



Hazem Malhas

## Getting connected

OBG talks to Hazem Malhas, CEO, Optimiza

**How effectively and to what extent are intellectual property rights laws enforced in Jordan?**

**MALHAS:** Recently, enforcement has been extremely effective. We had a case with one of our network companies where a former employee was replicating codes illegally. We went to court and the problem was resolved in a quick and efficient manner.

Similarly, there are increasingly more people who are taking the big multinationals' licensing requirements seriously, buying official versions rather than copies. The reason for this is that people are increasingly learning the value of receiving software updates and having access to technical support and other services provided by large manufacturers.

Most companies and organisations strictly obey intellectual property laws in Jordan. We are also seeing a marked rise in patents and copyrights registered in Jordan, which is a key indicator of economic development and technological innovation. People are becoming more aware of intellectual property, its value and how to use it to their own advantage.

**In what ways can the use of business-to-consumer e-services be promoted in Jordan?**

**MALHAS:** Access to and availability of online services are crucial, although the statistics on penetration are a bit misleading. One internet connection in Jordan, for example, might be used by 20-40 extended family members and neighbours. As a result, it is difficult to tell the true level of demand for and usage of business-to-consumer services. In terms of e-retail, more affluent Jordanians are using the internet for shopping on big websites like Amazon and eBay, but it is clear that not everybody can afford this.

I would say that the biggest breakthrough for consumer connectivity was in mobile phone technology. Everybody uses mobiles for calls, text messages, even the internet in some cases, and this has been the single biggest leap forward for internet and communications technology (ICT) usage in Jordan.

In terms of what we have in business-to-business e-services, most businesses are fully integrated online and completely connected. All banks offer e-banking services, for example, and transactions between Jordanian and foreign companies are often done over the internet, just as they would be in Europe or the US. More non-traditional industries are moving online every day, and are helping the Jordanian economy to become more technologically integrated all the time.

On the business-to-government front, we are seeing more e-services being developed, but the government is lagging behind businesses. There are many reasons for this, including the fact that government procurement policies are not structured to facilitate ICT projects. They are treated like any other procurement project, which means they are often unwieldy and inefficient. The government needs to demonstrate more flexibility by encouraging outsourcing or build-operate-transfer projects in order to maintain Jordan's regional position as an evolving knowledge-based society.

Additionally, the government has begun automating internal processes, which will have a significant impact on the performance of Jordan's administration. This is the true sign of e-government, enabling innovation, promoting the use of technology and setting an example for the rest of the country to follow.

**In your opinion, is there a gap between the skill sets of new ICT graduates and those that are needed by ICT employers?**

**MALHAS:** What is needed here are not only technical skills but soft skills as well. The challenge for our education system is that our ICT and high-tech sectors don't want just programmers or technicians; they want people who can think critically and analyze new problems and not just people who can write code and do well on their exams. The private sector needs people who can work innovatively and think outside the box, a skill set that is still in short supply in the region.