

Profit from tech

From back-end services to social marketing, SMEs get online to improve their bottom line



BY DEEPAK KARAMBELKAR
Special to GN Focus

Technology has changed the business of doing business. From the internet of things (IoT) and cloud services to mobile apps and affordable enterprise resource planning (ERP), small businesses can use tech to increase revenues while staying competitive.

Leverage the cloud

Rabih Dabboussi, General Manager - UAE, Cisco, believes IoT is just a foundation for the "next wave" - the internet of Everything (IoE), which will create "unprecedented opportunities" and transform the small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). "Small businesses face changing requirements of scale and data management and need standards-based infrastructure that is highly secure and interoperable," he says, noting companies like Cisco provide solutions to manage and store data in the cloud and data centre.

Meanwhile, IoE offers "a whole new level of opportunity" for technology leadership. "IT will be in the spotlight to

enable actionable information, build new connections and open fresh revenue streams for SMEs throughout the Middle East," he says.

Don't over-outsourcing

Omar Christidis, Founder of Arabnet, which organises digital summits in the region, insists using the power of the crowd is a great strategy for small businesses. This can turn customers into loyal fans who help improve the product and spread word about it. He recommends small businesses invest in paid Facebook posts to boost their message and engage with the community.

Finally, SMEs need to understand the role technology plays in their plans. "Lots of people believe they can outsource technology, but you have to be careful not to outsource something that is going to be a competitive advantage to your business or a competitive advantage to your competitor," he explains.

Small details matter

Abbas All, Vice-President, TASC Outsourcing, advocates a mobile-friendly sales force and retail management tools like IChannel, which automates data entry to save time. Giving the example of an unnamed global tech brand that



Rabih Dabboussi
Cisco



Omar Christidis
Arabnet

used IChannel during Gitex Spring Shopper 2015, he says, "The top management was able to see each product's sales statistics every hour. It enabled them to not only revise product pricing on an almost real-time basis and come up with new offers but also helped replenish stock quickly at the stalls without halting sales."

"Businesses can also capture in-depth demographic and behavioural information of their customers, which can be mined for useful insights."

Remote control

Yasser Zeineldin, CEO, eHosting DataPort, says keeping an SME's IT assets always up and running has become crucial and has led to a growing demand in the Middle East for secure and reliable IT services. He advocates a proactive approach to remotely monitoring and managing back-end systems on a 24x7 basis.

"It is vital for a company to have a reliable and agile IT in-

frastructure," says Zeineldin. "With many small businesses facing the challenge of limited resources, eHDF Remote Monitoring and Management service presents an effective solution that minimises their efforts and expenditures, and most importantly, reduces costly system downtime."

He also recommends managed remote backups that allow IT staff to focus on core business objectives without worrying about daily backup jobs.

Smart, cheap analytics

ERP solutions were once too expensive for the typical SME. However, recent developments and a move to cloud-based solutions have brought down entry level ERP costs to "almost equivalent to the addition of another human resource", says Rohan Tejura, Assistant Vice-President, Focus Softnet.

For this investment, SMEs can get dramatically enhanced operating efficiencies, reduced working capital requirements and costs, and proactive, rather than reactive, business governance. "The USP of Focus small business solutions is the advanced business intelligence capabilities that allow users to configure multiple dashboards and use advanced analytics tools to take smart decisions," says Tejura. ■