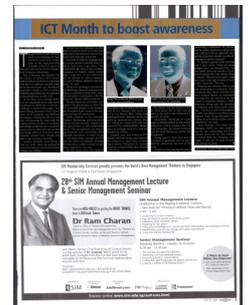


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ICT Month to boost awareness

| BY DOREEN LEONG |

The government and industry players are stepping up their efforts to create more awareness of the opportunities available in the ICT space as well as to elevate the level of household computer ownership.

This is because the deadline for the country to achieve 50% household broadband penetration is drawing close but it is nowhere near the target set for the end of next year. Broadband penetration stands at 26% at present while the penetration rate of computers at household level is only 35%.

"If we don't have enough devices to be connected when high-speed broadband is rolled out, it will be a challenge to achieve that target," says David Wong, chairman of the Association of the Computer and Multimedia Industry of Malaysia (Pikom). Not only will meeting the target help the country achieve its vision of creating a knowledge society but 50% broadband penetration by 2010 will add another percentage point to Malaysia's gross domestic product and 135,000 new jobs to the economy, he adds.

Another problem, notes Wong, is that not many users are getting the actual broadband speed of between 1Mbps and 3Mbps.

To overcome the challenges, he feels there is a need to reach out to the more rural folks get connected.

However, he believes language may be a major barrier in getting those living in rural areas to go online. "We could either get them to have a better command of English, which would take a long time, or we could localise the content in various languages, such as Bahasa Malaysia and Chinese," he says.

Wong was speaking to reporters after delivering a keynote address at the Pikom Leadership Summit 2009, a conference held in conjunction with National ICT Month 2009 on July 20.

He says Pikom has submitted a proposal to the government to revive the PC ownership scheme via the Employees Provident Fund as part of the initiative to boost PC penetration.

With reference to the proposal, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Maximus Ongkili says the government is still deliberating on it. "The government has always given priority to PC ownership, either through incentives or other means — not necessarily through the EPF but like when the Ministry of Higher Education assists students in getting computers," he says.

At the same time, the ministry



Wong: The situation is different now... the focus now is broadband

has taken steps to make the ownership of PCs cheaper. The latest effort is via Mimos Bhd, which has developed Idola (Internet device for learning applications) laptops that are selling for under RM1,000 and tablet PCs for under RM500. Mimos plans to package these PCs with the broadband rollout.

Ongkili says the National ICT Month will help create awareness of the industry as, apart from promoting products, it involves the sharing of minds and providing input for policymaking.



Ongkili: The government has always given priority to PC ownership

Its impact on the industry will be substantial but it will only be seen at the end of the National ICT Month, he adds.

Meanwhile, Pikom has set a sales target of RM260 million for the month-long event, which includes a Buy Online Campaign, the Pikom Software and Services Showcase and PC Fair Exhibition.

Wong expects these activities to continue to generate sales of up to RM750 million by the end of the year.

Ongkili is also playing his part in

promoting e-commerce. He reveals that he makes purchases online and will continue to do so, especially during the promotion month, to take advantage of online bargains.

"I checked a portal earlier and will visit it later today. There are some gadgets that I am interested in. I've also asked about the security of payment because this has always been a concern. But we have come a long way since a year ago in terms of such public concerns," he says.

Despite the various efforts put into promoting e-commerce, there is concern that these activities will die a natural death, as witnessed not long after the launch of the National E-commerce Month in 2002. However, Wong says the situation is different now than seven years ago. "The focus now is broadband. In 2002, broadband was almost non-existent. Now, the government is focusing on promoting content and e-commerce," he adds.

True enough, the times have changed. Many are now embracing the new technology but if the country does not act fast enough to evolve with the changing landscape, it will not be able to stand tall among its peers. ■

Comments: feedback@bizedge.com