The View from Down Under

By Mary-Anne Goldsworthy
Executive Officer
Centre for Electronic Commerce
Monash University Gippsland Campus
Churchill Victoria
AUSTRALIA 3842
Email: cec@buseco.monash.edu.au
Web Page: http://www-cec.buseco.monash.edu.au

Mary-Anne Goldsworthy has forwarded two articles from The Australian Financial Review for this edition.

The Electronic Services Delivery (ESD) project is a current development for the Victorian State Government in Australia to provide Victorian citizens with the means to obtain government services electronically, and to use these means to simplify the interaction between Government and its clients. The project takes a "life event" view in that the user needs to know what they want done, rather than which government agency to contact. The ESD will be offered via a number of service delivery channels, one of which are kiosks, other channels include the Internet, telephone including IVR, interactive TV, and the more traditional face-to-face and mail.
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Victorian multimedia kiosks first in world

By Stan Beer
The Australian Financial Review

A joint venture between NEC Australia and Aspect Computing will implement the world's most advanced electronic services delivery network, starting with the establishment of a network of multimedia kiosks in Victoria next month, according to its newly appointed executive director.

Mr Neil Yamagishi, executive director of Maxi Multimedia, which is 80 per cent owned by NEC, said the first 45 public kiosks would go live in October, a further 15 by January 1998, with several hundred to be installed within two years.

Mr Yamagishi said the Victorian ESD system was the first of its type in the world because it provides "three tiers of access points, including the Internet, interactive voice response on the telephone and networked multimedia kiosks".

The ESD network will initially enable users to perform seven types of transactions with seven agencies, such as making bill payments, registering address changes, ordering birth certificates and obtaining government information.

Maxi Multimedia, initially staffed by 20 people, developed all the software for the network and will oversee the ESD operation, including maintenance of a website and an interactive voice response centre.

Mr Yamagishi said Maxi was in the process of expanding the number of service providers beyond the initial seven that will be on the network. "Aside from 14 local government councils in Victoria which have expressed interest, private organisations involved in movie ticketing, tourism information and utilities have all indicated their willingness to provide services on the network," Mr Yamagishi said.

At the official launch of Maxi Multimedia at NEC Australia headquarters in Melbourne last week, the worldwide

chairman of NEC, Dr Tadahiro Sekimoto, said the Australian subsidiary was being used as a model for NEC's other overseas operations.

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The Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) is becoming a world leader in Internet use for stock exchange information and trading. The ASX has been involved in electronic trading for over 10 years, with the Internet accelerating the use of their site for electronic trading and exchange of information in the past two years. This article tracks the development of the ASX use of the Internet to achieve the strategic goals of the organisation.
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Internet makes exchange take stock

By Peter Roberts
The Australian Financial Review

The Australian Stock Exchange, which adopted full electronic trading of shares a decade ago this year, is emerging as an international leader in Internet use. While full-screen trading was the technology that allowed the merger of disparate State stock exchanges, the Internet is being used more strategically to under-pin the ASX's business goals. These goals include developing new markets for share ownership, and reducing the cost of distributing and increasing the reach of the rich load of information generated by the exchange.

After only two years using the Internet, the ASX's web site already ranks among the top five in the country, with the number of visits to the site increasing by 15 to 20 per cent a month. More that $1 million is invested each year into the site, which uses technology from the ASX's long term partner, Digital Equipment Corporation. Hardware needs alone are doubling every four and a half months.

The ASX launched its first Internet site in 1995, but there was little other than brochure type material available electronically until a second generation site was launched in November. "We underestimated the Internet on our first outing," the ASX's national director of information, marketing and research, Rory Collins, said. "The Internet has started us all over again in the learning process." The ASX web site is seen as a step one of a three-step Internet development process.

Since November 1996 it has been massively expanded to offer market news, including a value for the All Ordinaries index updated every 60 seconds. The site has an electronic stock exchange tour and an interactive guide to investing in shares. There is a search mechanism for finding a broker on the basis of 16 criteria such as geographical location and languages spoken. And there are hot links to specialist information vendors who sell stock price and related information. "This is the first time we have been providing really useful information," Mr Collins said.

The number of visits to the ASX's web site has increased as a result from 500 a day in March last year to 5,500 visits a day in the past month. The record number of visits reached 9,500 during the recent uncertainties in the US equity markets.

One of the most popular features of the ASX web site has been a realistic share game for school students that has been used 25,000 participants from 5,000 schools. Extensions are planned to make the share game available to corporations as a training tool and more widely to the general public.

In its second phase of Internet development, the ASX aims to use the technology to cut the cost of distributing information and communicating with the exchange's clients. Early in 1998, the first Internet market offered by the ASX, the Enterprise Market (e.m), will be launched. The e.m is essentially an electronic bulletin board attempting to bring together unlisted companies looking for equity capital with investors looking to make such investments. The e.m will also be a mechanism for existing investors in unlisted companies who want to sell their shares.

While the market has a number of restrictions to access and is definitely of the caveat emptor variety, it will go some way to streamlining the raising of venture and development capital in Australia. In its third phase of Internet

development, the ASX is working with information distributors to unlock the information held by the exchange and ensure its wide distribution. Says Collins: "We have amazing content, and isn't the world going the way of content providers?" The ASX's move onto the Internet comes after extensive market research of customer groups in the past two years. The exchange admits it rarely talked to its customers in the past. The research showed customers thought the exchange was inaccessible, its communications were jargon-filled, it was high risk and only for the wealthy. With 34 per cent of the adult population now owning shares, the greater accessibility of the ASX through the Internet can only be a good thing.