

# UAE's Growth into the Hub of the Arabic World

Robert Alcock talks to H.E. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim, Director General – Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, about the rise of the UAE



H.E. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim  
Director General – Telecommunications Regulatory Authority

**H.E. Mohamed Nasser Al Ghanim currently holds the position of Director General of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, whose primary role is to regulate the affairs of the telecommunications sector and ensure the creation of a fair competitive environment in the local market. In 2004 Al Ghanim established a telecom regulatory body, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA).**

**Under the supervision and management of Al Ghanim, the TRA succeeded in implementing the regulatory framework of the sector through developing the necessary policies and regulations such as the competition framework, interconnection agreements between providers, pricing policies, and the implementation of the National Spectrum Plan which is considered to be the first of its kind in**

**the region. Under his leadership, the TRA licensed the second telecom operator in the UAE; putting an end to a more than a thirty year old monopoly in cellular communications. Al Ghanim seeks, through several initiatives and projects launched by the TRA, to improve the telecom sector's market in the UAE in order to compete internationally by focusing further on the growth of scientific knowledge in Information and Communications Technology (ICT).**

**Q: The UAE has experienced massive growth in its ICT industry; what have been the key factors and how is government policy helping achieve this?**

**A:** Under the Chairmanship of HE Mohamad Bin Ahmad Al-Qamzi, the Board of Directors of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) held a meeting in December 2009. The meeting which took place at TRA's Board office in Dubai discussed policy related issues.

During the meeting, the Board signed off several regulatory and policy related items including fair market competition policy, a number of spectrum related policies, the policy on "spam SMS" and several licensing forms. The Board also discussed the contractual agreement to establish the "Emirates Foundation for Mobile TV Broadcasting" and the endorsement of an external auditor. Members of the Board were briefed on the proposed Executive Order of the UAE Federal Law by Decree No. 3 of 2003 which is to be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval. The Board also discussed several issues related to the ICT sector in the UAE.

2009 saw many achievements for TRA, most importantly, the revision and evaluation of the proposed offer for Mobile TV licensing presented by a consortium of several companies last October, and approving a Public Access Mobile Radio "PAMR" license to Nedaa' Company. TRA also licensed "Etisalat" as the first certification service provider in the UAE. The Authority

- ▶ also adopted the marketing plans to increase awareness and market the .ae domain name registration.

2009 also saw the nomination of TRA to a 2nd term for the membership of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), as well as the nomination of TRA's Director of International Affairs to the membership of the ITU's Radio Regulations Board (RRB12), the first Arab to be nominated to this post.

2009 also was a year highlighting TRA's Corporate Social Responsibility by supporting several initiatives and projects including the "Echo of Silence" with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the first of its kind in the Arab world to provide people with hearing and speech impediments the use of modern ICT technologies to help them integrate and become par with their peers. TRA also launched and is funding the "Emirates Telescope" project with Emirates Foundation of Science and advanced technology.

TRA succeeded in promoting a safe Cyber environment for all users, government, corporations, and individuals alike in 2009. Through its Computer Emergency Response Team (aeCERT), TRA signed several MOUs with governmental and non-governmental agencies to ensure the safety and protection of their IT infrastructure and online data. 2009 was the birth year for "Salim" the Emirati Cyber Security Advisor developed by aeCERT as a public awareness tool to provide safety tips and recommendations to computer and internet users. TRA also through its inattentive .ae Domain Administration announced its plan to launch .emarat (امارات), and UAE the first Arab country to introduce an Arabic domain name "strategy on the federal."

The launch of several initiatives have helped push the growth further these can viewed at:

[http://www.tra.gov.ae/tra\\_initiatives.php](http://www.tra.gov.ae/tra_initiatives.php)

**Q: How is this growth helping the socio-economic growth for the population and helping turn UAE into the hub for the region?**

**A:** The UAE ICT sector is one of the advanced markets in the Arab World. The UAE lead the world in terms of mobile penetration rates reaching over 200% penetration rate by the end of 2009 as well as sector readiness and regulatory environment. In the first half of 2011, the TRA undertook an intensive survey focusing on business usage of ICT services in the UAE in order to better understand business perceptions on their usage and demands for ICT Services. The business surveys spanned multiple services, fixed telephony, mobile telephony, internet, E-Commerce, etc.

This reviewed the access that business has to ICT services and the extent that they use the ICT services that they are connected to. We also looked at business satisfaction and engagement in E-commerce. 99% of organizations across the country consider telecommunications as an important aspect to the running of their business. The full results can be viewed at: [www.tra.gov.ae/ict\\_in\\_uae.php](http://www.tra.gov.ae/ict_in_uae.php)

**Q: What's next for the UAE, what are your future goals and ambitions?**

**A:** Firstly it should be noted that the TRA has a focus on Information and eGovernment and eCommerce services

following the successful integration of the former GIA into the TRA. A number of initiatives are planned in the area of Information and eGovernment services:

The Information and eGovernment Sector aims to build a competitive and sustainable eGovernment in the UAE. The Federal eGovernment Plan 2012-2014 charts out several initiatives that are directed at bringing about a rapid and robust eTransformation in the UAE government. Some of the initiatives are:

- To develop a management methodology for the eTransformation measuring and monitoring platform for federal entities
- To develop an eTransformation strategy for government services
- To build the enterprise architecture (EA) of the UAE Government
- To develop the computing cloud strategy and build the Computing Cloud of the UAE government
- To develop the IT architecture for federal government entities
- To launch and manage the interactive and collaborative electronic encyclopaedia of the UAE (UAEPedia)
- To launch the UAE eGovernment Award
- To launch the Open Government Programme
- To update the UAE Federal Government Web Guidelines document and conduct an annual assessment
- To launch campaign to promote eService and electronic channel adoption by the public
- To manage and develop the official portal of the UAE government

**UAE's rank in the United Nations eGovernment Survey**

As per the UN E-Government Survey 2012, the UAE was ranked 28th in the eGovernment development index; up from 49th rank in the 2010 Survey. The UAE leapt to 7th rank from 99th position in 2010 on the online service and 6th rank from 86th position in 2010 in eParticipation.

**The UAE Federal Government Web Guidelines document and annual assessment**

The TRA has developed the Web Guidelines document that acts as a guiding principle to the UAE federal entities with regard to the quality and consistency of their websites. The document is updated regularly to include latest international standards in this regard and to assess the websites of the federal government entities to ensure their conformity to the guidelines.

**As for the telecommunications sector**

The TRA will continue to monitor developments and will develop strategies relative those developments as well as Government policy. As stated above, the TRA's immediate focus is on securing a greater degree of competition in fixed-line services. The approach of the TRA is to bring about such competition through the sharing of networks. As you will know, the UAE has very advanced fixed-line infrastructure and we believe that infrastructure sharing is economically efficient and negates the need for investment in duplicate infrastructure.

**For more information visit:** [www.tra.gov.ae](http://www.tra.gov.ae)