

**SMU hosts inaugural int'l business-IT competition****By ZHANG YI TING**

LIKE golfers, chief information officers (CIO) have to be deft at both long and short games.

Sharing this analogy with participants of the first Apex Global Business IT Case Challenge in Singapore last week, Nariman Karimi, CIO of DHL Express Asia-Pacific, identified the short game as the current focus. 'Right now, our horizon is very much on the short game. It's all about cost and the containment of margin,' he said.

His sentiment was echoed by other panelists in a roundtable discussion during the event.

Ryan Sia, vice-president of Avocent Asia Pacific, also noted that asset management is significant as companies want to make full use of their costly investments on information systems and licences. Questions from the floor showed that besides cost issues, companies are also wary of risks amid the current crunch.

In answering a question about the feasibility of investing now in search of breakthroughs, Mr Karimi said that although the academic answer is yes, he is cutting his budget in reality.

Torben Bonde, CIO and senior vice-president of group IT at Vestas, shared his cautiousness. 'When we focus on the current situation, it is difficult to make that leap,' he said.

With these cues from the panellists, the 16 participating teams from countries that include Denmark, China and Canada are likely to watch their costs in the case competition. Initiated by SMU students, the inaugural business-IT case challenge requires each team to prepare a presentation addressing a corporate IT strategy and its execution in response to a case set by SMU faculty members in partnership with Vestas.

They are judged on their ability to think and analyse in the realms of both business and information systems. In particular, judges will be looking out for the feasibility of the proposal. 'The most important thing is the link between purpose and execution, the link down to reality,' said Mr Bonde, who is also a competition judge.

The challenge was conceived by three SMU undergraduates who came in second in last year's CaseIT competition in Canada and returned home with the idea of pioneering a similar event in Singapore.

'The two domains of business and IT are intertwined, which is why we chose to combine them in the case challenge,' said Deeraj Karnani, event vice-president.

Commenting on the partnership between Vestas and SMU, Mr Bonde told BT that the case challenge is an interesting avenue for the company to access a community of young people with relevant skill sets.

Anticipating interesting input from different angles, Mr Bonde said Vestas is 'very open to considering and implementing the proposed strategies'.

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