

# INVESTOR'S **UAE**

JANUARY 2008

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO UAE'S PROPERTY & INVESTMENT SECTOR

ISSUE 01 | AED 25

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# MAKING BUSINESS MOBILITY WORK

BY SANTHOSH SHYAMSUNDAR

**HUSSEIN DHARSI**, a new generation Information Technology entrepreneur with a passion for hardware design and flying planes, talks to *INVESTOR'S UAE*

Dubai Internet City was established on 29th October 2000, under the directive of Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, vice president and prime minister of the UAE, and ruler of Dubai. Translating his strategic vision within a short span of time, the technology cluster has convincingly created a niche for itself on the global ICT map, offering advantages too enticing to be ignored by the IT giants.

The dedicated free zone hosts leading international brands like Intel, General Electric (GE), Microsoft, Cisco Systems, IBM, HP, Dell, Siemens, VeriSign, Google,

“DIC provided me with the best business facilities I could have dreamt of.”

Sun Microsystems, Samsung, etc.... Dubai Internet City's business clout becomes obvious from the fact that it continues to attract business partners at an average annual growth of above 50 per cent since its opening in 2000.

The regional economies, fuelled by rising oil price and flush with new wealth, have been investing a great deal in the IT sector, boosting the defining role of Dubai Internet City. According to international market research firm IDC, IT spending by the six-member



Hussein Dharsi CEO, C2E FZ LLC

GCC bloc will reach USD8.6 billion in 2008, up from USD7.7 billion in 2007.

One of the many success stories of Dubai Internet City is Hussein Dharsi. Born in Zanzibar - the pearl of the Indian Ocean, off the coast of East Africa, Hussein Dharsi is one of

the new generation IT technocrats based in DIC, who has seen his investments grow at a rapid pace.

It has been a long journey for the sharp-minded Dharsi - a journey that took him from Zanzibar to the UK, and then to the US, Canada, Saudi Arabia and

finally to Dubai. Dharsi lives in the quiet Meadows community, not too far away from the DIC. He is not that quintessential IT geek by any stretch of imagination; Dharsi sees the investment he made in the villa at Meadows as a very smart move – in the last couple of years the property prices in that area have more than doubled, and is still going up!

Dharsi craves to go back to the laidback life in Zanzibar – of the uncomplicated life, and of the evenings spent at the beach, "As a family we were never really worried, we were quite contented with the life we had." His family moved to the UK when he was 11, "After my graduation in Computer Science, I went to the USA to complete my masters in Project Management from the George

Nothing revolutionary has come out of the Redmond lab; almost all of Microsoft products are evolutionary.

Washington University. My first foray on computers was on an Apple IIe running the C/PM Operating System and using WordStar - that antique version of Microsoft Word less GUI and could load in 64KB of RAM". He adds, "Yes, you heard me right - not 64MB but 64KB!"

As we continue our conversation, he is alerted of an incoming voice-chat with his client in India - and his attention goes to his favourite MAC Powerbook. After a brief interruption to take care of business matters, Dharsi tells me, "Visicalc - the antique version of Excel and dBase-II which was replaced by Microsoft Access... nothing revolutionary has come out of the Redmond lab; almost all of Microsoft products are evolutionary. The revolution part has always been connected with Apple and the story continues with iPod...."



#### DUBAI INTERNET CITY

Dubai Internet City (DIC) provides a strategic and cost effective platform for ICT companies targeting emerging markets in a vast region extending from the Middle East to the Indian subcontinent, and from Africa to Central Asia. Launched in the year 2000, DIC now features a dynamic international community of ICT companies including global giants like Microsoft, Cisco Systems, IBM, HP, Dell, Siemens, Sun Microsystems, Computer Associates, PeopleSoft and Sony Ericsson. Many small and medium businesses (SMBs) and promising entrepreneurial ventures are also part of the community. The cluster comprises companies from a variety of sectors - Software Development, Business Services, Web Based and e-Commerce, Consultancy, Sales and Marketing and Back Office. DIC provides an environment that attracts all elements of the ICT value chain, and in addition, has developed several programmes that can be leveraged by the community to explore and expand channel development opportunities. Companies are privy to an advanced Metro Ethernet broadband infrastructure and a range of business-enabling services including government transactions. DIC also has the world's largest commercial IP Telephony network.

About his early days as IT Professional, Dharsi reminisces, "I always wanted to be a hardware design engineer, but circumstances did not permit me and I ended becoming a software engineer."

For someone with a passion for flying, Dharsi's first take off in the business world was not too exciting. "I looked around and saw people being successful in business and enjoying a good life. I set up my own mail order company Discount Components Inc, selling electronic components through mail for the budding and aspiring electronic enthusiasts."

It wasn't just about a bumpy start, "Knowing the product and the technology is just half the battle. The other half is actually getting to understand how a business is structured and run, something I didn't know much about, and I had to learn it the hard way. Soon DC Inc was history and in 1988 I took a flight to Toronto, Canada, looking to resurrect my career."

A fair dose of luck helped Dharsi in Canada, "Even without the 'Canadian experience,' I was offered my first real job as a Marketing Support Representative

(MSR), but my true responsibility was to go out and fix IBM PCs, IBM Ethernet LAN etc." But, then, Dharsi wanted a serious job, a real tech job that brought the best out of him.

"One day I got a call from Zenith Data Systems and they asked me if I am still looking for that job of a software engineer on UNIX boxes. With assembler and C being part of my repertoire, soon I was writing low level device drivers for the first laptop with a blue colour monochrome screen, which was then called portables the Zenith SuperSport – running MS DOS 5."

A corporate merger in Zenith made quite a few employees redundant. Dharsi had to go through a very painful of waiting for his next job, and when it finally arrived – it was a very good one. "I was given the prestigious position of a Senior Systems Engineer to manage the largest key account of NCR, the Royal Bank of Canada. It was my first foray into the retail banking industry and a true taste of what it is to work with a fortune 500 company."

In December 1995, Dharsi left NCR Canada to join NCR Saudi Arabia as a Professional Consultant. "Needless to say I soon found out that I undersold myself whilst my colleagues were earning huge sums of money, I was just saving my 50 per cent tax and leading a miserable life - Riyadh is a very difficult place to live in."

"In 1997, luck turned around, I landed a job with Saudi Aramco, with the principal responsibility to replace the entire Novel infrastructure with Microsoft Windows Server."

In October 2004, Dharsi took the giant step of forming his own company in the Dubai Internet City. "C2E FZ LLC was born with a vision of becoming a premier solution and hardware design manufacturing company in the field of mobility."

"DIC provided me with the best business facilities I could have dreamt of. The facilities and regulations in place were perfect to do business. DIC is part of Sheikh Mohammed's vision of a new Dubai, which is

the number one in every field."

C2E manufactures IP54 certified Industrial Handhelds, which integrates latest technologies such as RFID etc. With manufacturing facilities in Taiwan, and operations spanning across the world, Dharsi runs his global business from his base in the DIC. In the last few years, C2E has signed major deals in the area of business mobility.

Dharsi is convinced that without the DIC, Dubai wouldn't have had the monumental growth, "They put the technology and communications backbone by establishing the DIC. By bringing all the big players under one cluster – the entire IT industry has benefited a great deal."

"Look at what is happening – the DIC has proved to be a great success story that the same model is now being replicated in India and Malta as Smart City. Definitely the partnership with the DIC is going to help these countries and the DIC's experience in managing and operating an IT cluster is invaluable."



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