

Multi Purpose Tele-center

1. Background

The Internet was introduced into Bhutan in 1999 coinciding with the Silver Jubilee Celebration of His Majesty's 25 years of glorious reign in the country, truly ushering Bhutan into the Information Age. With it Bhutan joined the multitude of nations aspiring to harness the power of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to achieve further progress.

With an Internet Service Provider (ISP), the Druknet, providing 128 kbps and 64 kbps leased line, and dial up connections, Internet access has reached most government offices in the capital and the dzongkhags administration offices. Most private businesses (relatively large ones) are also connected to the Internet. Altogether, Druknet has registered more than 1080 accounts, all benefiting from the myriad of resources and services of the Internet.

However, the Internet is inaccessible for the bulk of the population, consisting of farmers, students and small private businesses, as both computers and Internet connections are relatively very expensive. Even in places where private Internet cafes exist (there are Internet cafes in Thimphu and Phuentsholing) the high charges means that only a handful can avail the services. As a result, much of the potential benefits of the Internet are unavailable to the majority of the masses.

2. Project Objective

The objective of this project is to establish 10 multi purpose Tele-centers as pilot projects in different parts of the country, so that the public; farmers, students, teachers, government employees, and local businessmen/women, can have access to and benefit from the Internet and communication facilities. More and more government offices are making their presence on the Internet via their own websites, making available vital information and online services.

The public can access these websites, obtain information and avail these services. The Tele-centers will be centers, where besides information from the Internet, people gain access to the government, download government forms, market information on local crops and products, information on outbreak of crop and human diseases, and a gamut of other pertinent information, beneficial to the public. The project also intends to provide other services like telephone services such as ISD, STD etc for the rural community.

3. Implementing Agency

The Division of Information Technology (DIT) in collaboration with Bhutan Post will implement the project. Both Bhutan Post and education has a presence throughout the country and already serves as one of the main community hubs, so the project can be readily implemented benefiting from the infrastructure already in place, thereby reducing the cost of the project. Since the use of email can significantly shift communication method from the traditional paper mails to today's electronic mails it is of interest to the Bhutan post to implement the same.

Once implemented, the multi purpose Tele-centers will be operated and maintained by Bhutan Post. The Tele-centers will be made sustainable by charging nominal fees for the services.

4. Resource Requirement

In order to get the maximum benefit out of the Tele-centers, they will be located in places where there are relatively larger numbers of potential users. For example, they will be placed

where there are schools, markets, government offices, and where the general public in the area including the farmers can have easy access and where the services can be availed by a large number of people. Thus placed, it is anticipated that there will be a lot of users. In order to cater to this anticipated user size each Tele-center will have two computers, which will be networked using a simple hub and connected to the Internet using a modem. Very specifically, each public kiosk will require the following:

- 2 Personal Computers
- 1 Modem
- 1 Hub
- 1 Telephone line
- 1 Dial up Internet account
- 1 Printer
- 1 Photocopier machine
- 3 Stabilizers
- Cables and Wires
- Necessary software such as Windows Operating System, Microsoft office etc.
- PCO facilities

5. Human Resource

Since the project is to be implemented by the DIT and Bhutan Post, initially there will be no requirement to recruit any personnel as DIT staff can execute the work, starting from procurement of equipment to installation and set up, till the Tele-centers are made fully operational. Once the Tele-centers are online, a person will be required to manage and look after the kiosk.

The managing and running of the Tele-centers, for reasons stated in earlier paragraphs, will be carried out by Bhutan Post. As such, Bhutan Post will either recruit new personnel or delegate the responsibility to the existing staff of the post office where the Tele-center will be placed. However, in either case, proper training to operate and manage the Tele-center will be necessary. Therefore, a budget provision is accorded to train one personnel for each Tele-center.