

OPUS BY NUMBERS



■ Opus has had huge success being involved with the Palm Jumeirah project in Dubai

In the second instalment of *EI*'s examination of Opus's successful Middle East operation, Steve Simpson, GCC regional manager at the company conducts a tour of some notable Opus projects.

Leaving the exhibition centre in Abu Dhabi, where *EI* had been spending some time with Opus at the CityBuild exhibition targeting the main players in the Middle East development community, the destination was Dubai where some of the company's most significant projects in the area are located.

The first thing you notice out here about the roads is that they are very wide, very straight and almost everybody drives a huge 4X4, with air con of course. On the journey from Abu Dhabi to Dubai is Steve explained what the early days in the area were like: "The company came out here in 2002 on a fact finding mission and because of the huge amount of activity, decided that we should set up an office out here.

"At that point I had been with Opus for around 18 months on the technical side and another six months later, I came out here in 2003 and began to build a dealer base."

Steve adds: "We began with a few small projects mostly one-off audio installs and did loads of meetings. A key break through was when we met with the developer of Palm Jumeirah (Dubai's flagship luxury housing development) and convinced them they needed to be pre-cabling the development so people could upgrade to Opus systems as and when required. Every single apartment on the island is pre-wired for conversion to an Opus system."

Steve explained: "Originally 1,400 apartments were to be built on the Palm project, we think around 900 have been completed and out of those 500 are now occupied and we have converted about 25% to an Opus system!"

The company's conversion rate of those pre-wired apartments

is impressive, including many apartments in the high-profile Tiara and Oceana apartment complexes on the island.

Arriving in Dubai and driving onto the Palm project, the first thing that hits you is the scale of the development. *EI* had pictured a much smaller project, built for rock stars and premiership footballers, but the Palm Jumeirah is a little town all of its own with a mixture of highly expensive dwellings and more reasonably priced accommodation, but unless right at the edge of the water, you often forget that you are on an artificial island built out into the sea. It is also scale that impresses about Opus' presence here, the size of the projects just dwarf most of what happens in the UK or Europe.

Steve explains: "The next big project for us after the Palm was Le Reve Tower, 82 high-end apartments all taking Opus as standard and then after that we were involved with the highly impressive World Trade Centre Residence."

Steve explains that the company's presence here has not all been plain sailing. Many companies suffered when the development and debt crisis hit Dubai hard in 2008. However, Opus was well established enough to ride out the storm and continue to develop other markets such as Abu Dhabi, Oman and Kuwait and by concentrating on smaller one-off projects, but as Steve says the developer side of the market is starting to come back strongly now, particularly in Abu Dhabi.

IMPRESSIVE VILLA

Next stop was one of the smaller scale one-off Villas that is currently being fitted with an Opus system and other install

Another success story for Opus has been the large amounts of Villas it has converted in the Victory Heights area of Dubai



The Middle East arm of Opus has been leading the charge with the new 6 Series



goodies by a company called Dubai Audio. Lee Harrison from Dubai Audio met *EI* at the Villa, which in England would perhaps be more accurately described as an enormous house, with a swimming pool and views out over a man-made lake with fountains playing in the middle distance, the house's entrance hall and main stairwell takes up more room than many a London flat.

Lee is a veteran of the expat working community in the area and explains: "We like the Opus system, particularly the new version. It is easy to install, the functionality is good and it also presents us with a great backbone to sell other products such as a home cinema."

Lee adds: "There is plenty of work here, but the main problem is that we often compete with companies who do not have the same level of professionalism that we do, so it important we get over to people the standard of work that we deliver right at the start of any project."

Another major success for Opus in Dubai was its presence in the Victory Heights projects, a very large luxury estate built near the Dubai Sports City development. Steve explained as we drove onto the development that is built around an Ernie Els golf course (golf is a major factor in attracting visitors and permanent residents to the area) that on the project there are 565 Villas that are prewired for Opus and 365 that were fitted as standard with the Opus 500 Series.

Steve took us to meet one resident on the estate who was actually in process of having his Opus system put in.

Bilal and met us at the door of the property and explained: "This is actually my brother's place and I am project managing some alterations and the install for him. I wanted the functionality of the 6 Series and it also future proofs the property for new functions as they come in. The pre-wiring was of course already here and so the install team from OMC (a local installer) were able to come in and do the system really quickly and they also added another sub-zone kitchen,

so the project now has a total of four zones and two sub-zones." Bilal added: "I am a little unusual for Dubai as I am a real tech-enthusiast and know my technology, my mother is also an interior designer, so we have high-standards when it comes to projects like this. The system has to work well and it also has to fit in with the design of the place and the Opus system does just that.

"The install team and Opus also stayed with us through the whole process supporting us and making sure we were happy with the system and how it worked. This kind of support is really important out here, as consumers on the whole are far less tech savvy than in England. I am an early adopter by nature, so was able to do the research and compare systems, before we decided that Opus was for us, but it was also the support that was made available from the manufacturer and the installer that was important in the decision." Bilal explained: "One of the features we really like is the ability to connect the multi-room system to an iPod and Steve tells me that there will be a dedicated Opus Dock coming out towards the end of this year, so I think we will look at switching to that when it is available. The simplicity of the Opus remote for the 6 Series is also great."

The quality of the content of some TV and Radio channels can be an issue in Dubai and therefore Bilal is very happy that the Opus MCU is able to deliver the popular Showtime channel around the property, but music is the biggest medium which the system gets used for.

Bilal said: "I love music, without music a house is not a home, we have music in the bathroom (Opus' own single point stereo speaker), I love to cook whilst listening to music and we also have speakers in the garden where the swimming pool is going to be. I love annoying the golfers as they walk passed the bottom of our garden with the power of the speakers outside."

Bilal is a particular fan of the new internal WMS145 on-wall Opus speakers giving *EI* a blast of the system in one of the up-stairs zones and after a bit of Foo Fighters and Block Party, *EI* has to say that they do deliver an impressively powerful performance from a compact enclosure. The family also like the way the speakers can blend in with the decor of each room. Other key features that are enjoyed is the ability to link all zones for a family gathering or party and the ability to link content stored on the house's computers to the system via Blu-tooth and the simplicity of the navigation inside the Opus system via the touch-screens.

Bilal added: "We are also looking forward to the Internet radio feature when that comes out as the radio stations out here are pretty patchy in terms of quality."

Back in the 4x4 and on route back to *EI*'s hotel it is impossible not to be impressed with what Opus has achieved here with a relatively small team. Yes, the development money here made it easier to get developers to spec for pre-wiring as well as full systems, but if it can be done here then on some scale it must surely be possible to secure more new build projects in the UK and Europe.

Opus has presence in some major UK developments already such as the St George Wharf and Battersea Reach in London, and is of course pushing for more, but the conclusion that *EI* took from its Middle East Opus odyssey was a hardening of the view that the install industry's next step must be the undeniably challenging, but vital task of getting more developers on line with the future of home automation and entertainment.

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