

**Client:**

e-Government Authority (eGA) of the Kingdom of Bahrain

**Industry:**

Public sector – customer management and business process outsourcing (BPO)

**Country:**

Kingdom of Bahrain

**Challenge:**

Establishment of a national contact centre serving public and private sector customers was seen as a vital component of government's strategic focus on developing a services economy. However, neither the required on-demand solution nor experienced business partners were available in the region.

**Solution:**

Merchants and the eGA formed a joint venture (Silah Gulf) that licensed Merchants' intellectual property for designing, building, operating and, ultimately, transferring the contact centre back to Silah Gulf – with Merchants providing professional services.

**Results:**

- An on-demand contact centre currently employing 150 Bahrainis and capable of scaling to 1,000 jobs; meeting government's employment requirements
- A single contact point for Bahraini citizens for all government services; meeting government's service delivery requirements
- First external client facility of 100 seats – in Bahrain, and first external client facility of 150 seats – in Kuwait; meeting government's requirement for kick-starting a services economy
- Two industry awards within 16 months of starting operations: Best Contact Centre, Qatar Customer Service Excellence Summit in Doha, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2011; Best New Outsource Call Centre of the Year, Middle East Call Centre Conference in Dubai, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2011

## Silah Gulf – A BPO Industry First

### Client Overview

Silah Gulf is a joint venture between Merchants and the e-Government Authority (eGA) of the Kingdom of Bahrain. It was created to enable the establishment of a national contact centre (NCC) that would form part of the government's strategy of developing a services economy.

Following the successful establishment of an e-government web portal providing a single online point of access for citizens to all government services, the eGA wanted to provide citizens with a single telephone number through which they could access all government services.

The NCC was intended also to actually deliver government services, and not simply be a phone answering facility. This would require the re-engineering of the business processes for most of the government departments.

In addition, the Bahrain government wanted the NCC to create employment for Bahraini nationals, particularly women and the disabled, and generate revenue for the country by providing outsourced customer management and business process outsourcing (BPO) services to the private and public sectors throughout the Gulf Co-Operation Council region.

### The Requirement

The eGA wanted a scalable, on demand solution. Scalable, because the eGA didn't want to incur significant upfront costs in order to be able to employ 1,000 people three years from start-up. At the same time, the eGA didn't want to start with a small system that it would outgrow and be forced to start again from scratch.

The eGA wanted an on-demand

system so that it could be as adaptable as possible to the needs of external and additional internal customers – and, thereby, provide truly excellent service.

Neither an appropriate technology solution nor experienced business partners were available in the region.

### The Solution

As usual, Merchants, took an innovative approach to solving the eGA's problem – and found a client willing to be innovative, too.

In a first for the BPO industry, Merchants licensed to the NCC its extensive intellectual property (IP) gathered over 25 years of designing, building, operating, and transferring contact centres - in return for a 33% stake in the NCC, to be known as Silah Gulf. Merchants would also provide professional services to the JV.

"The JV has been a remarkable exercise on many levels, not least because it's usually so difficult to serve the interests of a commercial organisation like Merchants as well as those of government organisation," says eGA CEO, Mohammed Ali Al Qaed. "What we wanted was quality of service, employment of Bahrainis, and consistency of government services through one channel. For Merchants, a financial return had, quite naturally, to be a part of the deal.

"However, from day one, the Merchants team, including their managing director, Adam Foster, was determined to make our economic development strategy a reality. They approached everything from a relationship point of view, and our understanding of one another has become continuously deeper and stronger over time."

Because the eGA's on-demand requirement called for technology not readily available in a scalable environment, Merchants brought in its parent company, Dimension Data, to provide Cisco's On-Demand solution. This was the first sale of Cisco On-Demand outside South Africa.

## The Project

In order to ensure successful delivery of Merchants' IP – its operating model - a core project team of seven Merchants consultants worked in Bahrain for a year. They carried out a detailed design for the contact centre, sourced a location, planned and managed the fit-out, hired key staff and management, and documented and transferred operational, branding, and communication processes.

With the contact centre up and running, Merchants now provides IT support and management, including all change management, incident management, and new project development.

Silah Gulf CEO, Joe Tawfik, says: "The value proposition that Merchants brought to the table is visible in every aspect of the business – from the way the technology fits together to the human resources, operational, and quality processes that ensured that we achieved consistent, standardised service levels from day one."

## The Outcome

Tawfik believes that Silah Gulf stands head and shoulders above its 700 regional competitors because it doesn't just address a customer's transactional needs. "Our enhanced customer management actually creates strategic value. Customers that use us actually accelerate their growth and profitability."

Tawfik and his Bahraini team have added to Merchants' content and processes operational and content elements designed to appeal to an Arab target market. The entire Silah Gulf package has, therefore, attracted attention in the region and in the industry – and, within 16 months of going live, Silah Gulf has landed two industry awards.

Adam Foster, Merchants managing director, says that Silah Gulf gives the Kingdom of Bahrain a highly functional operational facility from which technology and services can be sold to the region on an on-demand basis. "What's especially pleasing is that our intellectual property helped give the Bahrain government the means to derisk the process of achieving its strategic objectives. The joint venture proves that, when governments have the will, there is always a way for private sector partners to give them the tools to restructure their economies to the benefit of all stakeholders."