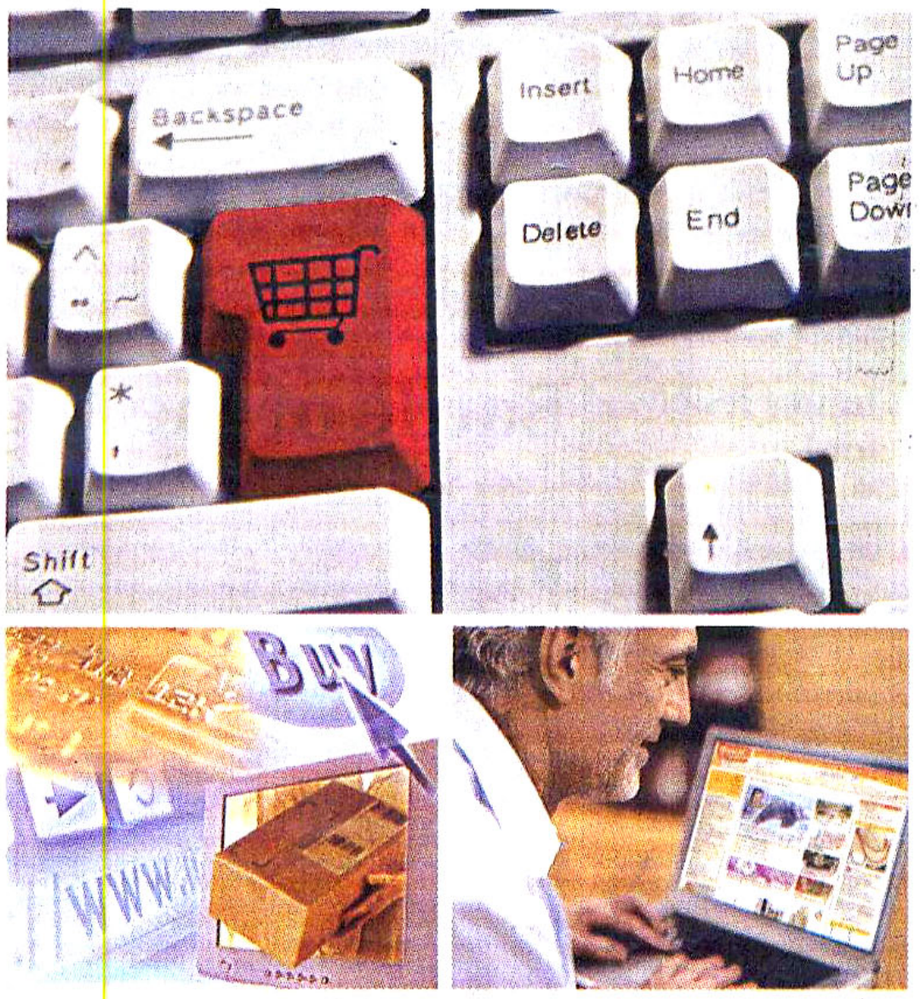
Opera

Opera is a cross-platform web browser and internet suite which handles common internet-related tasks including visiting web sites, sending and receiving e-mail messages, managing contacts, chatting online, viewing Widgets, downloading BitTorrents, and reading Newsfeeds. Opera's lightweight mobile web browser Opera Mini and most current versions of its desktop application are offered free of charge. Opera began in 1994 as a research project at Telenor, the largest Norwegian telecommunications company. In 1995 it branched out into an independent company named Opera Software ASA. With version 2.0 the first public release was made in 1996.

TECHFOCUS

E-commerce

Not really Virtual



EDWARD APURBA SINGHA

E-COMMERCE could well change your lot, provided you have some technical know-how and a desire for exploration. As the name implies, electronic commerce or e-commerce is an internet-based business scheme that does not require any particular location, space and other stuff to conduct the operation. That is why it is considered as a virtual platform that dramatically downsizes operation costs and eliminates common hassles.

Nowadays people are accustomed to moving with shopping cart in the marketplace but this will become history in the near future as widespread availability of the internet will make everything readily accessible from any place. Furthermore, the advancement of wireless devices and improvement in mobile internet services will add a new dimension to our lifestyle by making everything easily available.

Before entering into details, a few basics of e-commerce will help. It is a kind of online business that entails an assortment of things such as electronic funds transfer, supply chain management, e-marketing, online transaction processing, electronic data interchange (EDI), automated inventory management systems, automated data collection systems and the like.

Today all e-commerce services operate using websites and sending emails. A customer can order items from a vendor's website by making payment with a credit card. (the punter enters their account information via the computer) or a previously established 'cybercash' account. The transaction information is transmitted to a financial institution for payment clearance and to the vendor for order fulfilment. The encryption technology keeps all personal information secure from unauthorised access.

The e-commerce trend began in 1968 when electronic data interchange gave companies the leeway to start electronic transaction. However, it was not until 1984 that a standardised format (known as ASC X12) provided a dependable means to conduct electronic business, and it was not until 1994 that Netscape introduced a browser program whose graphical presentation significantly eased the use of computer communication for all kinds of computer activity, including e-commerce.

Three types of electronic commerce are available today -- business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C) and consumer-to-consumer (C2C). B2B scheme provides a direct interaction between two business activities. For instance, a wholesaler purchases one thousand units of printer from a manufacturer and deposits the payment to the manufacturer.

UN/EDIFACT is one of the most well-known and established B2B standards. ANSI ASC X12 is a popular standard in North America. RosettaNet is an XML based, emerging B2B standard in the high-tech industry. An approach like UN/CEFACT's Modelling Methodology (UMM) might be used to capture the collaborative space of B2B business processes.

For firms in developing countries, B2B e-commerce scheme has emerged as a potential way to reduce costs substantially. It has also given them the opportunity to access global market. Internet-based B2B e-commerce should help producers in developing countries to obtain better information about global market and give them direct access to new customers.

Business-to-consumer or B2C gives businesses the room to sell their goods and services directly to consumers. Suppose you need to buy a book online and go to a particular website to place your order. The portal processes your request and after receiving the payment, ships the book to you.

Consumer-to-consumer or C2C involves electronically-facilitated transactions between consumers through some third party. A common example is online auction in which a consumer posts an item for sale and other consumers bid to purchase it. The third party generally charges a flat fee or commission. Examples of C2C are eBay, amazon.com etc.

Starting a online business is a good decision for which you first need to develop a smart interactive website. Then you select commodities that you want to sell online. You should maintain a good network with others to market your products. Products for sale can be made by you or purchased from secondary sources. You can maintain a warehouse for product distribution.

A newcomer in the market, your first imperative should be building confidence. Collecting email IDs could be a smart a way to send product profile to others. For instance, you send in hundreds of emails to different firms and individuals. If five among them send feedback to you, it will be a breakthrough because you have made it possible with limited resources. The website that posts your advertisement should be intelligent enough. You have to take digital image of each entity and place them on the web. Adding a client interaction form is mandatory to receive order from the clients. Mode of payment can be online or direct hard cash. If online payment facility is not available, you can collect your payment after delivering the products.

Recently another technology called 'm-commerce' is gaining huge popularity. Mobile commerce has introduced payment without contact which in practice gives people the true touch of liberty. Today all cellphone manufacturers produce specialised phones with mobile internet facility and the rapid improvement in operators' network has enabled people to download rich contents on their palm-held devices.

In Japan I-mode service, unveiled by DoCoMo in February 1999, is a lucid example of the resounding success of m-commerce. I-mode facilitates buying tickets, ordering books and getting news delivered to mobile handset. The service has become the largest internet access platform in Japan. In addition, I-mode users can carry out banking transactions with up to 280 banks and securities brokers.

In Bangladesh e-commerce has not yet gathered the momentum. Although there exists some e-commerce websites, they do not provide full-fledged services. The absence of online transaction facility hinders the entire process. The government should come forward and initiate and regulate this service in order to create a true e-business environment in the country.

TECHVIEWS

50 years ago Sputnik changed technology

AP, *Washington*

WITH a series of small beeps from a spiky globe 50 years ago Thursday, the world shrank and humanity's view of Earth and the cosmos expanded.

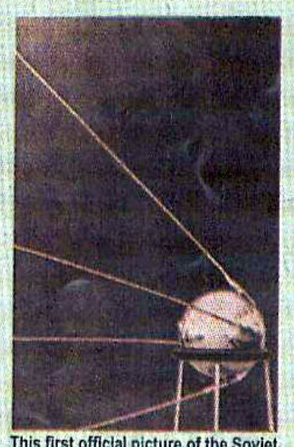
Sputnik, the first artificial satellite, was launched by the Soviets and circled the globe Oct. 4, 1957. The Space Age was born. And what followed were changes to everyday life that people now take for granted.

What we see on television, how we communicate with each other, and how we pay for what we buy have all changed with the birth of satellites.

Communications satellites helped bring wars and celebrations from thousands of miles away into our living rooms. When we go outside, weather satellites show us whether we need to carry an umbrella or flee a hurricane. And global positioning system satellites even keep us from getting lost on unfamiliar streets.

Sputnik gave birth to more than mere technology. The threat of a Soviet-dominated space spurred the U.S. government to increase tenfold money spent on science, education and research. Satellite pictures of Earth inspired an embryonic environmental movement.

Spy and communications satellites also kept the world at relative peace, experts say. Just last week, scientists used commercial satellite images to document human rights violations in Myanmar.



This first official picture of the Soviet satellite Sputnik

When Sputnik was launched, the public thought a space future would consist of gigantic space stations and colonies on the moon and other planets. The fear was warfare in space raining down on Earth.

"The reality is that the things we expected did not come to pass, and the things that we did not fathom changed our lives in so many ways that we cannot even envision a life that's different at this point," said Roger Launius, senior curator at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum.

America got a taste of that in May 1998. Just one communications satellite malfunctioned. More than 30 million pagers went silent. Credit card payment approvals didn't work. National Public Radio and CNN's Airport Television Network went off the air in some places.

"The civilization we live in today is as different from the one that we lived in the mid-1950s as the mid-1950s were from the American revolution," said Howard McCurdy, an American University public policy professor. "It's hard to imagine these things happening without space. I guess I could have a computer, but I wouldn't be able to get on the Internet."

All thanks to an 184-pound metal ball with spikes shot into space by a country that doesn't exist anymore.

TECHNEWS

SECL out against fraud

SPECTRUM Engineering Consortium Ltd (SECL) held a press conference on September 30 which aimed at creating awareness of fake D-link products. The firm said the counterfeits adversely affect the local IT market and at the same time erodes the clients' confidence in D-Link products.

SECL is a Bangladesh-Taiwan joint venture company, founded in 1995. It has tied in with leading equipment manufacturers such as IBM, Intel, Cisco and D-Link to provide cutting edge IT solutions in the country.

Forkan Bin Quasem, managing director of SECL, stressed the need for taking appropriate measures against the fraudsters and welcomed the media for their support to the cause.

He said, "Spectrum has started cooperation with its partners to root out this malpractice from the market". The firm showed both fake and genuine D-Link products at the press conference.

SECL said fake UTP (Unshielded Twisted Pair) cable suffers data loss, connection complexities and short-range coverage. Inside the cable two out of four pairs contain iron that in effect hinders video, voice and data transmission, it said.

Forkan Bin Quasem, managing director of SECL, speaks at the press conference

Circuits in a fake product are completely different from those in a real one and they do not last long. In addition, these products do not meet the international quality benchmark, making port malfunction a common thing.

D-Link products come bundled with a special identifying sticker (D-Link logo) and while marketing these products, SECL also attaches its own monogram to them. D-Link makes UTP cable under Digi-Link brand and there is no other UTP cable brand available from the firm, Spectrum told the reporters.

Customers will enjoy after-sales service if they purchase products from any SECL franchisees. The company suggests the customers to verify dealership certificate at the time of purchase.

SECL's client profile includes the likes of Siemens, Ericsson, Unilever, AES, and Aventis.

SECL's other breakthroughs include developing and implementing the core telephone and telex billing systems for Bangladesh Telegraph & Telephone Board (BTTB) and the consumer billing system for Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority.

SECL has also developed a number of proprietary software products, including industry-specific ERP packages, call logging and accounting software systems, and PABX billing and call management packages.

Edward Apurba Singha

TECHSEMINAR

Basis seminar on outsourcing opportunities in Finland

STARTECH DESK

BANGLADESH Association of Software & Information Services (Basis) organised a seminar, titled "Outsourcing opportunity in Finland: A case of Scandinavian countries", at Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre on October 1.

The event was part of a Bangladesh Information Technology Management Programme (Bitmap), a BASIS project funded by Asia Invest Programme of European Union. Partners of the programme are Danish Federation of Small and Medium Enterprise (DFSME) of Denmark, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce of the UK and T&E, Finland.

The chief guest of the seminar and joint secretary at the commerce ministry, Mostafa Mohiuddin, reiterated the government's attempt to shore up the local IT industry in the global market. The keynote speaker at the session, Kristina Sunell, development manager of Finland's Ailos Technology, gave a string of directives to local IT industry in her multimedia presentation.

Henriette Freris, chief consultant of DFSME, gave an overview of the Danida B2B programme at the seminar. In a conversation with StarTech, Kristina talked about the potential of native IT professionals and called on the authorities concerned to ensure collective effort to enrich their quality.

Henriette told the StarTech that Bangladesh needs to promote its image in order to transform the country into an outsourcing destination.

TIM Nurul Kabir, director of the BASIS-Bitmap project, coordinated the entire programme.

Kristina Sunell presents her keynote speech at the seminar

TECHNEWS

bdchannel.com kicks off

STARTECH DESK

The newly launched bdchannel.com is a unique addition to the online trend of Bangladesh. It is not only a website but also a gateway to access vital information closely related to our daily-life hurly-burly. If you, for example, need to learn about the immigration policies of countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and the UK, this portal will provide you with all the relevant details, says a press release.

The portal has a sensational look and its news section makes the website more enjoyable. It is a good platform for students to search academic contents. Due to this facility, a student can easily glean information on oversees universities and can find guidelines for BCS exams. Tech-loving people can get updated news about new gadgets on the portal's IT desk. Besides, the website also covers areas such as housing, banking, health care info and other things.

PHOTOTECH

EMOTIONAL BOT

Tokyo University of Science student Hikari Asano (R) and her look alike humanoid robot Pikarin, which is wearing a muscle suit, are seen at the Home care and Rehabilitation Exhibition in Tokyo on October 3. University professor assistant professor Hiroshi Kobayashi developed the robot which can express emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and surprise.

PHOTO: AFP