

# Ian Charles Dench

## CEO

### Ooredoo Oman



**DOB:** April 22, 1965

**Marital status:** Married, has three children

**Education:**  
FCIM Chartered Marketer, Chartered Institute of Marketing, UK

1999 - MBA, Cass Business School, UK

**Spoken Languages:** English

**Interests & Hobbies:** Fitness, Golf

**Sector:** Real Estate

**Ownership:** Private

**Established in:** 2004

Starting at a young age and building almost 40 years of experience in the telecommunications sector, Ian Dench has played a series of key leadership roles in prominent companies in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, a career which ultimately led him to Oman.

Born in the UK, he started his career at British Telecom at the tender age of 16 as a technician apprentice. He then worked his way through almost every department of the company, from customer service to PR, marketing and communications, product management, mergers and acquisitions, and more. Prior to joining Ooredoo, he was head of sales and marketing at Batelco. He also held various senior leadership positions with O2 and British Telecom.

While Mr. Dench became the CEO of Ooredoo Oman in 2017, he first joined the Ooredoo Group in Qatar and served in various management positions there since 2006. Ooredoo is an international telecommunications company based in Doha, with operations across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Those operations include fixed and mobile networks (including 4G, and very soon, 5G), data centers, and digital platforms that support Ooredoo's 130 million customers globally, of which about three million are in Oman. Despite those physical assets and the telecom provider's traditional role as a utility that enables making phone calls, Ooredoo sees its core value proposition as something much deeper: enriching people's digital lives. And in order to be able to deliver on that proposition, the company started going through its own digitalization process in 2017. Business leaders around the world see digital transformation as an imperative when it comes to building and maintaining market share in a technology-driven world.

The shift has meant Ooredoo has also changed the ways it works internally, but Mr. Dench is pleased to see that employees are fully on board with the new vision. Reorganizing the entire company in order to improve efficiency and to approach tasks in a more agile way, people from different departments now come together and co-create new products and

services, saving a significant amount of time. Also, connecting directly to customers through digital platforms and getting their feedback in real time makes it easier for the team to adjust to market requirements and constantly improve its products.

Based on its achievements, Ooredoo Oman has won recognition from the industry with digital transformation awards from both Microsoft and Global Business Outlook. One recent innovation that Mr. Dench considers especially interesting is a new chat bot using artificial intelligence that chats with customers via text and answers their questions. It's designed to gradually learn and become better at its job the more it practices, conversing with customers in Arabic as well as in English. "Now, we get 6,000 interactions per day, and 3,000 are answered by the chat bot," says Mr. Dench. This way, a significant amount of employees' time is freed up so they can work on other things, like tele-sales, up-selling, cross-selling, or explaining new services to customers. Ultimately, the company plans to become fully digital by mid-2020, so its customers will be able to do everything online-purchase products, change their plan, chat to customer service, etc. The new Ooredoo app has already been downloaded by 1 million customers and it has over 650,000 active users.

Ooredoo Oman offers mobile, as well as fixed plans, for individual customers and businesses, and it has also launched Ooredoo TV. The company has experienced the biggest growth recently in the prepaid mobile market, while the postpaid market is still developing. As Mr. Dench sees it, there are many opportunities in home broadband connectivity, mostly because in Oman, the number of households with home broadband is still quite low.

Looking ahead, Mr. Dench discloses that Ooredoo Oman is preparing to launch its 5G network in 2020, but not before building a solid commercial proposition. On the B2B side, the company has established a subsidiary called Data2Cloud which provides cloud data storage and hosting services. There are a growing number of opportunities in this space, as businesses need to store more and more data in a safe way in order to protect it from cyber security attacks. Ooredoo is also active in providing Internet of Things (IoT) solutions, providing connected water meters, for example, which are much needed due to the geography of Oman. But these are only a few of the innovative new projects that the company is involved in, with its CEO promising even more exciting initiatives in the pipeline.

#### My advice to youth:

Be entrepreneurial, start a business, and look for opportunities whether in Oman or outside.

#### My message about Oman:

Oman is a peaceful country with a great cultural heritage. It is set to become an interesting place for investment in the future.



Looking at the broader economic environment, Ian Dench believes that Oman is making good progress on its way to diversification. He is proud to highlight that among the approximately 1,000 employees working at Ooredoo Oman, 92 percent are Omani, which is very much in line with the country's vision and goals for the Omanization of the workforce.

Aside from its focus on technology and innovation, Ooredoo is also running two CSR initiatives called Springboard and Spring Forward, which aim to support young digital entrepreneurs in reaching their full potential by educating them, helping them develop the necessary skills, and encouraging them to implement their ideas. The Springboard program is only for women, whereas the Spring Forward program is for both men and women. In Mr. Dench's opinion, starting a digital business is now easier than ever, and the possibilities are endless due to the Internet and digital technology. He believes strongly that jobs in the future will look very different than they do today, and that the next generation must be well prepared for the new environment.

With high speed connectivity needed to underpin the ongoing digital transformation of businesses in Oman, the future looks very exciting for Ooredoo as well—with Ian Dench certain to play a key role in the company's ongoing evolution.

#### Affiliations, Awards & Honors

Top 4th CEO in the Telecoms, Tech, and Media category, GCC Top 100 CEO Awards 2019