FEAR AND DISTRUST OF TECHNOLOGY, OR OF ITS USE?

By coincidence, two of our articles in this issue deal with human anxiety over technology. While Professor Shamos has learnt that the public does not trust computers or the people who programme them enough to rely on electronic voting, our graduate Jackson Kwan reminds us not to let the advent of technology dictate our personal agendas.

I believe we fear and/or distrust technology usually for three reasons: we either know too much, or we do not know enough, or we are just unwilling to change because it sometimes means giving up certain cherished ideals or values in one's life and society. The three reasons feature prominently in the public debates over the adoption of a national ID card in Australia and the UK. After the recent terrorist attacks in London and Glasgow, and the detention of an Asian-born medical doctors recently migrated to Australia whose contact information was revealed on the SIM card in their mobile telephone of one of the terrorists, the verdict is still out whether technology is a powerful tool to combat terrorism or one that could easily be used unwittingly to incriminate an innocent person.

In Australia, the national card was proposed twenty years ago as a safeguard against fraud and abuse of national benefits, but was rejected by the majority of its people. Public opinion is still divided about a national card over its reliability, cost, and especially its declared purposes, which are generally along these lines: prevent illegal immigration, aid anti-terrorism measures, and reduce benefit fraud and abuse of public services. The objections are loss of privacy, leading to "function creep", and worsening harassment of ethnic minorities. One of our Australian instructors, Professor Roger Clarke (ECOM6001: Internet and the WWW), has pointed out that a card cannot be used as a tool against terrorism because face recognition is still unreliable (The Age, 2 August 2005). Some argue that unless there is a real-time verification system at any location where a national ID card check is required, the service cannot work effectively. Other concede that while the emergence of web services will make a card more achievable and eventually more affordable, linking the card with various data sources will be fraught with difficulty because of human input error and the data to be linked might be poor and incorrect.

As we learn about and deploy smart cards, RFID, GIS, data warehousing, data mining technologies and information engineering in gathering marketing and customer information for e-commerce, perhaps we should also bear in mind the human factor and the paramount importance of ethics and human rights.

Angela Castro
MEICOM Connect Editor

PROGRAMME OFFICE UPDATES

COMPLETION OF THE MSc(ECOM&ICOMP) CURRICULUM REVIEW

A curriculum review of the MSc programme in Electronic Commerce and Internet Computing has been completed. Thanks to all those graduates, instructors and teaching assistants who participated. Decisions have been taken to enhance the curriculum through the updating of existing modules and the progressive introduction of new modules.

• Mr. Peter Looms will teach a new elective module on "Technology convergence and digital entertainment".
• Dr. Renato Iannella has revised the XML module to come up with more advanced topics on Internet information engineering.
• Dr. Joachim Hammer, who has recently joined the Microsoft research team in Seattle, will redesign the data warehousing module to focus on Business intelligence.
• New topics like Mobile commerce (ECOM module) and Service science management and engineering (ICOMP module) are now in the planning stage.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) COURSES

Graduates are welcome to enroll in MSc(ECOM&ICOMP) modules for continuing and professional development purpose. We will offer the new modules as CPD courses to our graduates if enrolment quota allows. Information about CPD courses is published on the programme web site in September, December, and May. Watch out for our email notification if you are interested!

ECOM&ICOMP EXPERTS ADDRESS

The ECOM-IComp Experts Address series is designed primarily to keep students and alumni of our programme up-to-date with the information technology and electronic business trends around the world, and given by our visiting instructors who may also choose to share other expertise beyond that shown in their modules.

Mr. Sampson Lee from GCCRM presented his research on "Online Customer Experience in Mainland China" on 26 February 2007. The study revealed not only Chinese people’s surfing habits, but also their online experience.

In June, Mr. Bebo White of Stanford University gave a talk on "Open Source Software - A Collaboration Platform for Web Applications", which was about the close interaction between open source methodologies, tools, platforms, and the construction of modern web applications and services.

A panel discussion, chaired by Denis Lee, Professor of Suffolk University, explored the trend for IT/IS outsourcing and how Hong Kong should develop its human resources in the IT/IS area on 20 June 2007. Some graduates and current students were invited to join the panel to discuss and share their experience.

The slides and video recording of most of the addresses are available on our web site: http://www.ecom-icom.hku.hk/seminar/

Panel Discussion on 20 June 2007

WELCOMING RECEPTION FOR COHORT 2007-08 STUDENTS

We will have a welcoming reception for cohort 2007-08 students at Thetre B, Chow Yei Ching Building on 1 September 2007. Graduates and current students are welcome to attend this gathering and share your experience with new students. Please contact the Programme Office if you would like to participate.

GRADUATE DIRECTORY

To stay in touch with the Programme and with your fellow graduates, the Programme Office provides a graduate directory for you to update your contact information and look for other graduates. So don’t forget to tell us if you have moved, changed your telephone number or email address. You could check to make sure that your information is correct and up-to-date.

http://www.ecom-icom.hku.hk/graduate-info/

MEICOM CONNECT welcomes contributions and comments. Please email them to msc@ecom-icom.hku.hk. Deadline for the next issue: 7 December 2007.