'We want to revolutionise Internet use in Pakistan'

RIZWAN RAZI talks to Premium Hosting's CE Officer Sajid Sohail on his plans to bring high speed Internet service in Pakistan

Sajid Sohail inclined towards Information Technology when he was only 11 years old. Now, he is the Chief Executive Officer of Premium Hosting Inc., which is an American company providing hosting sevices for websites and portals. IT came his way when he left for the United States with his family. He went to John Bone School and then to Queens College for graduation in business studies. In the meanwhile, he started his business. In1995, he expanded his venture to IT sector and launched his own Internet Service Providers network across the US. In the same year, he came to Pakistan to start the same facility here. Due to the liberal investment policies of the existing government, he decided to materialise his four years old dream and decided to establish the highest capacity Internet backbone in Pakistan. He will start it from 2 MB and increase it immediately to 6 MB within a period of one year. He believes that it would revolutionalise the ISP concept in Pakistan because being a major player in the US, they are also

PAT for establishing a monopoly over the bandwidth for the domestic ISPs. He has also planned to get his company register at the Nasdaq. Following are the excerpts from an interview with him:

On the start of his business:

When I was in high school I borrowed 5,000 US dollars from my father and started my own business. It was purely my own business and my father and the other family members had no concern with it. I started in New York, where I hired a stall for selling Ice Creams and all such things. I earned handsome profits and reinvested this money to further expand my business activities. By the time I was 24 years old, I was the ninth highest tax payer to the City of New York in my department. You can well imagine the amount of revenue since the Yankee Stadium of New York was number eight at that time. We were paying $ 1.5 million per annum rent to the New York City.

In 1995, we started thinking about expanding the Internet business. I visited Pakistan for ten days and was shocked to know that while the rest of the world was flying high on Internet Cables, in Pakistan this sector was facing teething problems. Despite the fact that I visited Pakistan in 1984 and in 1994 and 1995 only, I decided that I owe something to my country and that we should invest in internet telecommunication sector of Pakistan. In 1996, we started communicating with the Pakistan Telecommunication Company

planned to install E-1(2 MB) lines for Internet communication. Till today this remains a dream for Internet users in Lahore. Majority of the Pakistani Internet Service Providers (ISPs) started with 64 Kbs.

We established Premium Hosting USA, and started providing Internet on dial-up services to US customers. Now we have reached every city of the USA and you can get Internet access to our network as we have our POP in each city. We have around 800 POPs in the United States as you have to have separate POP for every area code.

On the proposed IT infrastructure in Pakistan:

Currently Pakistani ISPs have narrow access to international lines. They are putting high number of customers on the small and narrow lines, which are resulting in time-to-time disconnections, slow data transmission and other such problems. We are going to offer free e-mail, free web hosting, free domain registration. Once we invest hosting servers then they would cost nothing. We would place maximum things on our website like real state data, job bank, on line shopping etc.

On free access to the Internet:

Free Internet access is being provided in the United States and some of the other countries because the bandwidth is very cheap there. In the USA, you can have T-1 at as low as 300 dollars while for the same capacity in Pakistan you have to pay 35,000 dollars. Here we are starting with 6 MB capacity. We have planned to purchase half circuit from PTCL and half circuit from the US carriers.

On operations in Pakistan:

We are starting from Lahore as it

market. Islamabad is a smaller market but with quality conscious customers. Lahore's set up would be operative by the month of Ramadan. We would start in Karachi with 6,000 ports and 200 PRIs by next month. The whole system would be expanded to 15 different cities of the country by June 2001.

On investment opportunities:

America Online and other such ISPs are all earning from Internet Related Business instead of merely tariffs of Internet services. Speaking about overall volume of the project, he said that we have already registered our company under the name of Go.net.pk which would be a subsidiary of the Premium Hosting Inc. USA. We are investing 10 million dollars initially out of which 1.2 million dollars would be invested in Lahore.

On future plans:

Our company is an e-commerce solution provider in the USA. We want to expand the same facility in Pakistan for trading and other business related people. Computer literate youth are becoming desperate with every passing day. We are planning to employ this youth for the development of e-commerce in the country. We will place their resumes on the website and then

offer the recruitment services to US companies. It would decrease the head hunting cost of those companies, while the Pakistani youth would able to get the job.

Then we have a plan to hold a conference of the leading Pakistani manufacturers. We would invite students there to share our concept with them.

What the Pakistani manufacturers would have to do, is to hire local students who would operate their international online market activity. We would provide full assistance to them for displaying their goods on a website. I think, a businessman should afford Rs 10,000 per month, if he can net a good order from the international market.

We also want to introduce wireless Internet in Pakistan. Our one tower will cover 25 km radius. Initially, we would install one tower in Lahore then four more would be added to cover the whole of Lahore. We would charge Rs 10,000 for the enabling card of the wireless data transmission. Moreover, the cost of the card would be refundable. Data transmission speed through the wireless card would be unlimited.

Our company has entered into negotiations for bringing in used Lap-top computers, which would b provided to the students on credit and per month instalments with th help of a leasing company. This would revolutionise Internet use in Pakista while facilitating students in their studi These computers wou cost not more than Rs 15,000 and even that instalments.