

“Bahrain’s infrastructure is among the best in region”

How would you define the meaning of e-Content in your country, in terms of its true meaning and practical implication?

e-Content means any content transmitted electronically. As there has been an increase in Internet penetration, e-Content is becoming a preferred form of information to be transmitted, especially among the new generation. As a result, many sectors have responded by starting e-projects led by the government.

factfile

Population of the country: 1,039,297
Total Number of Internet connections: 80000
Total Number of Telephone lines: 202000
Total number of Mobile connections/users: 1116000
Total numbers of universities: 19 (2 Public, 6 Regional, 11 Private)
Percentage of literate population: 97.0%
Percentage of educated population: 95%
Percentage of youth population: 37.15% (under 25)

5 pillars of e-Content development in Bahrain

- ↳ Awareness among individuals, businesses and governments.
- ↳ Creativity in developing new products and services that can compete both locally and internationally.
- ↳ Lowering of the prices of equipments and applications will narrow the digital gap between technology empowered and technology excluded communities and groups.
- ↳ Training web developers and personnel in creating and presenting good content.
- ↳ Legislation and security, so that people handle the new medium with confidence.

Q What is the current status of e-Content in your country - across all industry and aspects?

In the last two years, Internet penetration in Bahrain has increased drastically, as there are many Internet service providers in the country providing different types of services such as mobile Internet, ADSL, WiMax etc. As a result, almost every house in Bahrain has an Internet connection. In addition, many initiatives by various sectors in country - such as the Bahrain eContent Award by Bahrain Internet Society which is inspired by the WSA, the formation of Bahrain e-Government Authority and King's Hamad Schools of the future - have contributed to increasing public awareness about e-Content .

Q What area of e-Content is best developed in your country? For example, e-health, e-biz, e-culture, e-gov, e-entertainment, e-learning, e-science, or e-inclusion.

e-Government, as the kingdom of Bahrain intends to encourage e-Content in public service applications. The success achieved by Bahrain in this category at the WSA for two successive years would be a good indicator of this. Besides, if we look at the nominations and winners of the national contest - Bahrain e-Content Award - it is pretty clear that government nominations are close to highest and they have delivered good results, which has won them awards as well. I must say that the government in Bahrain is proactive in bringing forth the country on the digital map of the world.

On the other hand, e-Business is also well developed in our country, as the private sector is aware of the importance of e-Content. Once again, going by the national contests, it can be seen that this category is one of the toughest competitors.

Q Which sector in your country is more aggressive in developing e-content - business or private sector; government or civil society?

The government, public and private sectors are aggressively competing for e-Content development and the availability of services like online banking, flight reservation; trading and IT services prove that it is a growing trend. However, the establishment of e-Government authority has shown public sector to be more aggressive.

Q How would you describe the gradual progress of development of e-content in your country in terms of its rise? Any timelines?

The interest of the citizens in e-Content has grown since the introduction of Internet in the mid nineties. Also, the institution of the Bahrain e-Content Award in 2004 has encouraged web developers to further improve and develop their e-product with a view to meeting international standards and customer satisfaction. In addition, the establishment of Bahrain e-Government Authority, which is focused towards ensuring the effective delivery of government services to citizens, residents, businesses and visitors, has improved the lives of the citizens. Currently, all the government organizations are competing to provide more e-services to the society.

Q Can you list the major initiatives, which influenced and aggravated the development of e-Content in your country?

As mentioned earlier, we become active in the last half a decade, but we are pacing very aggressively. Some of the activities of significance are:

1. Establishment of e-Government Authority.
2. Forming a national advisory committee for e-initiative.
3. Launching Bahrain e-Content Award.
4. Future IT conference and exhibition and Global ICT Summit 2004 and 2005.
5. World Summit Award Grand Jury.
6. Arab e-Content Award.
7. Launching B-Online project with Microsoft.

Q How would you describe the major bottlenecks on the path of e-Content development in your country?

Currently there are no real or major bottlenecks on the path of e-Content development in my country. However, more awareness is required.

Q In majority of the countries, e-Content development is significantly dependent on ICT infrastructure and ICT facilities. But, in some countries that are quite developed, ICT has become part of daily life and e-content development is primarily subjected to the initiatives of an individual/organization/government, etc. Whereas, in some countries, especially those, which are developing and under developed, e-content development is largely dependent on ICT infrastructure. What is the situation in your country? Please explain in detail.

Bahrain has an advanced ICT infrastructure and is well connected through telecommunications. The island is also connected and covered by 3.5G technology and WiMax. Internet services with varying speed and services have achieved very high penetration. Within the framework of the King Hamad Initiative of Future Schools, many public schools have started connecting to the Internet. In addition, the Telecommunications Regularity Authority (TRA) has developed a framework of rules and procedures for new ISPs in the country, which resulted in having multiple ISPs providing different types of services.

Q How would you describe the ICT scenario in your country? Please describe in terms of infrastructure, penetration, acceptance and policies.

Our infrastructure is among the best in the region and the penetration rate is the third highest among Arab countries. Also, there are clear policies.

Q How do you see the future of e-Content development in your

country?

Bahrain will have more e-Commerce websites and its economy will further develop with government services becoming online. e-Learning will continue to be implemented in schools and universities and the influence of e-Content will reflect on our daily lives.

Q Please explain which medium is the most preferred medium for e-content development? Print? Or TV? Or Internet/Web? Or Radio? Or Mobile/Wireless? Or a combination of some of these?

The Internet is the most preferred medium for e-Content, then comes print, mobile, TV and finally radio, considering that most of the e-Content awards in Bahrain went to web products.

Best Practices

E-HEALTH

Ministry of Health Website

(www.health.gov.bh)

A detailed website by the Bahrain Ministry of Health providing all information and data about the ministry.

International Hospital of Bahrain (www.ihb.net/)

IHB is one of the private hospitals in Bahrain. It has an informative website with a simple and friendly interface. It offers online none urgent appointments for most of their doctors along with visiting professors mostly in the same day appointment. In addition, their website is updated on a daily basis and visitors can apply for a job and browse the health library.

E-ENTERTAINMENT

O on your mobile (www.o.com.bh)

It's a new generation of mobile services by Batelco. The areas covered are religion, fun, news and sport. Services such as mobile broadband, video calls and multimedia downloads are also available.

Adhari Park (www.adhari-park.com.bh/)

An informatics site which aims at marketing Adhari Park by introducing the park to the tourists and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) families in particu-

lar that are looking for entertainment during their visit to Bahrain.

E-INCLUSION

Women Gateway (www.womengateway.com)

A trilingual website by Women Gateway which primarily serves women in Bahrain. The site offers news related to women living in Bahrain and also outside the country.

There are various sections such as women portraits, where you are shown examples of successful women in the region and in the world, a Business Directory and an e-library that offers reviews for various books and links to the best online books websites. This site also contains various articles regarding topics that concern women in general such as politics, economy, education and health.

Tarbiya Net (www.tarbia.net/)

One of the pioneer sites in Bahrain that touch upon matters concerning social and educational issues.

Visitors can give their opinions through answering different kinds of beneficial questions. The site contains an e-Library that includes reviews for different kinds of books for local and international users.

Traffic Kids

(<http://www.traffickids.gov.bh>)

A unique programme established by the Bahrain Government (Traffic Department) in terms of educating the young generation about traffic rules in Bahrain. Navigation and animation helps the children to go through the complete site easily.

E-CULTURE

Jehat ALShear (www.jehat.com)

Jehat offers biographies, online texts, criticism, audio clips, history, and news about famous poets of the Arabic and remaining world, besides translated and non-translated compositions of literature. A very interesting feature of this initiative is mobile Jehat, which offer its visitors the facility of downloading poems on their PDAs. It is a cooperative project led by al-Nadeem Foundation of Bahrain and the poet Qassim Haddad. The simplicity and ease of design make it easy to navigate through the site.

Folkcultuer Bahrain (<http://www.folkculturebh.org>)

Folk Culture is a companion website to a physical publication by the same name. It aims to shed light on folklore and traditional games, dishes and habits, be it from Bahrain or the rest of the Arabic world.

The authors aim to make folklore parallel to modern life for the purpose of preserving the local identity and uniqueness of the communities that practice it.

Arabic Culture Café (<http://www.khayyat.net>)

The website houses a wealth of artistic cultural content, ranging from poetry to short stories, music and much more. It offers news and critique of many authors and their artistic work.

E-BUSINESS

BBK Website (www.bbkonline.com)

A BBK Bank website that has earned appreciation at many consecutive Bahrain e-Content Award events for providing innovative e-banking services and offering comprehensive up-to-date content, allowing customers to carry out their important transactions online. The content is fully comprehensive and bilingual. The ease of navigation and quality of functionality make BBK online one of the best in the e-business category. News and latest stock quotes add a great value to the website.

BMI (<http://www.bmi.com.bh>)

The Bank Muscat International (BMI) website that provides comprehensive content and e-banking services. A new SMS service channel has also been

added.

Asry (www.asry.net/)

This company owned by the seven OPEC countries has launched a website that gives a variety of information regarding ship building and repairing yards owned by Asry. All this information is supported with site plans and images. In addition, the website is updated with latest news, a list of all the services types that it provides, as well as a historic background about the group.

Riffa Views (www.riffaviews.com)

A website developed to serve a commercial real estate project with detailed information about its facilities, such as the location of this project, the different types of constructed villas and their shapes, and their plan. The 3D models and animation of the real estate project provide clarity about the villas' designs and location. There are few short videos about some of the events organized there.

Global Tourism Club (GTC) (<http://www.araboo.com/site/bahrain-gtc-travel-106678>)

A website that provides its customer with information about its complete tours packages, online booking for airlines, checking trips, hotel bookings, cars rentals, and all other services that tourists require. It also provides brief infor-

mation about most of the destinations, travel insurance and other useful details.

Moda Mall (www.ameinfo.com)

A website for the new international shopping complex located in Bahrain World Trade Centre. The eye catching website emphasizes the various luxurious international brands of fashion. It is dynamic and very rich in animation. The navigation of the site is also simple.

E-GOVERNMENT

Bahrain e-Government Portal (www.bahrain.bh)

The e-Government portal is focused on ensuring effective delivery of government services to citizens, residents, businesses and visitors (customers). Currently the portal is providing more than 100 e-services to the citizens.

Bahrain EDB (www.bahrainedb.com)

Website providing all information about doing business in Bahrain and thus helping new business entries in the country. This Economic Development Board (EDB) initiative is full of informative content and quite explanatory in terms of navigation. It explains minute details related to the economy, logistics, ICT, manufacturing and information on many more business establishments within Bahrain.

LMRA (www.lmra.bh/)

The Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) website providing information and e-Services for all stakeholders. The layout and organization make it easy to navigate and find information. The extensive range of e-Services provide required information in a timely manner with sense of protection. The website is true model for how government can leverage technology to provide information and services to citizens.

MOIC (www.moic.gov.bh)

The ministry of Industry and Commerce portal provides facility of e-services to Bahrain citizens and business sectors. It allows them to check their application status on the net. The portal is bilingual with user-friendly navigation to make the content more accessible. In addition, it provides information about all the commerce regulation and laws.

E-LEARNING

Arab Open University website (www.aou.org.bh)

A well constructed e-learning model website designed especially for the students affiliated with the university to enable them to communicate directly or indirectly with the educational, administrative and organizational structure of the university. The site helps students to view, download and access the course

materials and gives information about the activities and events on campus.

Importantly, it provides a platform for interaction to both students and instructors, illustrating the concept of e-Learning.

Multimedia Enrichment (offline/DVD, CD-ROM or video materials)

A governmental project adopted by the Ministry of Education, it is targeted to be a turning point in the history of education in the country that would move Bahrain towards the e-Learning era from its wide angle.

Teacher Anwar (http://www.al-ostath.com)

A personal website created and managed by a Bahraini teacher, Anwar Hassan Ali, which goes beyond providing direct educational information and offers consultation in sensitive and most debating issues.

Science for 6th Grade (offline/DVD, CD-ROM or video materials)

CD content to aid the hearing-impaired group in their study requirements. It has a combination of visual aids as well as side

video with sign language. The idea is innovative and has a bright future.

Wasmia Legal (http://www.wasmia.com)

A website dedicated to provide its audience - especially law students with a comprehensive wealth of references such as state laws, scientific research and many other services, including advisory services to researchers and students.

E-SCIENCE

BCSR website (www.bcsr.gov.bh)

The website for The Bahrain Centre for Studies & Research (BCSR), an independent scientific body, introduces the user to the center and its activities along with providing other valuable information. The website is rich in content that is relevant to the purpose of the center. A great amount of information is presented in the e-Library section of the website. It contains BCSR publications, audio seminars, academic PhD and Master degree thesis, periodicals and various links to reliable sources of data-

bases and research centers around the world.

E-MEDIA

Akhbar Al khaleej (http://www.araboo.com/site/bahrain-akhbar-alkhaleej-11388)

One of the leading Bahraini newspapers, Akbar Al Khaleej, has a very well constructed new revamped website that provides the reader / user with easy navigation and access tools. The website provides full fledged daily local and international news. On opening the site, the layout neatly shows the headlines section and further goes on to explain each segment separately along with the visuals related to the news. All pages of the newspaper can be downloaded on PDF including any advertisements published.

Trade Arabia (www.tradearabia.com/)

Portal for business news and information, covering various industry sectors. It is considered a reference for many organizations as well as businessmen in the region. This is due to its richness in content as its

database includes innumerable companies, classifieds and tools.

Manama Gate (http://www.manamagate.net)

A website providing its visitors detailed information about the capital of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Manama. The website has many categories such as articles, heritage, characters, organizations, activities, sports, and the city's problems. The easiness and simplicity of the design makes it very easy for the visitors to navigate the website.

Al Waqt (http://www.alwaqt.com)

The Bahraini newspaper website provides the daily local and international news with easy navigation. It has a dedicated section to Al Waqt writers / authors, where all their columns can be viewed and old journals can be archived. The previous editions are archived and can be accessed easily. Al Waqt has the provision of e-Service, by which the readers can receive the paper electronically.