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## Gitex I

By the early afternoon of day five, Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) was confident that it would hit its target of 75,000 visitors for Gitex 2003. Those visitors through the door witnessed a show larger than any of its predecessors, as more than 700 exhibitors displayed products from over 1,600 vendors on a show floor that covered nine halls and measured 35,000 square metres.

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"The 23rd edition of Gitex was the biggest ever, in terms of space, national pavilions and visitors," says DWTC's director general, Mubarak bin Fahad.

Furthermore, unlike the exhibitions of 2001 and 2002, this year's Gitex regained its vim and vigour. Poor global economic conditions were swept under the carpet, as were concerns for the ongoing political instability in Iraq, which had done so much to halt the local market earlier in the year. This positive outlook was borne out not only by the renewed efforts of the marketers, who rolled out more promotions, short-skirted demonstrators and quirky bits of R&D product than ever before, but also in the number of launches that were held at the show.

"All the people that are concerned with the information technology industry in region were present and many of the industry's leading vendors, including the likes of LG, Samsung, IBM and Microsoft launched new technologies [at the show]," bin Fahad says.

The round up below looks at some of these launches and identifies many of the trends touted by those present at the five-day event.

## Gitex II

### SOFTWARE

Perhaps the biggest software launch at Gitex 2003 was the unveiling of Microsoft's Office System offering. According to the Redmond giant, the latest iteration of its Office productivity software amounts to an entire redesign of the application, which has been carried out to significantly enhance its collaborative functionality.

Also, the product has been integrated with Microsoft's portal server, SharePoint, while the concurrent launch of Exchange 2003 has improved the solution yet further.

"We're moving away from the concept of Office as a series of [standalone] applications, such as Word, Excel or PowerPoint," said Emre Berkin, vice president, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Microsoft. "We have tightly coupled the applications in Office to enrich the offering and functionality," he added.

On the enterprise software side, Linux received more attention than usual at the show as local end users, vendors and Linux user groups (LUGs) all spent time focusing on the open source operating system. IBM, for instance, spent time educating the masses about its Linux win with the Government of Bahrain and other high profile installations, such as the one at Saudi Aramco.

"The time for Linux is now [and] the market is driving demand for Linux solutions," said Dr. Samer Shaar, general manager, IBM, Middle East, Egypt & Pakistan. "More companies are turning to Linux. They realise that it offers significant [total cost of ownership] benefits, high availability and code portability."

To ensure the region's interest in Linux extends beyond the show floor, Big Blue continues to invest in the Arabisation of the open source operating system. It is not the only one, however, and the Saudi Arabian LUG, along with Arabeyes, was handing out CDs containing Arabised Linux to visitors for the full five days of Gitex. Anyone picking up the free disc and installing it received an Arabised version of Morphix, called Arabix, and a host of open source applications.

"Once users try the CD they will realise the benefits of Linux," said Muath Al Khalaf, a member of the Saudi Arabian LUG.

Away from the operating system, Gitex 2003 was also a big show for enterprise

resource planning (ERP) application providers. In terms of the big names, Oracle was touting its Special Edition offering and rolling out massive customer wins such as Dubai Government, Mindscape and Dubai Police, while JD Edwards was educating the local populace about its acquisition by PeopleSoft.

In terms of the latter, JD Edwards was keen to impress upon potential customers how the deal has enhanced its support capabilities in the local market. "Our support system is now doubled around the world, which gives us much wider and stronger support," said Tim Caulkett, PeopleSoft's Middle East regional director.

It was not just the tier one ERP vendors touting their wares either during Gitex as a number of smaller software vendors took the opportunity to introduce themselves to the local market. For instance, Landsteinar spent the show talking up its retail sector specific, Microsoft Business Solutions-based application as a package capable of covering everything from point of sale (POS) through to back office billing and logistics. Elsewhere, Workplains spent the show touting its business process automation package as a product designed to for the small-to-medium sized business (SMB) segment that comes at a price they can afford.

"Given that it is common practice for SMB's to have staff with a number of roles, not just one area of responsibility, our easy-to-use and simple to implement solution means that a great number of employees can begin benefiting more quickly from Workplains' ERP offerings," said Ahsan Rashid, business development director at Workplains.

In terms of extended ERP applications, both customer relationship management (CRM) vendors and business intelligence (BI) solution providers were at the show. While ACCPAC used Gitex to launch the latest iteration of its CRM app, which it will make available to users online, Maximizer used its stand in the UK Pavilion to up its profile within the region.

On the BI front, Business Strategies Group spent part of Gitex presenting seminars with Business Objects on the benefits of its solutions and generally encouraging visitors to the show to make the most of their data.

"An increasing number of companies are spending a lot of money building infrastructures capable of storing growing amount of information. Now they want to make the most out of it to help them make better business decisions," said Arnaud Aumonier, regional manager, Business Objects Central-Eastern Europe & Middle East.

### **Gitex III**

#### **HARDWARE**

While most of the big iron vendors spent Gitex focusing on their other product lines, a few companies took time out to promote their servers. First up was Dell Computers, which was present at the show through several of its partners.

The vendor was keen to impress upon delegates that its year-old strategic agreement with EMC placed it firmly in the enterprise storage arena, while its 'scale out' computing strategy also allows it to play at the high end. Based on the clustering of two and four way machines to deliver high end computing environments, 'scale out' implementations have already been carried out at customer sites within the region, claimed Dell's general manager, Michael Collins.

Elsewhere, Fujitsu Siemens Computers (FSC) also unveiled plans to ramp up its presence in the Middle East's high end computing market and hired a room away from the show floor to showcase its range of computing hardware. There visitors saw not only the vendor's Unix kit, but also heard about its work in the last 12 months, which has included an extensive search for the right partners capable of supporting the FSC's Solaris Unix servers.

"We're starting to ramp up this business. It is a question of resources, in terms of knowledge, channel and support," said Jackie Carson, marketing & communications director, FSC.

Away from the big iron exhibits, a number of vendors dedicated time to mobile computing. For instance, HP and Palm were both keen to explain that handhelds were the way forward for enterprises with users who require the ability to access information on the move but do not really need laptops.

"About 30% of companies are looking at handheld solutions... Technologies like

Wi-Fi make handhelds more interesting now, as does the fact that they are becoming more powerful and can run business apps," said Stuart Maughan, general manager of Palm Middle East.

"Corporates are arming their users with handhelds to increase the speed with which users can access information and update it," added Christoph Schell, general manager of HP Middle East's personal systems group.

Both vendors have recently won key local accounts and both expect to sign up more as Middle East corporates begin to realise the many benefits handheld devices can provide and overcome any concerns they had about the technology.

"The thing that has hindered adoption [of handhelds] in the past at the corporate level was security. However, that has now been tackled and if you look at something like the iPAQ then this has a lot of security features built in," said Schell.

Furthermore, Palm believes handhelds will become increasingly popular as local organisations begin to address issues such as total cost of ownership (TCO) and investigate technology solutions that can deliver for them as soon as they have been purchased and implemented.

## **Gitex IV**

### **NETWORKS**

The ability to access information on the move and break free from wired environments was also the big message from many of the industry's networking vendors at this year's show.

For instance, Senao International demonstrated its range of solutions, including its long range wireless phone systems, while 3 Continents pushed its Colubris CM3000 access controller and Wificom authentication solution.

In fact, Cisco went as far as titling one of its offerings the 'SME Break Free Pack.' Created jointly by Cisco and its partner, Tech Data, the wireless package incorporates Cisco Aironet wireless products, access and security solution guides and an exclusive discount on antivirus software.

"Break Free is a mobility message, but it is much more than a wireless access point or a wireless card, it is about a complete mobility story," said Tim Scott, regional sales manager for commercial markets, GCC, Cisco Systems. "The Cisco SME-Accelerator Bundle has been developed to enable these companies [SMBs] to strengthen their position within the local market," he explained. Foundry Networks was also offering visitors an insight into its recently released wireless offerings.

Foremost among these was its IronPoint product family, which the vendor claims offers users a robust, scalable, flexible and secure wireless networking infrastructure. Foundry was also showcasing its IronPoint a/b/g multimode Access Points and IronWare Layer 2 switch, as well as demonstrating their integration with products from its existing switching families.

In keeping with the wireless theme, hotspots were also a hot topic throughout Gitex. As befits its position as the UAE's monopoly internet service provider (ISP), Emirates Internet & Multimedia (EIM) led the charge in this area and unveiled its wireless hotspot plans to show visitors, as well as demonstrating its first hotspot location — the Dubai World Trade Centre Convention Centre.

"We are looking at wireless hotspots as a new mode of access for the user," said Maan Al Sabi, marketing manager access, EIM. "We are covering the high traffic areas, where there are either home users or business users. Our targets are varied depending on the segment we are addressing, so areas that we are looking at are hotels, convention centres, airports, business centres and office towers for the business users," he explained.

## **Gitex V**

### **INTERNET**

Anyone taking advantage of the various methods of internet connectivity on offer during Gitex, whether that access be wired or wireless, have many more reasons for logging on following the show.

For instance, Etisalat unveiled a portal called Hayati that not only allows users to personalise content but also provides a platform for local developers to create

content and applications for use throughout the Arab world.

Tejari also launched a new portal at the show. Called, myTejari, the solution enables both buyers and suppliers to create their own personalised marketplaces and receive up-to-the-minute information via SMS or e-mail. This, in conjunction with the portal's single sign-on technology, enables users to access the information and services that are most relevant to their business.

"The objective of building the new Tejari portal was twofold. First and foremost, this new initiative is a core part of Tejari's goal to enhance customer adoption of online procurement, which we're driving through greater ease-of-use, personalisation, and mobile accessibility," said Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi, chief executive officer of Tejari.

"Tejari's mobile commerce strategy is positioned to give our members a more personal and integrated online procurement experience," she explained.

Elsewhere, e-learning was huge throughout the five days of the show. For instance, EIM announced a deal with Element K to deliver a wide range of bi-lingual e-learning courses to users in the UAE. The courses are targeted at all levels of society and cover everything from basic computing skills through to high end certifications. Accessed via EIM's dedicated portal, LearnOnline.ae, EIM sees the initiative as a way of not only boosting IT education but increasing its broadband subscription base.

"E-learning is a key application that is enriching communities, companies and employees on the one hand while driving up the demand for broadband internet services on the other," said Maroua Naim, general manager of EIM.

Online learning was also a big topic for Human Soft and the company spent much of the week promoting its Arabised material. Furthermore, the company highlighted its recent appointment by Dubai E-Government at the show and explained that it is working to create and implement a complete e-learning portal for users across the entire UAE.

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