

Tablets The Prime Minister Maker

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Tablet Thailand elected its first female Prime Minister, Yingluck Shinawatra, the younger sister of the exiled ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

Ms Shinawatra's election campaign pledge included increasing minimum wages and distributing tablet computers to students.

While Ms Shinawatra's political success could not have been attained solely due to her promise of free tablets, the whole election campaign was tailored to address the needs of the low income and rural voters.

Based on Euromonitor International's research, sales of tablets in Thailand is expected to hit nearly 159,000 units in 2011 and a 55% increase the following year, in volume terms.

Sales of tablets are not flying off the shelf as Internet users only make up 34% of the total population in Thailand and 3G is at its infancy.

Providing tablets to students from low income families seems like a great idea. Internet and computers can bridge the rich/poor divide and ensures that the less well-off students are not deprived of the wonders of Internet.

However, with low income families struggling to put food on the table, paying for Internet access is definitely not a priority. Tablets are rendered useless without Internet access as majority of apps are not preloaded and require users to download them online.

Another practical problem that the wealthy politicians may not have considered is that of electricity supply.

A lot of rural families in Thailand do not have ready access to undisrupted electricity supply and solar powered tablets are still years away from reality.

While the motivation of providing free tablets to students in Thailand is a noble idea (despite the suspicion of vote buying), it is doubtful that the students can harness the full potential of mobile computing.

Analyst Insight by Wee Teck Loo.

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