


Are you Using your Dongle?



The 'Dongle' is a device that plugs into the USB port on a computer and gives the user mobile broadband access.



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A telecommunications revolution is sweeping the UK and it is being led by the rise of the 'dongle'. This is a device that plugs into the USB port on a computer and gives the user mobile broadband access. A couple of years ago, the technology was available as a 'pay as you go' product, but is now competitively priced against fixed broadband access within the UK.

It seems that in the global economy, governments have identified broadband access as a major driver towards facilitating business within their economies. The European Union, always keen to improve innovation within the region, have commissioned a series of Europe INNOVA Networks to facilitate the business environment within the European Union. One such project, 'mClusters', focuses on the integration of Europe's Mobile ICT Community.

As any economics/geography student will tell you, geographical distances are a barrier to entry into the marketplace. During the Australian Federal Elections in 2007, the Labour Leader, Kevin Rudd (now Prime Minister) supported the \$4.7 billion 'Fibre to Node' proposal to enable download access speeds of 12Mbps to 98% of the population by 2013.

In February this year (2008) with the support of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), Telstra announced that it will be providing broadband access of up to 20Mbps to 2.4 million households through its ADSL+ broadband networks.

At the state level, Victoria has made ICT and infrastructure investment an important part of Melbourne 2030, the State Government's strategic plans for sustainable growth and change across metropolitan Melbourne.

How does all this impact the procurement profession? Undoubtedly, as procurement serves to better business and society, specific benefits to the procurement profession will have a positive impact on business and society as a whole. The reader will be able to think of specific procurement applications relevant to their own environment. For the fixed-line broadband access, benefits in rural and regional areas should include the following:

- Slashed telephone calls for small business
- Enhanced business services such as teleconferencing, video conferencing and virtual private networks
- Enhanced capacity for services like e-education and e-health; and
- High definition interactive television services.

Mobile broadband access has the potential to have a greater impact than its fixed-line cousin. Access via a dongle enables some of the most valuable supply chain activities to be documented and shared in real time. Technology becomes the enabler to more efficient execution of departmental and organisational strategy.

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The reader would be encouraged to map the benefits of ICT, and mobile broadband in particular, to their supply chain. As an example, other CIPS Knowledge Club articles suggest the benefits and disadvantages of location-independent working. Supplier development teams will be able to communicate with colleagues while they are on supplier premises. Similarly, pre-contract supplier evaluation would be sped up by using the new technology.

Why does all this matter? In short, the answer is 'competition'. Australia is located in one of the most competitive regions in the world, experiencing growth rates European countries would be jealous of. Speed to market is often the differentiator between those who are

successful and those who are not. Even in developing countries, mobile technology will enable some economies to start to become competitive. Leonard Waverman from the London Business School suggests that the use of an extra ten mobile phones per hundred people in a typical developing country could lead to an extra 0.5% growth in GDP. A small threat to the Australian economy at the moment, but the situation may be different within a generation. So maybe using your dongle could do much for the Australian economy.

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