

ICDL initiates public service announcement campaign for digital awareness in the region

Corporate citizens urged to play a role in public digital awareness in the region

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In line with its commitment to promulgate digital literacy across the gulf region, ICDL GCC Foundation, the governing body and certification authority of the International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) program in the Gulf region, has announced the launch of a region-wide initiative aimed at raising awareness about one of the most critical issues societies are facing today - digital illiteracy. The launch of a public service announcement campaign at this scale comes in response to the urgent need to create consciousness among all members of society on the importance of being digitally literate.



Today, with basic literacy having reached admirable levels and with the increasing use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the concept of literacy has taken on a new dimension, and has practically been replaced by digital literacy as the new economic growth-driver. Digital literacy has always been known to have an influence on socio-economic development. A few decades back, there had been strong literacy movements throughout the region, driven by a realization that a literate society held the key to sustained social and economic progress.

“Technology has undoubtedly become essential to enhancing the provision of healthcare, education and e-services. We have reached a time when the ability to use computers is as important as the ability to read and write. Everything has become reliant on information technology and digital

awareness is directly linked to a nation's socio-economic growth. The purpose of our public service announcement campaign is to create public awareness on the significance of computers and how it impacts their daily lives. People are not only going to realize the benefit from enhanced services, but also improve their overall quality of life, " said Jamil Ezzo, Director General, ICDL GCC Foundation. The campaign will focus on print and audio visual public service announcements in schools, universities and government buildings; and will leverage the reach of the print, broadcast and online media to urge the public to become digitally literate. Additionally, ICDL is partnering with organisations from the public and private sectors to initiate various steps that will provide free and/or affordable means to access computers and Internet.

"Equally important to further digital literacy in the region is the role of mass media in influencing the public attitude towards a certain issue. Public service announcements can reach out to millions of people and persuade them to become part of the digital society. The support of corporate citizens that have the resources to make valuable contributions to maximise the reach of digital literacy at the grass roots level is also of great importance," highlighted Ezzo.

Digital literacy refers to the ability of an individual to use modern computing and e-services in order to be functional in modern society, to participate confidently in the affairs of society, and to prosper in that society. Digital literacy competencies are the enabling skills for the citizen to be functional and confident using the common applications to achieve own current everyday work, personal or community tasks and duties.

"There is a well-established link between the digital literacy levels of a community or the workforce in a country and the rate of economic growth it has achieved. The effectiveness of digital literacy campaigns is to a large extent dependent on the support received from the government and the private sector, and in this regard, the governments of all GCC countries have showed exemplary commitment. Today, an increasing number of government departments across the region are adopting the ICDL program and enjoying the benefits of greater productivity. Moreover, several educational institutions are making the ICDL program part of their academic curricula, ensuring that students become resourceful and ready for what the job market needs," said Ezzo.

On a different front, ICDL in the GCC is working hand-in-hand with many organizations on various initiatives to create an inclusive digitally literate society. Expect to see kiosks in shopping malls and public places soon offering limited access to Internet. Women's Unions in certain countries are working with ICDL to provide free laptops and Internet access to those unemployed local women that can certify their computer skills. ICDL is also working with focused groups to ensure that individuals with special needs also have the opportunity to become digitally literate, complementing the ultimate goal of creating an inclusive digital society.