

BOSSit: Tales of a Jordanian Information Technology Start-up¹

AMMAN, JORDAN

As the founding managing director of BOSSit,² Faris Nimry was becoming increasingly exasperated with the marketing efforts of his firm. His company provided customer service for organizations seeking to outsource this function, but after being in business for a full year, he still had few clients. Customer service remained an unfamiliar concept in his country. The idea of hiring another firm to provide it was totally new. Faris believed that his firm's existing informal approaches to marketing were inadequate and a more formal marketing plan was required to move the company forward and expand its client base. Recently he brought in a new director of marketing from the United States, Ali Oveissi, to develop a more structured approach to targeting and acquiring new clients. Ali was charged with devising a marketing strategy similar to those employed by professionally managed Western firms. Though Faris did not want to give up his traditional manner of doing business – making deals through personal ties and alliances – he felt Ali's professional approach to marketing could and should be used concurrently to build the business.

BOSSit was doing relatively well compared with other IT start-ups in Jordan and the Arab Middle East. (The Appendix presents background on Jordan, its political and economic situation, and its national aspiration to become a leading technology nation.) The company carried impressive clout locally: it was owned by a member of the Mouasher family, a name that commanded great respect in business as well as political circles in Jordan. Furthermore its managing director, Faris Nimry, had significant experience managing large-scale projects for multi-million dollar companies in Jordan and abroad. Despite these strengths, marketing remained a central

concern of the company. Faris was uncertain whether a new structured approach to targeting clients would be as effective as the means by which he brought in their first major client – the prestigious Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) in Aqaba. That business relationship was established and cemented through personal connections or *wastah*³ and it was Faris' instinct to rely primarily on this mechanism to grow the business further.

The Birth of a Company

The BOSSit concept was born in a setting reminiscent of the birth of many dotcom start-ups of the internet boom in the U.S. in the nineties: at an American-style Irish Pub. Nestled in Amman's posh Abdoun district, the new Irish Pub served as a landmark restaurant and bar in the city because it was reminiscent of Western pubs. Alcoholic drinks were served at the bar and customers wore fashionable attire. Sporting events were televised on big screens in every corner of the main floor, making the establishment seem quite out-of-place in the Middle East. Customers who had been educated abroad, however, found the setting familiar.

It was here, while watching a Notre Dame college football game and enjoying a few pints of Guinness beer, that Faris and Maher came up with the idea of providing outsourced customer services for local companies. After a Notre Dame touchdown and start of the half-time show, Maher began recounting the latest cost-cutting measure of a Fortune 500 company he had read about earlier that morning in the business section of the New York Times online.

"They've outsourced their customer support functions to India, cutting costs by approximately two-thirds!" Maher

noted. "Now, the amazing thing is that the call center representatives in India have been trained to emulate very specialized American accents."

"You're telling me that a call center representative from India can emulate a Texan accent?" Faris asked jokingly.

"Exactly! Apparently, they can speak with a New York accent, a Louisiana accent and more. They are trained to switch accents depending on the region from which the call originates. Now imagine if we could offer such a service for the entire Middle East from Jordan!" Maher exclaimed.

"There are most likely no call centers that can offer services in English and Arabic, catering primarily to the Middle East," Faris realized. "Brilliant idea!"

Many drinks, discussions and months later, Faris began developing a business plan for the establishment of BOSSit. Both men were aware of Jordan's desire to elevate itself into an IT leader in the Levant (the region extending from Iraq to Lebanon) and they knew well that the Jordanian King often preached about the importance of technological development. Maher and Faris were determined to make things happen.

BOSSit Company Background

BOSSit, an acronym for Back Office Support Services using Information Technology, was created to help companies use new information technologies to improve the way they service customers. Recognizing that information technology could potentially transform the conduct of business, and responding to the King's call to grow the country's high technology sector, Mouasher and Nimry started the business with a capital base of approximately \$100,000 designated for a pilot project, the first phase of an anticipated quick rise to success. BOSSit's mission was the following:

To afford customers a high level of satisfaction by delivering superior, high-quality customer support services via information technologies.

BOSSit offered firms the possibility of outsourcing their customer support services and, using new tools and technologies, deliver entirely new levels of customer service. Companies with no customer support department, as well those seeking more sophisticated services, could hire BOSSit to perform customer support functions including handling customer inquiries and service requests. Eventually the company planned to offer detailed customer tracking and customer-tailored services, but initially it was content to respond to customer phone and email inquiries. To service a client, BOSSit would first absorb as much knowledge as possible about the client's products and services, then equip its

own Customer Support Representatives (CSRs) with the tools needed to become the client's off-site customer support department. As a result, when a customer called Company X for support, the call would be routed automatically to BOSSit offices where a BOSSit CSR would answer as if he or she were a member of Company X. Alternatively, when a customer sent an email inquiry to Company X, a BOSSit CSR would reply to the email as if he or she were a member of Company X, incorporating that name in the message signature and email address. They planned to offer this service in both Arabic and English.

BOSSit aimed to begin providing its services locally first, then regionally, then expand to the U.S. and European market. As part of its competitive advantage, BOSSit saw several key factors that would make it particularly attractive to potential clients:

- Cheaper labor costs
- 24-hour service
- Arabic and English language capabilities
- First mover advantage

BOSSit was owned by Mouasher, Nimry and a third investor whose involvement was largely passive. Ali was brought in a few months later to play a professional marketing role and make their information systems and call center operational. A few months later, an experienced, retired American executive came on board to help them get the business launched, but he had since returned home. [Exhibit 1](#) describes these individuals in further detail. [Exhibit 2](#) shows the organization chart of the venture.

Industry Background

Given the rapid growth of the internet and related applications development efforts, there has been a surge in demand for software to help companies capture and manage customer information through multiple communications media. Spending in the sector worldwide grew steadily from \$19.9 billion at 16 percent a year, predicted to reach \$47 billion in 2006.⁴ Those that implemented CRM (Customer Relationship Management) were reporting significant operational improvements and anticipated more in the future.⁵ The philosophy and principles of CRM appear in [Exhibit 3](#). CRM was the wave of the future, many proclaimed, providing companies new levels of connection with their customers – equipping them to know their customers better and enabling them to service customers more proactively.

Ali's Introduction to BOSSit

Following his welcome and brief orientation in Amman, Ali met Faris, his supervisor, who gave him a tour of the office. The company shared office space with its

reputable sister company, SMS, a Jordanian distributor of computer hardware, also owned by the Mouasher family. Ali began work with the company the following business day.

No Traction at the Company⁶

Ali's first month at BOSSit passed with little fanfare. Notwithstanding the fact the company had been around for nearly a year, its efforts had borne little fruit in terms of business operations. Most of the work done prior to Ali's arrival was industry research. On his first day on the job, Ali was asked to familiarize himself with the CRM industry and its applicability to Jordanian business and assess the future of IT in Jordan. Faris placed three large piles of articles and journals on Ali's desk and asked him to study them carefully. He was then to use them to refine the company's business plan, lay out the future of BOSSit and make plans to direct its development. Ali updated the plan within his first two weeks, but the industry research continued to roll on with no end in sight. Ali soon felt that further perusal of articles on start-ups, CRM developments and IT budgeting was superfluous. The unending stream of trade literature meant that as soon as Ali finished one pile, another appeared. The venture certainly required managers who were aware of industry developments, but he was eager to get the operation going. He wanted to build customer service capabilities and begin offering them to potential clients.

Faris underscored Ali's misgivings by acknowledging that little had been done from an operational point of view. To date, no call center had been established, no CSRs had been hired and trained, and no formal marketing and sales initiatives had been undertaken. Industry research had become an end in itself. The biggest uncertainty was what step to take next and how to begin.

Faris and Ali realized the gravity of the situation so to help them build traction they brought in a retired American executive volunteer, John Whiting, who had years of entrepreneurial experience with IT start-ups in both the U.S. and India. He came to help get the ball rolling. He joined BOSSit for a month-long mission during which he laid out a detailed plan of action and short-term and long-term needs for the business. He provided them with the impetus and stimulation to get the company moving. His input was welcome as he was an essential catalyst since the other players in the business had not previously started a company from scratch.

Local Business Culture

Jordan enjoyed good relations with the U.S. and it was home to many American subsidiaries, so over the years the country absorbed many American social and business conventions while remaining distinctly Jordanian. Many Jordanians were familiar with American culture through the popular media, and families often aspired to send

their children to a university education in the U.S. or U.K. Nonetheless, there were strong traditions in Jordan. A few months into his assignment, Ali began forming his own opinions about Jordan's cultural patterns and how they affected business.

In his view, Jordanian business practices were not as sophisticated as those in the U.S. Though a number of companies had operations on par with American standards, most did not seek out and internalize 'best practices' found in the U.S. The Government of Jordan attempted to address this issue by hosting scores of business conferences in the country, especially those pertaining to IT. But simply learning about best practices in a conference setting did not institutionalize them in local businesses.

Work hours were also noticeably different. Whereas Americans were accustomed to a standard nine-to-five, 40-hour workweek with some time off for lunch and breaks, work hours in Jordan were typically much more flexible. At SMS the computer distributor, for instance, employees came to work later in the day, left earlier and took longer breaks, sometimes long enough to accommodate a nap. Though not characteristic of all Jordanian firms or Jordanian people, such workplace behavior was common in Jordanian business. People also commonly shared offices and a radio might play music half the day. Religious observances also impacted workplace behavior. During the month of Ramadan, for example, daytime fasting significantly diminished work effectiveness, and people typically left the office by mid-afternoon.

Faris mitigated against potential attendance problems by tracking employee attendance. If anyone accumulated a certain number of violations, Faris reprimanded them. Too many absences led to termination.

However, since SMS did not enforce the same kind of strict attendance policy, resources required by BOSSit were sometimes unavailable when needed, adversely affecting BOSSit's development. A number of Ali's projects required consultation with SMS professionals.⁷ These projects were seriously delayed because essential meetings were cancelled and rescheduled due to staff absences. The call center's network architecture, for example, required integrating several software and hardware components. That required the assistance of several SMS network analysts, developers, and engineers to design and build the network. The effort was way behind schedule, however, as numerous meetings had been cancelled and appointments delayed.

Irregular attendance was not the only source of problems. Employees almost always cheerfully agreed to assist Ali, but when the scheduled time arrived, they would fail to show up. Ali learned from Faris that one cannot rely solely on phone calls or e-mails to coordinate action. Personal face-to-face appeals were often required to get the work

done. Even when appointments were pre-arranged via phone or e-mail, Ali would still come directly to the individual's office and ask politely for assistance at the appointed time. Appointments were more a respectful formality than a guide to action.

CRM Providers

First-time Encounters

Following the completion of its call center blueprint, BOSSit began searching for network providers that could build them a state-of-the-art CRM capability. After some research, four providers were identified as potential vendors: Alcatel, Lucent, Nortel, and Cisco. All four companies had operations in the Middle East and their local representatives were contacted and meetings were scheduled.

In contrast to business meetings in the U.S., Jordanian business meetings emphasized establishing trust and intimacy more than exchanging information, particularly during initial meetings. Ali's first encounters with representatives from the four companies were essentially ceremonial, get acquainted sessions. They learned that Ali had just moved to Jordan and they questioned him genuinely about his stay thus far and his sightseeing – whether he had already traveled to the ancient city of Petra or visited the Dead Sea. Only after learning about each other's past, families, ethnic origins, recent political developments and preference for Middle Eastern traditions like cuisine and belly dancing, did the discussion turn to business. In the U.S., such social interaction would not have extended beyond an introductory greeting, then all would turn their attention to the business at hand.

Nortel

Despite beginning well, meetings with CRM representatives did not always run smoothly. Frustrations soon surfaced as promises made in initial meetings were not kept. The Nortel encounter was a case in point.

At first, Faris and Ali were quite satisfied with the call center solution Nortel offered. Their sales engineer, Marwan, met with Faris and Ali a number of times and made several informative presentations. Things seemed to be progressing well, but as time passed, meetings were cancelled without prior notice. Marwan had excuses, such as waiting for input from regional headquarters in Dubai, but he made promises that went unfulfilled. BOSSit requests went unanswered for some time. When answers finally did come, they lacked the specifics that Ali had made clear were important to include. Marwan did finally present BOSSit with the proposal it sought, but by then Faris was so angry about the two-month delay that he ruled them out. He told Ali to inform Marwan that Nortel would no longer be considered a vendor. Marwan's desire

to give positive news led to a series of broken promises. This pattern of conduct does happen in Jordan, but BOSSit did not have this problem to the same degree with other CRM representatives.

Call Center Operations Begin

While contemplating different call center proposals from CRM providers, BOSSit decided to gain experience offering outsourced customer support using existing telephone and email technology. Faris' rationale was that BOSSit could now provide basic telephone and e-mail support to customers using SMS resources without extensive spending on software. They could implement the more technically advanced CRM solution later on, using powerful software that integrates multiple aspects of a customer relationship into one package and enables more tailor-made, customer-specific services.

Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority⁸

One day Faris arrived at the office proudly announcing BOSSit's new deal with the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA). BOSSit was to begin providing customer support services for the organization, both through telephone and e-mail, within the next 3 weeks.

ASEZA's role was to facilitate the establishment of businesses in the free trade zone at Jordan's southern port. It was one of many attempts initiated by the government to boost the Jordanian economy. Given the vast amount of legal, investment and procedural information surrounding this ambitious initiative, ASEZA decided to outsource its customer support function to BOSSit. More and more investors and curious minds were calling ASEZA to learn about investment opportunities in the free trade zone and ASEZA thought it was advantageous to outsource this customer support function.

BOSSit was asked to absorb as much information as possible about the economic zone and provide it to inquirers upon request. The BOSSit team of Faris, Ali and Gulnar (the human resources director) met with the ASEZA team (6 managers) to learn details about investments in ASEZA that warranted customer support. They took this information and broke it down into simple parts so that customer reps could easily access it to answer customer inquiries. To build staff, Faris placed job ads in local newspapers describing BOSSit's need for customer service representatives (CSRs). [Exhibit 4](#) is the job opening announcement featured in the press. Shortly thereafter, prospective employees began to appear for interviews.

Ali was never informed of the details of BOSSit's sales effort with ASEZA, such as how it gained ASEZA's interest in outsourcing customer support and the terms of the deal. Eventually Ali learned two things: 1) Faris had a

contact at FTEZA, the Free Trade Economic Zone Authority, the parent organization of ASEZA, and through him the connection to ASEZA was secured, and 2) there was no signed contract, only a verbal agreement.

Faris asked Ali to begin developing a training program for new employees. The CSRs were to receive training manuals that would detail expected behavior vis-à-vis customers – in conformance with call center etiquette. The manual would also include a list of sample call scenarios and email correspondence so that CSRs had proper examples to work from. “We have to make sure the CSRs can respond impeccably, both verbally and in writing,” Faris emphasized.

The training manual was completed, and with a growing need for CSRs, an employee was hired to train them. Gulnar took responsibility for overseeing CSR efforts. Faris and Ali then shifted roles. They focused on strategic aspects of the ASEZA project, seeing it as a model for relationships they might establish with other clients. They decided what type of support to provide, crafted and negotiated a service-level agreement (SLA) and discussed support technicalities. The ASEZA project required that they know many of the details of investment-related information about the free trade zone.

Targeting Clients

BOSSit was in need of brand building and recognition. It had to convince leaders of the Jordanian business community that CRM was the future and that BOSSit was the right purveyor of this “must-have” technology. Other than by word of mouth, BOSSit’s brand had not been promoted. Thus, a new communications campaign was undertaken.

IT magazines from across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) were informed of the ASEZA deal in a press release brimming with CRM buzzwords and phrases. Interviews with company owners were published in regional newspapers. Also, a marketing kit was developed for the purpose of informing potential customers of BOSSit’s services. This kit included a company brochure, a catalog, a Powerpoint presentation, and other marketing assortments. Complementing the kit was the recent completion of the new BOSSit website with an enhanced look and feel that replaced the former site that looked archaic.

The next step was to discern a target market – companies that could benefit from a CRM solution. BOSSit management knew that not every Jordanian company would be willing to spend money on CRM solutions, even if they had an interest or budget to do so. The key was to identify companies that could benefit from these services and convince them that it was imperative that they buy them from BOSSit.

Following up on one CSR’s recommendation for identifying a target market, the Ministry of Trade and Industry was contacted to gather information about businesses throughout Jordan. The Ministry was a repository of information about all businesses in the country, including information on company industry, capital base, key personnel, contact information, and indicators of company size. Due to difficulty obtaining information from the Ministry’s website, Ali and others thought it would be more efficient to visit the Ministry in person and make the request of an official face-to-face. After several attempts, a BOSSit employee finally met with a Ministry official. He had a successful meeting but was told to wait patiently for the list, allowing time for the bureaucratic ways of government. Over the next several weeks, each time he went to pick up the list from the Ministry, he was asked to come back at a later time or call again to set up an appointment for later pickup. Frustrated, the BOSSit team finally decided to use their powerful local playing card, *wastah*, to get a more acceptable response. BOSSit approached the Ministry on behalf of Maher Mouasher. Within a week, the list was sitting on Ali’s desk at BOSSit offices. Ali was beginning to understand the concept of *wastah* in Jordan. Elaborating on it in a letter to his brother in the U.S.:

In Jordan, as in most developing countries, politics and business are intertwined. This may be true in developed countries as well, but in Jordan it is different because they share interests, facilities, even the same bed. The success of a business can very much hinge on having adequate contacts within government and industry. A taxi driver told me that *wastah* is the elixir of advancement. Sometimes its use is sinful and opportunistic, a way to cut in line or practice cronyism, but it is a widespread phenomenon throughout the Middle East and with *wastah* even the Palace doors can open. Whenever I hear of an eyebrow-raising business acquisition, or the securing of a prominent position by an individual – even of the ability to walk straight into a fashionable Amman nightclub without having to wait in line – I always hear allusions to *wastah*.

When the list from the Ministry finally arrived, it generated much frustration and disappointment as they quickly discovered it contained obsolete and inaccurate information. Apparently this was typical of official recordkeeping in Jordan. The team decided to discard it and began brainstorming alternative strategies for identifying the market. Many ideas were entertained and rejected and the pressure mounted.

Ali then proposed a plan that would side-step the current problem of insufficient information. As a group they could generate a list of the most progressive and forward-looking companies in Jordan. These companies would be

logical candidates for CRM services. Their executives spoke at the huge IT forums frequented by ministers, multinational executives and wealthy investors. They hailed themselves as leaders of the technological revolution in Jordan. They were natural candidates for BOSSit's CRM services. Furthermore, they probably had budgets that would allow for some CRM expenditures.

Ali was confident the team could generate a list of twenty such companies. He cited one of the country's two wireless telephone service providers as a case in point. Known for terrible customer responsiveness, that reputation was substantiated with Ali's recent experience. He telephoned them and sent multiple emails about a service problem that went unanswered for quite some time.

Once the list of potential target companies was compiled, Ali and his team conducted research on each one. They learned about their businesses, their products and services and the value added they offered customers. They then identified how BOSSit might serve them with IT-enhanced customer support services, and contact was initiated. Marketing tools were already in place. A marketing kit was ready for distribution that included press releases highlighting the benefits of outsourcing customer service.

Ali further planned to host an event whereby representatives from each targeted company would be invited to a presentation about BOSSit services. In that forum, BOSSit could impress upon them new ways to help establish better connect with customers. "Your success will grow with BOSSit's superior CRM solution. BOSSit is here to stay. We will help you smoothly and continually adapt to changing market conditions that come this way."

Ali was proud of the work his team had done to help build the business. He felt the company finally had a formal marketing campaign underway. When he outlined these plans to Faris, however, Faris' reaction was less than enthusiastic.

"Remember, Ali, you're in Jordan, not America. Things work differently here." Faris admonished.

"But given our lack of information about potential customers, we should be taking the initiative and contacting these companies directly through my proposed strategy!" Ali argued. "We should show them what we can do. They will discern the value of our services. We have what they need, we offer something of value, and we should show it to them. We can demo these capabilities during our presentation."

"I understand what you're saying," Faris responded, "but things work differently here, including how to do marketing. We need first to find people in those companies we know and approach them. Transactions here are preceded with a relationship and trust."

Faris agreed that the leading technology companies should be targeted, but he wanted to contact the companies in his own way – that is, on his own, through contacting the right people personally. He felt that personal connections were more important to obtaining business in Jordan than Ali's formal presentations, endless meetings, elaborate brochures, press releases and marketing kits. His primary concern was to find someone he knew in each company so he could "acquire business the right way." With that said, he took Ali's list of targeted companies and walked out the door, leaving all the new marketing materials on the table.

"What is the point of all this work then!" Ali exclaimed. He glared furiously at the marketing kits scattered across the table. He had worked so hard to put together a company marketing strategy and communications plan that included memorable press releases and an elegant marketing kit, only to discover that his team's marketing efforts were destined to play a secondary, or even marginal role, to Faris' private meetings with customers. Faris did not even take the company brochures with him to his meetings!

Ali felt strongly that a formal presentation in a public setting was a logical way to pitch BOSSit's services. That way they could describe BOSSit's proposed CRM solutions to multiple prospective clients all at once. That way they could demonstrate CRM's amazing potential, providing new information and enabling new abilities to help each company manage their customers. The companies Faris was now planning to target with his "meal and deal" approach were exactly the firms Ali thought should be approached with informative material and a technical presentation. How else would the people there appreciate the potential of CRM for their business? How could he explain new capabilities over a meal in a restaurant? To Ali it was paradoxical that a company that hailed itself the deliverer of a cutting-edge, customer-centric strategy – CRM – would ultimately rely on age-old, face-to-face, relationship-based approaches to grow the business. Would professional marketing ever take hold in Jordan's business community, or in the entire region for that matter? Was Faris being old-fashioned or just pragmatic in his reliance on *wastah*? Ali wondered if his entire effort to bring American-style professional marketing to this firm would ultimately be of little consequence.

Questions

1. What is the nature of BOSSit's service and how applicable is it to Jordanian society? How big is its potential market?
2. How was BOSSit's work environment a different cultural experience for Ali?
3. What American ways were particularly welcome in Jordan? Which were not? Should some American-style professional management practices be introduced into, or imposed on, the Jordanian workplace?
4. What do you think of Jordan's aspiration to become a high tech center in the region?
5. What is the traditional approach to marketing in Jordan? What is the role of wastah in this society?
6. Will Western-style professional marketing take hold in Jordan? Should it? What is the best way to combine American and Jordanian ways?

APPENDIX A

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan



History

The secret 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement between Great Britain's Sir Mark Sykes and France's Georges Francois Picot laid the groundwork for international control of the Middle East. France was to rule much of the north, including Syria and Lebanon, and the rest of the area was to be under Britain's control. In 1921, at the Cairo conference on Middle Eastern affairs led by Winston Churchill, Britain broke up the Mandate of Palestine and defined Transjordan, which has now become the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Although a small country with limited natural resources, Jordan has and continues to play a seminal role in the dynamics of Middle East politics due to its key geopolitical positioning in the Levant.

Geography

Location: Middle East, northwest of Saudi Arabia and surrounded by Iraq, Syria, Israel, and the West Bank. Its capital is Amman.

People

Total Population: 5,307,470.⁹

Bedouins

It is said that the majority of the Jordanian population is of Bedouin origin. The "Bedu" – referred to as the Bedouin in the West, from the Arabic word "Badawi" meaning "a dweller of the desert" – are the pride of the Jordanian people. Known for their hospitality, Bedouins are seen living in tents in the desert where they shepherd sheep and raise camels in the wilderness of Jordan. Though the percentage of Jordanians leading a nomadic lifestyle now is small, those who do live in

adherence to Bedouin law, a system predicated on tribal law where loyalty defines relationships between a member and a clan. Many clans can be seen from Jordan's desert highway going from Amman in the north to Aqaba in the south (see map in the Appendix).

Palestinians

Jordan also hosts a rather large number of citizens of Palestinian origin. There are several different estimates of the percentage of Palestinians within Jordan. Although some estimates are dubious, since different groups have ulterior motives for promoting their calculations that occasionally raise eyebrows, Palestinian assimilation into the Jordanian system has been a significant factor in shaping Jordan's sovereign character. In fact, many times it has been a decisive factor when politics of the region were unraveling – particularly vis-à-vis Israel.

Circassians

A group originally from the Caucasus region, these people immigrated to the Balkan region of the Ottoman Empire during the Russian invasion of the Caucasus in the 19th century, after which they continued moving south to the Levant region. Though a minority, their role in shaping Jordanian institutions and culture has been significant.

Most citizens are Moslem but the minority are Christian. Amman is a modern city with elegant homes and commercial centers.

Economy

Given its limited natural resources and inadequate water supply, Jordan has had to rely on human advancement more than any other resource. This is in marked contrast to resource-endowed countries of the region whose oil supplies have provided the main driver of economic growth. The reliance on human development has led to the high level of education provided to citizens of this land. Its ratio of university graduates to total population matches that of many developed countries.¹⁰

To capitalize on this advantage, the King is leading the country towards an important economic goal of pursuing science and technology to turn Jordan into a technology savvy nation. He established the Higher Council for Science and Technology, and a variety of institutional moves reflect this national aspiration: the REACH initiative, a national strategy to develop the Jordanian Information Technology sector which "aims to produce 30,000 new jobs, \$150 million of foreign direct investment, and \$550 million in exports"¹¹; the Convergence Forum, an international conference on the convergence of technology and telecommunications which attracted senior executives from Cisco Systems, Alcatel and some French companies; and various IT job fairs and e-commerce workshops sponsored by organizations like Amideast and the Information Technology Association of Jordan (INTAJ).

As the head of state of one of America's free-trade partners, King Abdullah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan promised to turn Jordan into a prosperous information technology (IT) hub within the Middle East. On October 24th 2000, when U.S. President Bill Clinton and King Abdullah II of Jordan signed the Jordan-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, academics, analysts, and others realized that such a politically and economically seminal step illustrated strong U.S. belief in and support for Jordanian prospects.

Exhibit 1

Key Persons in the Company

Faris Nimry – Faris was the managing director of BOSSit and one of its three owners. Before launching the venture, he held over 15 years of progressively senior management roles as a consultant to the United Nations. He was VP Project Management at a medium-sized construction firm and most recently General Manager of a large manufacturing company with annual revenues of US\$100 million. Faris has a PhD in Management and a Masters in Finance, both with distinction, from American University in Washington, D.C. Faris played a seminal role at BOSSit. Of the three owners, Faris was the only one actively involved in the everyday operation. When Ali first arrived in Jordan, Faris was the only person working directly with BOSSit.

Maher Mouasher – Maher was another of the three BOSSit owners. For the most part, however, he remained aloof from its operation as his primary interest and energy were directed towards running SMS,¹² a computer hardware distributor that was BOSSit's sister company, where he served as CEO. Maher was educated in the U.S. where he received his bachelor's and law degree from Notre Dame. Although his role at BOSSit was limited, his name exerted significant influence on potential customers due to his family's prominence in Jordan. One relative, Jordan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, was a diplomat with a most unusual background – a Ph.D. in Information Systems from Purdue – now consistent with the country's national aspiration to be a leader in information technology.

John Whiting – John was a visiting International Executive Service Corps (IESC) volunteer who acted as consultant to BOSSit for a month. BOSSit had requested his services from the Jordan-U.S. Business Partnership, which "draws technical assistance capabilities from among IESC's 13,000 Volunteer Executives from U.S.-based consulting firms and other training, marketing and professional resources."¹³ Prior to joining BOSSit, John had completed a two-year engagement at the Tata Group in Mumbai, India. The Tata Group was India's leading industry house with \$9 billion in sales volume and a diverse portfolio of trading, manufacturing and services. Prior to that, he was President and Managing Director of Tata IBM Limited (the IBM/Tata Joint Venture in India). The company had become India's fastest growing, full-service Information Technology company.

Ali Oveissi – Ali was an Emerging Market Development Adviser who was sent by USAID to Amman, Jordan, to lend technical assistance in the areas of business development and information technology to BOSSit. He was an American of Iranian origin, and this background gave him some familiarity with this region of the world. He had an academic background in economics and information technology and professional experience with several U.S. start-up IT companies.

Exhibit 2

Organizational Chart

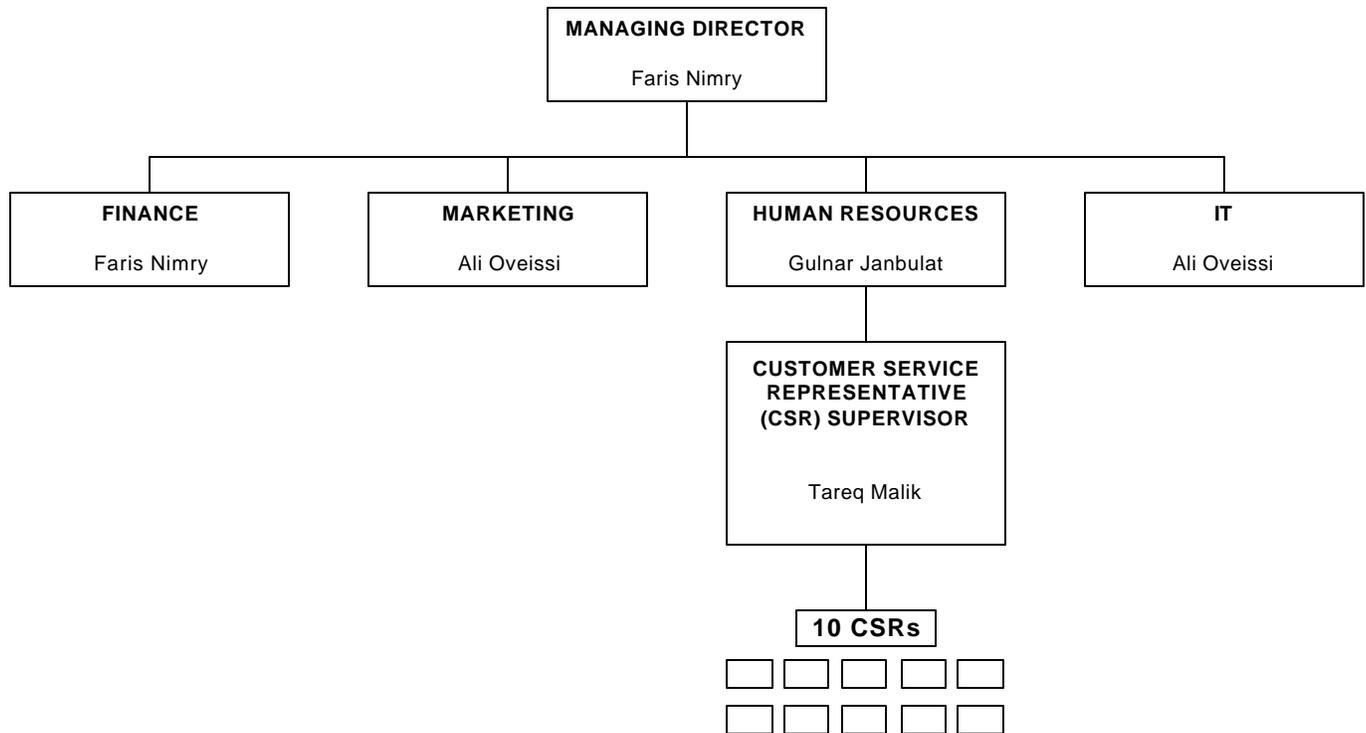


Exhibit 3

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a strategy of building effective customer relations by managing customer information more intelligently. By better understanding customer needs and addressing them conscientiously, companies aim to develop more loyal and profitable customer relationships.

Although the term is relatively new, the essence of CRM is a longstanding one that has been in practice since time immemorial. With the recent surge in advanced information technology capabilities, however, the process of gathering information about customers so as to identify their idiosyncratic qualities has reached new heights. The technology can help companies identify their most profitable and loyal customers, provide historical customer data and analyze customer spending habits, so they can make more customized decisions and recommendations regarding services to offer customers and thereby increase company revenues.

In summary, CRM affords the following benefits:

- Increase customer satisfaction
- Provide better and more individualized customer service and support
- Increase customer loyalty
- Increase customer retention

Exhibit 4

BOSSit Job Announcement

For Customer Service Representatives (CSRs)



BOSSit is looking for bright, intelligent, and hardworking people for Customer Service Representative positions within its firm.

Personality:

The CSA should have the following qualities:

- SMILE: To your colleagues and your customers
- Take team spirit seriously
- Time sensitive
- Positive attitude
- Take the initiative in handling inquiries
- Be proactive and extend the service
- Attentive, conscientious, helpful and considerate
- Well organized
- Accurate and thorough
- Firm and kind
- Able to follow instructions and rules

Tasks:

- Provide customer service via telephone, email and fax
- Answer customers, create and handle cases for each contact using a software platform
 - Use the platform efficiently and properly
 - Follow up on cases and update them
 - Look for solutions for cases
 - Look for items and alternatives
 - Close cases
- Research and prepare reports

Preferred skills:

- University degree in business, economics, or related discipline
- Proven problem-solving and organizational skills
- Computer and typing skills
- Excellent command of written and spoken Arabic and English
- A commitment to providing excellent customer service
- Good interpersonal skills
- The ability to do multiple tasks at one time

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This case study was written by Ali Oveissi of the George Washington University and Professor Richard Linowes of the Kogod School of Business at the American University in Washington, D.C. It was written in conjunction with the Emerging Market Development Advisors Program (EMDAP) funded by the US Agency of International Development (USAID) and administered by the Institute of International Education (IIE).
- ² The acronym stands for Back Office Support Services using Information Technology.
- ³ *Wastah* is an Arabic word that denotes connections or clout. To have *wastah* means to have connections and to use *wastah* means to leverage those personal connections.
- ⁴ Adam Stone, "Measuring the Value of CRM," *Small Business Computing*, March 15, 2004.
- ⁵ Bob Thompson, "A Five-Year Vision for CRM: Seven Key Trends," *CRM Guru*, Jan. 4, 2006.
http://www.crmguru.com/editor/top_10/1644.php
- ⁶ The term signifies a lack of progress by the company.
- ⁷ BOSSit not only shared office space with SMS but utilized SMS resources, both physical and human.
- ⁸ The Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) was the institution in charge of regulatory, fiscal, and administrative operations of the free trade zone in Aqaba.
- ⁹ The CIA World Fact Book. <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/jo.html>
- ¹⁰ Embassy of Jordan in Washington D.C. Information Bureau: Science & Technology.
<http://www.jordanembassyus.org/new/jib/factsheets/science.shtml>
- ¹¹ Jordan's REACH Initiative Mission. <http://www.reach.jo/>
- ¹² An acronym for Scientific and Medical Supplies, SMS is one of Jordan's leading computer hardware distributors.
- ¹³ Jordan-U.S. Business Partnership Web Site: http://www.jusbp.org/about_profile.htm