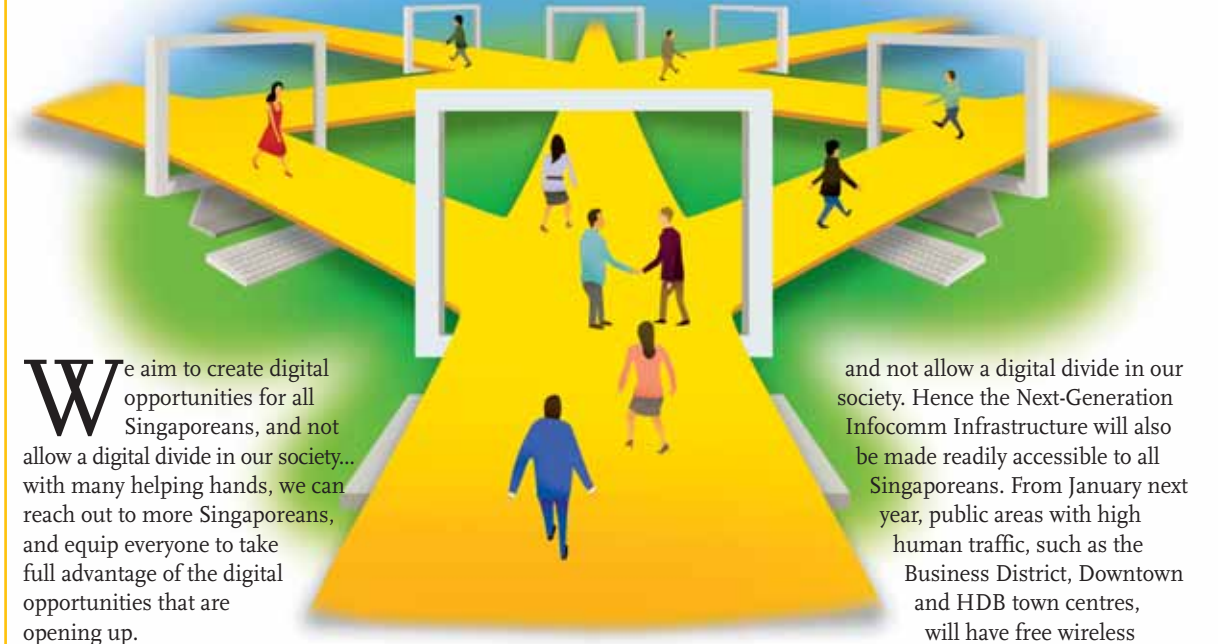


# Digital Opportunities for All

By Lee Hsien Loong



**W**e aim to create digital opportunities for all Singaporeans, and not allow a digital divide in our society... with many helping hands, we can reach out to more Singaporeans, and equip everyone to take full advantage of the digital opportunities that are opening up.

Singapore has come a long way in exploiting IT and making it a pervasive part of our lives. From having practically no IT industry, Singapore is now a global leader in e-Government and host to a thriving infocomm industry with nearly \$40 billion in annual revenues.

Looking ahead, the Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) of Singapore had sourced inputs in the past year from the private, public and people sectors to formulate a masterplan to sharpen Singapore's infocomm and economic competitiveness in the next decade. The masterplan is coined "Intelligent Nation 2015". In the plan, Singapore's infocomm infrastructure will be improved to include a new ultra-high-speed network linking every home and office, a wireless broadband network that allows Singaporeans to stay connected even while on the go, as well as supporting infrastructure for e-identity, e-payments and cyber-security. When completed, this Next-Generation Infrastructure will be a critical enabler to build new capabilities and transform our industries. It will help to jumpstart an exciting host of new applications and high-growth sectors that rely on broadband – from immersive learning and high definition video, to telemedicine and grid computing.

Singapore will invest \$500 million into R&D initiatives to strengthen our infocomm capabilities, especially in the area of interactive and digital media (IDM). R&D projects will reap benefits in many areas, such as education, for instance through a joint programme by MOE and IDA to develop "Schools of the Future", whereby infocomm will be integrated holistically into every aspect of the school environment to make learning come to life. A strong and vibrant infocomm sector will also create many new jobs for Singaporeans. Countries in Southeast Asia, China, India and the Middle East who are also keen to learn about our experience with e-Government will also benefit.

We have also planned to broaden the opportunities for all segments of the population to access and benefit from technology as we move forward in the digital age. We aim to create digital opportunities for all Singaporeans,

and not allow a digital divide in our society. Hence the Next-Generation Infocomm Infrastructure will also be made readily accessible to all Singaporeans. From January next year, public areas with high human traffic, such as the Business District, Downtown and HDB town centres, will have free wireless

broadband connections for at least 2 years. Thereafter, consumers can enjoy high speed connection to the internet, send out instant messages and check emails, and even make VOIP (voice-over-IP) calls.

In addition, more targeted assistance to help needy Singaporeans make full use of infocomm will also be provided. For most Singaporeans, access to computers and broadband is no longer a luxury. Most school-going children have computers at home, but 14% of households still do not. IDA currently runs a "NEU PC" scheme that offers needy families PCs at highly subsidised prices. More than 20,000 families have benefited from this scheme over the last 6 years. Going forward, the Government will enhance this scheme to benefit more needy families. With this "NEU PC Plus" scheme, students from low-income families can look forward to a brand new computer for less than \$300, bundled with 3 years of unlimited broadband access.

We are also paying attention to older Singaporeans and the disabled community. Infocomm can help them contribute meaningfully to society and stay connected with their family and friends. IDA will work closely with the grassroots organisations to help less tech-savvy senior citizens get connected to the internet. IDA is also working with MCYS, VWOs and industry partners to provide infocomm training for those with disabilities and create employment opportunities for them.

IDA and the infocomm industry has also set up an "iNspire Fund" to help needy students. For every dollar raised by the industry, IDA will match with two dollars. With many helping hands, we can reach out to more Singaporeans, and equip everyone to take full advantage of the digital opportunities that are opening up.

*Extracted from a speech by Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Innovation Gala Dinner in celebration of 25 years of Infocomm and the National Infocomm awards, 10 October 2006, at the Singapore Expo*

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