

Internet in UAE

Beginning of the Internet

The history of the Internet in UAE goes back to the year 1995 when Etisalat, the National Telecommunications Carrier, started providing Internet services to all categories of users, including academic, business, industry, and home users. Since 1995, the number of Internet users in UAE has grown exponentially and reached 240,000 subscribers.

In March 2000, Emirates Internet and Multimedia (EIM) was established as a Strategic Business Unit within Etisalat to be the first Internet Service Provider (ISP) in UAE. Even though a newly established unit, EIM has been playing a strategic role in quickly responding to the needs of Internet users, gaining a competitive edge by acquiring state-of-the-art Internet backbone and infrastructures, and enabling people of all walks of life to have access to the Internet.

Internet Penetration in UAE

UAE is the most wired nation in the Arab World and one of the top nations of the online world. With a customer base of about quarter a million, EIM has around 25 percent of Internet users in the Arab World. While the number of Internet subscribers is 240,000, the actual number of Internet users in UAE is about 775,000 users.

UAE has a total population of 3.1 million people and 565,000 households with 30 percent of these households having access to the Internet. On the business front, 45 percent of businesses in UAE have access to the Internet.

The Internet bandwidth connection to the outside world is through 3xSTM-1 (155MB) connected to New York, San Francisco and UK.

EIM provides various access methods to the Internet, including dial-up connection at 56K, ISDN at 64 and 128K, ADSL connections at various speeds of 384K and 512K, and various speeds of leased lines.

Regulatory Issues

EIM is the first and only ISP in the UAE and, according to the UAE federal law, competitors are not allowed to enter the market.

The ISP Market

The Internet market in UAE is in the growth stage with the early majority of the technology adopters constituting the current customer base of EIM. Late adopters and laggards are expected to get online within the coming few years to make the UAE the fastest growing digital society in the region.

Public Access Points

Access to the Internet is available to businesses and individuals at competitive rates. Residents of the UAE can subscribe to the Internet and choose from several access methods to meet their surfing needs. Users of the Internet who do not wish to subscribe to the Internet, but need to have access to the Internet, can use public Internet access points such as “Dial ‘N’ Surf”, “Internet Kiosks”, and “Internet Surfing Centers”. These are services that are designed for both residents and visitors who need to access the Internet while on the move and without having to subscribe to the ISP.

Cyber Cafés

EIM makes Internet access available at public places under the name of Internet Surfing Centers (ISC). The ISCs are similar to traditional cyber cafés and are available at public places such as shopping centers, restaurants, and gaming centers. EIM provides ADSL connectivity to these places, which use their own PCs to provide Internet access to their customers. At present, there are 55 ISCs in UAE and this number is expected to grow significantly.

Tariffs

EIM offers its customers, both business and home users, a competitive rate in terms of subscription fees and access charges. Subscription fees for most of the residential services stand at AED200 and access charge for dial-up connection is AED1.80 (peak hrs) and AED1.00 (off-peak hrs), whereas customers are charged a fixed monthly charge of AED250 for ADSL connection at 384k. For businesses, EIM provides various methods of Internet access, using leased access and ADSL technology, with varying rates based on the amount bandwidth required by the customer.