



Press Release

Lower Internet rates to boost Smart Government Services in GCC, says ICDL

Recent report shows GCC Data Service rates higher than USA and UK

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ICDL GCC Foundation, an organisation that promotes digital skills and cyber safety across the Gulf region and Iraq, has called for lower rates of Internet services to broaden the adoption of the countries' Smart Government services. Lower Internet charges will undoubtedly promote the subscription of data packages by the masses, which is highly important for Smart and e-Services to reach out to each and every member of society.

ICDL has lauded the efforts undertaken by regional governments toward building an integrated digital system, which is accompanied with the aim to boost the Smart Government's e- and m-Services. In fact, the regional governments have registered their highest levels of ICT investment

in 2013. For example, billions of dollars were spent to attain computer literacy with Kuwait taking the lead at USD 28 billion followed by Saudi Arabia at USD 4.8 billion. Qatar and the UAE take third and fourth place with a total spending of USD 3 billion and USD 2.7 billion, respectively. These figures highlight the efforts of GCC governments to create a skilled digital community capable of boosting the economy and adapting to the latest ICT tools and techniques.

On the other hand, ICDL also pointed out that governments should take effective measures to bring down the high data service rates to make them more affordable for all Internet users. According to a recent study conducted by the ICDL GCC Foundation, the rates for data service in the GCC are still high in comparison to other countries and diverse among each other as well. The high service charges inhibit users' ability to subscribe to data packages which can hamper the success of the GCC's Smart Governance agendas. Alternatively, affordable data service charges will result in greater participation in Smart and e-Services.

According to the study, the rates of monthly mobile Internet data for 1GB in Saudi Arabia starts from AED 23.5, AED 47.7 in Oman, AED 63.3 in Qatar, and AED 100 in the UAE. The mobile data packages in Kuwait start at AED 104.03/month for 6 GB while it is AED 195.35/month in Bahrain for an unlimited data. A similar monthly package is offered for AED 128.56 for unlimited GB plus 300 minutes calls in the USA, while it is AED 72.02 AED for 1 GB with a free phone plus 100 minutes calls in the UK.

In the Home Broadband category, the monthly rates starts at AED 149 for unlimited capacity in the UAE, AED 85.86 for 1 GB in Oman, AED 201.72 for 15 GB in Qatar, AED 68.20 for 5 GB in Bahrain and AED 208.10 for 30 GB in Kuwait. Similar monthly package is offered for AED 91.83 for 1.5 GB in the USA and AED 30 in the UK.

Indeed services for mobile data packages and home broadband connections command a higher price in the GCC when compared with the USA and the UK. The GCC government must proactively work on long-term strategic objectives to establish public private partnerships that will eventually help to bring down telecommunication rates in the region. Better coordination

and collaboration between government and Internet service providers will also help in bridging this gap.

Jamil Ezzo, Director General of ICDL GCC Foundation, said: “The governments of the GCC have launched Smart and e-Services for the benefits of its people and visitors. However, high telecommunication rates acts as a major obstacle for people to access to these services. There is a greater need for affordable telecom services so that people from all walks of life can have easier access to the Internet. ICDL GCC Foundation proposes cooperation between the public and the private sectors to devise solutions to make data service affordable and accessible in the GCC so that each household has an Internet connection and every smartphone user has access to a mobile data package.”

ICDL GCC Foundation has been spearheading regional initiatives to place IT security and cyber-safety at the top of government agendas across the region. It has been supporting a wide-scale implementation of awareness programs, including skills validation through training and certification programs centering on IT Security, Cyber Safety and the effective, safe, responsible and mindful use of Social Media. The Foundation continues to collaborate closely with the concerned authorities and experts to further elevate the level of IT security awareness among the public.

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