



## Microsoft .NET Customer Solution Case Study



### Overview

**Country or Region:** United Arab Emirates

**Industry:** Government

### Customer Profile

Emirates Post became a commercial operation in 2001. It is adopting strategies to diversify from traditional post office work into business-to-business and financial services.

### Business Situation

Emirates Post wanted to modernise its point-of-service application, including cash management at its counters and better support of couriers, with handheld devices running on Microsoft® technology.

### Solution

Microsoft Certified Partner Avanza Solutions helped Emirates Post implement a business management system with the Microsoft .NET Framework, Windows® CE 5.0, and Microsoft SQL Server® 2000.

### Benefits

- Improved customer service.
- Reliable and available system.
- New services.
- User friendly interface.
- Improved partner relationships.

## Emirates Post Replaces Point-of-Service Application to Support Courier Expansion

“Managing today’s complex courier operations is a challenging task in which the use of the right technology plays a critical role. Empost is now operating a more automated and secure service.”

Sultan Al Midfa, Chief Executive Officer, Empost

Emirates Post, whose core business is postal services, has transformed itself into a diversified commercial entity offering several non-postal services, including government services, banking, freight, and courier. Operating in one of the world’s most competitive markets, Emirates Post is now a major force in postal services, including online payment services. To aid this transformation, Emirates Post chose Microsoft .NET technology to replace its existing point-of-service application. The solution is also more effectively supporting its courier business connecting to handheld devices through a Microsoft® environment. Emirates Post is now offering a faster service to citizens and businesses. The solution is reliable, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and easy to deploy. The courier unit, Empost, in particular, can better track packages and is developing new lines of business with corporate customers.

“The deployment of Microsoft .NET technology is part of our constant effort to use technology to speed up service delivery and enhance customer service.”

Abdullah Al Daboos, President of Emirates Post Group Holding

## Situation

Emirates Post is the official postal service of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), serving a Gulf country the size of Scotland. It has 90 branches spread throughout the seven federated emirates and since 2001 it has become a full-fledged commercial operation rather than a government agency. Emirates Post is committed to fostering social inclusion by serving small rural communities as well building a strong base of corporate customers. It is adopting innovative strategies to diversify into online, courier, freight, and financial services. Reflecting the pro-business climate of the UAE, Emirates Post is offering several cobranded services with the private sector. These include a strategic alliance with the Dubai-based Emirates Bank Group for a low-cost gateway payment solution for e-commerce.

“As the UAE moves towards e-government, Emirates Post wants to be at the forefront of the e-transformation that is taking place nationwide,” says Abdullah Al Daboos, President of Emirates Post Group Holding. “The deployment of Microsoft .NET technology is part of our constant effort to use technology to speed up service delivery and enhance customer service. The new solution has been implemented after extensive studies, and we are confident it will help us increase efficiency and speed up service delivery, especially in the courier field.”

“Microsoft is an international leader in providing IT solutions for increased automation, and as the Emirates Post Group expands and diversifies, we look forward to working with Microsoft in different areas to help us achieve our automation goals,” Al Daboos adds.

To enhance its reputation for innovative customer-facing services, Emirates Post decided to replace its ageing point-of-service

application to cover all aspects of counter operations, including cash management and integration with all the peripheral devices used by Emirates Post. The company also wanted to more effectively support the Empost courier service, using handheld devices to capture, track, and integrate with other supporting business applications.

Sultan Al Midfa, Chief Executive Officer of Empost, says: “Managing today’s complex courier operations is a challenging task in which the use of the right technology plays a critical role. Empost is now operating a more automated and secure service for delivering new credit cards to bank customers with increased efficiency and better links with other courier services. We’ve also been able to offer great value add for our corporate customers.”

Khaled Shahdoor, Chief Executive Officer, Information Technology Sector, Emirates Post Group Holding, says: “We were looking for two solutions in one. First, to provide a new core point-of-service post office system designed to improve our post office counter services and, second, to give Empost, our local courier express service, an end-to-end tracking function. We needed to help Empost follow a parcel or special delivery from its arrival in the system to the addressee. We also wanted Empost staff to be able to book and amend jobs, providing a comprehensive service through our call centre and online facility to our customers.”

The Emirates Post IT team earlier used a custom-built solution that was rolled out in 1998 when the business was focused mainly on traditional post office counter services. Over time, this system failed to keep pace with change, especially after 2001, when the UAE authorities amended the law to give Emirates Post a new commercial mandate, including provision of financial services

“With Microsoft technology, we now offer a cost-effective border-to-border solution for our counter services.”

Essam Mohammed, IT Project Manager,  
Emirates Post

through the acquisition of large money exchange businesses.

Shahdoor adds: “Because we were using old technology with distributed deployment, there were multiple database systems. If there was an upgrade or change, our technicians had to apply it to all our offices throughout the UAE, many of which are in remote locations. The network requirements were also really high. If the network was down, branch offices were unable to serve customers.

“One of the requirements was to add Empost branding to the product, because Empost wants to project its experience to other postal systems. The courier subsidiary also has mail rooms at other organisations, such as banks and government ministries, to help collect and despatch mail. Emirates Post was keen to extend the benefits of automation to these mail rooms to achieve central storage and reporting of consignment details and status.”

### Solution

Emirates Post saw that the fastest and most cost-efficient roadmap should be based on Microsoft® technology using the Microsoft .NET Framework. Nauman Ahmad, Government Account Manager, Microsoft South Gulf, says: “Emirates Post decided that the Microsoft route offered a complete environment with end-to-end integration, ease of use for their people, and complete interoperability with their existing solutions.”

By using Microsoft Certified Partner Avanza Solutions—together with its IT development and system design team—for the application development, Emirates Post created its new environment using Windows CE version 5.0. This replaced the existing point-of-service application.

Developers also deployed Windows Mobile® powered smartphones, used Microsoft Content Management Server 2002 for the

Web site, and Microsoft SQL Server® 2000 database software.

Shazi Hassan, Chief Operating Officer at Avanza Solutions, says: “This was a significant deal and a unique opportunity, covering end-to-end automation, including the entire process of the Emirates Post and Empost business. This is also a project that demonstrated Avanza’s ability to apply state-of-the-art technology to provide business benefits to the customer.”

Emirates Post moved from a proof of concept to full implementation in 30 Emirates Post branches in just 12 months. “In the UAE, a proof of concept alone can sometimes take six months,” says Hassan. “It was the value of the environment and the capabilities of the development team that made Emirates Post realise this was the best fit for a business determined on growth. An implementation based on business value would help the team realise its goals in the shortest period of time.”

Essam Mohammed, IT Project Manager, Emirates Post, says: “The main modules for the Emirates Post point-of-service application provide counter services, including payment of telephone bills and application forms to the Ministry of Labour, delivery information entry, supervisor module, and postage stamps and printed material. Depending on the service, information presented and recorded on each interface varies. Connectivity with weighing devices and printers ensures automatic assessment of package weight and printing of receipts and labels. The user interface has a touch screen that makes it user-friendly for counter staff.”

The solution for Empost has several key elements. An integrated browser-based smart client application talks to the central database at the Dubai office of Empost over Web services. All Empost offices use the application through the intranet with Empost staff in government offices and banks accessing it through the Internet.

Empost also has a central call centre providing customer services. With different types of interfaces, the application will provide efficient information capture and exchange mechanisms.

To overcome the connectivity issues experienced with the previous solution, the back office server infrastructure is clustered. Hassan says: "If for any reason a couple of servers went down, this won't affect the system. The database is clustered and the Web services are running on multiple servers supported by a load balancer. We could always add more servers if there was a performance issue."

## Benefits

Emirates Post is offering a faster and more comprehensive service to UAE residents and businesses at post offices throughout the seven emirates. The solution is reliable, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is easy to deploy, with low maintenance costs. The company's courier service, in particular, can better track parcels and is developing new lines of business with corporate customers.

## Customers Get Improved Customer Service Across UAE

Waiting in long lines at post office counters is a thing of the past for residents and business users. Emirates Post has always been a vital life line, especially for people in remote locations. It can now offer more transactional services with little risk of downtime, helping to promote social inclusion. Now, the smaller and more rural emirates are on an equal footing with the city states such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Essam comments: "Emirates Post is the only channel many people in remote places use to communicate with people in the cities. And, even now, with vastly improved communications, the network can still be unstable at times. The Microsoft system works in online and offline mode so if the network goes down, the offline server picks up the full load. Users don't notice the difference."

Figure 1. User-friendly interface with touch screen improves productivity.



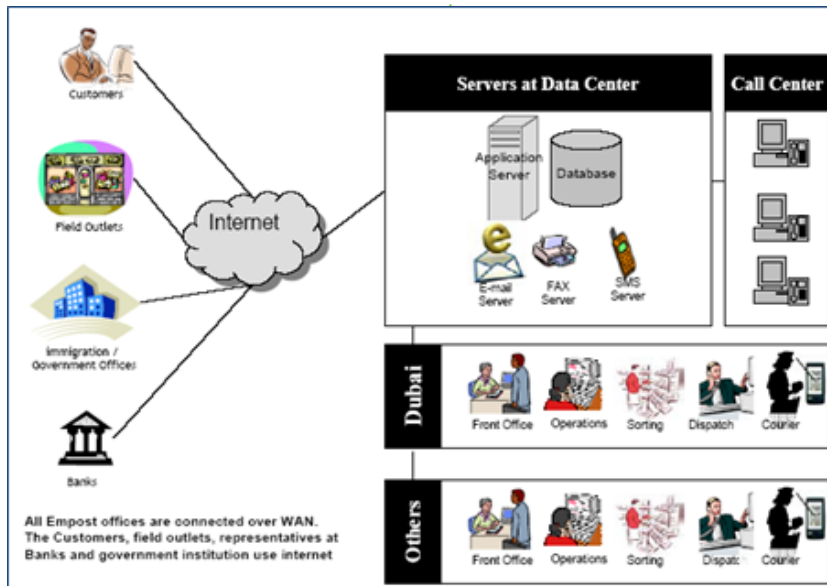


Figure 2. Faster and more comprehensive service.

#### Point-of-Service System Provides Reliability and Availability at Low Cost

Both Emirates Post and Empost have the security of a highly reliable and available solution, which is easy to deploy and enjoys a low total cost of ownership with significantly reduced maintenance costs. Essam says: "With Microsoft technology, we now offer a cost-effective border-to-border solution for our counter services. Our previous system was expensive to maintain, involving visits to individual branches for updates."

Empost has also benefited from similar resilience. Essam adds: "We now have end-to-end integration, up-to-the-minute clocking of documents and parcels, and an improved customer experience. If you go to the counter, the Web site, or the call centre, you get the same consistent view of activity on your account."

Al Midfa says: "With handheld devices, Empost couriers are much more in control of the delivery and distribution system. They work smarter."

Using global positioning system (GPS) technology with the Windows Mobile operating system, we have much better control of our couriers and can see immediately if there are any bottlenecks. With the handheld devices, we can capture signatures and validate customer or addressee identities without the need for paper systems."

#### Empost Offers New Services to Corporate Customers

Empost is now operating a more automated and secure service for delivering new credit cards to bank customers with increased efficiency and better links with other courier services. It has also been able to expand its business to corporate customers.

The new operating system means Empost can offer a wider range of secure delivery services for banks and corporate customers. "In addition, we're offering a much better track and trace service for all our customers," Essam says. "Customers also benefit from accessing their corporate account rates across all channels because everything is equally available from the counter, the Web site, or the call centre."

#### Employees Improve Productivity with User-Friendly Interface

The new user interface is first and foremost improving the customer experience, but is also a major benefit to Emirates Post staff. Ahmad says: "With point-of-sale systems, it is very important that business users can access an application easily and quickly without needing a lot of time-consuming training."

The customisation work has ensured maximum staff satisfaction with the new user interface, resulting in higher productivity.

Hassan says: "We have designed the user interface to support the 'touch screen'

## For More Information

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For more information about Avanza Solutions M.E. or Emitac Group products and services, visit the Web site at: <http://www.avanzasolutions.com/> or <http://www.emitac.ae/EmitacWebPortal/groupofcompanies.aspx>

For more information about Emirates Post products and services, call +971 4 262 2222 or visit the Web site at: [www.emiratespost.ae](http://www.emiratespost.ae)

interface and we also have provided use of function keys. Previously, our employees had standard menus with many screens opening up. An example of how well the UI is working with Microsoft technology is that after the first pilot implementation we rolled out a new branch every second day.”

### Scalable Solution Offers Potential for New Business Partnerships

Shahdoor says: “Emirates Post has already sold the solution to many Arab postal administrations and has ambitions to market it within the Middle East.” The system operates in Arabic and English, with Arabic being the principal language for users of post office counter services.

Essam says: “Emirates Post is leading on collaborating with its partners to offer a similar solution to other even bigger countries than the UAE. The existing system is highly scalable and a deployment is already in process at Bahrain Post.”

## Microsoft .NET

Microsoft .NET is software that connects people, information, systems, and devices through the use of Web services. Web services are a combination of protocols that enable computers to work together by exchanging messages. Web services are based on the standard protocols of XML, SOAP, and WSDL, which allow them to interoperate across platforms and programming languages.

.NET is integrated across Microsoft products and services, providing the ability to quickly build, deploy, manage, and use connected, secure solutions with Web services. These solutions provide agile business integration and the promise of information anytime, anywhere, on any device.

For more information about Microsoft .NET and Web services, please visit: [www.microsoft.com/net](http://www.microsoft.com/net) and [msdn.microsoft.com/webservices](http://msdn.microsoft.com/webservices)

## Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
  - Microsoft Content Management Server 2002
  - Microsoft SQL Server 2000
  - Windows Embedded CE 5.0
- Windows Mobile powered smartphone

- Microsoft Technology
  - Microsoft .NET Framework