Increased social media interaction urged with local government entities

Ezzo said: "Lack of proper online social media skills hinders people's engagement with public agencies"

UAE, December 2014 - ICDL Arabia, the governing body and certification authority for the ICDL certificate program in Egypt, GCC States and Iraq, has called on the public to increase their online engagement with various departments of the UAE, specifically by further utilizing social media as a strategic platform to discuss and resolve issues of public importance in a timely manner, increase awareness of government initiatives, and collate feedback. This comes following a recent survey titled '2014 UAE Social Media Outlook: Increasing Connectivity Between Government and Citizen,' conducted by the Governance and Innovation Programme at the Mohammad Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG).

Although the UAE leads the Arab region in the utilization of social media channels for the provision of public services, the user interaction with government remains to be optimized. The government survey revealed that while more than 78 per cent of users visit government social media pages to access information, only 8 per cent provide their opinions or suggestions. The important finding indicates that government's social media pages have emerged as a source of information, but have yet to take off as a channel for two-way communication.

Jamil Ezzo, Director General, ICDL Arabia, said: "The UAE tops the region in the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. There were 5 million Facebook users in the country in October 2014, up from 4.4 million at the beginning of 2014 and 2.1 million LinkedIn users, up from 1.77 million. The statistics reveal a penetration rate of 60 per cent for Facebook and 25 per cent for LinkedIn for the same period. The emergence of social media channels has offered a quick and easy platform to nationals and residents to reinforce their ties with various government offices and present an individual's perspective to concerned authorities. Looking to add pace to these figures, ICDL has added Online Collaboration to its list of modules,

which helps people develop their social skill sets. With a growing engagement on social media platforms, it effectively teaches how to properly integrate social media into our everyday lives."

Ezzo further added: "The UAE's government entities have yet to harness the full potential of online social media as a platform for healthy debates, engaging competitions, and valuable suggestions and not just a source of information. They need to foster public trust that their feedback will be treated with utmost confidentiality so that people feel comfortable to share their views with the government. People should also be educated about the importance of feedback, as it will enable the government to improve their services and offerings. Moreover, lack of appropriate online skills in general public hinders in their engagement in social media activities."

"There is a growing need for more advanced training programs in the UAE which can educate people on the safe and secure use of online collaborative tools for a more engaging and interactive experience on social media platform. ICDL Arabia has addressed this challenge by incorporating Online Collaboration module which helps people understand the key concepts of social media, mobile technology, and cloud computing and at the same time develop online etiquettes," concluded Ezzo.

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