

From The History of IT in Jordan

The history of IT in Jordan goes back thirty years if not more. Large computers were used by at least one prominent local bank as well as a research institution since the early seventies.

In 1982 I was hired by a newly established Jordanian computer company to setup and manage their Word Processing Division. The company represented a Minnesota based US firm that developed the first commercially available bilingual (Arabic/English) word processing system in the world. Although physically huge, the system was quite innovative at that time. It was based on the Intel 8080 microprocessor with 64KB memory and two 8" floppy disk drives, no hard disks at that time. It even had a vertically-mounted A4 sized, black-on-white screen. But perhaps its most interesting component was the twin daisy wheel printer, one wheel for Arabic character set and the other for English. The printer was over 1 metre in width in order to allow bilingual printing to the very edges of a centrally mounted A4 paper. The complete system used to sell for around US\$ 25,000.

The Jordanian military were the first to adopt such a system in 1982. I was given the task of installing a unit in the offices of the Commander-In-Chief and training a selection of the best army typists on how to use the system. I remember training a sergeant Abdullah who had the strange habit of striking the side of the machine with his right hand every few seconds. When I asked him about the reason for that, his answer was very simple. He had been a typist for twenty five years and a "typewriter carriage-return" hit had become a normal part of his uncontrolled reflex movement.

An identical unit was used in late 1982 by a recently established Jordanian pharmaceutical manufacturing company to print bilingual sticker labels for their medication bottles. That company subsequently flourished and grew to become of the leading producers of pharmaceutical products on a regional scale.

In 1983, a prominent research institute had a requirement to produce technical and scientific reports with Arabic/English as well as mathematical and Greek letters and symbols. Such a combination of features was not available from the US manufacturer; no problem, we "modified" the system locally to be able to accept all four character sets.

The US firm has long since disappeared, but IT in Jordan has certainly come a long way in the past 30 years.