

**H**ello everyone. My name is Mark Allen; I am another of Nicola's latest recruits and as a consequence now find myself Chairman of the Information Technology Special Interest Group ("IT SIG") of the RGGB.



I am a relative "newbie" to the Kingdom (arriving in November 2008) and the RGGB and I look forward to the opportunity of offering to the membership a wider insight to the world of IT.

I have more than 25 years experience in many facets of IT and Communications, predominantly in IT Communications and Security, having spent more than 18 years with the Bank of England. I have been fortunate in my career to have worked with many leading global companies with whom I maintain good relationships. These relationships have been of major benefit to me, particularly with the

diverse yet unique idiosyncrasies of business here in the Kingdom and the Gulf region in general.

The inaugural meeting of the IT SIG was held at Paul Williams' villa in the DQ, for which I would like to thank him and Barbara for their hospitality. We were fortunate to have a friend and colleague of mine, Yusuf Al Jobbar, as our guest speaker. Yusuf gave us an introduction to the world of IT Communications through the company he set up here a little over two years ago, Dispatch Technology. He received some excellent feedback from the attendees, many of whom were particularly interested in his presentation of Asset and Vehicle tracking technology.

Over the coming weeks and months, I should like to offer an RGGB members IT support forum. Whether members need advice on business or personal IT problems, the plan would be to provide a medium through the RGGB website where I can give options and solutions to any IT based "gremlins" that frustrate us all. Please keep an eye out for a communication on this and other IT SIG developments through Nicola.

## An Information Technology perspective: to synch or swim?

I suppose one analogy from an IT perspective is learning to swim. My brother and I were fortunate; both our parents were good swimmers, my mother gentle and patient, my father less so. The goal, of course, for all concerned was for us to swim. Once achieved, it is skill that can be applied across many different aqueous scenarios. As in life, there are many types of water to swim in, each with incumbent traits and risks. The sea, which is a constant variable, exposed too many external influences such as the moon and wind. A river, which although channelled, has many hidden characteristics and of course the pool, which has been prepared and designed by man with many safety aspects included. The same format can be applied with IT, a tidal variable where one is exposed to an ocean of change, with each immersion offering a modification to the basic swimming technique. The river, where one can be carried along at such a rate that there is little time to relax and develop the swimming technique. Finally, there is the pool, a catered for environment that generally is the same but, with effort and enjoyment, restricted by the number of swimmers participating at that time.

My introduction to swimming and IT were similar. My father concluded that progress would be made by throwing my brother and I in at the deep end. For me it worked - I swam. For my brother, it dented his confidence and he was to take a little longer to become a competent swimmer. You may wonder where I am going with this - some people have no choice but to master the reality of IT, from rebooting the PC or laptop because they cannot afford to be inconvenienced, or to wait. Few read or understand the manual fully, again because of a lack of time or patience to apply the information being portrayed. Thus, the feeling of drowning. Others chose to avoid IT altogether, thereby avoiding any exposure and leaving even the simplest task to another. As in all things in life,

some things can be hard to master, whether it be riding a bike or driving a car, but once mastered, they become second nature and we wonder what all the fuss was about.

For those of us who were a party to change through the '70s/'80s and '90s, there have been many directional variations in IT, often product led. From the original mobile phone designed by Martin Cooper of Motorola in the late '70s, to the hand held communicator where speech is just a default function. Many applications, formally residing on PCs, serve us in our day-to-day existence on our 'mobile phones'. Our constant desire for improvement is generally driven by the need for service, comfort and would you believe simplicity. So, going back to the swim analogy, we are being carried along by a river which is, by definition, changeable - sometimes smooth and tranquil where we are confident and content. Then a torrent, caused by influences beyond our control which make our journey fast and bumpy.

It is up to all of us to try to embrace and deal with changing technology, even if we are unwilling participants at times. The irony in my swim analogy is that the children of today embrace technology by default, often preferring to virtually swim using the 'Wii' than actually experiencing the real thing, particularly here in The Kingdom.

Whether we like it or not, Information Technology is here to stay and has an impact on our everyday lives, from remote controls for the television, to the basic timer on the microwave oven.

So, in my role as Chairman of the IT Special Interest Group for RGGB, I am hoping to make your life a little easier and ensure that we can all swim.