

## ICDL GCC Foundation lauds IT industry's role in making computers and software more accessible in GCC

Jamil Ezzo calls for stronger public-private partnership to accelerate the transformation to a knowledge-based digital society

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ICDL GCC Foundation, the governing body and certification authority of the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) program in the Gulf States, has lauded the IT industry for their efforts to facilitate greater IT penetration in the Gulf region by making computers and software more accessible and affordable. The Foundation also called for strengthening the partnership between the public and the private sectors to accelerate the transformation to digital societies.



Mr. Jamil Ezzo, Director General, ICDL GCC Foundation.

"The Gulf region has made commendable progress in terms of computer penetration and technology adoption, and the pioneering role played by the region's IT industry in making this possible is worthy of the highest praise. Personal Computers have become an essential part of every household, and in the light of the e-government movement, more support should be given to families and individuals to avail of the benefits of this vital tool," said Jamil Ezzo, Director General of ICDL GCC Foundation. "ICDL GCC Foundation has been calling upon various industry bodies and relevant government authorities to step up efforts to integrate all sections of society into the Information Age, and it is heartening that positive response has been generated."

The GCC region at large has seen significant increase in digital literacy and PC penetration in the last few years, due to awareness and education campaigns aimed at bringing IT into the social mainstream and the growing affordability of computers and software solutions. Technological breakthroughs achieved by PC manufacturers have brought down computer prices under USD 250, and easy installment schemes have been made available, making computers within the reach of larger sections of society.

International software and hardware vendors have also extended support to government efforts to educate the public on the benefits of IT and impart them IT skills training. These initiatives include the e-4all project launched by the Dubai eGovernment and the Saudi Arabia Home Computing Initiative (SaHCI), Communications and Information Technology

Commission (CITC) of Saudi Arabia aimed at delivering 1 million PC at reduced prices to Saudi homes within 4 years. IT education efforts in Dubai received a major boost following the decree issued by Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to make the ICDL program a requirement for all teachers and government employees.

"Today, regional governments are all pushing e-government initiatives. Providing easy and affordable access to Information Technology is crucial if these initiatives are to achieve their desired results. Effective IT education and training programs are also key to the success of any e-government project," Ezzo added.

Although e-government efforts in the GCC have been making steady progress, the region's e-governance readiness has been ranked at approximately 50 percent in a recent report released by the United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs (UNDESA), compared to 91 percent for the United States. In the Middle East, countries such as the UAE and Egypt have made significant advancements in their drive towards a digital society, by launching several initiatives and programs aimed at promoting IT and the use of online services.

"ICDL GCC Foundation is committed to continue its mission of reducing the digital gap and to pursue our goal of establishing a knowledge-based society. Making IT literacy accessible to all sections of society is at the core of our efforts, and we are working closely with the concerned authorities and organizations in the public and private sectors towards achieving this objective," Ezzo said.

"Many initiatives have been launched by various international IT companies in the region to increase IT penetration among societies in the region such as providing computers and software solutions at discounted rates to students and producing low-cost computers with easy financial installments for families. We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the various public and private organizations with whom we share our vision of a fully integrated knowledge based society", Ezzo concluded.