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DHL banks on IT

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COMPLEMENTING its two other global information service centres located around the globe, DHL Worldwide Express' Asia-Pacific Information Services (APIS) new four-storey facility, located in Cyberjaya, will offer the development and delivery of world-class information services and solutions to DHL's worldwide operations.

The RM200 million facility is part of the total RM1 billion DHL has to date invested in its operations in Malaysia.

Launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the 100,000-square-foot facility, managed by DHL's subsidiary, Asia-Pacific Information Services Sdn Bhd, a Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC)-status company, will serve as the data hub for DHL's operations in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East.

According to its regional IS director Michael Pilkington, the new facility will provide on-going support to the Asia-Pacific region, including the 24-hour service delivery management of all components in the network.

"We'd also ensure that all services meet the operations requirements of the business and control shipment information gateways for inbound and outbound shipments from all 41 operations under our purview, as well as shipment information to and from the region," he adds.

The facility. Housed within the complex are the Network Operations Centre and Data Centre. The Network Operations Centre provides 24-hour monitoring of all nodes in the network to ensure the availability of telecommunications services interconnecting more than 220 countries worldwide.

The Data Centre, where all of DHL's business applications are located, supports more than 10,000 users on a daily basis. It is from this centre that the management of DHL's various global services and control of the shipment information gateways responsible for information pertaining to inbound and outbound shipments from around the world. Nearly eight million shipment information message transactions are said to pass through these gateways on a daily basis.

IT investment. According to DHL Worldwide Express' chief information officer Stephen McGuckin, the organisation's belief and commitment to information services is evidenced by an annual global budget allocation of approximately 500 million euros or RM1.8 billion.

"Information systems designed by Global IS are used within DHL to despatch couriers to the right place, to record when a pick-up is made and what it contains, to determine how a shipment will be routed and when it was delivered, down to the precise hour of the day or night," he explains. In the area of business functions, he adds, IS facilitates the management decision-making process, from courier route planning and customer analysis to network routing and new product development.

DHL's Global Development teams, he added, tasked with design and development, are concentrated at DHL APIS. "Several of the information services developed by our global IS operations have put DHL ahead of competition. For example, the Proactive Tracing Service provides our customer service agents with complete visibility of shipment transit performance. Customer-specific reports can be generated to enable DHL to measure and improve service performance," he says.

According to him, DHL has also finalised a solution where the electronic

data interchange (EDI) has been replaced with a real-time XML system. "This allows the customers to send order directions directly from their systems to DHL warehouses electronically, thus cutting down a process by 11 hours," he says.

Technology in use. According to McGuckin, DHL is also ahead of competition in customs clearance with its Clearance in the Air application. "This enables us to capture an image of the shipment paperwork and customs documentation at the point of origin and make this available over our communications network to the destination customs authorities so they can clear it in advance. In many markets, we can gain half a day on transit, which gives our customers a significant competitive advantage," he elaborates.

DHL's Generic Shipment Information Service, or GeneSIS, is a new shipment information database that caters to the entire DHL global network, handling over 200,000 shipment information queries per day from its customer service agents and customers around the world. A hot standby full synchronised back-up of GeneSIS is located in DHL's other global IS facility in Phoenix, Arizona.

Future plans. DHL APIS currently has some 370 staff and it expects to increase its workforce to some 450 by year-end. Eighty six per cent of its present workforce are Malaysian knowledge workers. "IT is pivotal for any solution we provide to our customers. IT is a must-have for our successful operations and as such we will continue to invest in it," adds McGuckin.

The facility, which also acts as the DHL global training and research and development facility, has six training rooms, 15 discussion rooms, a 337-seat auditorium, a cafeteria, staff recreation area, including a gymnasium, a sick bay and a travel desk.