

# AL SAFEER GROUP CHOOSES SAP S/4 HANA TO STAY AHEAD OF COMPETITION

Organisation implements ERP system and Change Management, aimed at taking the organisation ahead of the competition

— By Baraka Jefwa

Al Safer Group is a diversified organization considered as one of the largest retailers in the Gulf region. It specializes in hypermarkets, malls, food outlets, real estate, furniture, manufacturing, advertising, trading and more. The organization operates more than 80 multi-format stores in UAE alone.

Founded in 1985 in Al Ain, Safer Group has successfully grown into one of the largest and most successful retail organizations in the UAE. The group operates majorly in UAE, and has branches in Oman and Doha. It employs more than 3,000 people. It has often been in the limelight for its business innovation and commercial success. Industry bodies of repute and global brands have many a times awarded Al Safer Group for its excellence in service.

In recent time the group appointed Mr. Partha Banerjee as the Chief Information Officer to oversee its innovations in the digital age. Banerjee is an Electronics and Telecommunications engineer by profession and has an MBA in Operations Management from premier institutions in India. He started his career in 1992 in India where he worked with some of the top IT corporates. He came to the Middle East in 2003 and was working in Oman until 2019. He was appointed CIO of Safer group in April of 2019.

According to Banerjee, his position as CIO at Al Safer Group is multi-dimensional. He is



**Partha Banerjee**  
CIO, Al Safer Group



responsible for the entire IT function of the group and his responsibility is to ensure optimisation of the IT cost and resources, ensure that business is not hampered by any lack of IT support services, and ensure that the end users are happy.

“This is a techno-management role and there are a lot of initiatives which I have undertaken to ensure that cost is optimised because in today’s market, sales margins alone cannot ensure sustained growth, as competition are fierce. The best way to maximise your profits is by increasing your savings and IT is something which can enable this by strengthening the backend of your operations,” Banerjee said during an interview with CIO ONE Magazine.

Banerjee notes that throughout his career he has viewed transformation in two ways. The first and most important, is the transformation of the human mindset. He says that without acceptance from the people, who would ultimately implement and use technology, Digital Transformation has a high probability of failure. The second is that, Digital Transformation journeys should be undertaken with the idea that technology must facilitate business.

“I’ve tried to instil my beliefs at Safer Group. When I came here, the SAP integration was going on and there were issues like in any other database migration. My first step was to sit down with the people and understand their pain points, so as to be on the same page. I even conducted a Change Management workshop for the CEOs of all the verticals of our company to ensure that the change orientation was effective and the transformation was effected smoothly,” he added.

Expounding on AI Safer Group’s move to SAP HANA S4, Banerjee notes that it was the Executive Director (FMCG & IT) at AI Safer Group of Companies, Mr. Ashok Tulsiani’s vision, which was aimed at moving the organisation to the next level that played the driving factor. Banerjee notes that SAP HANA S4 is a very advanced ERP system and is in line with the organization’s goals and ambitions of being ahead of the competition.

“By the time I joined the company, SAP HANA S4 had already gone live in January 2019. Even though the migration is still going on, most of it is now over and hopefully by the end of this year we would complete the migration,” he continued. The production stage included Sales and a part of Finance

The network was in place, the virtualisation layer was functioning, the endpoint security and the firewalls were in place, and the branch connectivity was well established. “I had to fine tune the IT Infrastructure that was already in place and work on the redundancy plans, particularly redundancy of the network, to prevent downtime. In retail every second counts as the frequency of customer turnover in this sector is very high and customers don’t have patience. If my backend is not strong enough, things can go haywire because even a few seconds of downtime can cause a lot of issues at the frontend, impacting business negatively,” he mentioned.

digital transformation project Banerjee had to undertake in the organisation. Next, he initiated the backup of data by end users performing vital functions, particularly in the Software application, IT support and the C-level. “I went for a backup solution for our internal end users. We made a list of people who were performing important tasks and now we have an automated solution in place. At the end of the day at a particular time, the files get backed up. I had to ensure prevention of data loss especially since we are still migrating from legacy Oracle systems to SAP,” he added.

The next implementation Banerjee oversaw was driven by the rise of printing cost within the organisation. The organisation had more than 80 printers in their Head Office and De-

**CONTINUED INNOVATION:**

Ensuring network redundancy was the first





sign Corner combined. Something Banerjee says, he was unable to justify especially since most of their transactions were happening on-line within their network with SAP in place. “We implemented Managed Print Services (MPS) and the number of printers fell to 19. This was a major cost reduction, both in terms of maintenance of the equipment and on the use of consumables. We cut back on the consumption of paper, ink and toner substantially. With MPS people became more system orientated which has helped in increasing the productivity of our end users and the profitability of the organisation,” he added. “Additionally, all those Printers in the branches which had high maintenance and consumable costs were identified and were replaced with cost effective MFPs”.

“Consolidation of the Rack inventory at the Data Centres was another cost saving initiative that was taken up”. Banerjee continued to add. “We consolidated the Hardware resources at our Data Centres, removing the redundant, legacy hardware, freeing up the Rack space and bringing down the rental and the energy consumption costs”. For his work in leading his team in implementing various technology deployments in Al Safeer Group, Banerjee recently walked away as a winner at the recently held Enterprise Transformation Awards. He was awarded the “Transformation Maestro in Retail” for his work in the organization, an award which he insists couldn’t have won without the support of his team and the Management of Safeer Group. Having won the award,

Banerjee along with his team are excited to get back to Innovating.

“My major focus now is on the Customer Analytics and improvement of the Supply-Chain Management because these two are at the core of defining our success. Unless we are able to predict the buying pattern and /or the preference of the customer, it could be difficult for us to keep pace with the competition. To know the exact position of my inventory and whether it is reaching the targeted customer on time is imperative for customer satisfaction, hence improved business. We are working on these two areas. We are also improving on our CRM; our CRM would be linked with our analytics for customer value addition.” Banerjee concluded.

