

CALENDAR OF EVENTS March to May 2005

22 March 2005

Breakfast Talk

Venue: Raffles Collyer Room,
City Convention Centre, Level 4

This breakfast talk is hosted by IDA and ILOG. Pierre Haren, Chairman and CEO of ILOG will share his insights on "Empowering Outsourced Business Processes on a Service-Oriented Architecture". Forward-looking enterprises are under greater pressure to deliver results, cost-effectively, and globally, all in real-time. This has spurred the global trend of outsourcing business processes to improve management and efficiency, while optimising costs. To meet these challenges, Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) has been identified to be vital to a company's survival. Developers are racing to learn about and adapt to this paradigm shift which promises agility, flexibility and scalability for business processes within the company or outsourced.

URL: <http://www.techmex.com.sg/bms2>

2 to 6 May 2005

GridAsia 2005

Venue: Biopolis

This will be Singapore's first ever major GridAsia 2005 event co-organised by A*STAR, IDA, NGO, NTU and NUS. There will be four tracks of activities, namely, international, academic and research; technical; industry and exhibition for both research and commercial offerings. This new series with a Grid Computing theme caters to everyone, from interested individuals to practitioners to user organisations from both the industry and the research and development community.

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The Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) is committed to growing Singapore into a dynamic global infocomm hub. IDA uses an integrated approach to developing info-communications in Singapore. This involves nurturing a competitive telecoms market as well as a conducive business environment with programmes and schemes for both local and international companies.

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Three waves of change to create new opportunities
for the ICT industry in the next decade

Ranked one of world's top location for
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Singapore's infrastructure and
workforce make it a world-class
location for outsourcing

\$S\$38 million initiative for infocomm
security: Pg 3

Infocomm Security Masterplan to augment
capabilities and develop human and
intellectual capital





Singapore wave

INFOCOMM NEWS FROM IDA

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SINGAPORE RATED TOP OUTSOURCING LOCATION

A RECENT STUDY BY THE Economist Intelligence Unit, the business information unit of The Economist Group, has ranked Singapore the top location for outsourcing projects relative to population size. Singapore's 22.6 outsourcing projects per million people beat 59 other key economies of the world, according to the EIU report which looked at data gathered by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

In addition, CEOs polled by EIU also ranked Singapore the world's fourth-most attractive outsourcing location.

"Singapore's very high-quality telecoms infrastructure makes it a logical location for data centres that demand world-class telecommunications," the study noted. "On the other hand, Singapore's well-educated workforce makes it suitable for high-tech activities and the offshoring of financial services," it added.

In absolute terms, Singapore's total of 95 offshoring projects puts it in sixth place globally, said EIU. India leads by absolute numbers with 228 projects, followed by Britain (187), China (132), US (123), Canada (98) and then Singapore (95). Behind Singapore are Germany and Ireland (77 each), Australia (72) and the Netherlands (52).

The study ranked 60 of the world's locations on their attractiveness for outsourcing in nine categories, including political and security risk, regulatory environment, tax regime, labour laws, costs and skills, and infrastructure. These projects include call centres, shared service facilities, infotech services, and regional headquarters related functions.

In Asia, Hong Kong also featured high on the list. It was ranked fourth in offshoring projects relative to population, behind Singapore, Ireland and the Netherlands. This demonstrates that success in attracting offshoring projects is not just a question of very low labour costs.

SINGAPORE UNVEILS S\$38 MILLION INFOCOMM SECURITY MASTERPLAN



Dr Tony Tan, Deputy Prime Minister, stressing the need for prevention against cyber attacks.

THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT is investing S\$38 million over the next three years to build Singapore's capabilities in cyber security. Announcing the new National Infocomm Security Masterplan in Feb 2005, Deputy Prime Minister Dr Tony Tan said that cyber security has become just as important as physical security and, that threats from cyber terrorists, cyber criminals and irresponsible hackers cannot be treated lightly.

Speaking to an audience from both private and public sectors at the Infocomm Security Seminar 2005, Dr Tan said: "Over the years, infocomm technology has become an intricate component of infrastructure in critical sectors like finance, energy, water resources, telecommunication, healthcare and transport. It is no exaggeration to say that the nation's infocomm infrastructure has become the nerve system of our economy. Attacks in cyberspace can come fast and furious. Unlike random acts of nature, an invasion in cyberspace is purposeful, targeting at the weaknesses of a system. Cyber attacks can seriously damage a country's economy if they are able to penetrate and attack critical infrastructure like the maritime navigational

systems, the country's stock exchange or the telecommunications networks."

"We must do all we can to prevent such attacks. Infocomm security is as important in protecting Singapore as is physical security at our borders," added Dr Tan, who is also the Coordinating Minister for Security and Defence.

The Infocomm Security Masterplan will augment current capabilities and develop new capabilities in three key areas - assuring information protection and risk mitigation, situational awareness and contingency planning and in the development of human and intellectual capital, which includes enhancing cyber security awareness among Internet users, the development of professional skills and the promotion of research and development in infocomm security.

Initiatives to be rolled out include:

- The National Cyber-threat Monitoring Centre, which will be a central facility for 24 by 7 vigilance and analysis of cyber threats, proactively monitoring and detecting real-time attacks.
- A National Authentication Infrastructure, to develop reliable and robust authentication means to curb identity theft and encourage offering of more secure e-services.
- The National Infocomm Security Awareness Programme, where a series of public outreach and awareness campaigns will reach out to and educate home users on best computing security practices.
- An Infocomm Vulnerability Study for National Critical Infrastructure, to assess the infocomm protection defences of critical infrastructures such as finance, energy, water, telecoms, healthcare and transport.

- Business Continuity Readiness Assessment Framework, to measure the effectiveness of business continuity plans of government agencies.
- A Common Criteria Certification Scheme, to build the capability to certify infocomm products in accordance to the Common Criteria, a set of international standards on security.

The masterplan was developed through a multi-agency effort led by IDA under the guidance of the National Infocomm Security Committee (NISC), chaired by Peter Ho, Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs and National Security and Intelligence Coordination. Feedback and inputs were gathered from companies and government agencies through surveys and focus group discussions.

Said Mr Peter Ho, Chairman of the NISC: "A cyber security incident in one organisation could very likely have a ripple effect across other critical infrastructures and systems." He called on the government, industry and people to join hands to combat cyber threats. While the government looks at issues of national security importance, the infocomm industry can lend expertise and experience to develop important services and solutions for the Masterplan projects.

Everyone has a role to play, including the individual computer user. "The Masterplan has something for everyone, down to the individual. Your role is to be a responsible and secure user of infocomm technologies. You can achieve this by keeping up to date with safe infocomm practices," said Mr Ho.

IDA UNVEILS ITS 10-YEAR INFOCOMM TECHNOLOGY ROADMAP

THREE WAVES OF CHANGE (1) Computing revolutions with nano and bio inspirations, (2) advanced ubiquitous broadband and short range wireless communication technologies, (3) sentient technologies enabled mainly by smart sensors, sensor networks, small software, distributed computing and other smart technologies will create new opportunities for the IT industry in the next decade. Mr Chan Yeng Kit, CEO of IDA said that the confluence of nano, bio and info were possible quintessential enablers at the heart of these waves that would define new disruptive innovations for the brave new world of tomorrow.

Delivering the opening address at IDA's fifth Infocomm Technology Roadmap (ITR5) Symposium earlier this month, Mr Chan said: "We believe the tectonic forces of info, nano and bio will converge to bring about the dawn of a new era of smart, ubiquitous computing." He added that ITR5 would paint a picture of where infocomm technology is heading and identify possibilities and opportunities created by the three waves of change in computing, communications and smart or sentient technologies.

The ITR5 is IDA's technology pillar behind the Singapore government's new ICT master plan called Intelligent Nation 2015 (iN2015) which will ensure that Singapore remains competitive in the global arena. This is the first time that IDA's technology roadmap takes a longer 10-year plan instead of the traditional 5-years, to complement all needs for short, medium as well as long term strategic planning.

Mr Chan added that over the next year, IDA will work with the industry, research institutes and civic organisations to firm up the iN2015 master plan.

Dr Tan Geok Leng, CTO of IDA, said that although ICT technologies have come a long way, even more is yet to come. Computing and communications power and speed continue to grow unabated, said Dr Tan. In fact, very soon, computers will become so small, that they will



Mr Chan Yeng Kit, Chief Executive Officer IDA, delivering his Opening Address

"simply disappear into the background," he added. New technologies like fuel cells and even nuclear microbatteries will appear to provide enough energy to the increasingly energy-hungry portable devices, cellular networks will further evolve from 3G to 4G systems, while nanotechnology will bring about new applications that will bridge new frontiers in technology.

Becoming part of daily life in 2015 could be, for example, computing storage that holds one-terabyte or a thousand gigabytes of information — every document, conversation, email, music or photograph you've ever made — in a device the size of a fingernail.

And mobile phones will become a PDA, communications device, camera, Web browser and videophone all in one, connected by wireless broadband.

"By 2015, there will be wireless sensors and networks which are aware of users and can detect and communicate with users as they move around," said Dr Tan. These "sentient technologies," he added, will bring about new possibilities and enhance the quality of life for both young and old. Smart systems will be routinely deployed to advance eldercare, such as to sense and remind elderly patients at home to take their medication. Monitoring of the elderly at home and detection of abnormal behavioural changes will be achieved through these sentient technologies.

Dr Tan added that Singapore was in a strong position to take advantage of the new technology age, because of its 7,000-strong local and multi-national industry base and its capable pool of researchers from the various research institutes, R&D centres and tertiary institutions.

Sentient Singapore is closer to reality than is thought. Researchers from the Institute of Infocomm Technology (I2R) have already developed exciting applications like the bedroom sleep monitoring system and the bathroom activities monitoring system for taking care of the elderly.

IT LEADER AWARDS 2005 SEES SEVEN WINNERS

SEVEN LOCAL IT PERSONALITIES won the distinguished IT Leader Awards this year, with well-known personalities Wilson Tan and Willie Cheng bagging top honours. Mr Tan, president of Mercury Interactive Asia-Pacific won the Person of the Year Award. Mr Cheng, formerly managing partner of Accenture and now chairman of the Singapore Science Centre Board as well as the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre, was inducted into the Hall of Fame for his leadership in the IT industry.

Picking up the Young Professional of the Year award this year was Mr Terence Swee, co-founder of muvee Technologies, the company behind the popular world's first automatic video editing software Autoproducer. Cardiologist Dr James Yip received the Friend of IT award for facilitating the use of IT in the medical industry. Dr Yip was involved in the development of the Cardiology Information System which consolidates patients' clinical information into a single location.

Three IT Youth awards were handed out this year – Stanford undergraduate

Ankit Fadia, Ngee Ann Polytechnic graduate Aaron Tan and Nanyang Polytechnic graduate Lo Min Ming.

The annual IT Leader Awards is given out by the Singapore Computer Society at its Gala dinner to recognise the contributions and achievements of members of the IT industry.

The guest of honour at this year's Gala Dinner was Dr Balaji Sadasivan, Senior Minister of State for Information, Communication and The Arts. Dr Sadasivan said at the event that IDA is working with the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) and Singapore Computer Society on the development of a national infocomm competency framework and a career progression roadmap to identify the education profile, skills gaps, training and certification required for key infocomm jobs. He also called for industry support to participate in the IDA's National Infocomm Scholarship to attract the best and brightest and develop future infocomm professionals.

IDA DETAILS 2.3 AND 2.5 GHZ WIRELESS BROADBAND SPECTRUM ALLOCATION

SINGAPORE IS ONE STEP CLOSER to enjoying the benefits of wireless broadband technologies with IDA's recent announcement on wireless broadband spectrum allocation.

IDA said last month that a total of 140 MHz of bandwidth in the 2.3 and 2.5 GHz bands, will be allocated for commercial deployment of wireless broadband services. A total of 25 lots will be made available to interested companies. 10 lots of 5 MHz each will be made available in the 2.3 GHz band while 15 lots of 6 MHz each will come from the 2.5 GHz band. Successful applicants will be given 10-year spectrum rights.

Mr Leong Keng Thai, IDA's Deputy Chief Executive and Director-General (Telecoms), said, "The framework is set to further invigorate competition in the local broadband market and encourage greater broadband offerings and options here for businesses and consumers. We hope that this, in turn, will lower broadband access prices and complement other existing high-speed connectivity options."

All bidders are eligible to bid for a maximum of six lots, deemed sufficient for nation-wide roll-out of wireless broadband in Singapore. The StarHub Group and SingTel Group, which already have extensive infrastructure reach in Singapore, will be limited to four lots each. This cap is sufficient for them to complement their existing infrastructures.

Should the demand for spectrum be more than the available lots, IDA will adopt the auction method to allocate spectrum for wireless broadband access.

In line with IDA's approach of lowering barriers to entry for the wireless broadband market, the spectrum will be put up for auction at a minimum one-off starting bid of S\$1,000 per lot. Like other wireless licensees, wireless broadband licensees will be subject to the standard annual spectrum management fee, in this case, of about S\$13,000 per lot, and an annual licence fee.

SUMMARY OF WIRELESS BROADBAND SPECTRUM ALLOCATION

	2.3 GHz	2.5 GHz
Total bandwidth to be allocated	50 MHz	90 MHz
Total number of available lots for bidding	10 lots	15 lots
Size of each lot up for bidding	5 MHz	6 MHz
Total cap per bidder (Singtel & Starhub)	4 lots	
Total cap per bidder (other operators)	6 lots	

HASSLE-FREE ALEXANDRA HOSPITAL TAKES A STEP CLOSER TO REALITY

ALEXANDRA HOSPITAL'S VISION to transform itself into a high-tech digital hospital system with hassle-free services for its patients took a step closer to reality last month. It announced the launch of the 1st phase of Healthcare.net featuring the Clinical Dashboard – where patient records and medical operations are digitised and integrated to make them accessible from a common user interface. Doctors and healthcare staff at the Department of Emergency Medicine can now access patient records instantly via their PCs, register patients, treat them and dispense medicine all from one standard user interface.

In the past, the various hospital and patient data were operating in individual "islands of information" which makes it difficult to have a bird's eye view of a patient's medical history. Now the plan is to work towards integrating these silos of information, paving the way for faster access to information like patients' medical history. Along the way, operations

processes are being reviewed and streamlined to ensure that patients receive the best possible service and experience.

The Clinical Dashboard is part of the Healthcare.NET project, a three-year long initiative between Alexandra Hospital, IDA and Microsoft Singapore. Healthcare.NET was launched on 18th November 2004. This project aims to deliver a patient-centric, seamless and cost effective healthcare system. The prototype Clinical Dashboard is developed by Nanyang Polytechnic, while Frontline Technologies is the system integrator that pulls all the disparate information together.

Mr Chan Yeng Kit, CEO of IDA, said: "We will continue to leverage on the latest infocomm technologies to enhance healthcare services delivery in Singapore. In all collaborations, partners play critical roles, with their own strengths and expertise. I am happy to note



Partners at the signing of the Memorandum of Intent. (From left to right): Lin Cheng Ton, Principal & CEO, Nanyang Polytechnic; Liak Teng Lit, CEO, Alexandra Hospital; Chan Yeng Kit, CEO, IDA; Lim Chin Hu, President and CEO, Frontline Technologies; Saw Ken Wye, President, South East Asia, Microsoft Corporation

that we have engaged two more strategic partners to realise the "Hassle-free Hospital" vision. We hope that more Infocomm partners will join us in this exciting journey."

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT TO CHART 10-YEAR ICT MASTERPLAN

THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT will draw up a 10-year ICT masterplan to ensure Singapore stays at the top of its class in the competitive global environment. Called the iN 2015 (in-twenty-fifteen), short for Intelligent Nation 2015, the masterplan will identify new possibilities for Singapore's industries, economy and society, and will be launched in 2006. Announcing iN 2015 at the Singapore Computer Society annual gala dinner earlier this month, Dr Balaji Sadasivan, Senior Minister of State for Information, Communication and The Arts, said a key input into iN 2015 would be the Infocomm Development Authority Singapore of Singapore (IDA) infocomm technology roadmap, which was released a few days later.

"iN 2015 will look 10 years into the future to examine key areas of focus which may give Singapore a competitive advantage. The areas under study include the development of a national infocomm infrastructure of

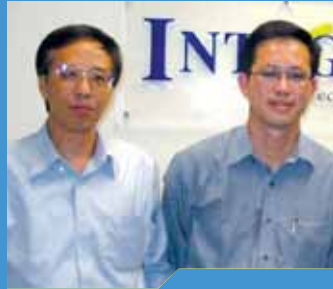
the future, the long-term development of the infocomm industry and its capabilities, as well as intelligent systems that will transform the way we live, learn, work and play," said Dr Balaji.

"Over the next year, IDA will work with the infocomm industry, key economic sectors, research institutes and public and civic organisations to discuss the issues and challenges we will face," the Minister added.

iN 2015 will pick up from the Connected Singapore Masterplan, which was launched in 2003 with the aim of promoting infocomm technologies among the public.

LOCAL BANKING SOFTWARE DEVELOPER POISED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NEW BASEL 2 BANKING GUIDELINES

FOR BANKS, ONE BAD APPLE can quite literally spoil the whole bunch. Banks' primary revenues come from extending loans to customers and earning the interest on those loans. For every 10 loans given, one irrecoverable loan can effectively wipe out all the profits that the bank would have stood to make on the other nine. That's why the ability to manage the risks in their loans – called credit risk management in bankspeak – is critical to its survival.



Founders of Integro Bak Wee and Chin Chau

All bankers understand the importance of good credit risk management, but one banker decided to take it further. Leaving behind a cushy job and 30 years of banking experience, Mr Lim Bak Wee decided to do what most bankers won't – start a software company. Together with his technology partner Mr Low Chin Chau, the two founded Integro Technologies at the turn of the new millennium, making software solutions to cater to the banking industry. With Mr Lim's domain knowledge and Mr Low's IT expertise, the duo packed a powerful combination. By all accounts, the company has done well. Today, its long list of growing customers include big names like Standard Chartered, United Overseas Bank, ABN Amro, Hong Leong Finance, Bank Mega (Indonesia), Kasikorn Bank (Thailand) and RHB Bank (Malaysia).

Integro started out with its Internet banking suite of products, but increasingly it is eyeing the niche credit risk management market. According to Mr Lim, recent developments in the banking industry have seen central banks in key economies worldwide imposing stringent

corporate governance requirements on the banks to ensure that they maintain financial stability. The international standard that is adhered to is the guidelines developed by the Basel committee in Switzerland. The first Basel accord in 1988 specified that banks needed to set aside a minimum capital that is 8% of their total loan amounts. But with the increasingly complex business environment, the committee has released a new set of guidelines, called the Basel 2 accord, which now sets the minimum capital dependent on how well the bank is able to manage its credit and other risks. In other words, if the banks have a more sophisticated credit risk management system in place, the less the amount of minimum capital they need to maintain to fulfill its central bank's requirements. This means an improvement in the banks' return on equity and share price.

Mr Lim added that although the Basel 2 guidelines were developed over a course of a few years, they were only recently finalised last year. Now banks are on the lookout for good credit risk management solutions. And Integro is ready to meet this need with its SmartLender Corporate suite of credit risk management solutions. "We have been developing our solution since the early days of Basel 2, and tweaking in tandem with the developments of the accord. Today, we have a product that has been carefully developed and is now ready for the banking industry," Mr Lim added. "Because we have been at it from the very beginning, we now have the first mover advantage," he said.

And he has the proof to show for it. While other software developers are scrambling to digest the Basel accord, Integro has already implemented its solution for a renowned global bank. To add a feather to its cap, Integro also bagged the Merit award for this credit risk management solution at the prestigious Asia-Pacific ICT Awards held in Hong Kong last December.

LOCAL STARTUP MAKES COMPLEX STAFF ROSTERING EASY TO DO

EVEN THE SKY'S NOT the limit for Friar Tuck. The local workforce optimisation solution provider hit the news last year when it announced that its software solution was selected by NASA for managing its scientists' rostering schedule for the Mars Exploration Rover mission.

Now, Friar Tuck is targeting the healthcare industry with its real-time workforce management solution that employs revolutionary optimization technology to help the hospitals manage staff rosters more efficiently, improve quality of service and increase staff productivity. Mr Sevugan Alagappan, co-founder and CEO of Friar Tuck, said that five of the local hospitals here are already piloting or implementing the optimization solution.

"Rostering doctors, nurses and other hospital personnel is just as complex as managing the scientists for the Mars project. The hospital needs to take into account staff's individual other factors when planning a staffing roster. The manual system is limited and cumbersome because the human brain is not capable of juggling the multiple permutations involved in these complex scheduling tasks," said Mr Alagappan.

"The healthcare industry is facing a severe shortage of staff. One solution is to look for more staff. A complementary solution is to optimise the management of the staff so that they can be more productive and suffer less from fatigue like back-to-back shifts. Based on our studies, our solution can increase staff productivity by at least 5-10% and reduce time to solution by 90%," he added.

With FriarTuck's solution, the administrator can now simply key in the requirements and the software will automatically compute an optimal roster that maximizes the effectiveness of operational management and efficiency of operational economics of the organization.

"Basically it takes the mind-boggling rostering process away from the human mind and passes it to the computer that could explore millions of possible staffing solutions," he quipped.

FriarTuck is a software company dedicated to providing workforce optimization solutions and consulting services for service industries such as healthcare, aviation, government and security. Its products are capable of handling large and complex optimization problems.

HIGH-TECH FACILITY MANAGEMENT CAN INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY AND LOWER COSTS

SINGAPORE IS HOME to thousands of tall buildings and skyscrapers, a necessity in view of the limited real estate space of the nation. Many of these buildings operate smoothly with lifts that are able to traverse floors quickly and securely; and lights that turn off automatically when the building closes. These building facilities are well-oiled and operate in clockwork precision because of use of modern technology and sophisticated systems.

Mr Chiang Peng Kheng, director, IDA, said that the use of technology in facilities management was vital. Speaking at the Facility Asia conference earlier this year, he said that the practice of

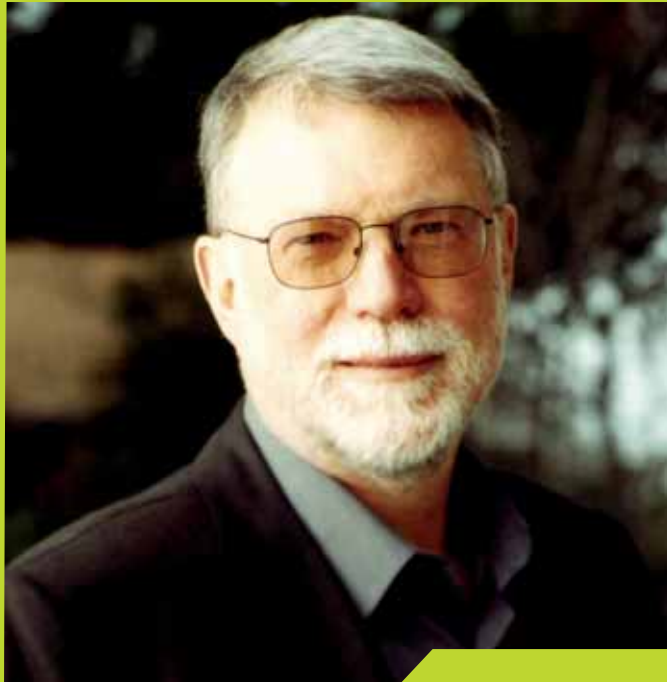
facilities management has been predominantly focussed on building maintenance, but that is changing with the times. "Organisations are facing a new business landscape – a digital one in which clients want results and information instantly," said Mr Chiang.

"Technology if harnessed appropriately, can increase productivity, improve efficiency and lower operating costs," he added. He cited the example of Surbana Technologies, the technology arm of HDB Corporation, which successfully developed and trialled the large-scale remote M&E monitoring system in 100 residential buildings islandwide. Previously status of lifts such as passenger

entrapments, lift faults and impending equipment failures was sent back to the command centre via leased telephone lines. Now, the information is sent back via GPRS.

The implementation resulted in immediate savings with the much more affordable GPRS system, instead of expensive leased lines. The pilot has improved response and recovery times of service faults arising in all HDB residential estates in Singapore. Through piloting the solution locally, Surbana Technologies has also acquired the technological know-how and now plans to export the customised solution for their township planning project in Chengdu, China.

EYE-TO-EYE: DR JOHN SEELY BROWN



THE WORLD IS CHANGING. The maturing of digital technologies is giving rise to new possibilities that will have a huge impact on the world. John Seely Brown, previously the Chief Scientist of Xerox Corporation and director of Xerox Palo Alto Research Center, said that digital power is continuing its growth unabated.

"Digital power is the combination of computing, communications, storage and content. Computing power continues to double every 18 months, communications and storage every 12 months. What we are seeing is an accelerating confluence of commoditisation across all three levels at

once," said Dr Brown. This is leading to new issues for the world, like how will infrastructure and systems change when the cost of computing becomes so cheap that it is readily available for all. For example, he added, in the not too distant future, the entire events surrounding a person's life can be all recorded into a pocket device that he carries everywhere with him.

But the most significant and greatest impact, Dr Brown added, will come from content, where communities of users will increase content exponentially by 2^n , n being the number of people involved," said Dr Brown. "This new techno-economic paradigm will form the new generalised common sense which gradually finds itself embedded in social practices," added Dr Brown.

Several trends will emerge from this new paradigm, he added. The traditional model of suppliers pushing products to customers will evolve into a "demand pull." Physical stores will be overtaken by online shopping, mass media by online news and blogs (web logs) while advertising will move from mass media to "search driven advertising," said Dr Brown. In the area of education, the focus will be transformed from "building stocks of knowledge" to "learning on demand."

In entertainment, users will move from passive activities, like watching TV to active ones, like playing online games. The massively multiplayer online games (MMOG), in particular deserve special attention, he added because of its huge potential. Dr Brown gave the example of MMOG Everquest, where the virtual property of players in the game is being sold for huge sums of money. "The GNP per capita of Everquest is more than that of Russia," quipped Dr Brown.

TECH TALK: BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER WITH SOCIAL SOFTWARE HO KHEE YOKE (SENIOR CONSULTANT)

THE FORTUNE MAGAZINE recently ranked the Blogs (short for web logs) as the top trend for this year. Blogging is powerful and large companies are learning to cope with it, as the voice of the small man has suddenly become a huge force to be reckoned with, when developed as a community of opinions. Social software like blogging has been the talk of the town in the recent months.

It is a broad term used to describe software that facilitates group interaction. Social software connects people together intellectually and makes it possible to share and evolve ideas. Social software is not bound just by what features the tool provides, but also by social conventions and etiquette on how to use it appropriately. Apart from blogging, some of these software include e-mail, online forums, instant messaging, "Wiki" plus dating and friendship matching services.

Out of the many social software, there are three that particularly stand out from the crowd, namely: Blogs, Wiki and Social Network.

Blogs, short for web logs, are like online journals for a particular person. The owner will post a message periodically allowing others to comment. Topics often include the owner's daily life or views on politics or a particular subject important to them. Blogs mean many things to different people: ranging from "online journal" to "an improved personal homepage." However, the real power of blogs as social software come about with tools that allow other users to comment on the entries (and hence create a

lively discussion between the author and the readers), and allowing readers to read the blog entries from a wide variety of devices using a technology known as Really Simple Syndication (or RSS in short). In 1999, there are only a handful of blog site out there. Today, they are probably more than 5 million blogs, and the number is still growing at an exponential rate. Some of the key players in this field are Blogspot.com, and LiveJournal.

Wiki (pronounced "wicky" or "weeke") is a website that allows users to add content, as on an Internet forum, but also allows anyone to edit the content. This is quite different from the traditional way of publishing content on the website, where the content usually needs to be routed through multiple parties (such as proof reader, approving authority, editor etc) before finally reaching the webmaster to publish it. One of the most well-known "wikis" is Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org) which has evolved to become the world largest encyclopedia that contains approximately 476,000 articles and 77 million words. It is also one of the most reference sites on the Internet receiving over 80 million hits per day! Increasingly, Wikis are recognized as a promising way to develop private- and public-knowledge bases.

Social networks allow people to come together online around shared interests or causes. The most popular used of Social Network is dating services, where the users will post their personal profiles and are able to search for a partner.



One such service provider is Friendster (<http://www.friendster.com>) which is extremely popular among the teenagers. Friendster was started only in 2002, but since then they have already captured over 13 millions subscribers. Beyond dating services, people are also using social network to build up their professional contacts, such as Orkut (www.orkut.com), and Linked-In (www.linkedin.com). Such services can help the users to discover inside connections to recommended job candidates, industry experts and business partners for new business opportunity.

The Internet is still in its infancy, but what is clear is that the voice of the community, via these social software and services will increasingly become even more important in time to come.