

ITMIN

Have you ever been at a loss wondering how you are to take advantage of the new technologies that are changing according to the way the world does business?

Do you regret having lacked the necessary information technology skills?

Or are you among those anxious to identify new customers and suppliers to improve your business?

If so, you will not have to wait too long. For a new organisation, the Industrial, Technological and Marketing Information Network Ltd., (ITMIN Ltd.,) will break all existing information barriers and source the kind of information you are looking for, when it begins operations in October 1996.



ITMIN Ltd., is a unique organisation conceived by the UN to help develop Sri Lanka's information structure. It is managed and supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with technical assistance from the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO).

Executive Director, ITMIN Ltd., *Kapan Perera* summed up this organisation as a network of databases on industrial, technological and market information within Sri Lanka with online international access.

Local entrepreneurs, industrialists and manufacturers will therefore now have

several avenues and ready access for studying prospective markets and keeping abreast of the latest technological advances in their respective areas and for planning their production and export strategies.

What is unique about ITMIN is that this is the first time UNDP and UNIDO are directly funding a project set up by a private sector organisation, said Perera.

He traced the beginnings of this project to December, 1992 when at the request of the Government of Sri Lanka the UNDP and UNIDO carried out a study on the information requirements of Lankan organisations and Sri Lanka, in general, and found the absence of a proper system whereby people, especially businessmen, academics, researchers and students could obtain the information they required. Though information was available, it was isolated in various institutions with no integrated system which would make it conveniently accessible to users.

Thus the UN proposed the setting up of ITMIN and volunteered to fund it, which meant the new organisation would have to be a government institution.

But the then Prime Minister decided to invite the private sector to set up this network and it was also agreed that any organisation existing at the time should not be allowed to dominate the network that was being set up, said Perera.

ITMIN was therefore incorporated in August, 1994 with private and public sector organisations and the NODAL organisations here as the main shareholders.

These were the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka. (BOI), Ceylon Institute of Scientific and Industrial Research (CISIR), the Development Finance Corporation of Ceylon (DFCC), Lanka Ceramics Ltd., Lanka Ventures Ltd., Ministry of Industrial Development, National Development Bank of Sri Lanka, (NDB), Sri Lanka Export Development Board (EDB), the Golden Key Credit Card Co. Ltd., and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

One of the problems this company encountered during its inception was in staffing and the manning of the operation.

“Getting the right people with the right experience was difficult”, says Perera. The Board of Directors thus appointed the Golden Key Credit Card Co., as its managing agents.

And that because the Golden Key Credit Card Co., had pioneered the setting up of

INFOMART - a consumer information service bureau in this country in 1992.

We had the expertise and the resources to manage a project of this nature and INFOMART was the closest parallel that could be drawn to ITMIN. And that is how INFOMART, a division of the Golden Key Credit Card Co., was selected to be the managers, said Perera who is also the Director/ General Manager of the Golden Key Credit Card Co.

He said this project took 20 months and with their taking over they have been able to reduce both the overall costs and the time frame of the operation.

In addition to the staff of 30, ITMIN enjoys the inputs of 10 UNIDO consultants working on the technical aspects of the operation.

UNIDO intends using ITMIN as the role model for all future programmes they hope to undertake throughout the world, because of the manner in which it has been implemented, said Vijit T Ratnarajah, Chief Operating Officer ITMIN Ltd.

Ratnarajah was invited to address delegates at the UNIDO Advisory Council Meeting in Vienna in May, 1995.

His presence was imperative. "Generally the private sector is not inclined to participate in a project where the financial returns are spread over a long period of time. So it was essential I was present to discuss, evaluate and introduce fee-based relevant services to ensure the commercial viability of this private/public sector operation", said Ratnarajah.

He says, traditionally, information-based services are available through government subsidies and at times free of charge. So what was proposed at this meeting was the upliftment of the information services industry with the emphasis on value-added information, since in this way a fee could be charged.

ITMIN Limited's Marketing Manager Lasantha Wickramasinghe referred to this as a national endeavour.

"We are setting up a network. of databases spanning resource locations within the country and selected international datahosts overseas. So to us it is a unique and pioneering endeavour," he said.

According to him, this network will be a "window which on one hand will drive an

exported economy and on the other encourage a stream of direct foreign investment to Sri Lanka.”

Wickramarasinghe said a business unit had been set up in March this year to provide the necessary information skills training to the corporate sectors both private and public from Chief Executive Officer downwards.

ITMIN's theme is: Build Better Business, says Wickramasinghe.