

Network Gulf helps Unilever embrace open source solutions

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In 2003, Unilever entered the Iranian market by establishing on-shore operations, two factories and setting-up its regional head quarters in Tehran. However, one of the biggest tasks for the company was to setup a comprehensive IT infrastructure in place, since the company could not use any technology developed or imported from the USA with a specific American content, due to the US embargo on exports to Iran.

The American embargo essentially meant that Unilever could not legally import American products containing more than 10% of American content into Iran. Additionally, the use of certain technologies such as encryption software, which was American made was prohibited. Faced with these problems Unilever Iran had to search for alternative technologies and software solutions, in order to setup its IT infrastructure, which would enable it to communicate with its customers and partners worldwide.

"We acknowledged that this was to be a great challenge for us to setup our business in Iran," explains Vijay Singh Atal, IT Director at Unilever Iran and Arabia. "Our intention of course was to have an onshore facility in place in Iran due to the high customs duty and so on. Even after opening up an office and factory in Iran, the parallel challenge was to set up an IT infrastructure over there."

Furthermore, according to Atal, "Unilever has very strong business principles in place - being a global company it respects each and every law that's in place in any part of the world. So under no circumstances was it to break any of these laws."

At this crucial stage Unilever entered into discussions with Network Gulf Information Technologies (NGIT), and based on their expertise, solutions and local availability a partnership was forged. NGIT implemented a range of solutions using Mandriva Linux. "We are one of the 20 Gold partners around the world of Mandriva, who supplied the required Linux platforms with support," explains Dileep V.S, the Director for Technology Integration at Network Gulf Information Technology (NGIT). "Though we had been working on open source technologies for more than two years before the project, we had never attempted a project of this scale and magnitude. We had worked on most of the components independently, but had never tried to integrate everything into an enterprise solution of this scale, primarily due to lack of opportunities."

Based on NGIT recommendation the entire IT infrastructure except for the ERP was migrated to Mandriva Linux platform. The key components included desktop workstations, file sharing, mail server, proxy server, firewall, virtual private network (VPN), antivirus, WAN and backup solutions. Furthermore, Unilever Iran could use Mandriva Linux for a variety of applications such as Office productivity, internet, multimedia, gaming, advanced programming, web server, database server, LDAP server, FTP server, DNS server, NIS server, file server in a Windows environment, email internet server, print server, and much more.

NGIT helped Unilever Iran overcome additional roadblocks as Dileep explains, "Since most computer users in Iran are quite proficient at working with Farsi (Persian)-based applications, it was a challenge finding open source Farsi fonts for OpenOffice office productivity suite. However, he also adds that NGIT was successful in localising OpenOffice by adding Farsi fonts to the infrastructure in place, thus



Dileep V.S, the Director for Technology Integration at Network Gulf Information Technology (NGIT)

adding another feather to its cap."

The project at Unilever Iran was completed in six stages and took 11 months to complete, which allowed Unilever Iran to integrate 40 users from the head office and 60 users at its factories with additional support for future growth. According to Dileep, the feedback from Unilever IT team and the users have been excellent. "As part of the project, our engineers had imparted extensive training to the Unilever Iran IT team. They have been managing and supporting the solution with out our assistance for the past six months, and I must say that they are doing a good job at that."

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About Network Gulf Information Technology (NGIT):

Network Gulf, a Dubai based IT solution company provides solutions and support to the enterprises in the region. The company leverages on it's unique skills in Linux and Open technologies to deliver alternative solutions. NGIT has the skills and expertise to assist companies from understanding their requirements, developing & implementing solutions to training and assisting in migrating the users.

About Unilever:

Unilever is one of the world's largest FMCG company, which produces and markets over 400 brands spanning 14 categories of home, personal care and food products. The company's brand portfolio includes favourites such as Lipton, Knorr, Dove and Omo.

Unilever employs over 200,000 people in 150 countries worldwide. Unilever Middle East spans 15 countries across Saudi Arabia, the Gulf and Levant region and employs 4800 people.

Summary Facts:

Partners: Unilever Iran and Network Gulf Information Technology

Software provided: Mandriva Linux (formerly known as Mandrake Linux)

Key Software Components: Desktop workstations, file sharing, mail server, proxy server, firewall, virtual private network (VPN), antivirus, WAN and backup solutions.

Time frame:11 months in six (6) stages.

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