

More Google products to facilitate trade

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GLOBAL technology company Google Inc will introduce more products like Google Maps and Google Places to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to go online.

This is part of efforts to grow the digital economy to connect SMEs and advertisers to customers in a relevant and engaging format. Both Google Maps and Google Places help users track products and services.

While providing the services for free, Google benefits from this strategy by growing its traffic and providing a pool of users for marketers.

There are now 600,000 SMEs in Malaysia, which makes up 99 per cent of total businesses, but only 100,000 SMEs have websites.

According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, Malaysia has 66 per cent Internet penetration and 17 million

Internet users.

"SMEs must realise that online marketing is a way to communicate directly with their customers. If we see the amount of time people use the Internet in Malaysia against the number of SMEs that have a website, it's clear that this is an untapped area and has huge growth potential," Google Southeast Asia managing director Julian Persaud told a media briefing in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

In December last year, Google teamed up with the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, the Multimedia University and the **Tunku Abdul Rahman College** for a campaign called "Malaysia SME business stimulus package" to encourage SMEs to have a website.

Under this campaign, students from the two institutions helped a few hundred SMEs to create a website. A voucher worth RM200 was given by Google to each SME to maintain its website.

However, Google declined to reveal how much money it spent or how many SMEs benefited from the

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campaign. The company is looking at organising more such campaigns in the future.

"SMEs must leverage the usage of Internet to their advantage. Consumers today use search engines for researching product and services online. About 83 per cent of digital lifestyle consumers in Malaysia used the Internet during

purchase processes," Persaud said.

Research group Nielson Co revealed that online media spending represented RM40 million, or 1 per cent, out of the total RM6.6 billion spent on advertising last year.

In developed countries like the UK, Internet advertising has taken over advertising on television and print.

