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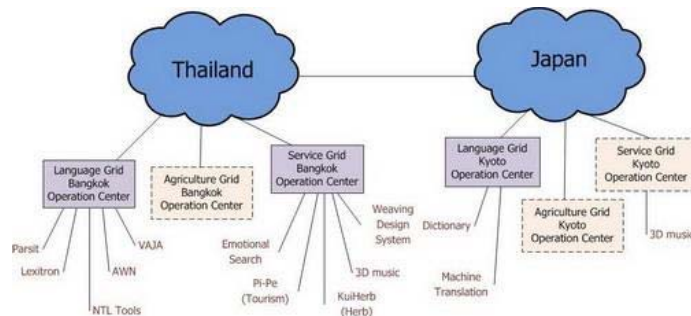
Nectec, Japanese counterpart, offer free technology

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Move to boost developments based on Nectec platforms

The National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre (Nectec) has launched the first virtual market place of technology research and development, in collaboration with the National Institute of Information and Communications Technology of Japan (NITC) and Kyoto University.

A wide variety of technologies developed by the two agencies are now being offered free of charge to government and private-sector researchers and education institutes for development of their own products and services.

In Nectec's case, about 20 technologies are being offered, representing 25 years of research effort and considerable expenditure. It is hoped that, through the new virtual market place, Nectec's existing technologies will multiply and grow exponentially.

Two centres are to be established in Thailand: the Language-Grid Bangkok Operation Centre and the Service-Grid Bangkok Operation Centre. These will be linked with two similarly named centres in the Japanese city of Kyoto.

Under the terms of the collaboration, government- and private-sector researchers, and those in education institutes in both Thailand and Japan, can access these online technology market places to look for technologies they want to use to develop applications and services for end-users.

According to senior Nectec researcher Virach Sornlertlamvanich, about 20 technologies developed by Nectec and other 94 developed by NITC and Kyoto University are now available free of charge, including all technology tools, components and services.

The beauty of the technology market place is the sharp reduction in time-to-market it offers for new end products and services. It will also help to encourage a wide range of new developments that are able to begin from matching with freely available technologies, Virach said.

"It is a part of Nectec's Digitized Thailand flagship, and it aims to gather not only digital information infrastructure, but also Nectec's existing research and development, and provide it for public use under a platform-as-a-service model. All technologies and services are under the same standard of information management," he said.

Language-Grid Bangkok Operation Centre and Service-Grid Bangkok Operation Centre are separate, but are linked. Both are located at Nectec. Language-Grid Bangkok Operation Centre will be dedicated to language-related technologies, while Service-Grid Bangkok Operation Centre will handle all others.

The concept of the two centres is to bring Nectec's existing research and development into wider public use. About 20 Nectec technologies are available, including everything from basic tools to core engines and applied systems.

They include BEST, short for benchmark for enhancing the standard for Thai language processing, which provides a large word-boundary annotated Thai text corpus with around 10 million words in at least 12 genres.

Others are Lexitron Pro, a Thai pronunciation dictionary with 120,000 words, and G2P, short for grapheme to phoneme, a text-to-speech conversion service. Parsit is an English-to-Thai general rule-based translator service that has been available since 2004 at www.suparsit.com, and currently has around 500,000 users per year.

Another two distinguished services are called Abdul and Vaja. Abdul is a universal information agent that is currently available on MSN, Web-service and Windows mobile, and has around 30,000 hits per day.

"Initial technology tools that will be available at the centres include speech recognition, speech synthesis, word segmentation, keyword extraction, translation, search engine, summarisation and opinion mining," Virach said.

A human-language technology laboratory researcher at Nectec, Chai Wutiwiwatchai, said many of technologies that would be available at the Language- or Service-Grid Bangkok Operation Centres were applications and services that were already available over the Internet. Development of next-generation versions was also continuing on most of them.

For example, Vaja, a high-quality Thai to English text-to-speech synthesizer, is in the process of development into a next-generation version that will make it a completely bilingual Thai-English synthesizer, complete with expressive-speech synthesis.

Parsit is also being customised for the travel domain.

Chai said that to be a member of service grid, people could apply as both service providers and service users. Service providers must contact Nectec's Digitized Thailand office to sign an agreement and then they can register their resources into the service grid. Service users also have to sign an agreement with Nectec before beginning to develop applications based on the resources available at the service-grid centre.

Virach said service-level standards at both the Language- and Service-Grid Bangkok Operation Centres were not guaranteed because they offered free services. The servers of both market places are located at Nectec.

In the future, Nectec plans to have partners joining the project - including Internet and data-centre service providers - who will become commercial hosts to the new market place. At that time, service levels will be guaranteed, Virach said.

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