Business Technology: An Enabler in Your Economy

The 2009 Global Public Policy Summit (GPPS) of the World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) will be held in Bermuda this November 1-3. The three-day summit is the flagship event of WITSA, a consortium of almost 70 information and communications technology (ICT) industry associations from economies around the world. WITSA represents over 90% of the world ICT market, and has a stated goal of advancing the growth and development of the IT industry.

WITSA was founded in 1978 as the World Computing Services Industry Association and has since increasingly advocated for a global information infrastructure in the international public policy arena. Such advocacy includes:

- increasing competition through open markets and regulatory reform;
- protecting intellectual property;
- encouraging cross-industry and government co-operation to enhance information security;
- bridging the education and skills gap;
- reducing tariff and non-tariff trade barriers to ICT goods and services; and
- safeguarding the viability and continued growth of the internet and electronic commerce.

As the global voice of the ICT industry, WITSA is dedicated, inter alia, to:

- advocating policies that advance the industry’s growth and development;
- facilitating international trade and investment in ICT products and services;
- strengthening WITSA’s national industry associations through the sharing of knowledge, experience, and critical information; and
- providing members with a vast network of contacts in nearly every geographic region of the world.

WITSA strengthens the industry at large by promoting a level playing field and by voicing the concerns of the international IT community in multilateral organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the G-8 and other international fora where policies affecting industry interests are developed.

WITSA achieves these aims and objectives by a variety of means

As licensor of the World Congress on Information Technology (WCIT) brand, WITSA serves as the oversight organization for the WCIT, the industry forum of ICT executives worldwide. The WCIT is unique in its global perspective on ICT issues and its ability to draw users and vendors from around the world.

Every two years, world business and government leaders discuss emerging issues, debate hot topics, and address how legal, political, and economic trends affect business opportunities. In addition to prominent ICT industry CEOs, featured speakers include internationally recognized leaders from government and industries such as retail, manufacturing, financial services, communications, health care, transportation, entertainment, and education.

As a signature event of the WCIT, WITSA holds the Global ICT Excellence Awards to honour exceptional achievements in the application of information technology around the globe. Winners of these awards have exhibited excellence within one of three categories:

- Public Sector Excellence;
- Private Sector Excellence;
- Digital Opportunity.

In addition, a special Chairman’s Award is presented to a nominee selected from the entire pool of candidates from all three awards categories.

WITSA produces the biennial Digital Planet report. This report provides current, comprehensive data documenting the size and shape of the ICT marketplace around the globe. The report highlights major trends in global ICT spending while telling the story of global expansion in internet usage, e-commerce penetration, and use of ICT equipment and services. WITSA publishes this guide to help policymakers, technology developers, and the general public to understand the ICT trends shaping society today.

The WITSA Public Policy Report, published annually and available on the WITSA website, is a summary of the positions taken by WITSA on global ICT issues. These papers have been used by the industry in its dialogue with governments and multilateral institutions in their decision-making process with regard to important issues of concern to the ICT industry, including e-commerce, information security and privacy, taxation, e-government, and workforce issues.

In addition WITSA produces a quarterly newsletter providing timely information on industry activities and policy developments at the global and national levels, including an overview of WITSA member activities, WITSA programs and events. This newsletter is available on the WITSA website.

The GPPS is a key part of WITSA’s mandate and has been held every two years since 1999. The theme of this year’s gathering will be “Business Technology: An Enabler in Your Economy”, with a focus on global policies affecting the ICT industry. GPPS 2009 will host valuable discussions of the “state of the world” in relation to public policies affecting the industry. The Summit aims to promote and educate industry and governments regarding the growth potential of the digital economy and, at the same time, examine key ICT public policy issues and explore the key policy concerns of ICT businesses.

Among topics to be discussed at the summit are:

- whether business technology is indeed an enabler in your economy;
- if enlightened IT policy can enable your economy and assist in its recovery;
- whether policies that promote technology infrastructures that are resilient and secure, and those that protect the privacy of personal data, conflict with policies that encourage economic expansion;
- how proposed internet governance policies on the stability, security and private sector leadership of the internet might dampen economic recovery and expansion;
- if environmental policies hamper growth — and whether enlightened IT policies and involvement can bridge the gap;
- whether there is evidence that institutions can play a positive role in promoting IT and expanding economies, or if they are simply relics of the past; and
- what potential business technology developments are on the horizon that will enhance business growth.

A pre-summit workshop will be held on October 31, entitled “Incubators as a catalyst to developing a strong IT sector.” WITSA will also hold its regular board and committee meetings in Bermuda on the weekend preceding the start of the Summit.

More than 300 senior executives, government officials and policymakers will attend the event, which is being organised by the Bermuda Chamber of Commerce’s Business Technology Division, in partnership with the Ministry of Energy, Telecommunications and E-Commerce.

There is no doubt that holding the conference in Bermuda is recognition of the island’s importance on the global information technology stage.

Information on the conference, together with registration and hotel details, can be found at www.gpps2009.bm.

Bermuda: a leader in ICT

Since being among the first countries in the world to pass legislation specific to e-commerce a decade ago, Bermuda has kept a steady focus on electronic possibilities in the public and private sectors, both internally and externally.

Bermuda was placed 17th in the world in the 2008 E-readiness rankings prepared by the Economist Intelligence Unit in co-operation with the IBM Institute for Business Value, ahead of Japan, France and a host of other countries.

The drive to bring government fully online continues apace, with several ministries now offering a complete range of services online.
Steps have been taken to automate the vehicle registration process and to electronically identify offenders. The island's Tech Innovation Awards have gone from strength to strength identifying innovative and successful technology products and services delivered by Bermuda-based organizations.

**Government initiatives**

The Ministry of Energy, Telecommunications and E-Commerce (METEC) has been highly active of late. The Minister, the Hon Terry E. Lister, JP MP, is a senior member of cabinet, whose portfolio recognises that the greater the country's achievement in the electronic field, the greater the impact on the country's energy usage.

In comments that amount to a mission statement, the minister said: "It is my vision that through the coordinated effort of the four departments that make up the Ministry, we can deliver to Bermuda, and to the global village, services that are second to none. I believe that in this ever-evolving digital world, Bermuda must be positioned and equipped to maintain our place on the global business stage. This means that we must and will continually adjust to and embrace emergent technology as well as becoming early adopters of modern technology, embracing innovation, and becoming partners in the creation of new ideas that will benefit every citizen of Bermuda. The Government is committed to the creation of a Bermuda where everyone in this community benefits from increasing access to information and support from communications technologies."

Bermuda's corporate legislation was recently updated with the addition of e-friendly elements such as the ability to hold board meetings electronically and a review is nearing completion that will identify amendments to the Electronic Transactions Act 1999 so that it is easier for Bermuda-based companies to operate solely in an electronic environment.

**Early adoption**

Much of Bermuda's success in the electronic field has derived from its early realisation that its IT infrastructure would be critical to the island's development as its burgeoning financial services sector kept growing. Bermuda was the first to elevate e-commerce to a cabinet post, a clear sign to industry participants of its serious intent.

The Electronic Transactions Act, one of the first in the world, was enacted into law in 1999. The heart of the legislation was a mechanism for building a suitable national platform on which business-to-business electronic commerce could thrive.

The subsequent Standard for Electronic Transactions (Code of Conduct), introduced in 2000, was designed to ensure that those engaging in e-commerce in Bermuda operate in a manner that would maintain the island's reputation as a premier international business jurisdiction. Bermuda first had to define its role in the electronic world. The global insurance, banking and trust sectors, and the other international industries that operate on the island, are critical to the economy, and a solid foundation was needed on which customised solutions could be developed to meet specific needs.

In the Bermuda context, e-commerce does not mean giant server farms or warehouses stocked with goods to be bought online. Like all its business activities, Bermuda e-business is all about brains. Organisations seek to use technology to provide market advantage in the most efficient and effective manner.

Bermuda has for more than a decade imposed strict limitations on the material that may be hosted from the island. Gaming and pornography have always been banned. Now anti-child pornography and internet luring legislation has been enacted, with all-party support.

**Strength in depth**

Among the reasons why Bermuda is an ideal location for conducting e-business:

**Regulation:** The regulation of international business in Bermuda is fair and reasonable. Bermuda has a flexible regulatory framework that conforms to international standards.

**Professional support:** Bermuda is a sophisticated financial and legal centre. The legal and fiscal system is based on English law with a final right of appeal to the Privy Council in London. Company formation is fast and streamlined. The banking, trust, accounting, custodial and legal services are of a high international standard. A strong technology support network is in place with online publishers, web designers, software and hardware vendors and ISPs.

**Infrastructure:** An excellent telecommunications network comprising four diverse bandwidth routes, top quality hosting facilities with maximum security and full redundancy, as well as the spectrum of telecommunication options.

**Location:** An hour ahead of the Eastern Seaboard, four hours behind the UK, and seven to 12 hours behind the Middle East and Far East countries makes Bermuda an excellent location for operating international businesses. Easy access by air to most international centres, and the appeal of a sub-tropical paradise with literate, helpful people. Bermuda is one of the most convenient places in the world to hold business meetings.

**Political stability:** Bermuda is politically, economically and socially stable, and strenuously safeguards its reputation.

**Taxes:** No income taxes, withholding tax, capital gains tax, capital transfer tax, estate duty or inheritance taxes. Bermuda exempted companies are usually granted exemption by the Bermuda government for an exemption from paying any taxes until 2016.

METEC has established www.cybertips.bm, a solid source of information on internet safety. The site provides practical tips, resources and contact information to help parents, children and educators to use the internet safely and be on guard against online predators and other inappropriate online content.

**An exhaustive review**

As part of its ongoing commitment to keeping Bermuda's service offerings current, the ministry is conducting a total telecommunications regulatory review that is addressing all such aspects of the island's telecommunications infrastructure. A new model has been proposed that is undergoing public and industry consultation.

The Ministry is also continuing to implement its ambitious e-government plans, which will lead to all the functions of the Bermuda Government being fully online.

The Bermuda Government has built its own Certificate Authority and expanded its pilot programme out of internal digital certificates. A Bermudian company, QuoVadis, has moved into the European market, playing an important role in the establishment of the new Extended Validation Guidelines for SSL (website) certificates.

The energetic METEC has ongoing support initiatives in computer security, protecting the island's satellite slots, and in privacy legislation.

**Current initiatives**

The Electronic Transactions Act and Standards are being reviewed. Public safety electronic messaging and top-level domain initiatives are under way. An island-wide e-mentoring project has begun that will enable young people to interact with those employed in the electronic services sector.

The island's annual Tech Week — motto: Every day; everywhere; everyone — once again proved to be a great success this year. A range of activities enhances public awareness of the electronic world and its possibilities, with a special emphasis on educating the island's students.

A solid field of entries in various categories of competition for the 2008 Tech Innovation Awards was judged by a panel of representatives from local business organisations and, amid strong competition, awards were made in eight categories.

On the roads, the Government has placed RFID chips on all vehicles in a move widely applauded and now being studied elsewhere. The chips enable various Government departments to provide more accurate service and are beginning to cut down on the operations of unlicenced vehicles.

Because of the island's remote location, telecommunications has been the lifeline for more than a century. The Government's consistent focus on e-commerce and its possibilities keeps the world's leading financial services jurisdiction at the forefront of the march of electronic commerce.

Thanks to this forward-looking approach, Bermuda is a full player in the global economy and a hive of activity. The island is among the world's most highly wired communities. Just about every business is online, wi-fi usage has been on the increase throughout the island, with Bermuda International Airport the latest to come on board, and latest surveys put broadband internet access among the local population above 80 percent.

Given that the island is 800 miles from its nearest neighbour, the embrace of the electronic future has broad support throughout the community.

**E-readiness**

Bermuda's long-term embrace of e-commerce has been acknowledged
by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), which ranked Bermuda 17th in a survey of the top 70 countries worldwide in 2008, in terms of e-readiness.

E-readiness is the “state of play” of a country’s information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and the ability of its consumers, businesses and governments to use such technology to their benefit. When a country does more online — or, as is increasingly the case, wirelessly — the premise is that its economy can become more transparent and efficient.

The e-readiness rankings also allow governments to gauge the success of their ICT strategies against those of other countries, and provide companies wishing to invest in online operations with an overview of the world’s most promising investment locations from the e-readiness perspective.

Bermuda’s place in the Top 20, which it has consistently maintained in each of the years that it has been included in the survey, is remarkable, given that so many other major global economies lag behind Bermuda’s efforts. Once again, the survey placed Bermuda in the top five in the world in the category of legal environment, as it affects the needs of e-commerce. Were Bermuda larger, it might have fared better in the one category, the social and cultural environment, that kept it out of the top 10 in the overall rankings. ■