

{ SERVICE MEETS } VISION }

As one of the largest government bodies in Dubai, Dubai Municipality has the most challenging job – to provide services to the citizens of Dubai – meanwhile meeting the strategic vision set by the government of Dubai. DM went through a transformation phase to achieve the business goals by utilising best of breed technology. The outcome is almost 500 on-line services that will be available to the public, thanks to its move to a Service Oriented Architecture strategy.

Dubai Municipality's Director of the Information Technology Department, Abdulhakim Abdulkarim Malik is not a man taken by technology buzzwords. "In an ever changing world, how can you decide which technology will take you forward?" he asks. Abdulhakim Malik prefers instead to put his faith in the business value that any technology offers.

"We've moved from our Cobol days to client server architecture to web enablement and now towards web services. Our vision clearly is to become more customer oriented and serve both internal users, government departments and citizens effectively. So any technology that enables us to do so is the right way forward," he adds.

Crossing the chasm

The diversity in its business was the spark that lit the transformation fuel.

With over 100 locations to manage, DM over the years found that as its services grew, so did complexity. "We had to support infrastructure across our locations that



(L to R) **Abdulhakim Abdulkarim Malik**, Director of the Information Technology Department, Dubai Municipality and **Abdulmajid Abdulrahman Abdulrahim**, Assistant Director of ITD, Dubai Municipality

ranged from two users to 3000. This resulted in increased complexity and left us with heterogenous spaghetti of systems and networks. DM wanted to be more dynamic and make life easier for the customers. So change was inevitable," says Abdulmajid Abdulrahman Abdulrahim, Assistant Director of DM ITD.

The answer lay in the emerging concept of Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) because it was based on business logic and offered the value of reuse. The architecture also makes an e-service truly deliverable on-line, dynamically and in real-time supported by the underlying processes and systems.

"SOA helped us fulfil a lot of our requirements without having to re-code and develop every single module. A payment module for instance could be used across any type of payments that we were accepting across divisions and services from citizens. Similarly, an inspections module could be scaled across a number of different departments without major recoding. Changes to a service and its process could also be dynamically invoked," Abdulhakim Malik says.

According to the plan, 80% of the SOA services will be targeted at citizens and external customers, while 20% of them will be for internal use.

A platform of choice

DM is a demanding customer and one that does not believe in getting locked into vendor talk and technology. "We want to invest in standards, not standardisation of vendors. This means that we want to keep our platforms open, choose the best vendors and also have the freedom to change them," Abdulhakim Malik states.

With a charter to adopt new technology, work with best in class vendors and invest in building strategic partnerships, DM wants to keep its choices open. On the SOA front, the department has chosen to go with IBM.

"The reason we went with IBM was because they offered us the right choice of platform and solutions along with global expertise and capabilities. So we could complement our team of 10 employees on the SOA project with key personnel from IBM," Abdulmajid says.

citizens and departments and create an environment where the community it serves can suggest changes to the system and services. "In the earlier days, we could not do anything to improve certain services or processes because of the legacy. But with SOA supporting our services, we can actually see a day when we can accept customer complaints and suggestions and implement them easily and immediately," he adds.

"Business now clearly drives IT and we have a plan in place. And we are set on aligning our goals with the vision we have," Abdulmajid adds.

With its sleeves all rolled up, DM is set to change the course of the way government services are delivered. So what can we expect to see as citizens of Dubai?

"Well, hardly any downtime, better performance in the delivery of services and a chance to make your suggestion a real improvement in the system," Abdulhakim Malik emphasises. A good way forward indeed.

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Jumping right in

Having made the decision to kick start a massive transformation project, DM began to take the lead in adopting a number of new operational models to improve efficiency and focus on the core business. Outsourcing development, maintenance and infrastructure support, digital document management and involving strategic partners for project management was one of the first steps it took.

The department also drew up a strategic three year IT for business project armed with a budget between AED 50-70 million of which AED 17 million was dedicated to SOA alone. Since then, DM has been working hard on the first phase of its SOA project roll-out expected to go live in July 2007.

"In the first phase, 27 services will be enabled and this is just the tip of the iceberg. By the end of the project over the next three years we expect that all our 500 services will be delivered as true web-services," Abdulmajid adds.

A view from the top

This transformation also gave DM the chance to take a view of its operations and where it wanted to go from the top. "We are currently looking at a number of high level initiatives to invest in best practice frameworks and methodologies like COBIT and ITIL compliance leading up to an ISO 20000 certification," Abdulhakim Malik shares.

This move is intended mainly to change the culture of work and operations and become more focused on customer service quality. "Adopting such operational frameworks will give us a chance to change the way we deliver our services and make a cultural shift," he adds.

Another project that is in the pipeline is a move to get BS 7799 certified for Information Security.

Eventually, DM hopes that this project will facilitate it to open the doors to

OFFERING SOA EXCELLENCE

Dubai Municipality along with IBM will host the region's first SOA Centre of Excellence, expected to fast grow into a facility for sharing expertise, experience and knowledge with the government and education fraternity.

"This project is jointly being put together by DM and IBM and is focused on creating a platform where we can share knowledge with the industry. We will work on increasing the level of awareness about SOA. IBM will provide the technology expertise and we expect a number of regional companies and organisations to benefit from this initiative," Abdulhakim says.