



## **Computer Times (Singapore) “Hair salons on the cutting edge of IT”** **July 23, 2003**

*The hairdressers may be the ones cutting the hair but it is a computer network that runs the QB Shell salons. EILEEN YU reports.*

The recently launched QB Shell hair salons - where hairdressers charge \$10 for a no-frills haircut in 10 minutes - has been much talked about. But each 40-square foot booth is hardly a no-frills operation. A mesh of various technologies churns out data which is used to evaluate the company's business operations.

QB Shell salons are currently located at Changi International Airport Terminal 1 operating from 7am to midnight.

Each QB Shell salon is equipped with several sensors which are placed throughout the circular chamber, revealed Mr James Ng, the company's marketing manager, who declined to specify where these devices were located.



Mr Ken Tan from Pacific Internet and QB Shell's managing director, Mr Takashi Konishi (seated) give a tour of the mini hair salon. They explained that the salon captures data when sensors, placed throughout the booth, are triggered, such as when a \$10 note is inserted into the slot.

The sensors collect data which is later used for business analysis including the number of customers served and sales registered by the hour, day or month. For instance, there are sensors at the doors so Mr Ng can identify what time a specific salon opens and shuts for the day. The sensors are linked to an 'industrial strength' computer system installed in each QB Shell.

Data collected is then sent every hour, via a general packet radio services (GPRS) modem which has been installed at each salon, to a server located at PacFusion's data centre.

A provider of e-business services, PacFusion is a subsidiary of local Internet service provider, Pacific Internet.

Mr Takashi Konishi, managing director and chief executive officer of QB Shell, explained that the information can be accessed and viewed via the Internet. This is a critical feature since the company is a fully-owned subsidiary of QB Net in Japan where it has 200 salons similar to the QB Shells here.

### **Crucial data**

With this Web-based access, noted Mr Ken Tan, vice-president of Pac-Fusion, the company can easily create and 'add a shell' as it expands its network. They can also evaluate the sales volume of each salon by location, be it in Singapore or Malaysia.

Said Mr Ng: 'The system can tell me how many haircuts have been given by a certain hairdresser, so it helps us to not only monitor our customer headcount, but also our staff members' performance.'

Added Mr Konishi: 'We don't have a manager. The computer is our manager.'

QB Shell has purchased two 30GB hard disks, located at PacFusion, which are protected behind a firewall. Data collected is mirrored on the second system so nothing is lost in the event of a system failure on the primary hard disk.

Although not encrypted, the data is transmitted in codes so it is useless even if a hacker manages to capture the information, Mr Ng explained. 'After collecting the codes, we'll decipher them and churn out the relevant reports.'

Each salon is also out-fitted with a liquid crystal display (LCD) screen which broadcasts the company's marketing and promotional campaigns while the customer has his hair cut. New material and pictures can also be downloaded from the server at PacFusion's data centre via the Internet.

QB Shell initially had problems trying to fit the various IT systems into the compact booth. The company had to source for smaller components and equipment and customise them to fit.

There are plans for four to five new QB Shells to open here every month. The company is also looking to start a franchise in Malaysia.