradual approach towards liberalizing its ICT related industries. Previously the Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT), a state enterprise, was the sole operator for the domestic fixed line services. Then TOT awarded two private companies concessions to operate fixed line services: TelecomAsia in Bangkok and TT&T upcountry. With regards to international telephone services the Communications Authority of Thailand (CAT), another state enterprise, is the sole provider

Recently, Thailand has privatized both TOT (now TOT Corporation Plc.) and CAT (now CAT Telecomm Plc. and Thai-Post Co., Ltd.), although government still holds 100% share in these companies. This move is to encourage more competition, and hence motivate the existing operators to prepare for further competition once liberalization comes into full effect in 2006.

A number of laws have been enacted to assist in the protection of Thai intellectual properties. These include the Copyright Act B.E. 2537 (A.D. 1994), the Trade Secrets Act B.E. 2545 (A.D. 2002), the Trademark Act B.E. 2534 (A.D. 1991, as Amended by the Trademark Act (No.2) B.E. 2543), and the Patent Act B.E. 2522 (A.D. 1989, as Amended by the Patent Act (No.2) B.E. 2535 And the Patent Act (No.3) B.E. 2542). In addition, several other activities have been initiated to ensure the protection of Thai intellectual properties domestically and abroad such as upgrading the efficiency of IP registration services and appealing to the WTO to revise the TRIPS Agreement to expand the protection under geographical indications.



REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Thailand's telecommunications regulatory regime is encompassed by three important Acts which are the Radiocommunications Act B.E. 2498 (A.D. 1955), the Frequency Allocation Act B.E. 2543 (A.D.2000) and the Telecommunications Business Act B.E. 2544 (A.D. 2001).

Thailand is now in the process of establishing two independent regulatory bodies named the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) and National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) in accordance with the Frequency Allocation Act. During this establishing period, the Post and Telegraph Department (PTD) and relevant organizations are still responsible for spectrum management, frequency assignments, licensing and regulating or controlling the broadcasting and telecommunications business operations, but the consideration of new or additional frequency assignments, issuance of new or additional business operations shall not be allowed.

Electronic Transactions Act B.E. 2544 (A.D. 2001), the first IT Law in Thailand, came into enforcement on April 2002. Other Laws are in the development and legalization process, including Electronic Fund Transfers Law, Computer Crime Law, Data Protection Law, National Information Infrastructure Law.

CONTENT AND APPLICATION

The first phase of ICT development in Thailand had focused on building up information infrastructure. Although it is necessary to continue strengthening the physical information infrastructure, the emphasis has now shifted, as stated in IT 2010 that information, contents and knowledge must receive priority over, or at least not less than, investment in basic infrastructure, tools, equipment and materials.



Language is a major barrier for Thailand to reap the benefit offered by ICT, particularly the Internet since most of the Internet content is in English. Thailand measures to counter this problem can be grouped into three main areas:

- 1) Developing technologies such as Multilingual Machine Translation to convert information in other languages into Thai. This will increase the information accessibility for Thai people. Currently, Thai people can browse the original English web pages in Thai and also translate a short English message into Thai via we-based MT service, called, Parsit. Further research and development in this area is being carried out at NECTEC.
- 2) Strengthening English language skills particularly for the youth via educational sector. This is expected to yield the long term benefit.

Encouraging more local content development, a challenging task for Thailand. Right now the status of existing local content development is not well-documented. Nevertheless, we witnessed the initiative in this area such as the Digital Library, the sub-project of SchoolNet.

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

At the policy-level, the private sector has played an active role in the shaping of national ICT development via its representatives in the National Information Technology Committee as well as related subcommittees. Furthermore, the ICT Master Plan encourages the public-private partnership, apparently through its 1st strategy on the development of the ICT industry, particularly software industry. To materialize the plan, the Ministry of ICT recently set up the Software Industry Promotion Agency (SIPA) and appointed the distinguished personnel from private sector as the first Director.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The establishment of MICT reflects the commitment of Thai government to nourish the development of ICT within the country. However, the linkage between ICT and



the socio-economic development needs to be explored further if ICT is going to contribute to Thailand move towards Knowledge-based Society.

To support the development of infrastructure, other areas are urgently needed to pursue, particularly in the area of local content development. The prevailing Digital Divide is one of the most challenging issues that Thailand faces. The need to ensure that benefit of ICT reach all in the Society is a paramount issue that we are embarking.