

Corporate conscience with a heart

Iraq's leading mobile operator takes its corporate social responsibility very seriously

When the Republic of Iraq's Communications and Media Commission (CMC) announced its intention to award up to four 15-year mobile telecoms licenses earlier this year, one company in particular was eager to place its bid.

MTC Atheer, part of MTC Group and one of Iraq's three former incumbent GSM operators, has been going from strength to strength since it began operating in Iraq two and a half years ago.

By the end of 2005, the company had the highest reaching mobile telecoms network in the country, spanning 2,200 kilometers, and today, it has over two million subscribers, mostly pre-paying customers.

The road to success has not been without its challenges, but MTC Atheer's CEO Ali Al-Dahwi is proud of his company's achievements and indeed its commitment to Iraq. He says: "We came into Iraq in December 2003, when there was only a very basic level of technology. The population was untrained in business and telecommunications infrastructure did not exist. There was a penetration of barely 1.3% of fixed lines, and, in Baghdad, only 60-70% was of that was functioning.

"We had 60 days from the signing of the contract to get the network running in the South's major cities. We put in the sites, developed them, rented them out and



Ali Al-Dahwi with Sourour F. Khesro, MTC Atheer's Public Relation and Corporate Communication Manager



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possible. Al-Dahwi says: "We discovered that the engineering skills in this country are ultra-good. Iraqis are hard-working and adapt quickly to new technologies. We believe in the integration of women in the workplace—most of our senior positions are held by women—and we believe in our people. There is a social role to be played by big companies such as ours."

to vote for. We just emphasized that is their right and they should use it."

Al-Dahwi acknowledges that the company's strength lies in its synergy with MTC Group, already a major presence in the Middle East. The group's ambitious and sustainable expansion strategy will, it predicts, see MTC become "a leading mobile and lifestyle service provider on the global stage by 2011." Al-Dahwi says: "We are able to use the group's facilities, talents and resources when needed, which has been a great help when rolling out services and establishing roaming agreements."

The CMC states that Iraq's mobile penetration range of 15-20% represents an increase in the number of users of over 300% in the past 12 months, adding that Iraq's national fixed line penetration is around 4%.

As Al-Dahwi notes: "Iraq is a gold mine of business opportunities. There are openings available in every sector. By providing a basis for communication, we are illustrating the liberalization of Iraqi society. We are in Iraq to stay."

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managed to meet our benchmark in the first year two months ahead of schedule."

The company has since gone on to connect Baghdad and has expanded its customer base by 377%. Al-Dahwi says: "We did not want people to think we were just here to make a profit and then disappear. Of course, we wanted to have a successful business and we invested heavily, but we were there to invest in Iraq."

This is demonstrated by the fact that 100% of the company's employees are Iraqi and it uses local suppliers wherever

Indeed, the company has spent more than U.S.\$0.5 billion supporting Iraq's education, culture and health sector, including vaccination and blood donor campaigns. It has also sponsored the Iraqi Symphony Orchestra and the Iraqi Olympic Football Team, as well as football clubs at grass-roots level.

During the elections last year, MTC Atheer sent its subscribers messages by SMS to urge them to participate in the process. Al-Dahwi says: "Many people responded to that. We did not specify who

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