

Dubai Internet City

– New World Oasis



“WE ARE CREATING A NEW DUBAI BASED ON THE HUGE POSSIBILITIES OFFERED BY TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS SERVICES. DUBAI HAS ALWAYS BEEN KNOWN AS AN IMPORT/EXPORT HUB. NOW WE ARE CATAPULTING THAT ECONOMY INTO THE FUTURE BY EMBRACING THE INTERNET.”

Ahmad Bin Byat, Director General, Dubai Internet City

The future at work
Always a leading regional trading hub in the Middle East, Dubai has transformed itself into a truly international business centre of global significance. Multi-national companies are increasingly aware that Dubai's expanded business horizons cover many of the most interesting emerging markets of the future.

Critically, overseas companies setting up in Dubai can secure cost advantages not generally available including no corporation or income taxes, no foreign exchange controls and no trade barriers. Dubai's imports have more than doubled since 1989. It is highly accessible, being served by over 170 shipping lines and 86 airlines.

At the opening ceremony for Dubai Internet City, which rises from the dunes a few kilometres from Dubai itself,

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) bestrides continents and cultures. Sitting at the nexus of the Middle East, the Asian subcontinent, East Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, the CIS and Central Asia, the UAE has long been regarded as the trading hub for a huge region encompassing around two billion consumers. Whilst oil has historically been the main trading commodity of the region, the UAE recognised that this natural resource would not last indefinitely. A new direction was required.

Challenge

Rising to the challenge of leading the UAE into the 21st century, the Crown Prince of Dubai, His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, is transforming the UAE commercial landscape. He is populating once barren deserts with high-tech zero-tax business environments for the globe's leading companies.

Solution

The Crown Prince conceived an Internet business park equal to any such facility anywhere in the world. It would make real his objective of putting Dubai and the UAE at the very forefront of New World e-business. Dubai Internet City was constructed in one year, with Cisco Systems' Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG) providing technological vision and expertise. It provides international companies with a leading edge IT infrastructure and the world's largest and most complex IP telephony system – developed and delivered by Cisco Systems.

Results

The \$200 million site is luring international companies so quickly that it is already vastly oversubscribed. Over 300 enterprises are installed in the 37,000 square metre 'phase one' site. Phase two of the project will house a further 350 global businesses in 14 new buildings. One hundred and twenty technologically advanced luxury villas – together with shops, cinemas and restaurants – are also being developed.

Dubai Internet City and Cisco have now signed a 10-year partnership agreement. Under that agreement, Dubai Internet City will purchase Cisco's latest technology for the full 10-year term and Cisco will put its full resources at the disposal of Dubai Internet City in an active and critical role as futurist and trusted advisor.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum told the audience: “I had a vision to transform the old economy by making Dubai a hub for the new economy. This is a project to be pursued with energy and efficiency... this is Dubai's future.”

An Internet vision

This vision sought to bring together innovative people and innovative companies to create a synergistic hothouse environment with the best infrastructure available.

Ahmad Bin Byat, the Director General of Dubai Internet City, says: “Dubai Internet City was built in the UAE to provide a platform for growth, but its mission is to serve the whole region – from Morocco to the Indian subcontinent.

“We are creating a new Dubai based on the huge possibilities offered by telecommunications and applications services.

KEY FACTS

Dubai Internet City is the most ambitious engineering, business and political project in the Middle East. Commissioned by the Crown Prince of Dubai, His Highness General Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, it is the centrepiece of the transformation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from an old world economy based on import/export and oil to a New World leader in e-commerce and related activities.

- It is the world's first and only zero-tax, free trade zone for e-commerce.
- UAE is ranked 18th in the world for Internet access.
- It has implemented the largest IP telephony installation in EMEA. Four thousand individual phones are currently in place and this figure will triple by mid-2002.
- There are now 10 buildings in Dubai Internet City – with 100 per cent occupancy, 300 companies and 3,500 users. Currently 350 more applications from major enterprises for office space are being considered.
- The total cost to date is \$200 million, and 2002 will see the addition of 14 more office buildings, and 120 luxury residential villas.
- Dubai Internet City was designed, built and launched in only 12 months.
- The site contains lakes, landscapes, trees and oases and is a massive 37,000 square metres in area.

As a magnet for companies and talented professionals from right around the world, Dubai Internet City is set to make a mark on the region that transcends the business dimension. In January 2002 it was announced that Dubai Internet City would be incorporated with a market valuation of \$2,000 million.

Dubai has always been known as an import/export hub. Now we are catapulting that economy into the future by embracing the Internet.”

But far from remaining a mirage in the Arabian desert, this vision began to coalesce in 1999 when Dubai Internet City planners began to talk to Cisco Systems. Together they envisioned a leading edge converged architecture to deliver voice, data and video services as well as a host of other features across the whole geography of the City.

A wealth of knowledge

The Dubai Internet City concept was announced on 27th October 1999. From that point, project planners engaged with Cisco Systems' Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG) to understand requirements, troubleshoot potential problems before they arose and share Cisco's wealth of knowledge on delivering complex New World IT and telecommunications solutions in rapid timescales.

“We saw Cisco from the start as a partner to help us build on our broad vision,” Ahmad Bin Byat comments.

“Cisco's existing involvement in the region was a big bonus. It already works with service providers in the Lebanon and other areas close by and its status was a big factor in our choice. Cisco's technology matched our business need precisely.”

Challenging timeframe

The timescales were certainly rapid. The Crown Prince of Dubai envisaged a one-year timeframe for the construction of the City. This challenging objective necessitated immediate discussions as to potential IT architectures and communications infrastructures.

These interactions ranged from workshops with IBSG experts, senior Cisco presentations to the Dubai Internet City board and customer site visits to assess working solutions. The IBSG team shared Cisco's expertise and own experience in implementing IP architectures for voice, video and data (AVVID).

Farid Faraidooni, Manager of Telecoms, says: “Cisco people help us on a day-to-day basis through visits, presentations, and workshops. They take us to visit Cisco customers to assess working solutions, they host us at their regional offices, and they put their senior staff in front of us to provide guidance. We have had some of Cisco's most senior VPs visit Dubai. That range of help has been invaluable.”

World-leading platform

The technology platform for Dubai Internet City is amongst the most advanced and complex in the world. It offers feature-rich telephony services through a voice infrastructure built on IP. Clients can take advantage of robust, high-bandwidth Internet access of up to 2Mbps through direct connectivity via a 10/100Mbps Ethernet connection. Combining multiple traffic types on a single network connection obviates the cost of investment in separate networks and for the City itself will reduce the complexity of managing and maintaining multiple networks.

Farid Faraidooni explains: “Dubai Internet City offers a complete environment for IT companies and for professionals. We chose to go totally IP from scratch – so we actually operate one network which can carry everybody's voice, data and video.”

The telephony solution provides clients with the option of using a virtual PABX, eliminating the need to invest in their own PABX platform. Cisco has provided 4,000 IP telephones and this figure is set to triple by mid-2002.

Scalable telephony

The phone system is easy to maintain and is scalable as and when more businesses move in. To achieve this, Cisco engineers reconfigured an enterprise IP telephony architecture to incorporate multiple companies with different service requirements over the same IP network. To counter difficulties with legacy systems, Dubai Internet City also caters for analogue, ISDN and trunk lines.

The local area network is Cisco end-to-end and was designed and installed in consultation with IBSG and other Cisco experts to comfortably handle Gigabit Ethernet.

Dubai Internet City's reach extends far beyond the immediate locality, and its wide area network services include:

- Leased Circuits – ranging from 64kbps to 2Mbps with service coverage for the UAE and cross-border connectivity to major cities around the globe.
- MPLS VPN – covering entire e-business communications needs, intranet, extranet, and Internet services with combined IP, data, and voice support.
- ATM, Frame Relay and ISDN.
- X.25 – legacy networking protocols such as X.25 are also provided at Dubai Internet City to protect existing customer investments.

Advanced service provision

Hosting facilities such as providing virtual web space, co-location services and application service provision are also playing their part in driving Dubai Internet City further up the service provision value chain – to the great benefit of its corporate residents. Huge Internet bandwidth availability guarantees speed and performance for the companies of Dubai Internet City. Domain name, FTP, web hosting, virtual e-mail services and static IP addresses are also provided – paving the way for Dubai Internet City to offer even more advanced service provision in the near future.

An IP-enabled contact centre has also been created to serve companies' communications needs. "This contact centre is based on IP technology – it will offer voice and web connectivity," continues Ahmad Bin Byat. "It is primarily to service all of our customers' needs, and part of the standard offering will be multiple channels of contact to our business partners."

Last but not least, Dubai Internet City's network operations centre, the heart of the whole site, maintains the environment needed to keep clients' servers and applications available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Systems deployed protect and manage infrastructure and security.

Farid Faraidooni adds: "The Network Operations Centre controls not only the hosting services, but also every active network component – so our network is genuinely 24 x 7. Our technical people are centrally located there, which gives us flexibility and efficiency and better control of the whole City. One of the main concerns with this new technology is technical support, and we've had truly excellent rapport with Cisco."

Seeing the future

With the technical infrastructure in place, Dubai Internet City and Cisco are looking ahead and the IBSG team has been heavily involved in the specification and development of new value added services that might be offered by Dubai Internet City.

One of these areas is e-learning. Dubai Internet City quickly recognised that in attracting some of the most luminary and experienced technology players to the area, the opportunity to share knowledge to everyone's mutual benefit was too good to pass up. IBSG is playing a pivotal role in helping Dubai Internet City develop the architecture to deliver true e-learning. Eventually the plan is to launch a virtual university to rival any in the world.

Ahmad Bin Byat, says: "We are building a 'knowledge village' here in Dubai Internet City. We will be launching an e-learning academy to leverage the vast amount of talent we have – and will continue to attract – for the benefit of the whole region."

Blossoming in the desert

Cisco Systems and Dubai Internet City have now signed a 10-year partnership agreement. Under the terms of that agreement, Dubai Internet City will exclusively purchase Cisco hardware and software to meet the rapidly developing technological needs of its customers. In return, Cisco will provide a full range of free services including training and knowledge exchange, service creation and provisioning skills, and marketing expertise.

Dubai Internet City's vision of a technological oasis blossoming through the sand dunes of the Arabian desert is continuing to take form. Its mission is to facilitate the Internet economy for the whole region – acting as service provider, think tank, business incubator... In fact, being Dubai's weapon to address the New World.

“Our end game is to eliminate the divide which exists in this part of the world, through bringing talented companies and talented people together in one place and having them network and interact. That will, without question, be our greatest achievement,” Ahmad Bin Byat concludes. “Dubai Internet City will be a model for the whole region and Cisco will help us to achieve that better than anybody.”



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