

> CIO NAME CONNECTIVITY AS BIGGEST ISSUE

UAE's IT managers joined CPI and eHosting DataFort (eHDF) to discuss the state of the enterprise data centre and what they would like to see from vendors and service providers going forward.

CIOs AND IT MANAGERS IN THE

UAE named connectivity and the lack of redundancy in their data centres as one of the biggest issues that they are facing in the country. They stated that connectivity issues will have to be rectified, and more of a free-market like environment created for service providers in order to improve the operational efficiency and productivity at an exclusive CIO roundtable conducted by eHosting DataFort (eHDF) and CPI.

The IT decision makers had gathered at the roundtable to discuss some of the continuing challenges connected to their infrastructure. When asked to name the issues that confronted them with building and maintaining data centres in the country, many also stated that they

had to constantly tackle vendors and providers who often knew very little of the solutions that they were selling.

"Compared to the situation in Europe or the United States, where there is a lot of evangelism on technologies, many companies here do not do enough on knowledge transfer. Their internal staff themselves often do not know a lot about the solutions they are selling, and they constantly have to check with their peers in developed markets. Many people in the UAE are still box pushers this way," said Sacha Narinx, technical director for Bios ME.

According to the CIOs, connectivity issues and the lack of redundancy was one of the main reasons that many did not consider managed data centre services seriously in the country. Many also stated that in truth there was not much choice when it comes to managed service provision within the country, especially when considering local providers.

"Many service providers in the market still do not provide proper detailed SLAs (service level agreements) to clients. Often, this leaves the customer with nothing to compare back to on service provision or to properly measure the quality of the services being provided," said Saleem Ahmed, IT manager at Emirates Steel.

The audience also named the lack of experienced IT staff and the unavailability of quality training courses as other factors holding back the market.

"It takes me an average of six to seven months sometimes to find the right resource for certain job titles. We get a lot of resumes when we put out an ad, but to find someone who is of quality and who is the right person it takes time and internal resources," pointed out Tibor Loncsar, director of strategy and operations – IT at Dubai World Trade Centre.

The group also mourned the lack of reliable international service providers and the inability to access and use the resources of international service providers in the country due to either connectivity or data integrity issues.

"From our part, we are constantly in conversation with entities in the UAE to enforce the idea that cheaper bandwidth and better connectivity is essential to the economic development of the country. That if these two factors exist then it is easier for industries to expand their bases in the country, bring in more people and therefore help the entire economy. This is a constant discussion at our end and we will continue to push it," said Yasser Zeineldin, CEO of eHDF.

He also assured that, unlike some other service providers in the country, eHDF does operate with clients on SLAs and contracts across certain metrics.

The CIOs also engaged in an involved discussion on virtualisation, its pros and cons and how they can get more from their investments.

"We have a huge number of servers in our current infrastructure and in an effort to improve our utilisation on these servers we have started with virtualisation. We hope that the virtualisation initiative will help us get more from our server investments," said Raj Patel, VP of IT at Majid Al Futtaim in the UAE.

Other IT managers in the room who were experimenting with virtualisation stated that while the technologies had obvious benefits there were still major constraints against large-scale implementation. One of them is the large

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capital investment that is necessary and secondly, the fact that many smaller apps that are necessary to the business might not always be capable of being migrated to a virtualised environment.

Ahmed, said, “We have adopted standards to help us out with implementing and managing infrastructure elements. We have also been certified for ISO 27001, the security standard. Depending on the organisation, I think it is very important to benchmark themselves and get standards in place in order to manage infrastructure and security properly. They have to plan for the worst, and expect the best.”

On the IT budget front, CIOs spoke heatedly about the increasing influence of the CFO in organisations and their involvement in every IT decision.

“Often when it comes to solution or vendor selection, we go through detailed examination, POCs and research in the market to present a selection to the CFO. We also tell him very clearly that even if the solutions look similar, the one with a

higher price tag often comes with better solution and services. But almost all the time we get the solution that comes with the cheapest price tag selected off the cuff,” stated Narinx.

Bassem Aboukhater, IT manager at UAE’s Leo Burnett offices countered by saying, “I would say that the way an IT manager talks to the business often determines the budgets he can get and the projects he can conduct. If he is talking to the business group in business language and emphasises ROI over the long term, most management would be willing to listen and implement. However, if he focuses only on the technology and the technical side of things, his argument will be lost to the higher management and he could face issues in getting his projects commissioned.”

Agreed Lindsay D’Mello, IT manager at SALAMA – Islamic Arab Insurance, “It is important for the IT manager to work with the higher management and the CFO. They have to learn to discuss business issues and then suggest

technology that can help with solving these issues.”

Others piped in stating that the relationship has to work as a partnership where the management was as willing to listen as the IT manager had to talk business.

Conversation also touched upon what they are looking for in their organisations for the new year and this included everything from improved training services to better presence of global cloud providers, improved performance and forensic capabilities along with better local managed services and providers. ■

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