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Doing business on the Internet may hit local scene

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Malaysians will be able to buy and sell anything from computer components to chrysanthemums on the Internet within the next few years, if local company Office Connect Sdn Bhd has its way.

They will also be able to compete on level playing fields with foreign companies which are already penetrating Malaysian markets through electronic commerce, Office Connect accounts manager Ho Ching Wee said yesterday.

"An Internet storefront will give you a sales representative in every country, working every hour of the day, at a fraction of the cost of an actual physical storefront.

"You do not have to be a big company or an IT-based company - virtually any business that can deliver its products or provide service outside its doors is a potential Internet merchant," he said.

"Even Amazon.com - now the world's largest bookstore - started out with only two people and managed to dislodge traditional giant bookstore chains like Barnes and Noble solely through e-commerce."

Foreign businesses now successfully dealing in e-commerce included manufacturers, distributors, publishers, specialty retailers of products such as candles, books, specialty foods and flowers, insurance firms and holiday resorts, Ho said.

Office Connect, an e-commerce systems provider, aims to help small and medium-sized Malaysian businesses set up Internet storefronts to get an edge on the competition.

"Clients don't have to worry about the technical details, just about the business aspect," Ho said.

The company, which can be accessed at <http://www.osb.com.my>, will be showcasing its e-commerce system products InterNiaga and Bistari at the upcoming ITX '98 exhibition at Putra World Trade Centre.

InterNiaga is a complete e-commerce system, providing the Internet Store's layout, easy storage and updating of product information, "shopping cart" technology that lets shoppers pick items they want, automatic calculation of shipping costs and a multiple secure payment option.

Bistari provides economies of scale for small businesses by letting them enjoy Office Connect's advanced infrastructure network at an affordable price by sharing the infrastructure with other Internet merchants.

However, Ho said, Malaysians were still just talking about entering foreign markets through the Internet.

The development of local innovations, products and brands is among the main thrusts of the four-day Infotech Malaysia/ITX '98 conference and exhibition, to be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on April 21.

It is organised by the National IT Council and the Association of the Computer Industry Malaysia (Pikom), with the New Straits Times, Berita Harian, Computimes, Berita Komputer and Sin Chew Jit Poh as the official media.

The event is co-organised by Mimos Bhd, the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit, Telekom Malaysia Bhd, the Multimedia Development Corporation and Uni-Technologies Sdn Bhd, the commercial outfit of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

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