

## Piecing Together



We needed an infrastructure, that was state-of-the-art." Abdulsalam Rahma Al Bastaki, director of IT and services at DSOA.

**The IT team at Dubai Silicon Oasis Authority (DSOA) has fit technology to business aims to achieve the highest levels of service provision.**

The Dubai Silicon Oasis Authority (DSOA) has the distinct advantage of being 'young'. One of the most recent smart city projects to take shape in the region, the DSOA presents observers with a chance to see how technology investments and usage can be done just right from the beginning to get the most in the long term.

DSOA had to be especially nifty on the technology front because, unlike many other smart cities of the region, the organisation was going to host only technology companies - firms that would do and demand more from information than most other verticals.

**We have the infrastructure ready, now the tools are coming on top of this foundation, and we expect to be web-enabled to a certain extent by the end of next year.**

Now well into its third year, the DSOA plays host to more than 2000 companies, with new organisations joining in scores across its six wings and the central 'icon' building. It has also established an infrastructure that can take it well into the next few years, keeping the unique business requirements in mind.

"The way I saw it was that we needed an infrastructure, which was state-of-the-art, up to date and to the level that most European and American organisations are enjoying. I thought about it and decided that the first thing we would need to do is to put in place a really strong and secure IT infrastructure which includes the communication, network, storage, servers, connectivity and overall recovery systems.

I thought about all this, how I can make an umbrella that contains all of these things, is necessarily state-of-the-art, without spending too much money, investing huge amounts in a big bang, doing it gradually but in a way that does not create any limitations for future growth," says Abdulsalam Rahma Al Bastaki, director of IT and services at DSOA.

The IT team found that the first step to set up world-class IT provision would involve very strong, high throughput network connectivity, with redundant, high availability switches, which can support not only DSOA but whatever tenants it gets.

"We went with Nortel and we implemented their switches as part of the first phase. Now we have completed the second phase, which is the deployment of two highly available redundant switches that take care of each other, in every wing of the buildings. We have right now seven areas of the tenants to cater to, as well as future growth for network requirements to consider.

With this second phase completed, the network and backbone is extremely stable, using fibre channel and switches all connected with high availability. Fibre has been used throughout the buildings, to connect everything to the last endpoint," states Bastaki.

Even when the first phase was completed the IT team realised that the next logical step for setting up service provision would involve using network throughput through measures like IP telephony.

"For this we went with Avaya. We saw that they have a market lead. To us, the company is ahead of everybody else when it comes to IP telephony. Many people are just following what Avaya is doing right now to catch up. We went about it in the same way as with the switches. We started with phase one, which involved having telephony for DSOA and two or three other buildings.

Now, we are working on the complete high availability of having redundant Avaya across all the structures, which can cater not only to these buildings currently, but for future growth. Right now we are working on this project with EMW as a provider," explains Bastaki.

The company has not only implemented the billing system for the technology already, but is also in the process of getting due approval for some of the services that it wants to provide its tenants through the IP system. Till such a time, these services will be provided only to DSOA employees.

However, there are other services that DSOA can provide already and it is moving on these rapidly.

"We thought that we should start providing various, different services to the tenants. To do that we need to have the right storage infrastructure, which we are about to finish deploying. We have selected a highly available Hitachi storage solution from the market and this is under progress of being deployed, and in fact is almost completed," says Bastaki.

### **At the next stage**

"So you have the storage available, you have the network available, if you look at it under the umbrella, you have the communication and IP telephony and everything else. As you see, where we are going is with technology that is available. We are trying to use it and go with state of the art solutions," says Bastaki.

While the current infrastructure provides DSOA with the stability it requires, it is nowhere near the end of the line for the organisation.



"On top of the current infrastructure, we are building necessary applications. Last year, we completed deployment of Oracle ERP for finance and accounting; even human resource management systems (HRMS) and other applications were completed.

And we are working on the CRM and portal server, for which we have already selected Satyam as the partner working on a predominantly IBM infrastructure. Satyam, working with Oracle's capabilities, will automate all services and make it web-enabled.

This will be especially true when it comes to government services, including facilities requests, visas, licensing, marketing, property management, almost all of this will be web-enabled. We have the infrastructure ready, now the tools are coming on top of this foundation, which we initiated, and we are expecting to finish by the end of 2009," says Bastaki.

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**for the next three years at least. We are making sure that this technology will provide support for the future.**

The idea, according to Bastaki, is to make many organisational activities as paper-independent as possible by the end of next year. The firm is also working on providing adequate wireless coverage for its tenants, existing and future. The RFP for the solution has already been sent out and DSOA is in the process of evaluating all of the possible providers for the project.

On the datacentre front as well, the company has been working hard to ensure the best of provision for its tenants.

"Currently we have one datacentre, intended for the purpose of catering to the existing clients that we have. However, since DSOA has been growing rapidly, there has been some limitations, especially issues with extra power.

We needed some additional UPS capability to make it a true tier 4 datacentre. We are working on this. We have already selected the vendor that will help us in upgrading our current datacentre. At the same time, in parallel, we are working on another datacentre located in another premise to serve as a redundant and highly-available copy for the current datacentre," says Bastaki.

## **IT and business**

Every choice in IT systems and service provision has been done keeping in mind the need to protect the investment for some years in the future and the overarching business requirements for the same.

"I am going with the latest technology as of now, which is investment foolproof for the next three years at least. We are making sure that this technology will provide support for the future. For example, from now I am making all my applications kind of web-enabled. So I know technology is going to stay there and it is going to go that way. I mean we are not going to go back to mainframes.

This is a trend, this is where we are going. That is why we are building everything based on that vision of where technology is going and where we are going to be in terms of future needs and how we are going to develop. I have no fear that in five years I will be able to provide whatever service I want, because my infrastructure is ready to integrate with any other new technology," says a very confident Bastaki.

The 22 member IT team has set in place a process for making sure that every system or software is user-oriented, and does exactly what the business requires of it.

"This is one of the most essential things, to have the user involved. For example, when you talk about CRM or property management or any other system, we spend a lot of time in involving not only the IT department, but the vendors who are trying to propose solutions to sit with the eventual users. We want them to get the full picture of almost everything.

Without users, IT is not aware of the process that is happening in every area, so usually this is our practice. Users need to be involved, and we select super-users within each department. They become the point of contact for the IT team and vendors for every IT project," explains Bastaki.

He continues: "Right now we are working on a document management project, which we are going to start in the next two to three weeks. It is along the same lines. Users were involved from day one, we know what type of data they are talking about, we know what work flow exists there, and what is required as per document handling between the managers and lower-end users. These processes are clear to the IT team and we ensure that this is communicated in the company."

The organisation also spends an inordinate amount of time in defining the scope of the project. This is in order to make sure that nothing goes wrong in the future.

"We do take our time with projects. First of all the scope should be clear. We spend so much time in clarification of the scope. That is the main thing for us in any project. If the scope is not clear to our team, we don't start.



DSOA brings rigorous processes to the table when selecting vendors for its IT projects.

Most of the time in a project is spent in this area - clarifying the scope. Once that is clear and we communicate it with the vendors, we end up saving a lot of time with them, because we know exactly what we want.

We only use vendors to give us more ideas, especially if something is lacking. This is how we are going about approaching projects," says Bastaki.

DSOA brings the same similar rigorous processes to the table when selecting vendors for its various IT projects.

"We have a very standard and set procedure. Our RFPs go to our purchasing department, they enter it into Tejari and most of our well known vendors are registered in Tejari. In cases, where a vendor is not registered on Tejari, and informs us that they want to participate, we still give them a chance.

"We give them a certain time to respond with a proposal. And we expect that before they submit their proposal, they should spend a reasonable amount of time with IT and users, to clarify if anything is not clear, if they have any questions.

We spend some time with them, we clarify all the things to make sure the scope is clear and then they submit the proposal. We have a technical team and the project leader evaluates the proposal. The team fills out a matrix giving values against what we are asking and what they are providing, for every vendor.

They don't see the prices, or the commercial side. We try not to give that to the technical team. The technical teams are only evaluating the technical aspect of the solution, and they send the proposal of the solution and their recommendation to the IT management team, which is myself and I have four more managers under me. Then the management might ask or request for the commercial side.

We consider that side, with the auditors and the purchasing department, and then we kind of evaluate based on the matrix, based on the price and we select the right solution set," explains Bastaki.

The firm works on an annual IT budget that is formulated at the end of every year. According to Bastaki, the higher management of DSOA has been consistently supportive of the IT team's work in the organisation, and encourages the team in reaching its eventual aim of attempting paperless service provision in the near term.

"Next year, server consolidation will happen. When I joined, there was some equipment that was passed on to us. A lot of these small servers that were passed on are obsolete now. We need to go with a total consolidation for a different level of operating systems and backend servers. There will be a renewed focus on backend storage.

And on top of that, the applications which are CRM, e-services, e-government services, all those things, we will attempt to have them web-enabled and automated by the end of 2009. This includes the portal servers. We want to have all these things in place. With

this, the service level at DSOA could increase from between 60% to 100%," says Bastaki.

Bastaki and his team are working consistently hard and with due process to piece together DSOA's IT infrastructure and service provision.

Considering their early success and rapid pace, there is no doubt that they will continue to innovate, cover new territory and reach their goals in the foreseeable future.

### **All about DSOA**

DSOA was formed with the purpose of creating a universally recognised state-of-the-art 'technology oasis', by facilitating and promoting technology-based industries, research and development within a fully integrated community.

DSOA is the preferred address for several internationally recognised companies. With its advanced infrastructure, state-of-the-art facilities, appealing value proposition, and unrivalled commitment towards establishing an integrated technology park, DSOA has become the region's leading business address for technology companies seeking to establish their operations.