

**REMARKS BY MINISTER OF COMMERCE, SCIENCE  
& TECHNOLOGY  
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EMOQUAD INTERNET SERVICE SYMPOSIUM  
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UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES**

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**Salutations: -**

I welcome the opportunity to be here today because I believe symposiums such as this are very important. Telecommunications is a rapidly changing industry and it is vital that those in the industry get together from time to time to provide their customers and themselves with a view about where things are heading. One of the critical issues for the industry is to develop applications, which benefit both businesses and consumers and in helping to promote information and communication technologies as a tool for business growth.

Today, the Internet plays an increasingly important role in our lives, individually and as a society. We are now preparing ourselves for the full transition to a knowledge-based economy and society. This entails building our national telecommunication and information infrastructure. It involves the liberalization of our telecommunications market to give more choice of service providers, better quality and range of services and more competitive prices. It means making Jamaica a more competitive and attractive place to do business, for our own people as well as for our international partners.

Since the commencement of the third Phase 3 of the of the telecommunication liberalization on March 1 this year, some 43 licences have been issued, broken down as follows:-

- International Carrier (IC) – 25 licences
- International (Voice/Data) Service Providers (International Service Provider) – 18 licences

Overall, we now have some 251 telecommunications licencees, including a total of 67 Internet Service Providers, which includes 7 Internet Service Providers for Subscriber Television Operators.

For the rest, we have:

- 45 International Voice Service Providers (IVSP)
- 22 Domestic Carriers (DC)
- 31 Domestic Voice Service Providers (DVSP)
- 25 Data Service Providers (DSP)
- 10 Free Trade Zone Carriers (FTZC)
- 8 Free Trade Zone Service Providers (FTZSP)
- 25 International (Voice/Data/Transit) Carriers (IC)
- 18 International Service Providers (ISP)

With the convergence of telecommunications and information technology, we see an opportunity for our public telecommunication licensees to enhance their traditional telecommunications service offerings.

We have long realized that ICT must be considered both as a sector in its own right, and also as an enabler of other sectors.

To that end, we have seen unparalleled growth in this sector during the period 2000 – 2003, largely due to a mix of policies.

Significant progress has been made in facilitating public access mainly through schools, post offices and public libraries. Also, as Internet service providers multiply, and subscriber television operators provide Internet access, we anticipate that more households will have Internet access.

Currently, there are some 30 post offices with Internet Kiosks. As far as the public libraries are concerned, there are 13 parish libraries providing Internet access and 31 branch libraries providing a total of 44 public access points.

Jamaica possesses a fairly advanced telecommunication infrastructure containing a hybrid mix of wireless and wired technologies. There is an optical fibre ring around the island, (C & W) and a pervasive cellular network (C & W, Digicel & Centennial). Digicel has an earth station (satellite) and several entities have VSAT's. GOTEL and N5 systems provide fixed wireless options, and several Internet Service Providers such as Infochannel, C&W, and Emoquod provide dial up access as well as wireless. Cable operators have been given the opportunity to provide internet access through coaxial cable, but at present I believe only one operator (Entertainment Systems) is providing this service.

Full liberalization is now a reality, and new entrants and new technologies are emerging on the ICT landscape. The major challenge facing the GOJ is to decide which technology platforms to adopt, and in which sectors to concentrate our efforts. In the final analysis, what is it that is being sought? The goal must be reliable, affordable fast ICT enabled services that can be accessed from basically anywhere.

The provision of these services must enable businesses, create employment, improve the quality of life and generally facilitate progress. From this perspective, the way forward in ICT is simply broadband. Broadband must be widely deployed enabling a host of broadband services. Public access to these broadband technologies must be facilitated, and the ICT skills of the general public enhanced so as to allow them to derive maximum benefit.

At present in Jamaica, internet access is primarily narrow band, that is, speeds of 56K-128K. The challenge is to move the country forward to broadband capability (200K and above) at affordable prices, which will enable new business opportunities.

If Jamaica is to be effectively integrated with today's digital world, the entire economy/society must be ICT-enabled and ICT-oriented. All sectors and industries must be ICT equipped in order to ensure competitiveness in the increasingly global business environment.

Against this background, the government has prepared an Electronic Transaction Policy designed to address the integrity of information transferred by electronic means.

Our existing laws relating to e-commerce date back to the 1800s and, hence, cannot efficiently facilitate on-line business transactions. We, therefore, need to modernise our laws and regulations dealing with government operating systems, such as record keeping and administration required the use of several signatures for verification and cumbersome paper work.

The proposed Electronic Transactions Act, given its scope, would lead to the amendment of several existing legislations such as the Evidence Act and the Financial Administration and Audit Act and the criminal laws, among others.

The proposed new legislation is intended to:

1. Complement the liberalization of the telecommunications sector which was fully implemented on March 1, 2003
2. Enhance business on-line transactions, and
3. Stimulate competition

It will address:

- electronic governance/signatures
- a system and structure of certification
- information technology offences

- investigation, search and seizure
- companion legislation dealing with criminal sanctions for the misuse of data, and so on.

This legislative action will signal to investors and other stakeholders that the Government of Jamaica intends to ensure the creditability of online commerce, trade, and transactions.

In closing, I would like to issue a challenge to all of you here today to think about ways in which you can both create efficiencies in your organisation and open up new opportunities for Jamaica. To that end, I am sure this symposium will be a success and I look forward to the results of your deliberations.