

Working group vows broadband Net for all

Increasing access for poorer people could boost the whole economy,

- Published: 8/07/2009 at 12:00 AM
- Newspaper section: [Database](#)

Some of Thailand's most powerful telecommunications executives met with the regulatory agency, National Telecommunications Union (NTC), last week to embrace a plan for spreading broadband.



Members of Meaningful Broadband Working Group announce ambitious plans to present an economic model to the Prime Minister that will show how the nation can be transformed through broadband. From left, CAT Executive Vice President Suchin Pungvor-asn, True Corp President and CEO Supachai Chearavanont, Chulalongkorn University's Prof Craig Warren Smith (who directs the Working Group), NTC Commissioner Prof Setaprong Cusripituck, NTC Commissioner Prof Prasit Prapinmongkolkarn, TOT Executive Vice President Montchai Noonsong, and Dtac Senior Vice President Andrew McBean.

Released in an NTC-sponsored white paper called "Meaningful Broadband: A Manifesto for Thailand", written by Prof Craig Warren Smith of Chulalongkorn University, the plan calls for telecom sector leaders to reach out directly to the Prime Minister and his cabinet.

They plan to develop an innovative economic model that would define precisely the role that broadband can play in solving the the nation's problems.

"Broadband is a precious factor that will be used to transform Thai society for better or worse," said Prof Smith.

"Now that the country is on the verge of 3G, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet should define how they want to use broadband to further their own reforms. Once they do so, it will be possible to clarify how to share the costs and risks of extending the benefits of high speed internet to everyone," said Prof Smith.

The meeting, held at the Oriental Hotel, was the first of the Meaningful Broadband Working Group, composed of the Chairman and CEOs of all five Thai telecommunications corporations - ToT, CAT, AIS, Dtac and True Corp - along with NTC. Though the Working Group is organised by a secretariat at Chulalongkorn, its chairmanship rotates between members.

The interim chair and co-host of the meeting was Prof Prasit Prapinmongkolkarn, a commissioner of NTC. He said "What makes the Meaningful Broadband plan truly innovative is that it doesn't imitate the common pattern of broadband in advanced societies of serving the wealthy only, or of pushing broadband applications created for the affluent onto the poor.

"The Meaningful Broadband plan looks beyond affluent markets to bring mobile broadband to 28 million low-income citizens who are wealthy enough to have cell phones but too poor to attract the attention of marketers.

"As it turns out, this plan will be good for business because lower costs will result from increased market penetration. More investors will be attracted to the sector."

Prof Smith's report advocates that the same companies competing vigorously for the affluent markets should join hands to formulate a way of delivering essential services to the poor through smart handsets.

"If the government joins into this collaboration, those who make just \$2 to \$6 (68-204 baht) per day could achieve a 'wealth effect' that will change the character of the entire Thai economy," says Prof Smith.

"But first, certain technology problems must be solved, like how to develop a government-approved user interface that is interoperable among handsets."

The new interim chair of the group and its next host is True Corp President and CEO Supachai Chearavanont. He said that the next step for the Working Group will be a follow up study that would prepare for a meeting with Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva along with ministers of Finance, Education, ICT and the head of the National Economic and Social Development Board. "We need to determine the roles of government, the regulator, and the telecommunications operators within this framework," he said.

"Clearly human resources development should be at the center of this strategy," said Montchai Noosong, Executive Vice President of TOT.

"Once we have an overview of how broadband can serve the nation at large, we should consider how broadband could be used to unleash human resources in Thailand. It can be a vital addition to our educational system."

Chulalongkorn University's Soraj Hongladarom added: "Central to the 'meaningful' idea is a new approach to ethics.

"We want Thailand to bring in the world's top designers of next-generation technologies to create mobile applications that help low-income users choose broadband applications," he said.

Prof Soraj is Director of the Centre for Ethics of Science and Technology, which serves as the organisational Meaningful Broadband Working Group at Chulalongkorn, directed by Prof Smith.

For a copy of 'Meaningful Broadband: A Manifesto for Thailand', sponsored by NTC, email craigwarrensmith@hotmail.com

Reference:

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/tech/technews/19860/working-group-vows-broadband-net-for-all>