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MEDIA REGULATIONS FOR NEW TIMES

INTRODUCTION

1. Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like first to thank the Asia Media Information And Communication Centre (AMIC) and the conference sponsors for giving me the opportunity to share with you Singapore’s perception and experience on “Media Regulations For New Times”.

2. My presentation will cover 3 main aspects:

   a. An overview of the development of the media scene in Singapore.

   b. Implications to regulators and regulations.

   c. Observations and conclusions.

3. To make full use of the limited time allocated to me, I will present the subject from a largely conceptual and macro perspective, and leave specific details, if any, to the Q & A session that follows.
OVERVIEW - DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIA SCENE IN SINGAPORE

4. In the last few years, Singapore's broadcasting landscape has witnessed a sea change. Free-To-Air TV, or old media if you like to call it, is or will face competition from newer media in the form of cable TV and Video-On-Demand.

5. Cable TV was launched in 1995. To date, about half of all Singapore households have been cabled, and by end 1998/early 1999 all Singapore households will be cabled. It means that the 4 local Free-To-Air TV channels will be competing with the more than 30 cable TV channels for viewership. It means that local content on the Free-To-Air TV will have to compete with the largely foreign content on cable TV for attention.

6. Video-On-Demand is being actively tried out, and commercial VOD will probably begin as early as next year. Thus Video-On-Demand will join in the competition, providing viewers not just more choice on programmes, but also more convenience in that they can choose what programme to watch and when to watch it.

7. In addition to the traditional media like TV, video, and print, content through the computer and internet has and will continue to change the entire face of what media is to Singaporeans. Singapore has one of the highest rate of computer literacy for its population, and the number of Internet subscribers has been rocketing. In 1994, there were about 50,000 Internet subscribers. Today it has gone past 150,000, and the figure is still growing.
by the day. The number of actual Internet users will be more since some operate shared accounts.

8. The profile of Internet users has also expanded, from essentially university researchers, scholars and knowledge workers to incorporate also students and the man in the street. It appears a matter of time before Internet in Singapore will become as pervasive as TV and radio are today.

9. The growth of content in the media is complemented by the technological advances that will result in the convergence of the broadcast, telecommunications and computer industries. Singapore is exploiting this wealth of content and technological advances in an integrated and systematic way. The result is the formulation and implementation of Singapore ONE, which was just launched by our PM Goh Chok Tong on 9 Jun 97 during the Asia Telecom 97 Exhibition held in Singapore.

10. What is Singapore ONE then? In layman terms, Singapore ONE is the world’s first nationwide broadband network that will deliver a new level of interactive, multimedia applications and services to everyone in Singapore. Its high-speed and high-capacity will enable users in every home, school and office in Singapore to experience richer, more exciting and interactive content. These content will be delivered faster and more reliably than is currently available through the Internet or other media. Users’ access to content will be vast, from entertainment to education, from on-line shopping to other electronic commerce services, and many others. It will also carry government services including information, transactions, and video
conferencing. Internet through the broadband network will be more than 100 times faster.

11. For businesses, Singapore ONE offers the unique opportunity to operate in the business environment of the future. This high speed broadband network offers companies the platform to conduct R & D in leading edge technologies, and to develop and test service applications for a "live" market. Singapore ONE has the full support of the Singapore government, and is driven by the National Computer Board, the National Science & Technology Board and the Telecommunication Authority of Singapore, with the support of the Economic Development Board and the Singapore Broadcasting Authority.

12. A number of local companies and multinational corporations have signed MOUs with the owners of Singapore ONE to either provide applications and services or to develop broadband enabling technologies for Singapore ONE. The numbers are expected to grow as the project gathers momentum, and will bring about a content-rich environment.

13. How is Singapore ONE possible? Here a little bit on the technology of the Singapore ONE infrastructure is relevant:

   a. The core network for the Singapore island is a high-speed broadband optical fibre backbone network based on Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM) technology. This core broadband network is built, owned and operated by an industry consortium called 1-Net.
b. Local access networks will connect to the core network. The local access networks use advanced technologies such as hybrid fiber coaxial (HFC) cable and Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Lines (ADSL) to connect to users' PC as well as public kiosks meant for public access. Local access networks will be operated by access providers, Singapore Telecom and Singapore Cable Vision.

IMPLICATIONS TO REGULATOR AND REGULATIONS

14. Given the rapid changes and advancement, the challenge to the regulator is not confined to just how to manage changes, but also how to facilitate changes.

15. The regulator has to be aware of changing trends and their implications. I will touch on three of them, from Singapore's experience:

a. The first - Regulation has to take into consideration, indeed accept, that to an increasing extent content will become universal and borderless. Internet is the best example, touted by some as the last frontier for freedom of expression. But even for TV, the regulator has to realise that it is so much easier to regulate local content on Free-To-Air TV, because the content is produced locally within a known environment, when compared to foreign content through cable or satellite TV which is pumped continuously from abroad. The challenge here to the regulator is to have in place a regulatory system
that is practical and manageable, and a content code that balances the need to preserve core values on the one hand and not to over-censor on the other hand.

b. The second - The volume and variety of content will continue to increase. The last thing the regulator should do is to slow or stop the growth of content. Instead, the regulator’s main task is to help users deal with the quality of content and the problem of information overload. This the regulator can do through instituting proper guidelines and public education. The regulator should be perceived not just negatively as a policeman, but also positively as a facilitator. Thus, for example, the need for the regulator to highlight the easy availability of pornography in the Internet, and the need for public education on the subject for parents and educators so that they could in turn advise and guide the children and students in a positive way, that is, not to avoid the Internet just because there is pornography but how to exploit the Internet positively and put it to good use.

c. The third - The growth in media and content in general will benefit both businesses and users. Businesses will be able to reach out to wider geographic, social or economic markets. Users and consumers will have more choices, will be better informed, and will be able to experience potentially more enriching and fulfilling lives. The regulator’s job here is to ensure that such positive aspects of new media are not negated by dangerous and socially-undesirable content, perpetrated or exploited by a small minority for selfish reasons. Thus
the need, for example, to have proper laws for electronic commerce to safeguard the interest of bona fide business transactions.

OBSERVATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

16. Media regulations for new times have to be considered from a fresh perspective. Fortunately, they need not be revolutionary. But they have to be relevant, practical, manageable and enlightened.

17. The objectives of regulation are not to stifle exposure to new technology, or exploration of new knowledge, or to block information per se, but to enhance the positive aspects of the new media. Both the public and the regulator must understand this, in order to achieve a consensus and for all to benefit fully from the new media.

18. Just as there is a technological convergence of broadcasting and telecommunication, there should be a convergence of the regulatory and facilitation roles. Our integrated approach in regulating and promoting the use of Internet and other media exemplifies this principle. We recognise the new media and Internet’s growing importance, and that their influence and benefits will reach all levels of society. As we regulate, we will also help in the development of the new media and Internet to its fullest potential.

19. Singapore is embarking on a very exciting journey on media for new times, a journey which will eventually reach every home and everyone (Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans) doing business in Singapore, a
journey which will affect all stages and all aspects of our life - the way we learn, the way we socialise, the way we work, the way we shop and transact business, and the way we seek and derive leisure and pleasure. We certainly do not have all the answers on managing the media for new times, but as we move on, we hope to continue to share experiences and exchange views in forums such as this one.

20. We believe that as the world continues to shrink in size, with universal access to all places through the Internet and other media, countries and people could work closer together to exploit the potential of technology and the wealth of content to enhance our quality of life.

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HIGHWAYS, SKYWAYS & CORRIDORS

To be delivered by

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