

# **Catalyst for a Creative Community**

**How ICT Fosters a Vision and Ensures Success in the WKCD**

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## **1. Introduction**

### **Why the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority Should Take the Outstretched Hand of Hong Kong's Information & Communication Technology (ICT) Community**

The establishment of the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) is about creating the infrastructure to foster a cultural renaissance in Hong Kong. It is to be a place for all people to see the world landmark that is Hong Kong: the place where East and West first meshed to create one of the most fascinating cultures on the planet. This undertaking should strengthen our position as a world city, but also enhance the livelihood of local talents and be place of pride for generations to come.

But as of yet, it is still a field of dreams: if we build it, they will come. Many of the established ideas (the theatres, the large performance venue, the museums) go a long way towards establishing such an infrastructure, but in today's world, and increasingly in the world of the future, a purely physical infrastructure is not enough.

If the WKCD is to become a world-class arts & culture hub in Asia, we must also establish a digital infrastructure, or in Henry Tang's own words, a 'cultural software'. This underlying support structure will allow traditional art forms to flourish, as well as provide new opportunities.

To establish this cultural software, the WKCDA should take the help of Hong Kong's expert Information & Communication Technology (ICT) community. ICT is an essential tool for building the WKCD and should be included at the early planning stages for better integration with other facilities and functions. ICT is the

great facilitator; all projects become easier to manage, easier to integrate, and more impressive to the beholder.

ICT will equip the WKCD with three important assets: first a link between Hong Kong's 18 districts for local community participation through fostering online connections, second, it will enable a connection to the world by making performances and information live and available anywhere, and finally, it could enhance communications between the Government, general public and media through interactive websites.

To help the WKCD achieve its goals, they have created an organizational framework that includes: a Museum Policy & Management Service, a Performing Arts Policy & Management Service, a Project Development Department, a Marketing Communication & Programming Department, a Finance Department, an HR Department, and a Legal Department. The WKCD needs to add an ICT Department headed by a well qualified Chief Information Officer (CIO) to this structure. China, Taiwan, and Singapore have done so when organizing for similar projects, with Taiwan even placing their ICT Consultants above these other divisions in their Puyu Development Plan.

Finally, the WKCD should aspire to showcase art that is at the cutting edge of new culture. To further this end, plans should include a gallery to showcase local digital art and art forms made possible by new technology. A dedicated Gallery for Digital Art, Digital Media & Digital Entertainment, with highlights and showcases for locally developed digital creative content and technology would keep the WKCD at the forefront of world culture and engender new local art in our community.

The following proposals will outline specific areas that ICT can aid the WKCD in becoming something truly special for Hong Kong and the world, while promoting ICT's emerging importance to growing culture.

## **2. Information & Communication Technology in the arts**

ICT in art at its most familiar is IT used in to facilitate the operations of arts. The physical structures in the existing plans for the WKCD will obviously require IT to operate in the present day: theatres will need lighting technicians; concerts will need sound technicians; and museums will need people who can digitize their galleries. Modern interactive buildings can't even function today without an efficient IT network for security, functionality and human services. IT support for these areas will be just as important to the success of the project as the walls and the people who work there.

But ICT is also becoming a vessel for something new; information technology as art itself. The difference between art (sculpture, painting, music) and craft (cooking, design, architecture) is one of function. Crafts are about beauty, but must also serve a purpose. Buildings must house people, chairs must be sat upon, food must nourish. Art need only be beautiful. In the past, information technology has only been a craft, but now, and increasingly in the future, IT has transcended craft to become full art. Artists today are using technological skill to create things that have no purpose other than to be beautiful. This is the future of art, and IT is where new art forms will come from.

To be a real cultural innovator, and not a mere follower, Hong Kong must become a source of new art, not just a host for new art from other cities. If Hong Kong hopes to be the cultural centre of Asia, it must look to, and foster these new forms. A space for the digital arts would be integral to this goal; both as a showcase for and inspiration for local talent.

## **2.1 New Canvases and Materials**

The IT world and modern technology are providing artists with new forms and materials, WKCD should encourage artists to use them. In September 2008, the U.S. edition of the magazine Esquire first used a new product made primarily in Shanghai called 'Electronic Ink.' Displays as thin as paper that scroll and flash text and colour, powered by tiny batteries, can now be used in disposable magazines. Factories in Guangdong province are now cheaply utilizing materials in design that could help artists create new things: 'Techno-gels' that impede momentum, new firing, colouring, metal-toning and polishing techniques that are readily available only in Guangdong provide Hong Kong artists with materials that would not be available anywhere else in the world.

## **2.2 Digital Multimedia Arts**

The WKCD should look to the ICT industry for ways to foster cutting-edge multimedia art to be featured in the district. Multimedia art, as its name implies, combines different art forms to create something new. Its advantages are that it is just as durable as traditional art, but it is also infinitely replicable. An example of such artists would be Peter Greenaway who, among other things, combines opera and cinema. Another such artist would be video game designer Jason Rohrer who creates 'artgames' as art pieces themselves, their purposes being to enlighten rather than merely being fun. The WKCD should feature spaces where art like Greenaway's (requiring sound and projection machines), and Jason Rohrer's (requiring simple computer consoles) could be displayed.

### **2.3 The New Cartographers - How Artists Are Using IT Product Information to Create New Art**

People tend to think of their IT use as private, but increasingly this information is gathered and kept track of by phone companies and internet service providers. With the mass use of so-called 'smart-phones' coming with built in GPS, companies now not only know what people surf for on the internet, they also know where people go during the day, how they get there, and where they live.

But rather than react to these new truths with fear, some artists and designers are using this information to create new art forms. Artists using geographical maps as their canvases can now portray how people move about their city in real-time, with each GPS signal point represented by glowing point of light. With support from the Hong Kong government, artists could acquire, anonymously of course, cell-phone provider data from local companies to create art unique in this world. Though never done before, the WKCD could feature a real-time LED map of Hong Kong and viewers could watch as people (represented by dots of light) gather in offices to work, empty out for lunch, and return home on the MTR. As Shakespeare said, "What is a city, but the people; true the people are the city."

### **2.4 Digital Art Walls**

Featured prominently during the Beijing Olympics, a growing art movement utilizing dynamic electronic canvases is occurring. More and more, as artists become tech-savvy and technology becomes user-friendly, artists will utilize new forms to create art that was never before possible and this art can be built into the very walls of the WKCD.

In Beijing a design firm called Simone Giostra & Partners created the GreenPix Media Wall. The self-sustainable gigantic display consisted of a spectacular light and moving art show powered entirely by 'solar photovoltaic cells' hidden behind the Light Emitting Diodes (LED). LED technology is an area ripe for exploration by artists; from LED wallpaper, to complete large glass structures with LED infusions - the potential is incredible. Such new technologies provide new canvases for artists to think through to new ideas.

### **3. What ICT in the WKCD Means to the Public**

More importantly than being a place for culture aficionados and lofty artists, the West Kowloon Cultural District is for the people of Hong Kong. With this in mind, a great, low-cost, high-access way to ensure public involvement is to connect and empower them through Information & Communications Technology.

The WKCDA has repeatedly stated its goals for the district to be a venue that ‘brings art to the people, and people to the arts’, as well as to ‘enhance Hong Kong's cultural connectivity beyond our borders’. What better way to do this than with comprehensive ICT? For success with goals such as ‘organic growth’, and ‘connectivity and cohesion with surrounding districts’, who better to help WKCDA than Hong Kong's ICT Community? What better way to widely promote and disseminate public art information than through the web? Through things like online social communities, IT can help the WKCD achieve direct access with Hong Kong's individuals to ensure that the project truly belongs to the people.

In addition to aiding artists with operations and community building, IT can benefit audiences by enhancing their experience of the WKCD, while cutting down on required man power and costs. Information technology is becoming more and more user-friendly these days, in addition to being prevalent and expected in large new constructions. Both the IFC and the Elements mall feature IT terminals as part of their facilities. To be considered on par with these iconic new Hong Kong buildings, the WKCD should also incorporate IT enhancements.

#### **3.1 Public Wi-Fi**

While public provided Wi-Fi already exists in many government buildings and tourists destinations such as the peak, it exists in these places merely to provide

information or a distraction for tourists. In the WKCD, public Wi-Fi could be utilized to forward the goals of connectivity with surrounding districts, as well as outside our borders. With publicly provided Wi-Fi, not only will the well-funded and publicized performances at the WKCD be broadcast and receive attention, all events big and small can enjoy real time publicity from individuals with their phones. Tourists can upload camera pictures of themselves in front of the harbour view, families can share pictures of themselves enjoying outdoor performances, and passer's by will become promoters and journalists. Unlike other government provided public Wi-Fi, the WKCD's will not be a useful luxury, but potentially as an objective expanding utility.

### **3.2 District Wide Website Portal**

Every different area of the WKCD should be accessible, and connectible to the 18 districts of Hong Kong from the main website. There should be separate and unique spaces for providing information. There should be maps, long term schedules of programs, information about the nuances that make each different area unique – all these are standard. But there should also be virtual tours, online galleries, interactive displays – cutting edge. This website should take full advantage of the top-notch web designers available in Hong Kong to create something technologically awe-inspiring. But what it needs even more than dazzling graphics is community.

### **3.3 IT in Support of Art Online - A Blanket Internet Community**

In order for the WKCD to be successful, it doesn't just need a website, it needs to foster an artistic community online to match the artistic community it will house physically. This website should be state of the art, but also user friendly. It needs to have one main portal, as well as offshoots into specific community portals for

the different areas of the WKCD. Every museum, every theatre, the large concert venue, and the outdoor areas should have a space reachable through the central portal.

The WKCD website should have message boards, community portals, blog spaces, personalized profiles, and mailing lists. In order to get people involved in the website, it can't just be a site people go to get concert information. It needs to be a site people go to network and socialize. When people can generate and share content on an area of the site, it provides much more power to artists to promote themselves. Allowing people with a common interest in art a place where they can share and follow the art of other people is what forms internet communities like Twitter and Facebook. The community can also be called upon to organize private and commercial donations and sponsorship, engage in overseas exchanges, and promote public art.

The fact that such people have an online community to unite them as well as a physical area will ensure that the WKCD is a vibrant, organic, and exciting place.

### **3.4 Public Arts Classes Online**

In addition to providing a social community, ICT can also be a part of the education community. An easy way to provide a great public resource for Hong Kong's schools, as well as provide ongoing arts education to the community at large, would be to provide online arts education. Courses on current exhibits could be uploaded for local students to study before visiting the WKCD itself. This method would provide a tangible way for students to learn about art that they can repeat independently as they grow to foster a lifelong appreciation for art and culture. Using the internet and IT to provide online classes also makes economic and logistic sense. Instead of having to painstakingly schedule time for every class of

Hong Kong's children, online classes would allow schools greater latitude in planning their visits. Furthermore, rather than paying hundreds off disinterested artists to constantly tour classes, an online class could feature a few brilliant recorded classes to keep students better connected.

### **3.5 Wireless Tour Guides**

If you have ever been on a tour where you couldn't hear the presenter, you know that it's difficult to stay engaged. Again, ICT can help with wireless tour guides. In addition to being more audible, wireless tour guides have the added benefit of being programmable to any language; in Hong Kong, this is of course important. Rather than worry about hiring multilingual tour guides who would have to give speeches multiple times in multiple languages, the WKCD should invest in wireless tour guides set to different languages. With wireless tour guides, visitors from mainland China and all over the world can enjoy the WKCD at their own pace and in their own language. Again, a high-tech tour guide solution helps create a professional image and helps associate the WKCD with quality, innovation and internationalism.

### **3.6 Online Ticket Sales**

Just as important to a WKCD's front office ticket vendor, is an user-friendly easily accessible online ticket sale program. For every show, a certain amount of tickets should be set aside for online sale, a certain amount for telephone sale, and a minority for tickets at the door (depending on the performance type). Hong Kong IT firms are ready and more than able to construct such a distribution network.

### **3.7 Live Streaming and Video screen support**

As outlined in the Legco PWSC papers enumerating the details of the WKCD, the total seating capacity of the all the performance arts venues' combined comes to a little over 24,000 people, which is a tiny fraction of the local Hong Kong, not to mention non-local visitors, to WKCD venues. If the WKCD is to have a significant cultural impact, it has to be able to reach more people than that.

ICT can help expand that audience, as well as enhance the experience of attendees with live streaming of performances. In addition to selling tickets to attendees, tickets could be sold online to watch events streaming live over the internet. These live-stream viewings could be further enhanced by installing high-definition video screens in the mega-venue largely popularized in American sporting venues.

### **3.8 IT in Museums - New Displays, New ways to see the world**

The Modern Museum of Art (MoMa) in New York is undoubtedly one of the more prominent drivers of art innovation in the world. The ARS Electronica in Austria has a similar innovative IT/Art drive. Though other WKCD museums should focus on Hong Kong's unique and beautiful cultural history, at least one should follow

the lead of MoMa and ARS Electronica and team up with Hong Kong's IT community.

With Hong Kong's close proximity to the world's largest manufacturing base in Guangdong province, amazing feats of technological art could be conceived and displayed here. From massive structures utilizing 'planilum' technology which creates light emitting glass without filaments, to exhibits that use live footage and projection technology to skew people's spatial perceptions, a Hong Kong Modern Art Museum wedding art and technology could accomplish amazing things. The WKCD project needs to take into account this ever-growing link between art and technology, and build that into our designs. To encourage this kind of art, the WKCD should restrict certain areas to non-profit cultural use in perpetuity.

### **3.9 IT and Mobile Art**

Another architectural endeavour that requires extensive ICT support is Mobile Art. Mobile art has been in the Hong Kong news a lot lately with Chanel's gallery having come to Hong Kong. Mobile art is both enabled, and facilitated by IT. Information technology professionals are heavily involved with the logistics and planning of moving such displays around the world. Of course WKCD would be an ideal location for these kind of events in the future. Providing one of the planned piazzas for these types of projects would attract exhibits from all over the world, and perhaps encourage local business to engage in their own mobile art creations. Going from a mere host of foreign exhibits, to a contributor to the globalized cultural community should be a central goal of the WKCD.

A prominent Hong Kong group that is already engaging in this kind of mobile art exhibition is the organization MobArt. MobArt organizes public installations in places regular people pass through every day instead of at galleries that are only

attended by people already interested in art. One lesson the WKCD project could take from the MobArt group is to try to make it so that the district is passed through naturally, not just a place off to the side that people have to be lured too. This type of accessibility helps attract men and women who have never really thought about art, and gets them excited about possibilities.

### **3.10 Interactive Information Kiosks**

With almost a hundred acres of space and an intricate layout planned, the WKCD may prove a difficult area to navigate. Luckily, IT can help both native Hong Kong yan and visiting tourists navigate the district with interactive information kiosks. IT can be instrumental in the WKCD as a green promoter, and as early evidence of Hong Kong's commitment to green technology such kiosks should be powered by renewable energy (most likely solar). As for services rendered, the kiosks should provide maps, directions, and descriptions of venues. They should also feature ticket sale software that's both Octopus and credit card compatible. Not only will these kiosks make the WKCD more tourist friendly, it will contribute to Hong Kong's image as a cutting-edge city.

In addition to basic features such as recycling bins, the WKCD should strive for green by powering all their various minor installations with renewable energy. All street lights, semi-permanent digital art installations, as well as the kiosks mentioned before should be powered with solar panels. Also, though difficult with Hong Kong's current power supply system, the main museums, theatres, and venues should strive for some percentage of power garnered from renewable energies. This not only helps the environment, it helps drive innovation and fuel job growth in Hong Kong.

### **3.11 ICT Art to Help Us See**

Another great meshing of IT, art, and green promotion is the art work of Chris Jordan. Jordan creates art out of what happens to old used up IT products. In his photographic series “Intolerable Beauty: A Portrait of American Mass Consumption” Jordan examines the data of American waste (4 million plastic cups are used on flights every day and never recycled, 426,000 cell phones are retired every day, 125,000 cigarette butts are discarded every second worldwide). Using IT programs, Jordan extrapolates these numbers into images. To help people visualize what 2 million plastic bottles being used up every 5 minutes actually looks like he photographs 500 and multiplies that image 4,000 times and blows it to a massive 23 by 34 metre frames. Promoting such art examining consumption would be particularly meaningful in Hong Kong, and a great way for IT and art to mix in the WKCD. In light of our goals for the WKCD, they should commission a piece of a similar theme just for Hong Kong in order to broaden awareness of the dangers of over consumption.

#### **4. Conclusion & Recommendations**

Ten years ago memory was something you lost with age, a hard drive was a difficult journey, and windows were something you cleaned. Ten years ago there was no Google. Tools people spend 50 percent of every day using did not even exist just ten years ago. If IT has affected people's lives this much in ten years, imagine the next twenty or the next fifty. This is how much information technology is changing the world, and this is why the WKCD must have an ICT steering committee.

For the West Kowloon Cultural district to be a true investment in the future of Hong Kong, it must look to the future. The WKCD must invest in the IT infrastructure for these spaces to be useful to people today, and also the generations of tomorrow. Our recommendations in summary:

1. Establish an ICT steering committee that reports to the Board of the WKCD and involves representative ICT professionals to provide on-going strategic recommendations on the use of ICT.
2. Create a CIO position within the WKCD to oversee and manage the ICT applications and implementation in the project.
3. Establish mechanisms (e.g. roundtable sessions, engagement programs, EOIs) to connect the designers, managers and developers of the WKCD with ICT industry players.
4. Sponsor pilot IT projects, under the existing frameworks in CreateHK and OGCI, to explore the use of innovative technologies in current arts and culture setups.

5. Connect arts and cultural institutions in WKCD with the town halls & facilities in the 18 districts of Hong Kong through IT networks.
6. Establish community portals, managed by dedicated communication professionals, for public involvement in developing the WKCD.
7. Expand the WKCD's website into an online resources and collaboration platform, serving both local and international arts and cultural communities.
8. Establish discussion groups, applications and digital directories in the major portals and community sites.
9. Establish a dedicated Gallery for Digital Art, Digital Media & Digital Entertainment, with highlights and showcases for locally developed digital creative contents and technologies.
10. Invest in audience-expanding programs to artists for and creative works utilizing ICT technologies.
11. Sponsor engagement programs between ICT industry professionals and WKCD creatives to suggest innovative technologies for creative processes, visualizations, multi-media productions as well as conceptualization.
12. Further, encourage engagement programs for ICT industry professionals to invite ideas, solutions, and on-going support from the ICT communities.
13. Ensure the right representation of ICT professionals in the WKCD's planning, execution and management structure.

14. Identify pilot programs for capacity building, cross-disciplinary collaborations and proof of concept projects.

15. Virtualize, digitalize and make the WKCD accessible to everyone.

IT is an integral part of people's lives today, and art and culture tomorrow, and it should be an integral part of the West Kowloon Cultural District. As outlined in this proposal, many of the challenges, both predicted and not, are solvable through IT. At the same time, ICT can help be a catalyst for creative industries, while making it both a sustainable endeavor.

Most important of all, ICT can help meet our vision of WKCD that "It's all about creating something that is relevant for the many different people and groups who will visit the district."