

Tech Focus

Bridging the digital divide

SYED TASHFİN CHOWDHURY

ALCATEL, one of the leading global telecommunication brands, is taking the initiative to facilitate the overall development of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector of the country by aiding the students and faculties of various universities through numerous programmes, seminars and internships.

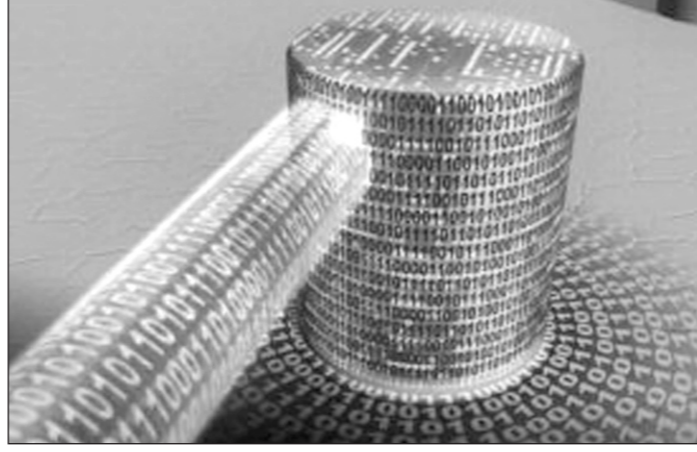
"We are planning to involve Bangladesh in our initiative to bridge the digital divide," said Shajel Qureshi, Manager, Marketing Business Development and Corporate Communication, Alcatel, South Asia.

The digital divide indicates the difference in facilities for people to communicate, relative to their

geographic location, living standards and level of education. It is an advantage that most countries like the US, Canada, Australia and so on have in information and communication technology over other countries in this area.

So far, Alcatel organised a three-day seminar last year, where thirty students along with faculties from some leading universities of the nation took part. Students from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and North South University (NSU) were among them.

On the very first day, the students interacted and took part in seminars presented by experts from some of the leading cell phone operators of the country. Technical experts from the



Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) took part on the second day, while experts from Bangladesh Railway, to whom Alcatel has provided optical fiber solutions

and operators from power grid company and the forthcoming Public Service telephone network (PSTN) took part in the seminar on the last day of the event.

"The event was a unique opportunity for the students to discuss various technical issues, products, solutions with experts," said Qureshi.

Along with such an event, the company plans to initiate other projects to aid the overall infrastructures of most universities as well as to propel the knowledge and skills of the students at these institutions.

Alcatel plans to provide their journals and news-letters for university libraries, provide access to the Alcatel Virtual University via the internet, sponsor special projects and research done by students, contribute toward the video learning library of the universities and set up high tech telecommunication labs.

The company will also offer internships, provide the opportunity to university students and lecturers to work with Alcatel with a more 'hands-on' approach thus replenishing the skills and knowledge of employees of the

company and the university members as well.

"As more universities are introducing telecommunication as a major in their curriculum, hopefully the nation will benefit from students graduating from these institutions with such majors and the experience and skills that Alcatel will be able to provide to them," said Qureshi.

Alcatel will also participate in different IT and telecom seminars organised by the universities concerned. Experts from the company will also hold presentations for the students of the leading universities on a regular basis thus updating students about recent developments in the global ICT scene.

"Alcatel may also collaborate on joint programs with some of the leading universities, in order to determine the readiness of Bangladesh for the anticipated submarine cable network and other appropriate technology infusion to the country such as WLL, YMAX and XTSL", Qureshi added. He also stated that most of these activities will be undertaken within the first quarter of this year.

Alcatel is known for their contribution in the telecommunication sector in countries like Namibia, Colombia and China.

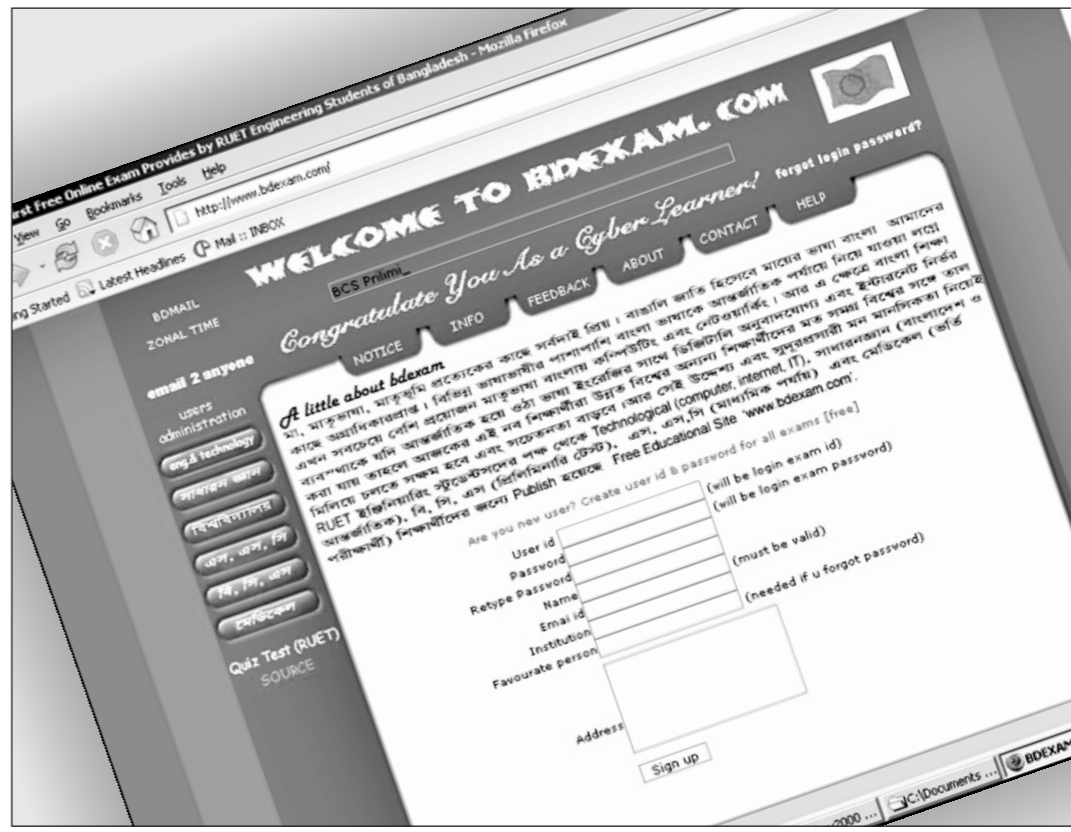
Alcatel provides communication solutions to telecommunication carriers, Internet service providers and enterprises for delivery of voice, data and video applications to their customers or employees. The company is also known for their fixed and mobile broadband networks, applications and services, through which it has helped its partners and customers in building a user-centric broadband world. Alcatel operates in more than 130 countries.



A snap from Alcatel's seminar 'Broaden your life'.

Tech Site

RUET student develops educational site



RIDWAN A KABIR

IMPLEMENTING the usage of computers in educational institutions and using Bangla in data-communication and networking accessibility are areas that now receive much attention in different private and public organisations. A free educational site -- bdexam.com -- developed by a student of Rajshahi University of Engineering Technology (RUET), has created new usage possibilities for students sitting for various examinations.

The site has links to practice level multiple-choice questions (MCQ) on Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) modules, Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams, general knowledge, information and technology and also to RUET and medical admission tests.

"This site may become a role model for all primary, secondary and even university level

academies," said the site's developer, Mohammad Emdadul Haque Murad, a fourth year engineering student of RUET, while holding his high hopes that all educational institutions will use such MCQ exam based websites to administer their exams for the students.

Entrance to any practice exam at the site is free of cost. The only requirement is to take a little time in filling in an online registration form. A login name and password is allocated to each user of the service. A single login name and associated password may be used to attend any category of exams that are listed in the site.

"Once you enter an example, the timer starts counting your staying period while attending the question paper," says Murad. This is exactly how a student will time him or herself and hence take any necessary precaution for the real show ground. Submission of any such paper within the allocated time

frame is essential. As soon as someone presses the 'finish' button on an exam-paper version of the site, the results pop up within a few seconds.

"This might be adopted by all public and private universities and colleges, which take unlimited time to publish results of their examinations," he said, referring to the late responses on SSC and HSC results from the education boards.

The site has been built using MSQl and PHP as the main server is on Linux. A Unicode based software is also at use for the site to view Bangla fonts. Many links of the site are still under construction and will be completed soon.

Such an effort is always praiseworthy. Educational institutions should come forward and help their students realise their hidden potential, which, in turn, can help the institution itself.

Tech Review

Review: Mac Mini elegant, inexpensive



The Apple Computers Inc. new Mac Mini is shown at an Apple store in Palo Alto, Calif., Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2005. As it works to expand its share of the PC market, Mac is shipping a computer that starts at \$499.

AP TECHNOLOGY WRITER

WHEN the original Macintosh computer was little more than a sketch, its creators envisioned the machine retailing for about \$500. But when the first Mac finally rolled out in 1984, it carried a hefty price tag of \$2,495.

Apple Computer Inc. has never had a problem capturing consumers' hearts, though their wallets have been another story. Over the years, Apple's reputation for innovation, fashion-forward design and high prices rose while its market share dwindled.

Now, it's finally selling a computer, called the Mac mini, for \$499, the same price as one of its higher-end iPod music players.

Though this compact little box won't have the same impact that a \$500 Mac could have had 21 years ago, it just might be the right computer for our times.

The Mac mini is elegant, inexpensive without being cheap, and it's not a magnet for the viruses, worms and other malware floating around the Internet. It could fit in any room as a first, second or third

computer. And it plays well with others on a home network.

Most of all, it's a low-cost alternative to Microsoft Corp.'s Windows that doesn't carry the learning curve of Linux. It also doesn't presume you're guilty of software theft: And refreshingly unlike Windows, there's no activation when you set it up or an anti-piracy checks afterward.

The Mini seems designed more like a consumer electronics device like Apple's iPod than a general-purpose computer. But despite the name, it's watered down only in size and cost. This is as much a Mac as any other that's been sold over the years.

It arrived on my front porch in a carton that seemed more like a cake box. Removed from the packaging, the 2.9-pound unit is basically a 6.5-inch square just 2 inches high. The silver-and-white case resembles the color scheme of an iPod.

It doesn't include a keyboard, mouse or display, but all can be purchased separately based on what you like and need. After my borrowed Mini arrived, I dug out my old iMac's keyboard

and mouse as well as a 15-inch monitor from the attic.

The old parts worked beautifully and cost nothing extra.

Setup took less than five minutes and involved nothing more than connecting the monitor, the mouse and the keyboard to the computer, and plugging everything into the wall. (Yes, there is a pretty sizable power brick, unlike the latest iMacs.)

After completing a brief startup wizard, I was whisked to Mac OS X's simple desktop where I could launch Apple's recently updated suite of programs for music, photos and video as well as check e-mail and surf the Internet. All the software is included.

My unit came with a 1.25

gigahertz G4 microprocessor, double the default (and skimpy) 256 megabytes of RAM, a 40-gigabyte hard drive and a combo CD-burner/DVD player. It also had a built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth wireless option installed. The extras brought the total price to \$673.

A number of other upgrades are available, including a faster processor, even more memory, a bigger hard drive and a combination DVD-CD burner. The options are best ordered when you buy the machine. Unlike most PCs, the Mini isn't designed to be easily upgradeable at home.

I slid a DVD movie into the slot that, aside from a tiny power light, is the only feature on the front of the computer. The show started up immedi-

ately, and didn't stutter even though the Web browser and iPhoto picture management program were already running.

I downloaded and installed a trial version of Microsoft's Office for Macs, and the applications worked fine. (Apple's new productivity suite, iWork, isn't included but can be purchased for \$79. Microsoft Office 2004 standard edition for Macs is \$399.)

You also can add a Mini to your existing home network, and it will work well even with all your Windows PCs. You can share files, printers and even desktops.

Because I use Microsoft's Windows XP Professional on my primary computer at home, I was able to control that system and view its desktop from the Mac mini in the dining room. That was thanks to a program called Remote Desktop Connection for Mac OS X that Microsoft offers as a free download.

Thus, I could run software on the PC while controlling and viewing it on the Mac, including the Windows-only text editor that I used to write this review. (I also could have used Microsoft's Virtual PC emulator, though I find it sluggish even on higher-end Macs.)

I could have done the same even without XP Professional. A number of Virtual Network Computing programs are available at little or no cost, including some that can transfer the Mac desktop to the PC or another Mac.

There are other options, too: including a \$20 KVM switch that lets two computers share a single keyboard, video display and mouse.

Or you could abandon Windows altogether at the risk of breaking out in a cold sweat, not knowing what to do with the money you would have spent on anti-virus and anti-spyware software.



Apple CEO Steve Jobs holds up Apple's new Mini Mac PC which he introduced at the Macworld Conference in San Francisco on January 11.

Getting familiar



Helped by a Sony's engineer a schoolgirl dismantles a Sony handy camcorder during a workshop on electronics products at Sony's science museum in Tokyo on January 30. Elementary school children and their parents participated in the event to get familiar with the conception of electronic devices.