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Merchants joint venture assists Bahrain with e-Readiness

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Bahrain

While it only has a population of around 1 million people and covers a small geographical area of 662km², the Middle Eastern country of Bahrain is proving itself to be a force to be reckoned with on the international government e-readiness front.

With the country's government firmly set on moving its petro-chemical-based economy into a service-led economy by 2030, the local eGovernment Authority (eGA) is investing heavily in partnerships and initiatives that can put Bahrain on the map as a country at the forefront of technology adoption and utilisation.

An important step in the accomplishment of this goal has been the establishment of a joint venture between the eGA and Merchants, the contact centre division of international technology company Dimension Data.

The joint venture, called Silah Gulf, which officially kicked off with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in January 2009, saw the beginning of what has been a progressive business model – leveraging private enterprise expertise to fast track a country's desire to build service excellence for national and regional economic development.

While the establishment of a 250-seat contact centre in Bahrain's capital of Manama is seen as a major boom to the local economy, by creating jobs and providing the government and private sector entities with a vital customer service channel, it has also signalled the beginning of the country being recognised as a technological hub in the Middle East.

According to Paul Scott, Solution Director, Merchants, in terms of the MoU, the eGA provided the resources, facilities, infrastructure and access to customers in Bahrain, while Merchants licensed its customer service and contact centre operating methodologies to the joint venture.

"Contact centres, as they exist in today's terms, are a commodity. With enough money, any company can set up and run a contact centre. The trick is ensuring that the customer management strategies, the customer service ethos and the operational methodologies are correctly implemented and successfully deployed," Scott explains.

"Intellectual property licensing is the next logical step in the evolution of the contact centre business, but it's not standard practice in the contact centre industry for a provider to licence its intellectual property in this manner.

"This is what makes Silah Gulf such a unique joint venture because we have been able to demonstrate real business value to the government of Bahrain and deliver very favourable results in the process by

licensing our intellectual property to the joint venture. It is also important to note, that the commitment of the Bahrain government to investigate and implement innovative services that will transform their country has allowed us to set this JV up in a relatively short space of time. The desire to make a significant impact in the Gulf region and open up Bahrain as a technology hub, has positively impacted on the project.”

As a direct result of the Silah Gulf joint venture, the latest United Nations eGovernment Index rated Bahrain first in the Middle East for e-readiness, third in the Middle East and Asia region and thirteenth worldwide.

“This is an unbelievable accolade for Silah Gulf when you consider that Bahrain’s \$5m e-readiness investments competed against some of the biggest economic powers in the world in these assessments – including a \$21bn investment in Dubai,” Scott says.

“It’s the passion, vision and astuteness of the Bahrain government, and its ability to select partners that can add real value back into the country, that has led to the success of this ongoing e-readiness initiative.

“I have no doubt that Bahrain will fulfil its 2030 vision to become a service-led economy,” Scott concludes.

Ends

Note:

Proof of the success of the Joint Venture and the concept and strategy of Silah Gulf, is the signing on of the joint venture’s first private client – Saudi Telecommunication Company (STC). STC recently signed a five-year contract with Silah Gulf to operate a contact centre in Bahrain employing 100 people. .

“STC’s new contact centre, which goes live at the end of February 2010, is on target to deliver great customer service through a world class environment and well trained agents for STC’s valued subscribers.”

About Merchants

Merchants, a Dimension Data company, is a leading provider of bespoke outsource contact centre solutions with a more than 25 year track record of successfully delivering customers contact centre solutions for a variety of blue chip organisations, globally.