

<a href="#">Home</a>	<a href="#">Head</a>	<a href="#">Local</a>	<a href="#">Business</a>	<a href="#">World</a>	<a href="#">Sports</a>	<a href="#">Feature</a>
<a href="#">Analysis</a>	<a href="#">Columns</a>	<a href="#">About Us</a>	<a href="#">Archive</a>	<a href="#">Contact Us</a>	<a href="#">Oman in Pics</a>	<a href="#">Links</a>

## Local news

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### Oman aspires to become regional hub for IT enabled services: ITA chief



**Dr Salim bin Sultan al Ruzaiqi, CEO of ITA, with an editorial representative of the Golden Book.**

**By A Staff Reporter**

MUSCAT — Oman is expected to lead in building a regional centre of excellence in IT service-oriented industries and associated research, according to Dr Salim bin Sultan al Ruzaiqi, CEO of the Information Technology Authority (ITA). In an interview to the Golden Book — a joint initiative of the Federation of GCC Chambers (FGCCC), Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and GEOC Group — Dr Al Ruzaiqi said the Sultanate aspires to become a regional hub for IT enabled services.

ITA is an autonomous government body tasked with implementing the National IT Strategy of Oman and overseeing all infrastructures, e-service and literacy training projects in the realisation of e-government in the Sultanate. This Digital Oman strategy aspires to streamline government services to businesses and citizens, he said. “ITA’s main vision is to transform the Sultanate of Oman into a sustainable, knowledge-based society by leveraging Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to enhance government services, enrich businesses and empower individuals.

Apart from executing our projects we also act as a competency centre and support other government entities in executing their IT projects,” Dr Al Ruzaiqi explained. During 2006-2007, the ITA launched an extensive ICT awareness campaign in support of its eOman initiative, with road shows and informative sessions held in all regions of the country. Focusing initially on major cities, the campaign will progressively cover other towns, while the Authority continues to work closely with the private sector in jointly developing Oman as a digital nation.

**NEW STRATEGY**

“Oman has based its strategy on a vision that spreads the range of utilisation of ICT and scientific research in providing collaborative services to public and private sectors and citizens through electronic means at a low cost as being the driving force to move forward the Sultanate to a knowledge-based economy and achieve sustainable development,” Dr Al Ruzaiqi said. To help realise this vision, a number of initiatives are already well under way, he explained. One such initiative is the Convergent Government Network, launched in association with Omantel. The latest MPLS technology behind the network enables easier management while offering secure and high speed data transfers.

Several key ministries are already logged into this network with other ministries set to follow suit according to a carefully scheduled migration plan. “We believe in the role of ICT as an enabler and as a tool in speeding the development of a nation and sustaining it as well as in closing the digital divide. Towards this direction we have undertaken several infrastructure projects for connecting the public sector and support them in taking a lead to offer electronic services to the public.”

The Ubar common gateway portal, the first phase of which is expected to launch next year, will enable the delivery of all government services will be delivered in a seamless manner to the public, said Dr Al Ruzaiqi. Additionally, the ITA is also developing a government e-tendering solution for enhancing procurement efficiency and transparency within the public sector.

### **VSAT CONNECTIVITY**

Schools are also increasingly going the e-way, according to the CEO. “While most of the education community is adopting networked solutions, soon the schools of Oman will also avail the VSAT connectivity that is being availed from international expertise. The Ministry of Health is also drawing the expertise of ITA in deploying its networks and IT systems across the Sultanate.”

As the apex government body for IT in Oman, the ITA is playing an advisory role in the IT related initiatives of other governmental agencies. The Authority is establishing common IT frameworks, standards and guidelines to integrate all government units within the eOman initiative.

“It will establish an overall ICT architecture, associated technical and application infrastructure and develop and implement the government-wide integration plan.

Further it acts as the competency centre with best practices for re-engineering business processes of associated entities and supports their movement to eOman. ITA supports ministries in implementing the Community of Interest (COI) Development Methodology. It ensures seamless integration of e-services from public sector entities by ensuring interoperability of systems for their respective projects which will eventually be offered through a single entry point portal,” the CEO said.

The official also outlined the Authority’s long-term goal in supporting the creation of a dynamic ICT industry in the Sultanate. “Currently we are focusing on internal economic diversification and capacity building leveraged by ICT. In the long run, ITA will have created a conducive business environment where a catalytic effect drives the ICT industries in a sustainable manner and it will play a more regulatory role in the dynamic ICT industry with regard to standards and service levels and monitor the digital community for equity and continuous enhancement. At which point we will be in a position to share our experience in building a knowledge economy and best practices with the then emerging economies.”

The Golden Book of the Sultanate of Oman 2008 is a national book initiative produced by Daleel LLC on behalf of GEOC. GEOC has commissioned Daleel LLC in the Sultanate to work with entities both from the public and private sectors to implement a national awareness and media campaign designed to introduce and inform citizens and residents about all the phases of FGCCC’s plan for attracting European Direct Investment (EDI) to the GCC states.

Part of the ‘Business Gateway to the GCC Countries’ series, the Golden Book is a cost-effective means to reach a large number of prospective business partners in the European Union and GCC upon a successful conclusion of a free trade deal between the two blocs. Oman Establishment for Press, Publishing and Advertising (OEPPA), publishers of Oman Daily Observer and its sister Arabic daily Oman, are media partners of The Golden Book of the Sultanate of Oman 2008 project.

*Go Back*

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