

# Keeping Makkah Connected

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Alawi Mohammad Baroum is the CEO of Baud Telecom Company (BTC Networks), an entrepreneur and Board Member of several companies locally and internationally. Mr Baroum is a dynamic business management professional, with a rich experience of business planning, business management with an outstanding record of achievements.

**T**he holiest city in Islam, Makkah and its surrounding region has a population in excess of eight million people, making it the most populous area in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, each year the city attracts millions of Muslim pilgrims: during last year's Hajj, more than 1.8 million visitors arrived in the region.

Given its importance, Makkah has been the focus of government-led ICT development programmes in recent years. The long-term goal of the ongoing development of Makkah is to become a smart and green environment, and one of the most livable cities in the world, by 2025. Market observers are rightly optimistic about the government's continued investment in Makkah, along with rising levels of private sector participation, both in the form of public-private partnerships and standalone ventures. Moreover, the expectation of continued demand growth from both residents and visiting pilgrims bodes well for the future.

As well as ICT, the real estate, infrastructure, renewable energy, hospitality and retail sectors are among those most likely to benefit from growth that will reshape large areas of the city. In the real estate sector there are several large-scale projects under way to improve informal settlement areas. At the same time, transport infrastructure is being improved, with an improved road link. A high-speed rail connection between Makkah and Madinah is set to open in early 2018.

There are also opportunities in the services sector as visitor numbers are set to double in the next few years. This number may even be tripled or quadrupled in five years, potentially to 25 million visitors. This will require major upgrades in catering, guides and tours, hotels, and private transportation. The government wants this to be taken care of by businesses in the private sector.

At the same time, Makkah's banking and telecommunications sectors are also focusing their efforts to reshape customer experiences and cater to a largely young, connected and digitally savvy demographic.

Behind the scenes, technology, particularly the digitisation of processes and procedures, is playing a critical role in the ongoing

modernisation of Makkah and will be vital to the future of the city. BTC Networks, a leading provider of integrated technology solutions for more than four decades, is providing ICT and telecommunication solutions enabling businesses to operate more profitably and adapt to new technology more quickly in Makkah.

Information and Communication Technology represents a historic opportunity in helping Makkah reach its full potential. Opportunities and impact potential can be realised across all sectors. The use of digital technologies in education and healthcare has already gained momentum in Saudi Arabia, and will play a key role in Makkah's development. Similarly, ICT is impacting the labour market through digital marketing, social media, and customer relationship management. Moving online enables the authorities in Makkah, along with businesses, to increase employment as well as consolidate services.

Underway since 2015 is a historic expansion of the Holy Haram to add 400,000 square metres and add shaded areas to shelter worshippers. Long-term projects around the Holy Haram include hotels, malls and cafes. Developments in the suburbs include housing estates and a park for residents who have been made to relocate from the city centre.

Within these ambitious projects BTC has played a key role in the Al-Shamiya Security Buildings Project, considered one of Saudi Arabia's most ambitious construction plans. Located close to the Holy Haram. Another example where BTC is contributing to the improvements to Makkah is the Integrated Security Systems Project, a CCTV surveillance network made up of 7,000 cameras covering wide areas of the Saudi fourth expansion of the Holy Haram, with analytics for crowd monitoring and smoke detection also in tunnels, ring roads, security buildings and other Haramain projects. BTC has a strong presence in many hotels, offering tailored, smart and integrated solutions. One of the cornerstones of BTC's success has always been our eagerness to introduce new technologies and add to the diversity of products and services we offer to our clients. Our customers have asked us to stretch to meet their requirements and today BTC's end-to-end portfolio will further enhance our ability to support our ever-growing list of clients.

The Saudi government recognises the importance of ICT development, and has recently indicated unprecedented commitments on initiatives that will achieve leadership in ICT regionally, if not internationally.

With an integrated effort from both government and private sector organisations, the Holy City of Makkah has a promising future as one of the world's foremost sustainable and smart cities. **E**

*BTC Networks, with 40+ years of market presence, is one of the leading System Integration companies in Saudi Arabia. For more information visit [www.btc.com.sa](http://www.btc.com.sa)*