CPI

TECH STRATEGIES

REFOCUSING THE BUSINESS WITH IT AGILITY

eHosting DataFort – delivering the services stack

eHosting DataFort is a fully owned subsidiary of TECOM Investments and is a leading provider of managed IT and advisory services. The organisation has obtained a number of notable projects to deliver world-class managed IT services to major enterprises across GCC, MENA, US and Europe. eHosting DataFort's proven track record for managing an enterprise's IT infrastructure includes some of the largest organisations, such as Dubai Financial Market, Arcelor Mittal (the world's largest steel manufacturer), Emirates Airlines, Tejari, , Axiom Telecom, Al Jazeera, Dubai Municipality, Khaleej Times, Panasonic, Dubai e-government and du. World-class data centres, resilient and scaleable infrastructure, round-the-clock managed operations and a team dedicated to disaster recovery and Business Continuity Planning (BCP) have ensured eHosting DataFort remains a market leader in the field of managed hosting services. It enjoys a wide network of technology and channel partners within the GCC/MENA, Europe, North America and Asia-Pacific regions.

Yasser Zeineldin, CEO of eHosting DataFort, discusses the company's strategies and successes.

What is your area of specialisation? How extensive is your managed services portfolio and how do you intend to develop it in future?

eHDF offers customers a complete stack of managed IT services ranging from Dedicated Servers to a fully managed services option whereby a customer's entire IT infrastructure is managed right from the data centre layer to the Application layer and everything in between (including network, servers, storage, backup, security etc).

What services do you offer?

Firstly, managed IT services which include data centre services (co-location and managed co-location), managed hosting services (with either dedicated or managed servers – the latter providing managed security services, managed databases, managed storage services, managed back-up and restore services, managed exchange and IT admin services) and disaster recovery. Then we have various advisory services for security, vulnerability and risk assessment, business impact analysis and data centre auditing and consulting. eHDF has a constant quest to improve value to its customers by launching new services and product offerings (virtualisation, cloud infrastructure services, remote infrastructure management, content distribution networks, etc. In an ever evolving technological era, eHDF's data centre is designed to respond to future computing demands, such as virtualisation, software-as-a-service, infrastructure-as-a-service and cloud computing.

Customers come in all shapes and sizes – from small businesses to large enterprises. Does your offering cater to everyone or are you focused on a particular demographic of the market?

Absolutely. Before the economic downturn hit, it was perceived that managed IT services tend to be more relevant and more worthwhile for enterprises. However, the tides have turned and smaller sized businesses are now realising the value in looking to third party IT service experts who can take care of their IT operations. Here are just some of the reasons why. The liquidity crunch has created even more opportunities for SMBs to have their IT infrastructure

Yasser Zeineldin, CEO of eHosting DataFort

managed by a services provider because they need to do more with less. Most companies are looking to move from investing in upfront CAPEX to OPEX model which allows companies to 'pay as you go' and reduce overall risks. Guaranteed level of service is also offered with managed service providers offering high end service level agreements. eHDF finds that companies prefer to spend on predictable monthly expenses to host services elsewhere than spending on building a data centre of their own that would inevitably cost more – ie lease versus build.

How can customers be assured that their data isn't compromised with leasing? What sort of SLAs would typically be put in place?

eHDF offers high end Service Level

Agreements(SLAs) to ensure the customer with guaranteed uptime and availability. Accreditations in assurance and best practices also make us one of the few Service Providers in the world to have obtained the prestigious ISO9001, ISO 20000, ISO 27001, ISO 14001, ISO 18001 and ITIL certifications.

What are the key benefits of managed IT services?

There are also a number of key benefits gained by customers by adopting managed services. At the strategic level, these are that customers can focus on their core business and on driving business innovation rather than spending too much time on operational activities; there's a faster time to market and rapid provisioning of managed IT services thereby achieving

a competitive edge in the market; businesses can adapt rapidly and cost efficiently respond to changes in business environment; and, finally, managed services offer customised solutions specific to business needs. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Financial benefits include reduced TCO, converting CAPEX to OPEX, predictable monthly fees and reduced financial risks. And, operationally, benefits include access to skilled resources and the latest technology, high availability and minimal system downtime, a high quality of service based on SLAs and a 24/7 operation.

What kinds of Middle East enterprises have been adopting data centre and managed services so far?

Enterprises across the Middle East and industry verticals have taken to leasing data centres and adopting managed IT services. From government, banking and finance, aviation, oil and gas, automobiles, media, technology to steel, eHDF's portfolio of customers reflects the breadth and diversity of sectors and size of companies it currently offers IT services to.

What are the key factors that an enterprise should bear in mind when choosing a managed IT services provider?

Some top tips a company should bear in mind before choosing to work with a managed IT service provider are to evaluate the credibility of the service provider; check the service provider has good references from its customers; ensure service provider has guaranteed level of services offering high end service level agreements (SLA); conduct a due diligence audit of their existing IT infrastructure – this will assess the areas of IT that can remain in house and what can be outsourced; and ensure the service provider meets specific needs of the nature and size of your company.

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A lot of companies claim to provide managed services, when often it is nothing more than traditional support and maintenance. How does your managed services offering stand out from the crowd?

The key differentiators that set eHDF's Managed services portfolio apart from the market include a maturity and success in the market – now in our tenth year of operation, eHDF has over 500 clients across industry sectors including public and private sectors, multinationals and SMEs in both global and regional markets. eHDF enjoys longstanding relationships with major players from both global and local spheres and some of our managed services customers include Panasonic Middle East, Dubai e-government, Dubai Financial Market, Dunia, Ministry of Public Works, Dubai Government Media Office, Trimex, etc. eHDF offers customers a complete stack of managed services ranging from dedicated servers to a fully managed services option whereby a customer's entire IT infrastructure is managed right from the data centre layer to the application layer and everything in between (including network, servers, storage, backup, eecurity etc). eHDF has partnerships with leading vendors across the globe including Cisco, Microsoft, HP, IBM, Dell, BMC, EMC etc. to provide holistic solutions to their customers which are backed by stringent SLAs, backed up by the vendors to provide 24/7 support to customers. eHDF boasts an impeccable reputation for achieving industry standards recognised across the globe. By achieving three industry certifications including ISO9001: 2008, ISO 20000-1: 2005 and ISO 27001: 2005 in an impressive period of just 12 months, eHDF ensures their Managed services are best-in-class thanks to their focus on international best practices, including quality assurance, IT service management and information security and putting in place clearly defined processes as recognised by international bodies (British Standards Institute and ISO). eHDF has a team of highly skilled resources having both technical and

On-line trading speeded

eHDF has enhanced the communication network for JRG International Brokerage, to speed up its on-line trading platform for customers and business.

JRG International Brokerage DMCC (JRG International) is a Dubai Gold and Commodities Exchange registered (DGCX) international commodity derivatives brokerage house, based in Dubai.

The financial group's online trading platform, communication and back-office servers are all hosted at eHDF's data centre. Used by customers to trade gold and commodities, the on-line trading platform leverages eHDF's resilient and scaleable IT infrastructure, as well as round-the-clock managed operations, to constantly update services and information from other countries.

According to CEO Yasser Zeineldin, "For on-line trading and business, the volume of transactions also increases over a period of time, which requires regular upgrades and investments in the data centre. As a service provider, we need to maintain these systems and keep them running 24/7. Our systems and infrastructure provide best-of-breed solutions and our consultants are always prepared to continuously support our customers in their everyday business needs. eHDF had to make sure that the highest levels of security is maintained and round-the-clock monitoring is carried out for their trading business."

In the future, JRG International plans to build upon the existing synergy with eHDF as part of its ambition to expand its business portfolio and ensure a presence in other parts of the GCC region.

domain expertise in deploying and managing IT environments across different technology platforms. We have also invested in the latest technologies to support best-in-class data centre infrastructure. To ensure the most optimum utiisation of the technology and people resources, we have put in place well defined comprehensive processes (like ITIL) to ensure high levels of service delivery and support to their customers. Finally, the blend of the following three elements has resulted in eHDF being awarded the Best Managed Services Provider in the entire ME Region consecutively year on year: a state of the art infrastructure (data centre coupled with the right technology alliance partnerships), streamlined processes (related to ITIL & corporate governance etc) and skilled resources across all technology and business domains.

Banking smart

International bank Société Générale is a little unusual in that it does not boast a retail operation in the region. "We have had a business in the region for the past few years but we started off as a purely marketing office only. And that continued until 2007. We got our active banking licence only in early 2008. Basically we became a branch only in early 2008. Our main activity in this region is corporate investment banking and private banking," says Abdul-Mannan Contractor, CTO for the Middle East at Société Générale (SocGen).

According to him, SocGen operated as a small office with around 15 people for many years before becoming an official branch. Now, the group has over 100 people in the region, spread across multiple office locations, including Abu Dhabi, Bahrain and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. "Between the two divisions that operate here, it is almost like two different banks. Both teams sit here at Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC). The only thing common between the two is IT. Globally, our IT team operates under the banner of Global Technology Services (GTS), and that team is around 4,000. We work for the SocGen group. Private banking or corporate banking, they are our

clients and we provide them with relevant services," says Contractor.

IT operates in a fashion similar to a cost recovery model. It has a services-catalogue, clients select the services they require, and all services are charged to the relevant client. Almost all of the critical applications used by the bank is hosted out of its main HQ in Paris. "We have got three huge data centres in Paris. We have Citrix farms in these places and our users connect via that and they use any app that they want."

Offices in the region are served via the same. According to Contractor, the other sites also have small data centres and these are connected to Dubai via high-speed lines and MPLS circuits. Services provided to the smaller sites include all the basic ones such as mail infrastructure and storage, among others.

In 2009, SocGen felt the need for a proper DR site in the region. "Minimum distance was key for standards. Then we came across EHDF, which was previously managed by IBM – that was an advantage that we saw. We had a couple of meetings with them and then decided to go with them," says SocGen's Contractor. SocGen had wanted the DR site and the backup hot seats to be located at the same site. But since this was not possible in EHDF

facilities at that point in time, these seats were located in another office in Dubai, and all three offices were connected.

Rid of the need to host or support applications the five-member IT team in the Middle East has had to handle elements connected to infrastructure alone. "Before becoming a branch we had a very small computer with a couple of servers. Nothing was standardised. When we started this office, we had to set up the entire data centre. We built this from scratch. We were given just four concrete walls and we built up the entire data centre. We had the standards and procedures trickling down from the headquarters; we used that and we readied our model based on that. Everything was standardised with the establishment of the data centre, including data storage and transfer elements. Standardisation was very important."

The company has certainly achieved ROI in its investment with EHDF and continues to do so. In fact, SocGen is in discussions with its partner to move its DR site to EHDF's new premises once that comes on-line since, as Contractor puts it 'we are growing and the users are increasing'.