

IRAQ

While much of Iraq's business news is overshadowed by the country's dramatic political climate, we focus on one company making a difference



Ali Al-Dahwi believes Iraq is a goldmine of business opportunities. And as CEO of MTC Atheer Iraq, partner of Kuwait's highly successful Mobile Telecommunications Company (MTC), Mr Al-Dahwi is a man that would know. In the space of just two years, MTC Atheer has exceeded cell subscriber targets three-fold, and it seems the telecoms company has every intention of staying in Iraq for the long haul.

One of the biggest operators in Iraq today, MTC Atheer began operations in southern Iraq in 2004. Al-Dahwi says: "When you become an operator in any green field, you come across many challenges, no matter which country you are in. Obviously, the challenges were magnified in Iraq because we were coming into a nation where civilians were isolated from technology."

The challenges included "a population untrained in a business sense, and a telecoms infrastructure that did not exist," says Al-Dahwi. "The devastation of the war had left a penetration figure of barely 1.3% of fixed lines. What was functioning was even less than that and most of it was in Baghdad. The whole country was lacking the backbone of communication, skills, marketing, sales, knowledge of GSM and technology."

With the backing of the MTC Group, and sister companies based in Jordan, Lebanon and Bahrain, MTC Atheer set to work. "We had to move fast, because we only had 60 days from signing the contract to assemble the network and get it up and running in all the South's major cities. We used a



Ali Al-Dahwi, CEO, MTC Atheer

100% Iraqi team and were able to meet our benchmark in the first year two months ahead of schedule."

Building a strong company structure was vital. "Without the MTC Group, we could not have done the job," says Al-Dahwi. "Not many people wanted to go to Iraq, so we had the group behind us to

help us overcome this challenge. We created a very flat structure, in which we placed some good managers who reside in Baghdad. We brought in people who knew about logistics and IT to work under them. We also tapped into MTC's company resources, which saved a lot of time searching for the right expertise."

MTC has a good track record. Founded in Kuwait in 1983, it recently celebrated its 20th anniversary as a leading mobile operator. Having pioneered mobile and paging services, MTC has also been at the cutting edge of mobile data services in Kuwait. In September 2002, the company went into partnership with Vodafone—the first agreement of

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its kind in the Middle East—and plans are underway to work on a second GSM license in Bahrain.

The number of subscribers in Iraq now stands at around five million. MTC Atheer faces the challenges of a growth market and a competitive one. Al-Dahwi says: "We are buying media gateways from Nokia that are the latest in the world, but the expertise in this equipment is not yet there. Some of our equipment is ready for 3G, it is just a matter of switching it.

"We are, however, offering the basic services, such as SMS and GPRS (General Packet Radio Service), which we are proud to be introducing. GPRS is limited, but welcomed by the Iraqis. Families do not want to have to worry about the safety of their loved ones when they go to an Internet café—now they browse the web from home."

The company has taken its sense of corporate responsibility to interesting lengths. Before the recent elections, MTC Atheer took the unusual, but highly effective, decision to send out bulk text messages encouraging Iraqi citizens to vote. It worked. More than 70% of the population exercised their new-found democratic rights.

Al-Dahwi takes up the story: "We were approached by the Independent Election Committee to send messages to encourage our subscribers to vote. We did not specify who to vote for, but emphasized that it is their right and they should use it. I decided not to charge the IEC a penny for this service, because I believe it is our duty to help support the growth of Iraq.

"Our number one objective is to win the hearts of the Iraqis. People here are tired of war and low incomes. They want to live their lives and enjoy their freedom. By providing a basis for communication, we can show the liberalization of the Iraqi society and the investment opportunities it offers."

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ONE NATION. ONE PEOPLE. ONE FUTURE.

Some may say that's a challenge. This is where MTC Atheer believes otherwise. In the past two years, we have succeeded in creating the largest, most technologically advanced network to become Iraq's leading telecommunications company.

With the widest coverage. With a 100% Iraqi workforce. Simply because we believe in Iraq. We believe that communication will bring the Iraqis together. And through a multitude of mobile services,

which we provide, communication has never been more accessible. In addition to creating business and job opportunities, sponsoring sports events and supporting cultural and health organizations, we have managed to materialize our vision of an empowered Iraq. We invest in more than just equipment. We invest in the future and potential of Iraq.

 **mtc atheer**
The mobile telecom of Iraq



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