

Connecting the World

Irving Tan is a man with a mission. His company wants to connect everything to the Internet. Not just most things—everything.

“Most Internet connections are to people, or to people with devices,” explains Irving Tan, VP of ASEAN, at IT giant and Internet pioneer, Cisco. “That leaves about 95% of things that could be connected but are as yet unconnected. We want to switch them on.” Irving describes his company’s vision as the “Internet of Everything”, or IoE.



Irving Tan, VP of ASEAN, Cisco

The big difference between IoE and today’s Internet, says Irving, is that the next phase of Internet connections will not simply be greater numbers of people-to-people links. “The next

phase will be people to machines, then after that machines connected directly to machines,” he explains. “We are looking to a future where connected machines and smart sensors will play a huge part in industry and commerce. There will be sensors in agricultural fields, in fridges, in vending machines—all connected to the ‘net,” he explains.

This über-connectedness has plenty to recommend it from a business angle. Irving says that Cisco’s vision could bring up to US\$14.4 trillion worth of cost efficiencies. The links between people, data, things and processes will offer a totally integrated economic and production system. By 2017, almost half of the people in the world will be connected, says Irving.

“For example, we can look at how to manage a connected supply chain, from raw materials through delivery and processing to finished goods and retailing,” he says. He notes that this is already happening in some sectors, like the automotive industry and soft drink retailing. The value of IoE, he asserts, is that it can realize dramatic benefits in five key areas of industry. “The added value from innovation, cost, shared experience, asset utilization and supply chain productivity will enable billions in reduced costs,” he says.

Cisco is walking the talk when it comes to IoE. It has just moved into a new office at Changi in Singapore, and offers its employees a total work experience based on IoE. With 45 TelePresence and conference rooms, it allows employees to work seamlessly across borders and time zones. “They can access work on any device, anywhere, anytime,” says Irving. “I travel 60-70% of the time, but anybody

can reach me on my office number anytime, anywhere in the world with complete security.”

Security is a top priority for Cisco. Irving predicts holistic, smart networks that will kill security problems before they even get near end users. “It’s not just the device or the data center that will maintain security, but the network itself,” he explains.

“There is no doubt that Asia is an extremely varied business environment,” says Irving. “In Singapore and Korea, they already have government examples of IoE with machines talking to machines, but in countries like Myanmar, things are still very basic. And in some ways that gives us an advantage, as we are not hindered by legacy issues that slow progress.”

So Asia could be the place where IoE really starts to make a difference to commerce, attests Irving. “It will be less about the technology, and more about results. The IoE could be a fourth utility, like water, power and gas.”

This year Cisco celebrates 20 years in Singapore, “We already generated around 17% of the company’s global business in the Asia Pacific, Japan and Greater China region, and we aim to be No. 1 in terms of mind share,” says Irving. “To be a great catalyst and driver of innovation, we think like a startup.”

