

# 1

## Quo Vadis? --- Internet

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I am deeply honoured to be invited as the key-note speaker of the ITEM '96 conference today. It is also a pleasure to be here with so many people of achievement and importance in the field of information processing and technology. I am particularly privileged in sharing the same platform as Mr. Joseph Wong, Secretary for Education and Manpower and Dr. Daniel Tse, President and Vice-chancellor of the Hong Kong Baptist University and Dr. Alex Fung, Chairman of the Organizing Committee for this conference.

As the title for the conference itself denotes, information technology in educational management for the schools of the future is important.

I have therefore deliberately chosen for my talk a topic which yet has to evolve answers. I should like to discuss with you the question of processing information, having regard to dramatic advancements in modern technology which allows quick access to information and which has yet to evolve a set of acceptable and universally understood standards of behaviour. This, indeed, is where educational management for the schools of the Future is central to the issue.

For many years, I have felt that computer studies are not only part of science but part of humanity. To understand the use of the computer, and to understand the morality involved in the computing business and the use of the internet, we need people who can communicate and we need teachers and students alike who will help to address the moral aspects of handling information technology, the use of the internet and access to information.

We all know that at affordable prices, and with incredible speed, people from a diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds can visit people in far away places. They can exchange information on line and need not worry about getting out of line.

Although already some 60 million people, spanning over some 150 countries, are already surfers on the Web, many of them may feel that they are at sea or are managing to keep themselves from being bitten by sharks on the Net, so to speak.

But, let us face it, though the Internet is still an inchoate technology, it is here to stay. Its possibilities for exploding into a global market in information, in commerce and trade, are enormous, though the risks of the Net being used and abused by shady sharks in cyberspace are also there.

Reality being what it is, I think the key to information technology and to the future relationship between the Government, the individual and the international community rests with evolving a universal *modus operandi*: a code of practice, if you like, for acceptable standards of behaviour for us to act locally and interact globally in a coherent manner.

The question is how to arrive at a situation where there is truly egalitarian interaction between the peoples of the world on the Net. How to get the full benefit from this technology; how to get the right balance between the rights of an individual and the responsibilities of the State; and how to set the right level of control, if we need controls at all, to preserve the integrity of the technology and promote individual choice: all these

are questions to which we do not have ready answers yet. There is at present no consensus. Neither is consensus something that can be cursorily arrived at or carelessly agreed upon.

But it is important to arrive at some commonality of view since having some connectivity is better than having no connectivity at all. I put it to you that we need to come together and to evolve a new universal consensus to that we are all on the same intellectual and moral wave-length to deal with access to information and to deal with the information technology in educational management for the schools in the future.

For a start, I think not enough resources are being deployed to promote in schools a cyberconsciousness in the use of the new technology. While we recognize the good work done in schools and while we acknowledge that the Government is trying to introduce computer literacy in schools, I put it to you that not enough is being done in schools to educate students with a view to understanding not only the mechanical side but also the ethical side of information technology.

The use of computer requires as much knowledge in ethics as any other science. For example, in medicine, we have laws to guide practitioners and we have self-regulating councils that govern the behaviour of practitioners in that profession.

But even as I speak, there is an absence of a universal consensus in setting a framework for some commonly acceptable multilateral and multinational parameters within which each country is free to determine rules governing the deployment and use of information technology.

Here I am of the view that the deliberations of this conference are of immense importance to the future educational management of information technology. And it would be a good thing to have every contentious view and important issue identified and thrashed out; and to have available options evolved and developed for adoption. It is important that the right sort of questions are asked. The pros and cons must be debated. All the twists and turns of each argument, albeit all inevitably interlinked, must be ironed out, negotiated and resolved on a world wide basis. In this technology, we need to develop a tripartite relationship between the cyber-mind, the cyber-brawn and the cyberheart --- I hope you will forgive me in coining these words to reflect exactly what I mean.

Thus, I have a vision that very soon, there will be a set of internationally understood and acceptable framework to guide us through the years.

To develop a comprehensive and coherent policy for providing information on the Net, we should develop a coherent approach. There should be provided the necessary resources for this strategy. In this public domain, we must move with the times. I hope too that at the end of the day, before the dawning of the next century, international internet agreements could be negotiated and agreed upon just as trade treaties or agreements on intellectual property are negotiated and signed to govern acceptable standards of behaviour between countries.

When this happens, concerned individuals, communities and Governments will be on the same wave length. When this happens we'll have good reason to celebrate.

Let me therefore extend my best wishes to you and hope you have a successful conference. Let me also say that I shall look forward to the outcome of your deliberations which will have far reaching implications in the years to come. Your individual contribution and collective wisdom will be long remembered and appreciated in the years to come.