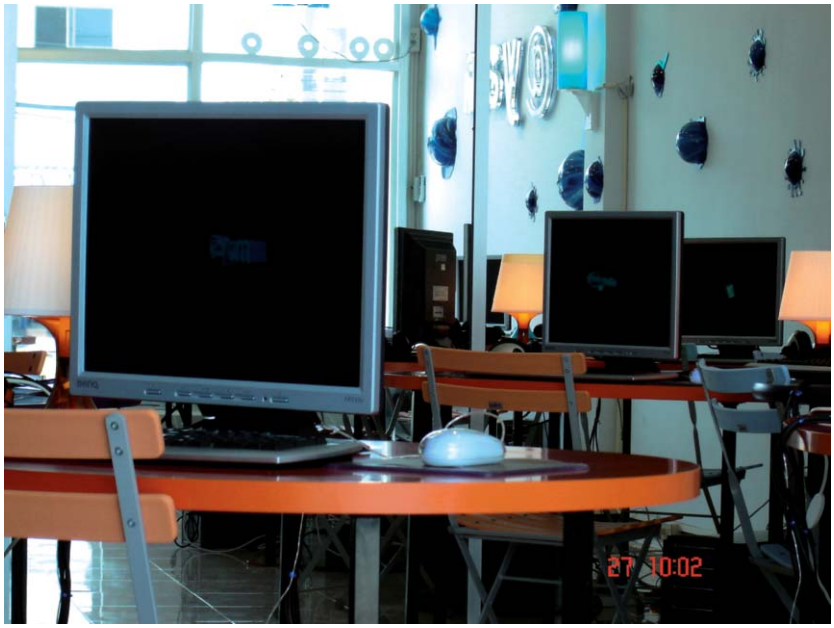
ICT ADVANCEMENTS





Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have an ever stronger impact on Thailand's culture, society, economy and public administration, at the macro as well as micro levels. Applications of computing technologies and the use of modern communication technologies trigger effects of broad variety. The salutary effects include such constructive impacts as enhancing the learning capability in virtually all disciplines; creating employment opportunities; increasing revenue; raising management effectiveness; improving production efficiency; expediting business activities and transactions; in short, uplifting the quality of life. Given the rapid advances in information technology such as the computing power of microchips and the importance of communication technology systems with their media such as the internet, keeping abreast becomes of vital significance to stay connected with global trends and to remain competitive.

Strategic Planning

The Information Technology Master Plan 2001-2010 was drawn up with the ultimate objective of creating a strong knowledge-based society. This will help Thailand meet present and future challenges under the impact of globalization.[1]

Key factors were identified and grouped under three strategic targets : (1) building a knowledge-based society; (2) responding to challenges in the age of

[1] *See also the chapters entitled "Government and Policy" and "National Development Strategy and Planning".*

globalization; and (3) guiding Thailand into the 21st century. In essence, the strategies speak of technology that combines computing and telecommunication. This is encapsulated in the composite body of expertise known as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which also encompasses biotechnological and engineering advances.[2] More importantly, this interfacing will mobilize synergies to give rise to new capabilities, with profound effects on culture, society, and economy, in short, people's way of life.[3] It is generally assumed that the 21st century will be that of the knowledge-based economy worldwide. It is, hence, opportune to avail and take advantage of the capable human resource so as to forge ahead.[4]

Technology driven by electronics caused the digital divide, first, between developed and developing countries, only to widen it, then, in the course of making advances. Thailand accepted the challenge and resolved to get geared to bridge this hiatus. Appraisal studies rendered evidence that it is in a position, given its strengths and opportunities, to become competitive in the world economy through

- investment in the development of human resources within the shortest feasible span of time;
- promotion of the adoption, adaptation, and development of advanced technologies; and
- investment in high-tech industries to build the required information infrastructure.[5]

ICT Development Strategies

Seven targets were identified, complete with a larger variety of objectives to be fulfilled in the foreseeable future.

- Update laws, regulations, procedures of granting concessions, and licensing, as well as devise measures to facilitate the development and use of ICT for improved efficiency and competitiveness.[6]

[2] *See also the chapter entitled "Science, Technology, and Innovation".*
[3] *See also the chapters entitled "Culture, Arts, and Religions" and "Social Development, Human Rights, and Human Security".*
[4] *See also the chapter entitled "Education".*
[5] *See also the chapter entitled "Industry on the Move".*
[6] *See also the chapter entitled "Government and Policy".*

- Promote and support the development of ICT industries, as well as the use of their products and services.[7]
- Promote the development of human resources with expertise in ICT for global competitiveness.[8]
- Promote ICT research & development (R&D) for the benefit of the society and economy.[9]
- Ensure equal opportunity of access to and use of ICT.
- Provide opportunities for the underprivileged to access knowledge and promote life-long learning.[10]
- Support the development of communication networks so that Thailand becomes the premier internet hub in South East Asia.[11]

Current ICT Development Status

Presented hereunder are 14 + 1 distinct, virtual or real ventures, including electronic means, software as well as hardware, products and services, information systems and data bases, organizations, and electronic nodes.

- **Establishment of Ministerial Operation Centres (MOC)**

Government agencies were provided with high-quality, up-to-date information in a timely manner, to be used in high-level decision-making.

- **The Capitalization Database Centre**

A central database was set up for the efficient management of capitalization, to be used by relevant government agencies, financial institutions, and citizens alike.

- **e-Procurement**

The introduction of electronic means at all operational levels of government agencies is well under way, resulting in an expenditure reduction by approximately 20 percent.

- **The e-Citizen Project and the** Single-Point-Service Project

Through the government service portal of www.ecitizen.go.th a total of 13 government services have become available. For those who do not have access to the internet, the Single-Point-Service Project provides integrated services with convenient access to the e-Citizen portal via internet kiosks at post offices.

[7] *See also the chapters entitled "Industry on the Move" and "Private-sector Role in the National Economy".*
[8] *See also the chapter entitled "Education".*
[9] *See also the chapter entitled "Science, Technology, and Innovation".*
[10] *See also the chapter entitled "Social Development, Human Rights, and Human Security".*
[11] *See also the chapters entitled "Development Strategy in Regional Perspective" and "International Relations".*

- **Digital Signatures**

Electronic signatures will be given to 50,000 senior civil servants to expedite the exchange of official email messages.

- **Government Contact Centre 1111**

Government-related services.

- **Cyber Inspector Project**

A special committee will be set up to receive complaints about undesirable websites, verify them, and compile a list thereof. This project is part of an integrated approach to ensure website integrity and decency.

- **Smart ID Card Project**

Citizens will be enabled to access government services more effectively with a Smart ID card which can be used for many purposes.

- **Establishment of ICT Cities**

The establishment of the three ICT cities – Chiang Mai, Phuket and Khon Kaen – will transform them into centres of ICT development and subsequently important economic centres, as well as help uplift the quality of life.

- **ICT Computers for All**

The project highlights the government's effort to bridge the digital divide by providing equal access to all people. Altogether 25 first-phase campaigns targeting first-time users benefitted over 100,000 households.

- **Affordable Broadband Internet Access**

People are encouraged to use high-speed broadband internet access which will help increase internet use and improve access to information and services.

- **Reduction of Long-distance and International Telephone Charges**

Domestic long-distance telephone charges were limited to three (3) baht per minute, and international call charges reduced by 10-70 per cent to encourage more people to avail themselves of telecommunication.

- **Computers for the Thai Children's Development Programme**

Donations of new and used PCs to rural schools were solicited to improve ICT access. Under the project, ICT camps were organized, and competitions held on the creation of learning-content material by school children.

- **Promotion of the Domestic Software Industry**

This is aimed at increasing the potential of Thai enterprises to compete internationally.[12]

[12] *See also the chapter entitled "Government and Policy".*

Thailand Knowledge Centre

To ensure that the population is heading towards a society that will be distinguished by tapping intelligence and learning, the Thailand Knowledge Centre (TKC) was conceived to act as the country's biggest public source of knowledge. Its mandate is to underpin endeavours geared toward sustainable development amid the current trend of globalization. The TKC web portal of *www.tkc.go.th* was officially launched on 24 November 2004, as a component of the implementation of the National ICT Master Plan 2002-2006. The salient feature of the TKC web portal is the facility to establish a "community of practice" (CoP) that serves as the learning forum for various segments of knowledge, wherein scholars, experts, and interested laypersons discuss, exchange, transfer, and share their knowledge and experiences.

As of recent, the TKC web portal comprises numerous interesting issues, such as projects under the royal initiatives of Their Majesties the King and the Queen[13], as well as culture, arts, education, politics, economy, health, science, technology, and agriculture. It is planned to expand the TKC web portal into a collection center for local wisdom and knowledge on such topics as lifestyles, culture, and history, to name but few.

Vision

The government will try, in every conceivable way, to ensure access to information in the IT world. This could be made possible through the existing school and district internet projects, or other possible learning gateways such as the envisaged One Temple One Computer Centre Project. Besides, the ICT Ministry will introduce "lower-cost computers", along with a campaign to foster an attitude that having a computer with internet connection at home is like having at hand a large library for the entire family.

The "Digital Divide" poses a threat and causes disadvantages, unless it is perceived as a challenge and tackled constructively. Thailand availed itself of the opportunity to make the transition from ICT transfer and adoption through adaptation toward becoming a player in the advancement of ICT applications, hardware production, and software development.

[13] *See also the chapter entitled "Modern Monarchy".*