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**Zain KSA and Netcracker
redefine customer
experience for the 5G future**

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Zain KSA and Netcracker redefine customer experience for the 5G future

Zain KSA is an innovator of mobile services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and has been at the cutting edge of 5G development and digital transformation for more than a decade. As a member of Zain Group, a pioneer of mobile telecommunications in the Middle East since 1983, Zain KSA is a key contributor to Saudi Arabia's national digital transformation programme and the ambitious Saudi Vision 2030. Zain KSA's dual focus on 5G and customer experience has seen it become among the largest telecoms operators and digital service providers in the region. Eng. Sultan Bin Abdulaziz AlDeghather, the chief executive of Zain KSA, and Benedetto Spaziani, the general manager at Netcracker, discuss what the two companies are doing to improve the customer experience and accelerate 5G monetization

VanillaPlus: Please can you tell us a little bit about Zain KSA, its customers and its mission?

Eng. Sultan Bin Abdulaziz AlDeghather: Zain KSA is a pioneer in digital innovation for mobile services. Our mission is to equip our customers – whether business, residential or government – with the latest technologies and innovations to redefine customer experience and enable the rapid, efficient and reliable development of businesses throughout our region. Our mission aligns with Saudi Vision 2030, a nationwide strategic framework to reduce

Saudi Arabia's economic dependence on oil by diversifying into health, education, infrastructure and a variety of industries and business segments.

We believe that 5G is the key to accomplishing these diverse goals. We want to deliver a fully integrated digital ecosystem of innovative digital services and products to become the digital service provider of choice in Saudi Arabia and to contribute to creating a digital economy and continue to support a digital community and benefit people in a hyper-connected world. This includes providing reliable support for the ►

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In Saudi Arabia, we provide 5G coverage for 51 cities through more than 5,000 towers, contributing to bridging the digital gap and empowering our community

next wave of innovation, including IoT, robotics, artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML), blockchain, big data, drones and augmented reality.

VP: Your 5G network has already helped raise Zain KSA's profile in the telecoms sector. Why has it attracted attention and given you such a large share of your domestic market?

Eng. Sultan Bin Abdulaziz AlDeghaither: We were actually amongst the first in the world to provide commercial 5G services on a large scale. In October 2019 we rolled out the third largest 5G network in the world, and the largest 5G network in the Middle East, Europe and Africa at the time; we have been expanding it ever since. We currently provide 5G coverage for 51 cities across Saudi Arabia through more than 5,000 towers, contributing to bridging the digital gap and empowering our community. We want to harness 5G and digital transformation to both increase our competitiveness and provide the myriad benefits of advanced technology to the people and businesses of our country.

Coverage is only half the battle when it comes to networks though. We have also made significant investments in network performance, reliability and speed. This has resulted in us ranking among the fastest networks in the world, as we were the first telecom operator to provide 5G Carrier Aggregation, supporting the highest internet speed ever recorded. We have received a lot of local, regional, and global recognition for these improvements, such as consistently ranking as a leader in 5G networks with the fastest download and upload speeds for our fixed and mobile networks as recognised by top international bodies such as **Ookla**, **Umlaut** and **Opensignal**.

In parallel, we pursued our strategy by vertically expanding our services and rolling out innovative solutions serving our adjacent markets, including enhancing our B2B offerings and tapping into digital entertainment.

We have also been actively ramping up our pioneering cloud capabilities and recently, Zain Cloud received the highest rating (Class C) for cloud computing services in the Kingdom from the Communications and Information Technology Commission. Our suite of cloud-computing products and services supports present and future needs for enterprise-level digital transformation by ►



Eng. Sultan Bin Abdulaziz AlDeghaither, Zain KSA



Benedetto Spaziani, Netcracker

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Our cloud-based Netcracker Digital BSS will make the most of Zain KSA's advanced cloud infrastructure and provide a vital foundation for its digital transformation strategy

providing a reliable and flexible platform for deploying cloud infrastructures.

These technological breakthroughs and accolades translate into many practical benefits for both our B2C and B2B customers. Consumers can enjoy rapid music downloads, crystal-clear video streaming, innovative gaming and seamless social media experiences, while enterprises can take full advantage of greater efficiency, better customer experience and lower operational costs.

VP: How is Netcracker supporting Zain KSA in all of these endeavours?

Benedetto Spaziani: Netcracker is an ideal partner for Zain KSA because we share the same core values. Zain KSA has grown by leaps and bounds over the last few years by adopting a digital-first strategy and prioritising customer experience. Zain KSA teamed up with us to fuel greater digital transformation and business growth by creating memorable customer experiences through streamlined, powerful cloud-based technology. As a leading provider of billing and operational support systems (BSS/OSS) and customer engagement solutions, Netcracker has the extensive experience in drawing from innovation to deliver a personalised, real-time and digital customer experience on a whole new level.

VP: What growing pains have you encountered as your network expands and improves?

Eng. Sultan Bin Abdulaziz AlDeghaither: Excellence in customer experience is our top priority in everything we do. This goal inspires us to continue to seek innovative solutions to keep pace with our growing operations and future-proof our services. Our 5G network covers 85% of all major cities in Saudi Arabia, and that coverage rate is increasing every day. A network that large presents a variety of distinct challenges, but also provides the unique opportunity to pinpoint problems and solutions with the vast volume of customer data that it makes available to us.

With customer-centricity being one of our core corporate pillars, we apply data analytics to evaluate the journey of our B2C subscribers, to continue to offer them an unmatched customer experience, driven by best-in-class services and products that help them thrive in a hyper-connected world. This is why we continue to seek out partners whose values

align with our own and whom we can collaborate with in order to take the next step in our digital transformation journey.

VP: What were you looking for in a partner for your digital transformation and billing upgrade?

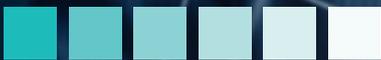
Eng. Sultan Bin Abdulaziz AlDeghaither: With all the expansion our network was undergoing, we needed to create solutions that would bring practical benefits to consumers and match the power of our 5G infrastructure. We wanted to adopt a powerful billing solution to transform our legacy BSS infrastructure into a truly unified and 5G-ready digital ecosystem. We were also looking for a partner with the technological capabilities and expertise to provide us with end-to-end support as we migrated our BSS infrastructure.

Netcracker was the natural choice for both of these requirements. One of the things that initially drew us to the company was its expertise. We found in Netcracker the reliable support that would accelerate our digital transformation in the telecoms industry. The full suite of pre-integrated solutions, precise delivery and extensive expertise offers us the chance to drastically improve customer experience and deliver new innovative 5G products for rapid and sustainable growth.

VP: How does Netcracker help Zain KSA to maximise returns from its 5G investments?

Benedetto Spaziani: Our cloud-based Netcracker Digital BSS will make the most of Zain KSA's advanced cloud infrastructure and provide a vital foundation for its digital transformation strategy. It provides a single platform for transformation and convergence across all payment types and optimises support for B2C and B2B customers. Zain KSA will enjoy a lower total cost of ownership (TCO) and accelerated time-to-market while its customers will be able to enjoy a premium digital experience.

We will also provide Netcracker Service Management and Orchestration, part of our Netcracker Digital OSS, to help sustain the impressive growth of the 5G network without worrying about additional complexity. When you are managing a network as comprehensive as Zain KSA's, the ability to simply automate services and provide vendor-agnostic support becomes essential if you truly want to make the most of what 5G has to offer. Netcracker Service Management and Orchestration also provides the ►



5G

At Zain KSA, we recently announced the launch of Saudi Arabia's first 5G standalone network as part of our commitment to creating the 5G future

foundation for many of the advanced 5G services that Zain KSA wants to offer moving forward, such as network slicing within Zain KSA's 5G core environment and across its entire network. Network slicing in particular presents many exciting opportunities for creating new revenue streams from 5G investments.

We are also helping to centralise customer data across all communication channels so that customers benefit from personalised management of their journey for a truly unique experience. A customer can interact with Zain KSA and its network in retail shops, e-commerce portals, mobile apps or whatever method they prefer and enjoy the same high quality of experience and personalisation. Finally, it offers targeted digital marketing. Standardised and impersonal promotions become precise targeted offers that take full advantage of rich customer profiles to truly engage on the individual level.

VP: What are your plans for 5G development in the future?

Eng. Sultan Bin Abdulaziz AlDeghather: The achievements that I have already mentioned are just milestones in our digital journey. We recently announced the launch of Saudi Arabia's first 5G standalone network as part of our commitment to creating the 5G future. Our existing 5G network integrates 5G components into the older 4G

infrastructure, but standalone 5G combines a 5G radio access network (RAN), a 5G network core and cloud capabilities to make a huge leap forward in the evolution of 5G technology. It offers many exciting new possibilities like network slicing that will revolutionise the digital experience. Also, we have recently launched 5G LAN, becoming the first operator in the MENA region to provide the technology that will provide businesses with a high-end virtual network fully reliant on our 5G standalone network. In addition, we continue to expand into adjacent markets. For example, in February of this year we announced the expansion of our partnership with **NVIDIA** to roll out GeForce NOW cloud gaming platform to serve regional markets.

Becoming the best digital service provider means more to us than just improving our business and profits. We want to provide each person and business in Saudi Arabia with the practical benefits of digital transformation. However, digital transformation is a vast and enormously complex undertaking that involves years of effort to complete. Enabling digital transformation to benefit the millions of people throughout Saudi Arabia on our own would be a daunting task without a reliable partner. We believe that our partnership with Netcracker will help us redefine customer centricity to inaugurate a new era of digital innovation in Saudi Arabia. ■

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