KSA turning to IT proficiency certification to address Middle East's 29.7 per cent digital illiteracy rate

ICDL Saudi Arabia intensifies inclusion of IT literacy programs across Saudi's government agencies and universities

December 20, 2009
According to the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, digital illiteracy in the Arab World is at 29.7 per cent, compared to 19 per cent global average. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has been encouraging nationals to participate in digital proficiency accreditation programs to enhance their IT competency and help improve the region's IT capabilities.

'Digital illiteracy,' defined as the inability to use digital technology, communications tools or networks to locate, evaluate, use and create information, is recognized globally as a major hurdle to social and national development. To complement government efforts to address this issue, ICDL Saudi Arabia, the governing body and certification authority of the global International Computer Driving License (ICDL) program in the KSA, has developed a new strategy to involve more schools and government agencies to adopt its ICDL certification program in their IT Literacy campaigns.

ICDL Saudi Arabia has already begun a series of agreements with private sector organisations and governmental departments such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and the Ministry of Defence and Aviation to make ICDL certification an essential requirement among their staff. It also continues to dialogue with the local universities to include the ICDL in their curricula.

"Information and communications technology (ICT) is essential to business productivity and sustainable national development, which is why we are greatly concerned about the level of illiteracy in this domain across the Arab World. As the region's strongest economy, KSA has taken the lead to address this issue and transform itself into a digital society. Our two-pronged approach to promoting ICT literacy has been specifically developed to complement government efforts and establish Saudi Arabia as a global ICT hub," said Dr. Sulaiman Al-Dhalaan, Consultant, ICDL Saudi Arabia.

KSA's ICT spend is expected to total around USD 733 million between 2009 and 2011. The country's expanding ICT infrastructure will require more digital proficiency from citizens, starting with the youth. In line with this, ICDL Saudi Arabia has successfully convinced some of the KSA's top universities such as King Saud University; Princess Noura Bint Abdulrahman University, the first university for girls in Saudi Arabia; Taibah University; Al Baha University and the University of Tabuk to adopt the ICDL program as a mandatory or equivalent course for freshmen. Around 20,000 university students across the country are currently enrolled in the ICDL program as a result of ICDL Saudi Arabia's efforts.

The ECDL/ICDL program is the world's largest vendor-neutral end-user computer skills certification, endorsed by education ministries, universities and government organisations in more than 168 countries and available in over 40 languages, including Arabic. It recently marked its 9 millionth enrollment, with ICDL Saudi Arabia emerging as one of its key contributors in the Middle East. During the ECDL Foundation's Annual Global Forum held in October 2009 in Athens, Greece, ICDL Saudi Arabia won the 'Programme Implementation within an Organisation' award for participating with major Saudi universities to integrate ICDL certification into their academic programs.