

From the ruins of Iraq's war came opportunity

Technology Partners keeps Baghdad wired

BY SCOTT SHUEY
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Dubai Smart grids and telecommunication technology wasn't what was on Omar Barzanji mind when he went to Iraq in 2003.

He was more concerned that he has just watched his old neighbourhood in Baghdad being bombed on television.

Barzanji, an American citizen and the CEO and President of Dubai-based Technology Partners, said one of the most important things he brought with him on that trip was a satellite phone, which he used to help friends and families make calls out at a time when Baghdad was almost completely void of telecommunication services. He says he remembers how frustrating it was, having just come from the UAE, where its telecommunications operator was working with fibre optics.

But Barzanji's journey also led to other opportunities. His company was awarded a contract, given to them by Lucent and worth \$1.5 million (Dh5.5 million), to rebuild 14 destroyed telephone exchanges.

"We built all 14 exchanges in Dubai in Jebel Ali in container shelters," he told *Gulf News*. "We put them on flat-bed trucks, and we trucked them to Baghdad and then we helped install them. And that was my first really big project in Baghdad. It put us on the map"

Appointment

Barzanji's work has paid off in other ways. Now, seven years later, he has been appointed vice chairman of Iraq's new telecommunications group, the Telecommunications Industry Association (ITIA.)

Dr Saman Shali, Chairman of the ITIA, said Barzanji's background and experience made him the obvious choice for the vice

chairman's role. Barzanji's appointment in September came only a year after the formation of the Telecommunications Industry Association, an organisation to address many issues of Iraq's growing ICT industry.

"Iraq has had a number of lurching starts and subsequent setbacks in previous years but with ... imminent forming of a new government, we are now at a point where there is a real, presented opportunity to move the country forward." Barzanji says he is looking forward to the opportunity.

Close ties

"Given my close ties to the country, Iraq is obviously very dear to my heart and we're currently at a critical turning point in history with a huge opportunity to enable it to perform to its full potential."

Barzanji said he plans to continue to build up Technology Partners too.

Technology Partners, when it first started working in Iraq, focused primarily on infrastructure, so initially it did not yield the dollars that a lot of other people made, but as of 2006 Technology Partners has been seeing annual revenue of \$20 million. He said the company is currently seeking to grow to \$100 million in revenue over the next five years.

While the company initially saw much of its revenue from Iraq, it was forced to diversify following the violence in Iraq in 2006 and 2007.

Now the company focuses on professional services group (software) solution, providing operational support services to mobile operators, such as billing and customer service, and smart grids, currently a hot area of technological growth in the Gulf region.

He said the company expects to announce smart grid projects in the country later this year.



ATIQU-UR-REHMAN/Gulf News

Major strides

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