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Ambition without bounds

At risk of being overshadowed by its noisy neighbour, the Emirates are a distinct, exciting and growing market,

says Adrian Pennington.

In the decade up to 2018 rapid high-tech modernising in the Middle East was focused on Dubai. That spotlight shifted to Saudi Arabia and its Vision 2030 cultural renaissance, leaving the Emirates in the shade.

"There's lots going on in KSA but its early days and a lot of the focus is on future projects for which they still have to build the infrastructure and the buildings themselves before the AV is installed," says Steve Simpson, account and project manager, Datapath. "Meanwhile, the UAE isn't standing still. There are opportunities and projects happening especially in cyber

security, education and utilities."

Johnny Hickman, sales account manager at Matrox Video agrees. "The UAE pro AV market is thriving, fuelled by investments in infrastructure, tourism, and technology. Demand for advanced AV and AVoIP is strong, especially in videowalls for control rooms, entertainment, and signage."

The KSA's Vision 2030 poses competition, but UAE's mature infrastructure and early tech adoption (eg. Expo 2020) give it a leading edge. Both markets are set to coexist and complement each other.

Distinct strategic markets

Netgear maintains "distinct strategic focuses" for both markets. Sales chief, Annamalai Ar reports: "The UAE is characterised by an expectation for cutting-edge technology implementation, making regular system upgrades virtually inevitable for businesses seeking to remain competitive."

He cites rising demand at stadiums and racing tracks for specialised AV network switches of the type that Netgear sells. "The primary drivers of AV investment over the next five years will be live events, stadium developments, government office modernisation, and new infrastructure initiatives," he adds. "These sectors represent the cornerstone of future pro AV growth in the region."

Brad Maiden, regional General Manager, d&b audiotechnik calls AV business culture "dynamic, supportive and

above all, a lot of fun. Whilst it is growing and robust, it is also a close-knit community where competition is fierce, but (mostly) with a good nature."

"The majority of project processes are tendered and the level of documentation required to win projects is of a really high standard. The quality of your brand, work and character really matter in this market."

He highlights the Coca-Cola Arena, Dubai, which is installing the full range of d&b's signature SL-Series "making it one of the most sonically sophisticated venues in the world."

Justin Joy, senior sales manager, Peerless-AV judges the local pro AV market "positive" on the back of "an

established, globally connected business hub with prominent investment opportunities.

"Multinationals are opening more local offices there. As more major rental companies set up bases in Dubai, this is having a big impact on UAE's live events sector which is seeing exponential growth. We continue to see increased demand for dvLED mounting systems across multiple sectors, including corporate, hospitality, finance and auditoriums."

He also observes that the UAE is slightly overshadowed by the KSA's 'Giga Projects' which major integrators are focusing on. "Having said that, UAE remains the AV design hub for both



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**Steve Simpson,
Datapath**



The control room at Bahrain's International Racing Circuit, which runs on Datapath hardware.



A live demo setup at Abcom Distribution's showroom in Dubai showcases Matrox Maevex 7100 encoders, delivering 4K AV over IP.

UAE and KSA as the top consultants are Dubai office based," he says.

The UAE is a "dynamic and forward-thinking environment for pro AV," according to Sergio Molho, director of business development at WSDG. "Its openness to foreign investment and strategic position as a tourism and business hub give it a unique advantage. While Saudi Arabia is seeing massive, rapid growth, the UAE maintains its own distinct appeal, driven by its stability and international connectivity."

Molho further judges Emirati AV culture to be highly sophisticated and aspirational. "There's a strong push to showcase the latest, boldest, and often most luxurious technology, sometimes prioritising visual impact over functionality. It is a market that thrives on innovation and spectacle, with a continual appetite for differentiation. This cultural mindset drives demand for standout installations and future-forward systems."

Also calling the pro AV landscape "incredibly vibrant with a wealth of opportunities" is Rebecca Knight at Disguise highlighting the ambition across live entertainment, government and enterprise which is driving significant investment in advanced media server technologies.

"There's a real appreciation for quality and reliability," Knight adds. "AV culture in the UAE has historically been characterised by a pursuit of excellence and a willingness to embrace technology to deliver world-class experiences. The scale and ambition of these projects is driving significant

demand not just for pro AV technology, but expert technical and creative services to help bring these visions to life."

Simpson has lived and worked in the region since 2003, working exclusively in AV. He says the market has evolved a lot in that time. "One thing is for sure - they do not like to pay for services or recurring licence fees, so if this is your business model it is a tough sell."



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**Justin Joy,
Peerless-AV**

The fact that the company's Aetria control room product is made, tested and approved in the UK has helped win high-end security projects. "This is one aspect of change which definitely helped us get into certain projects, and was never an issue a few years ago."

Simpson advises care in posting to social media in the region "or you could be in trouble subject to the laws that govern this." Consequently, billboards and advertising are still big business with many huge DooH displays, around malls, on the sides of buildings and main roads. "Lighting or projection mapping on large monuments also plays a big part of events with large sound staging and amazing content," he notes.

Joy also finds DooH an expanding category with advertisers "embracing new technology advances and recognising the importance of targeting communities and audiences in new urban areas."

"AV projects in UAE are highly organised and key consultants are more involved than they ever have been in the control of design and eventual product selection in a project."

Peerless recently completed a flat-to-wall dvLED video wall project with an international bank in UAE. It's part of increased investment in the banking sector to modernise branches and enhance competitive edge while improving internal and customer communications.

According to AVIXA, the wider MENA market is expected to generate \$13.5 billion in pro AV revenues this year, growing at 5.4 per cent to 2029.

While Giga projects for tourism and sports make headlines, the top two solution areas are conferencing/collaboration and security/surveillance, representing 16 per cent and 15.2 per cent of revenues respectively. Corporate and media/entertainment are the top vertical markets - at 20.8 per cent and 17.1 per cent of revenues.

"Control rooms remain a strong vertical in the UAE, with AVoIP streaming now a standard requirement rather than a future aspiration," says Hickman. "This shift isn't limited to mission-critical environments. In the corporate sector, organisations are increasingly adopting AVoIP to support a wide range of applications, such as 1G or 10G content distribution for meeting rooms, lobbies, and breakout areas."

Broadcasting abilities

Separately, in-house media studios are demanding the ability to broadcast uncompressed content, requiring higher-bandwidth 25G-capable solutions. "Open standards like IPMX and SMPTE ST 2110 are gaining traction across these applications, offering the interoperability, scalability, and performance needed to support multiple concurrent workflows in a unified AVoIP ecosystem," Hickman informs.

"Over the past few years, the region has seen a significant rise in technical maturity, with more integrators and value-added distributors (VADs) gaining deep expertise in technologies like AVoIP."

The ability to demonstrate products, providing prospective customers with a hands-on experience, is very important, and many AV VADs and integrators have invested heavily in demo facilities and experience centres to meet this need.

"We see growing interest in sustainable solutions, smart city integrations, and immersive, interactive deployments driven by AI, IoT, and automation."

Growth is expected to continue, driven by scalable IP-based workflows, reduced hardware needs, and open

Gateway growth at Al Maktoum International

The ambitious \$35 billion expansion of Dubai International Airport (Al Maktoum International) is set to become the world's largest airport, handling up to 260 million passengers annually. When finished around 2034 it will feature five parallel runways and 400 aircraft gates, covering an area of approximately 27 square miles, five times the size of the current

Dubai International Airport (DXB) which has consistently topped the list for the world's busiest international airports.

WSDG is leading the acoustics and systems engineering through its Berlin office working via London-based architect, Leslie Jones Architecture.

"The scale and vision of this project are

unparalleled, aiming not only to redefine air travel in the region but also to establish a new global benchmark for airport design and functionality," says the company's director of business development, Sergio Molho.

Sharjah has also begun a \$327 million expansion that will increase the airport's capacity to 20 million passengers a year.



standards like IPMX, confirms Hickman.

Hospitality growth

With an extensive coastline and a great climate for most of the year, the UAE is seeing a large investment in beach bars and clubs, restaurants, hotels and pop-up leisure events.

"Leisure is a large part of the offering in the UAE and they do it so well here," says Maiden. "Service is key. In

Dubai in particular, but also in Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah (RAK), you will receive some of the best service and experiences anywhere in the world."

The Wynn Integrated Resort is driving development in RAK. Nearby Ajman is increasing its entertainment and leisure sectors. Saadiyat Island (Abu Dhabi) is expanding with museums and galleries:

"It will be a global cultural destina-

tion when it's finished," says Maiden.

According to Simpson, Abu Dhabi hosts the majority of the large ministries and government projects. Dubai has always been more focused on tourism but also has a thriving financial centre. "Sharjah, Al Ain, Ajman and other emirates only have a few projects - mainly in government or utilities - with the exception of Ras Al Khaimah where they have a good number of high-end hotels now."

Dubai remains "the powerhouse for business with a strong entrepreneurial climate and government initiatives supporting development of young talent," reports Joy.

Hickman notes that Dubai leads in entertainment, smart city projects, and events.

"Abu Dhabi focuses on cultural, education, and government sectors. Sharjah and Al Ain prioritise heritage and cultural tourism." ■