

Asia Pacific Top Level Domain Association (APTLD) Meeting

ICT in the UAE

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The ICT Sector in the UAE is witnessing an era of rapid growth, making it a more visible sector in the region. According to the e-Government readiness rankings carried out by the UN, the UAE in 2005 has taken the lead among its neighboring countries with a ranking of 42 in the world, rising 18 spots from the year before.

Talking about competition, the basis for competition in the Telecom Sector is now in place with the introduction of a second operator. The highest rates of internet penetration in the Middle East is recorded in the UAE, while the distribution of international internet bandwidth in the UN-ESCWA region marks the UAE as having the largest share at around 30% of overall regional connectivity, followed by Egypt, then Saudi Arabia.

According to these UN studies, “this large UAE share stems from its advanced Internet market, the high adoption of broadband by the large cosmopolitan communities that reside in the country and the supply of Internet services to neighboring countries through the current UAE EMIX”. Furthermore, the number of Internet hosts per 10,000 individuals is at 62.2 according to a 2006 ITU study, ranking the UAE again in the forefront.

The UAE has established many technological cities, and many of high tech firms continuing to set up their regional offices here to monitor and support the regions successful growth; the Regional, Asian and International media are choosing the UAE for their Middle East & North Africa (MENA) Region headquarters; the Gulf Information Technology Exhibition (GITEX) takes place in the UAE every year witnessing the highest rates of attraction

in the field, where in last year alone the number of trade visitors exceeded 130,000, representing a 5% increase over 2005.

Moreover, last week the TRA co-organized the UAE Forum in Information and Communications Technology Research, bringing together experts from Europe, Australia and the United States to help foster collaboration and knowledge exchange amongst researchers in the ICT Sector. The Forum also announced the launch of the UAE Research and Education Network. The aim of this network is to provide a Leading Edge Network Infrastructure to centers of Learning and Research within the UAE, fostering continued collaboration and cooperation between them and establishing connectivity with peers at an international level to effectively participate and collaborate in research activities over the long run.

We believe also that a successful ICT Sector should be based on secured information, therefore, the TRA introduced yet another initiative, the Computer Emergency Response Team (aeCERT), which will constitute a cyber-security coordination center in the UAE.

This strategic initiative will facilitate the detection, prevention and response to the broader set of cyber security incidents on the Internet. The aeCERT has the mandate to work towards:

- enhancing the cyber security law and assisting in the creation of new laws and legal instruments if and when required;
- enhancing information security awareness across the UAE;
- building national expertise in information security, incident management and computer forensics;
- providing a central trusted point of contact for cyber security incident reporting in the UAE;
- establishing a national center for the dissemination of information on threats, vulnerabilities and cyber security incidents; and finally
- becoming an active and independent recognized security organization.

Therefore, I have faith that the aeCERT will succeed in presenting a proactive and structured approach to deter any potential and forthcoming cyber security threats.

Still, the TRA did not stop there, but rather invested in and developed a new (.ae) Domain Name Administration. Under the new (.ae) framework, users will benefit greatly through:

- a single focused and neutral administrative body;
- a facilitated accessibility of the (.ae) domain name to the Internet users in the UAE;
- enhancing the integrity of the namespace and promoting the strong cultural values of the country;
- following a “best practice” procedures regarding the technical management and delivery of the Registry; and
- achieving, as we strongly believe, an increased sale of the (.ae) domain names.

On the electronic commerce and transactions front, the UAE government has issued a Federal Law No.1 of 2006 regarding Electronic Commerce and Transactions, where the TRA has been mandated to regulate all that is pertaining to electronic transactions and commerce, including electronic records, documents, and digital signatures relating to electronic transactions and commerce. With such a mandate, we have set up in March of this year a new department and attracted expertise to address all subjects of this law and to develop an e-commerce regulatory framework that will encapsulate best practices from around the world. The department’s key objectives include:

- providing legal validity and public confidence in e-commerce;
- raising legal certainty by eliminating any barriers to e-commerce;
- monitoring compliance to the eCommerce Regulatory Framework;
- acting as a supervisory authority for electronic signatures (from setting the parameters for digital certificates to issuing licenses to digital certificate providers to inspecting digital certificate equipment and licenses);

- handling e-commerce disputes;
- supporting UAE Businesses in conducting further business online locally and globally;
- sustaining a Regulatory Framework that encapsulates rules, standards, and policies that are aligned to the day's political, technical, financial, human and information resources; and
- has in place the right support infrastructure that ensures continued validity of e-commerce in the UAE.

Last month, the Middle East Communications Exhibition and Conference (MECOM) took place for the first time in the city of Abu Dhabi, where the ICT Development Fund was launched.

The ICT Fund is a new venture dedicated to advancing the UAE ICT Sector both regionally and globally that proudly shares the UAE's commitment to innovation. The Fund is designed to fuel innovative research & development projects within the UAE ICT Sector and support education and training in the field. With the firm belief that technology is the creative engine of all new opportunities, the ICT Fund offers funding to drive results, introducing innovation with impact to the region.

The ICT Fund's key objective is to drive the strategic development of the UAE ICT Sector in order to strengthen the innovation and knowledge capital level of the market by providing research, education and entrepreneurial opportunities. The Fund will initially focus its funding and technical and advisory services on supporting the following core areas to create significant, sustainable innovation:

- **Incubators**

Nurturing business incubators in the UAE that support the development of new ideas and provide early stage startups with financing, management expertise and infrastructure support.

- **R&D Projects**

Enabling research teams to carry out world-class research, both basic and applied, and advancing the level of theoretical understanding of ICT subjects as well as their real world applications.

- **R&D Institutions**

Supporting the creation of high-quality R&D institutions in the UAE, that focus on basic and applied research and that contribute positively to the ICT Sector of the country.

- **Educational Scholarships**

Providing educational scholarships to support the education of motivated and capable individuals who are keen to work in and contribute to the ICT Sector

The ideal complement to the ICT Fund's financing capabilities is its commitment to providing comprehensive resources to meet the unique needs of each project. In addition to grants, equity and scholarships, the ICT Fund provides comprehensive business advisory, technical advisory and commercialization support services to ensure innovative projects and individuals have the help they need to succeed.

What's more, the ICT Fund also provides invaluable access to networks of industry professionals, technical experts and investors to further promote ICT innovation in the UAE.

The ICT Fund welcomes applications from all individuals and entities who feel that the success of their initiative will directly benefit the UAE ICT Sector.

All over the UAE, ICT has become a main source for every day life, from media, to the Internet, to Telecommunications, to health care services, to educational services, and so on. Hence, the TRA is determined to implement and sustain a technological strategy of the government with an aggressive approach to cope with the country's demand for continued improvements in this sector.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for your participation, and wish you all the best in building bridges of cooperation within the ICT arena, for the joint prosperity of our societies.

Thank you and good luck.