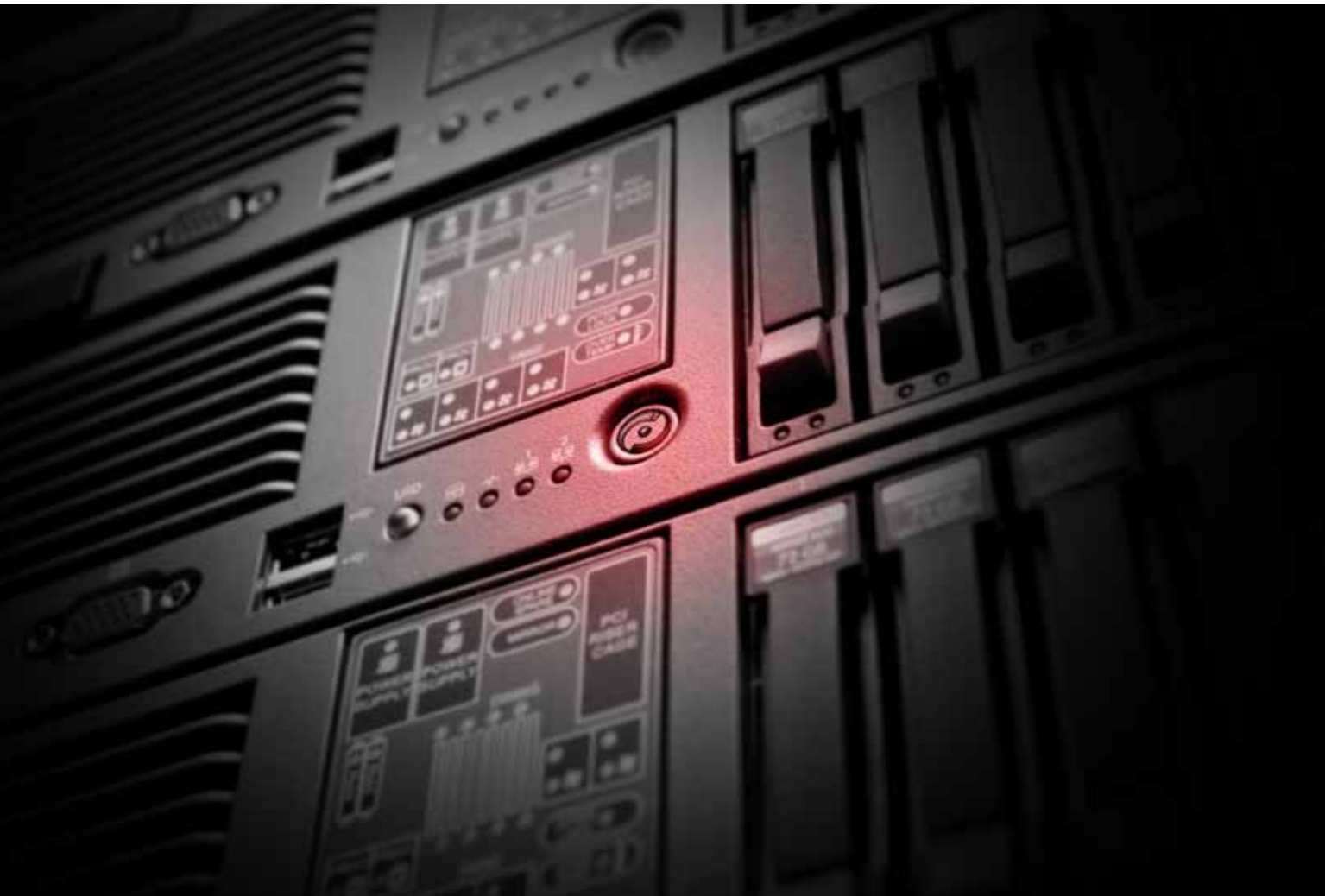# Conciel

ENABLING AFRICA

ENABLING
AFRICA

Conciel is evolving as fast as the needs of Africans to develop the communications on which economic development depends

Based in Lagos, Nigeria and run by Michel Maalouf the energetic Lebanese entrepreneur who founded it in 2005, Conciel started life as a management consultancy business, focusing on software solutions for communications and assisting companies to get ISO certifications in quality management or environmental performance, or to manage their data and automate their workflow. The company forged a niche for itself in telecommunications, later focusing on data centre management. As we reported in an article we published as recently as April this year Conciel's core solutions for the market had emerged as electronic document management systems (EDMS), computerised maintenance management systems (CMMS) and risk business inspection (RBI) tools and more recently DCIM (data centre information management). One might have thought that not much would have changed in the space of eight months, and certainly the company has continued to grow its client base for these products.

But some companies and some individuals are more restless and more agile than others. Conciel and Maalouf are among these. As we shall see, the scope of the company is growing rapidly. He has for some time been aware that data centres are not the sole domain of telecoms these days, and is actively pushing out his services to the banking and power generation sectors. Data centres have two

"We make everything ready for the client to simply plug in their server - they don't need to worry about power supply, cooling, fire safety or anything else"

"Conciel goes much further, devising, designing and managing all the service and software applications that the client might require"

interdependent sides to them, he explains. Active equipment includes the switches and the servers that store and transmit the data and which is bought in from global suppliers like IBM and Ericsson. Passive infrastructure is the domain of Conciel. "We make everything ready for the client to simply plug in their server - they don't need to worry about power supply, cooling, fire safety or anything else."

That's when the data centre is set up, but Conciel goes much further, devising, designing and managing all the service and software applications that the client might require. This is the software as a service (SaaS) model, in which the system is put in place and maintained on behalf of the client in a way that the end users, their customers, can log into and use without problems - the client settles a monthly bill just like any utility. This is the kind of service that Conciel is offering its clients across west and central Africa, operating in the fields of telecommunications, oil and gas, facilities management, food and beverage, manufacturing, logistics and water supply.

However during the course of this year the company has added a number of important additional services, and is well advanced with some other packages that really amount to diversification, so far do they take the basic proposition. First off is a software package specifically targeted at telecoms operators who are having to find new ways to control

costs while still offering the services and products that customers want, at the level of service they demand. "Price Simulator is a software tool that allows service providers to model complex pricing scenarios with drag-and-drop ease, ensuring margins are in line with corporate objectives before new services are launched. It is a software that reads the data of the consumers in the database and runs certain algorithms that propose for the operator the best package that fits each consumer." For example if a consumer shows a pattern of frequent calls to family members it can identify that pattern, and next time the caller has occasion to contact the call centre the agent may propose a lower cost 'friends and family' option. The customer wins because calls are cheaper, and the operator wins by retaining the customer - and perhaps make even more money from his increased usage.

That's a very simple example that only scratches the surface of Price Simulator's functionality. To cite another scenario, it allows marketing teams to work independently from IT. They can easily access all the data and reports they need without having to rely on other departments. This can save hours, days, and even weeks of valuable time. Conciel is selling Price Simulator into the West African market under an agreement with its developer, Redknee of Canada and has already provided it to one major operator, Etisalat Nigeria. The UAR company entered the Nigerian market in 2008, since when it has seen unprecedented growth with over 15 million subscribers to whom it offers world-class telecommunications services.

Another new platform that promises to make a serious difference to the way mobile

---

"Conciel has developed Contromote, a unique solution with added value features"

---

banking is done in Nigeria is at an earlier stage. "Banking is a new sector for us," says Maalouf. "Again this is a SaaS solution, but unlike the much vaunted mobile banking solutions that operate on basic cellphones, this is a concept that runs on the banks' servers, not SMS. So the end user is only being charged for the bank transaction, not for the text message." An additional advantage of the system is that it can encompass NFC (near-field communication) transactions, meaning that the customer can use it at the point of sale in the growing number of retail outlets that using this type of technology. NFC utilises electromagnetic radio fields and is more secure than technologies such as Bluetooth and Wi-Fi that focus on radio transmissions instead.

These are exciting initiatives, but Maalouf has his eyes on some potentially even

Did you know?

2005
Michel Maalouf
founded Conciel

....

7
Countries in
Africa where
Conciel is active

larger opportunities. Still in the telecommunications space, he is developing a range of services to operators to help them manage the mobile networks. Masts require a lot of maintenance, not often an easy task in Africa. They all need power. Some rely on diesel, others have already invested in solar power, but Conciel has now developed a solution that can be used by a telecom operator, but is also suitable for lighting up an entire rural community in places where it unrealistic to think of connecting it to the grid. "In the coming year we will be marketing an independent power plant - one that we can design, import the equipment, install it and test it just as we already do for data centres."

Bringing power solutions to rural communities is challenging, he admits. The client is usually a government agency, which
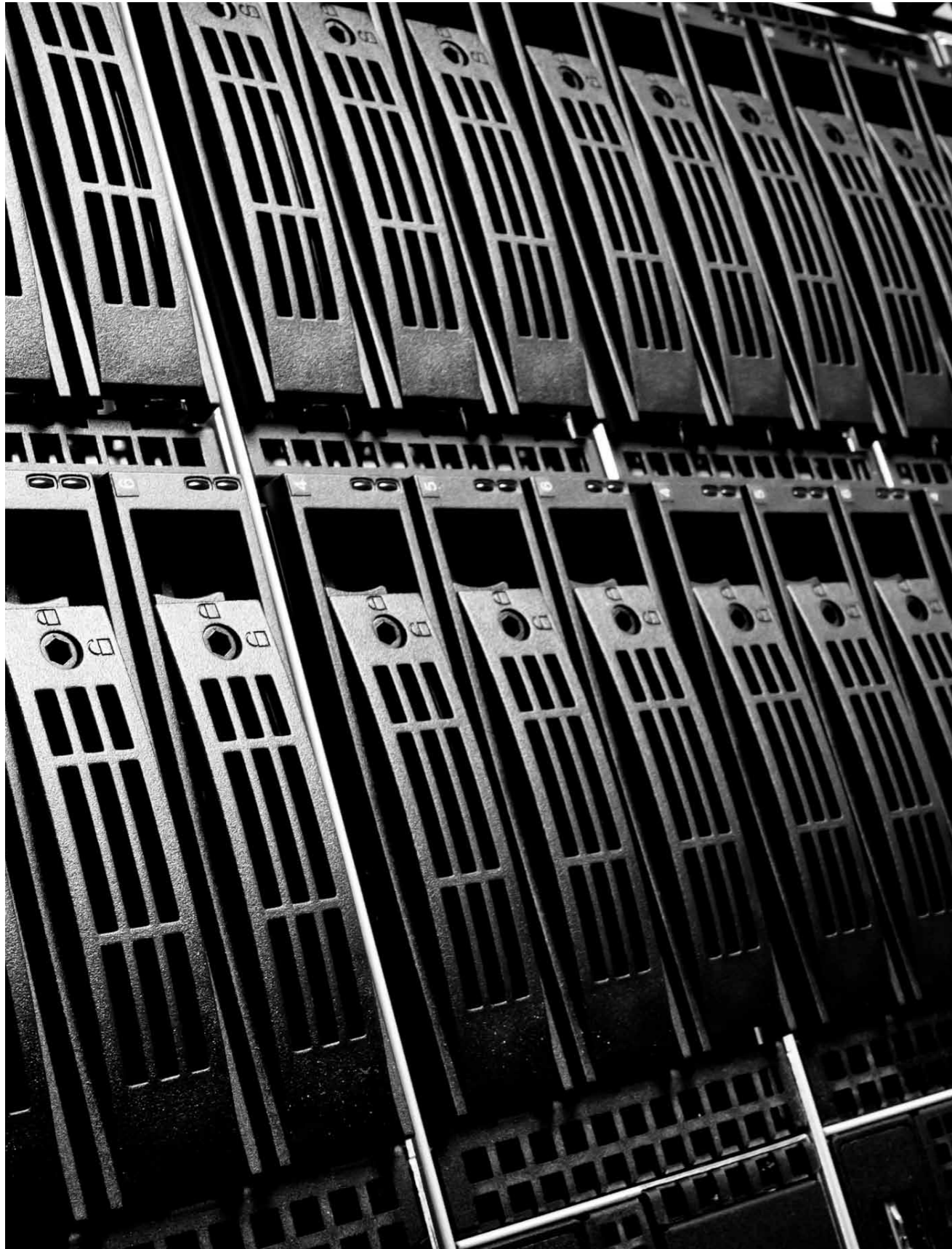
> *"Price Simulator is a software tool that allows service providers to model complex pricing scenarios with drag-and-drop ease"*

means a lot of red tape, but he believes it is worth the effort. "The Nigerian government 's strategy is to bring power to rural communities, and Project Light Up Nigeria is a government initiative that encourages the private sector to get involved." Incentives to local authorities to invest in and own solar power schemes on an appropriate scale will, he believes, ensure that this is a dynamic new market.

Finally though, it's back to the telecoms clients, and here is where the real innovation lies. Not in solar power as such; not even in remote monitoring of mast sites, but in a much more comprehensive solution for managing the network. Conciel has developed Contromote, a unique solution with added value features such as camera control and monitoring, Google Maps interface and a comprehensive software package that enables the operator to log in securely, control the camera and monitor maintenance issues like fuel levels, battery charge levels and security. One problem all companies face is that of vandalism, whether malicious or accidental. Cameras at the site will go a long way to saving the money this costs to the operators.

One Conciel site in Lagos is already using the new Contromote technology and the coming year will be one of intense marketing. The face of mobile telecoms in Africa is changing fast, as companies like Orange and Airtel address the cost of ownership of their networks. Additionally the proliferation of masts and operators has meant that in Nigeria particularly, with the largest mobile take-up on the continent, the service has not

improved as fast as it should. Many operators are now selling their mast sites to colocation companies, then leasing back the capacity they need. This is a much more stable business model and it means that the phone companies can concentrate on their core service and not worry about engineering and maintenance. The market is thus wide open for Conciel to sell its best in class solution, either directly to the operators or to the colocation companies themselves: given the scale of their operations they will need the kind of support that Conciel can provide, Maalouf believes.

In other parts of Africa the opportunities are endless. It is already established as a partner for data centres in the Republic of Congo, DRC and Sierra Leone, though in the last of these countries a $10 million data centre for Airtel is delayed by Ebola. Conciel is the design and management partner for this project, however the execution phase is being held up because equipment already delivered to Freetown can't be sent up country under present conditions. Undaunted he has his eye firmly on geographical as well as technological expansion: "This year we are continuing to target West Africa, and we are also bidding for some projects in East Africa too." **BE**

CONCIEL

📞 +337 8248 8844

✉ info@conciel.com

🐦 @CONCIELT

www.conciel.com