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MN Chaturvedi, Director of IT at Al Shirawi Group of Companies

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# LEAVING LEGACY BEHIND

The Al Shirawi Group takes transformation by the horns

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# Leaving legacy behind

In what could be termed as the largest consolidation effort in the history of the company, the diversified Al Shirawi Group has initiated an enterprise wide application and infrastructure centralisation exercise that is aimed at leaving legacy behind.

**With over 30 diversified companies structured** across eight business units under its umbrella, the Al Shirawi Group found itself at cross roads. “Growth was excellent. The group had diversified interests from manufacturing, trading, plastic, printing, global shipping to logistics and transportation, but each company was operating within its own island of systems. The infrastructure was also sagging. If we had to keep up with the pace of growth, change had to be initiated,” says MN Chaturvedi, Director of IT at Al Shirawi Group of Companies.

“Having run the business on Informix based systems for over 10 years we found that we needed applications and systems that could enable management to get a

group picture. The first step therefore was to head towards a major ERP initiative,” Chaturvedi adds.

In line with this plan, the company took the decision to implement the Oracle e-Business Suite based on HP servers to integrate the different lines of activity including manufacturing, projects and accounts at the group level.

“We decided to invest in one central system that could integrate various aspects and then integrate best of breed, vertical, domain specific applications that some of our business interests would need,” he adds.

With the application centralisation underway, the next step was to ensure that an infrastructure that could cope with growth was put in place.

“This is the largest transformation project in our business, given its highly diversified nature and this means a complete change of process.” — MN CHATURVEDI, DIRECTOR OF IT AT AL SHIRAWI GROUP OF COMPANIES

## Growth infrastructure

The backend, prior to consolidation was very mixed and included a variety of systems. “What we wanted was cost effective infrastructure that will support the centralised approach we were taking,” Chaturvedi notes.

With about 600 users across the group, Chaturvedi and his team focused on two aspects – network infrastructure and better connectivity. “This is set to be the largest transformation project within our diversified business and means a complete change of processes. Management support in this regard was also very high, which gave us the ability to go and get what was best for the company.”

Information availability was a key consideration. “In our line of business, typically any material coming from the stores cannot be issued unless the entry has been made in the

books. This would take anywhere between four to five days, which meant that the material would lie unused till that point. With the new infrastructure in place, this process can be done in a few hours,” he says.

Moving from a decentralised model to a centralised one also required a high level of user acceptance and training.

Speeding up customer response time was also critical to the business. “We are working towards enabling customers, especially in our Global Shipping and Logistics business, to access our warehousing system for material tracking, warehouse management and shipment tracking. The infrastructure had to be robust to enable all of this,” he says.

Interestingly, the whole project evaluation process was not driven by ROI calculations. “ROI for us was a secondary consideration.

Without the right infrastructure we could not achieve what we were planning for. So the main consideration was to invest in a back-end that could empower the users to focus on their core business, become more competitive and deliver better quality,” Chaturvedi emphasises.

The entire backend, following the evaluation, will now be standardised on Cisco infrastructure, implemented by EMITAC.

## Partners in progress

To make a success of a large-scale project such as this, Al Shirawi believed that it had to standardise on the number of partners it worked with. “We were keen to work with partners who could offer us the right level of consulting and technical expertise. Regional support was also a very important consideration. Any serious project like this has to have strong support from all quarters,” Chaturvedi says.

UAE-based systems integrator and solution provider EMITAC (Emirates Technology Company) was selected as the exclusive partner for the entire infrastructure roll out. “One very important role of a partner in such a project is to size the business requirements and map it to the customers’ specific objectives. Consolidation is a very serious undertaking, more so with a group like Al Shirawi which was setting out on a complete overhaul,” says Lalit Kumar Motwani, Deputy Sales Manager (Sales and Marketing), EMITAC.

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“The ERP consolidation and infrastructure connectivity will touch 450 users. We have however, architected the infrastructure to support 800 users.”

— SUHAIL KHAN, SENIOR ACCOUNT MANAGER, EMITAC

“We had to enable business on demand, which made the backbone very critical. Components like disaster recovery, networking and security were also top priority. Back up and recovery (at the main site and a secondary DR site) also had to be clearly defined and enabled,” Motwani adds.

Following the project scoping, EMITAC then architected the network and infrastructure based on Cisco networking gear, HP storage, servers, SAN, backup and recovery. “The entire infrastructure will then be linked through a VPN network, offering a centralised platform for information flows,” says Suhail Khan, Senior Account Manager, at EMITAC.

“We were also selected as a tier I supplier owing to the strong level of support both locally and regionally. Meeting customer SLAs is the most important consideration and Al Shirawi has opted for a high-availability, on-demand support,” Motwani notes.

### Planning for capacity

How much planning is good planning? “Going by the growth, we expect to see a 25% increase in business year on year. So the plan has currently built in projections for a period of five years,” says Chaturvedi.

“The ERP consolidation and infrastructure connectivity will touch 450 users. We have however, architected the infrastructure to



(L to R): **MN Chaturvedi**, Director of IT at Al Shirawi Group of Companies; **Lalit Kumar Motwani**, Deputy Sales Manager (Sales and Marketing), EMITAC; **Suhail Khan**, Senior Account Manager, EMITAC

support 800 users,” adds EMITAC’s Khan.

In the first phase of the project, about 15 of the most infrastructure demanding companies have been earmarked for consolidation. “This phase began in April 2007 and will be completed by December 2007. Phase two will bring the other companies into the fold starting January 2008. We expect the project to be completed by September 2008,” says Chaturvedi.

### The road ahead

Looking ahead, the Al Shirawi Group sees a future where a number of emerging technologies will be leveraged for better business. “Mobility and collaboration is a near term goal for us. We have already started on enabling collaboration using Blackberry based e-mail communication for senior management and executives on the move. Currently 25% of our 450 users use the

Blackberry to access workflow, e-mail and fax,” Chaturvedi says.

Taking on a process driven approach to IT is also a major consideration. “Enabling the right processes using IT and change management will become increasingly important. In our second phase, following the consolidation we expect to move ahead from a unified view to a process and then a services view, enabling tighter alignment of IT with the business,” Chaturvedi says.

### Benefits from consolidation

- A centralised application and systems infrastructure
- Group wide collaboration
- Unified view of information
- Timely response to customers
- Centralised systems control mechanism
- Up to date information availability

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— LALIT KUMAR MOTWANI, DEPUTY SALES MANAGER (SALES AND MARKETING), EMITAC