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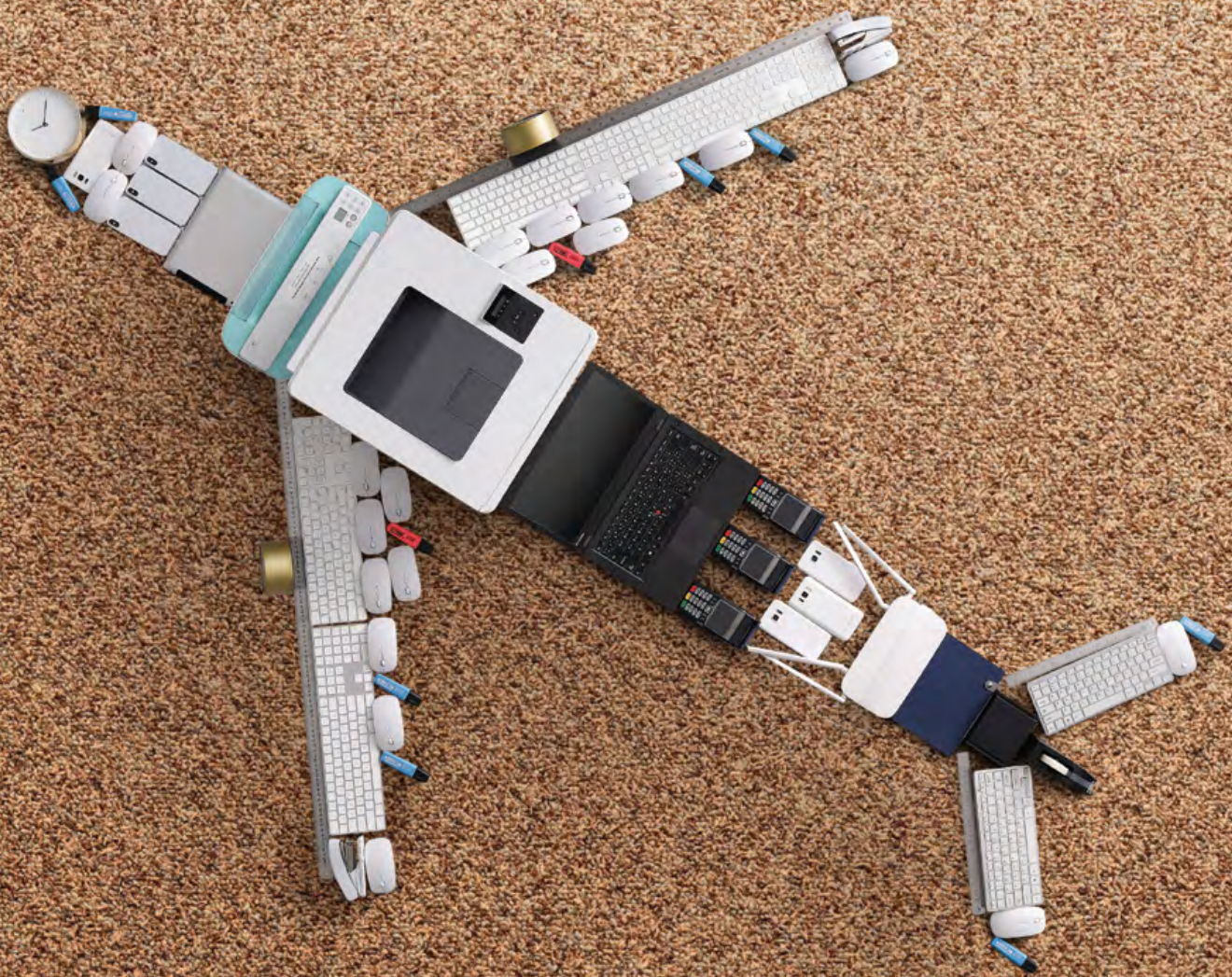

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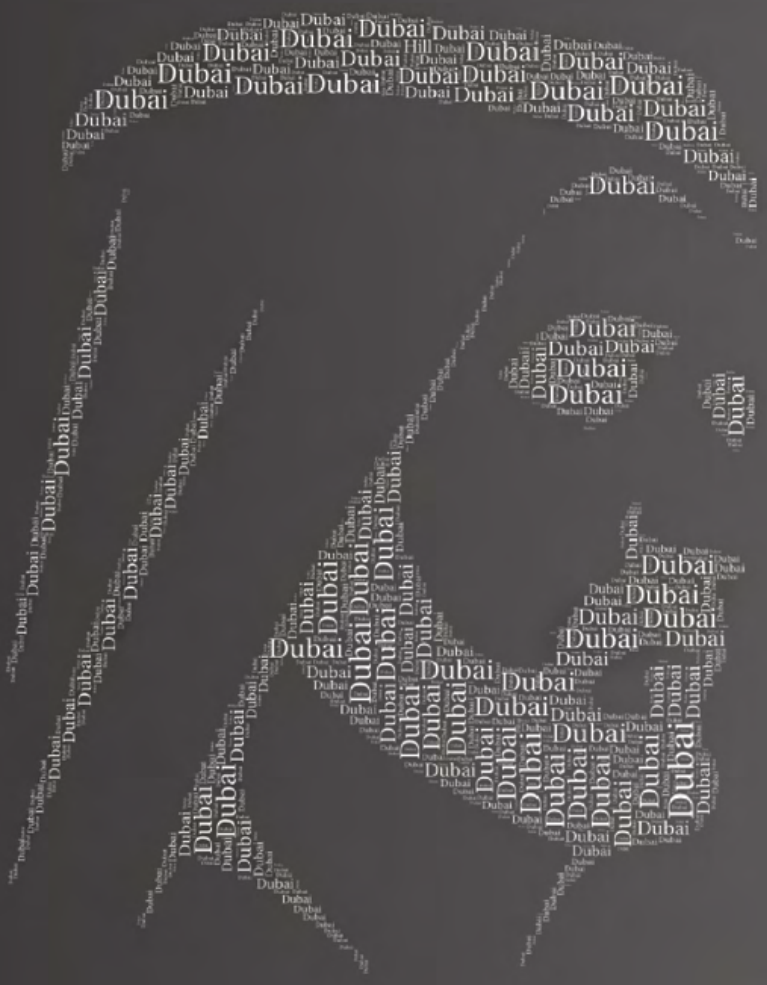

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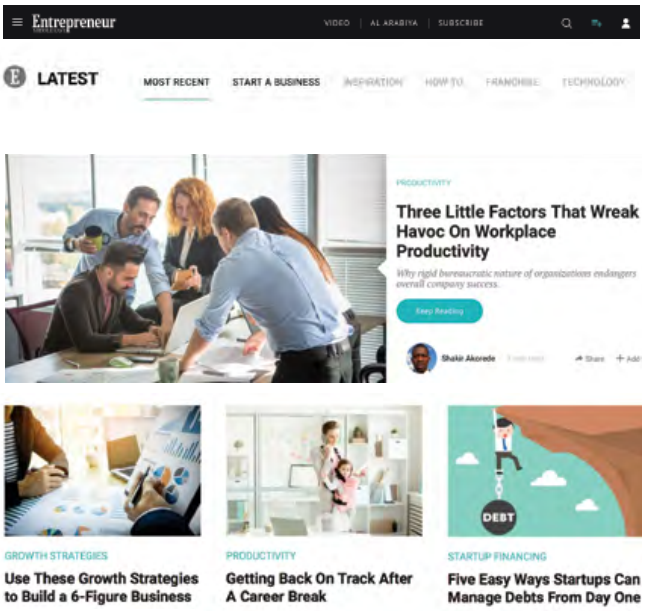

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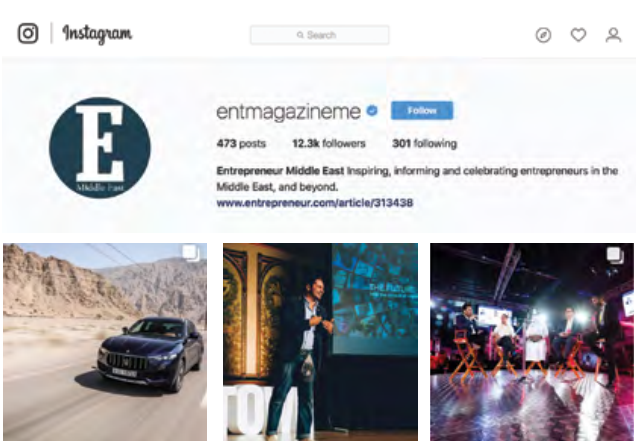

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Perception is everything

When disaster strikes (hard)

For those of you who go through every line in a business contract, the *force majeure* clause that's often included as standard in such documents shouldn't be hard to miss: it is the provision that exempts the contracting parties from fulfilling their respective obligations due to circumstances that are beyond their reasonable control- these can range from unexpected natural disasters to unanticipated governmental directives that cripple or destroy the business activity that was agreed upon. Now, there are, of course, actual events in the world that fit the literal meaning of *force majeure* (which is Latin for "a superior force") and occur –thankfully- not on a regular basis.

But if one were to consider only the devastating effects these kinds of unforeseen events have on people and businesses, then I'm going to wager that it wouldn't be so hard to find parallels of that happening around us on a day-to-day basis. For instance, there are those who get suddenly laid off from jobs they've had (and, by all accounts, performed well in) for quite a while. Regardless of the reasons for their dismissal, it's always disconcerting to see how such people's lives are thrown into complete disarray owing to reasons that they often simply don't understand or comprehend. In the world of entrepreneurship, similar scenarios can be seen to arise rather regularly. It could be the last-minute loss of a deal on which a startup was pinning all of its hopes on owing to someone else's stronger clout (*wasta*, as the Arab world would call it), or the crumbling of a what was once a perfect relationship between co-founders at an enterprise.

In the past month, I've been personally witness to quite a few of these kind of unexpected situations: there was a friend who got abruptly fired from an enterprise he had been working for about a decade, the break-up of a couple that literally no one in their social circle saw coming, and an entrepreneurial venture, which was once a business to watch out for, now suddenly finding itself in the doldrums, thanks to a slew of bad decisions. It is, of course, distressing to see such things happen to people you actually know- but the way some of them react to such curveballs can be rather instructive and inspirational as well. When faced with such situations, one should be allowed (heck, encouraged even) to buckle down and grieve for what has been lost, but wallowing in self-pity shouldn't be the only order of the day, there also has to be a game plan to get back up after a fall.

As debilitating as such occurrences may seem, it is in getting past

them that will define us- not these failures themselves. Indeed, we at *Entrepreneur Middle East* have often seen that the toughest hurdles that happen along an entrepreneur's lifecycle are what contribute to their greatest strengths and successes in the long-term. And that's something all of us should take to heart when faced with our own versions of *force majeure* events: these don't have to be the end- perhaps it's just time for a new beginning.

Aby Sam Thomas
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Middle East luxury retailer Chalhoub Group invites tech entrepreneurs and startups for its new retail accelerator

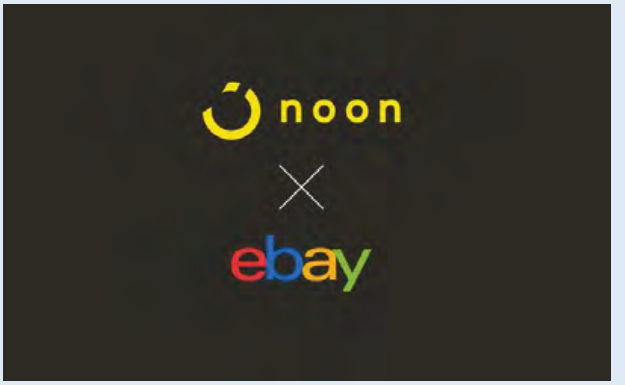
Patrick Chalhoub, Co-CEO, Chalhoub Group

MENA entrepreneurs, if you are working on a solution that has the potential to shake up the retail sector, this new challenge is sure to help you. Chalhoub Group, a Middle East luxury retailer, is looking for tech startups with ready to deploy products addressing a set of retail challenges through their new Greenhouse Accelerator. Referring to their initiative as "not a typical startup accelerator," Chalhoub Group notes on the official website that the "equity-free program will accelerate the implementation of the right solutions" at the heart of its own company. Essentially, the ideas emerging out of the program stand a chance to carry out pilots and case studies with brands from Chalhoub Group, and get an opportunity to deploy their solutions at the MENA retail major.

In the process, the entrepreneurs/teams will also get to work closely with and gain mentorship from retail and digital experts. Chalhoub Group's Head of Customer Experience and Marketing, Grégoire Charpe-Civatte, Chief Transformation Officer, Rania Masri, and Head of Greenhouse Accelerator/Innovation Lab, Dina Sidani, are a few of the mentors who are set to be involved in the process. "As a leading retailer of luxury in the Middle East, we've decided to transform," said Patrick Chalhoub, Co-CEO, Chalhoub Group, announcing the initiative on the website. "Our north star vision is to become a hybrid retailer delivering luxury experiences to the fingertips of our customers everywhere. This is a unique opportunity for tech companies and startups from all over the world to implement and test their solution with the largest fashion group in the Middle East."

"We are looking to collaborate with you with the goal of being your customer or licensing your technology," he adds. "We may also invest in you at later stages," reads the information on the equity-free program, taking place from September to December 2018 in Dubai, UAE, and accompanied with a grant of US$20,000, and access to a co-working space. Some of the retail challenges that the accelerator is looking to tackle relates to creating a personalized in-store experience, optimizing operations, omni-channel retail, and human capital allocation in the sector. Applications for Chalhoub Group's Greenhouse Retail Accelerator are open until July 10.

www.chalhoubgreenhouse.com



NOON ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP WITH EBAY

"Our partnership with eBay opens a whole new world of shopping experience," says founder Mohamed Alabbar

Mohamed Alabbar

The Mohamed Alabbar-founded e-commerce platform noon has inked a partnership with the California-based multinational eBay, which will see the former's customers in the Middle East be able to buy products from the latter's global marketplace.

"noon is connecting the region with the global e-commerce market through our partnership with eBay," said Alabbar, in a statement. "With this, we are offering our customers access to products that are not otherwise readily available in the region. As a brand from the region, we listen to our customers and tailor the online retail experience to suit their needs."

The partnership will see noon fulfil all eBay orders made on noon, and deliver it directly to the customers' doorstep. According to a release, noon and eBay will also "explore joint opportunities in marketing, know-how and best practices sharing to leverage the strong growth of online shopping in the region."

"Our partnership with eBay opens a whole new world of shopping experience," Alabbar added. "E-commerce continuously evolves, and this partnership guarantees noon stays on top of the trends and consumer preferences."

noon's partnership with eBay follows fellow regional e-commerce venture Souq's announcement in December 2017, which saw the enterprise, thanks to its acquisition by Amazon earlier that same year, offer its customers in the region the opportunity to shop over million products on Amazon.

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IMPACT AT SCALE

TARIQ CHAUHAN

THE **GROUP CEO OF EFS** FACILITIES SERVICES GROUP REVEALS HIS VISION TO BUILD A US$1 BILLION ORGANIZATION

by TAMARA PUPIC

In 2009, Tariq Chauhan, the newly-appointed CEO of EFS Facilities Services Group (EFS) at the time, was thinking big, despite personally recovering from a few scars of the 2008 global financial crisis. EFS was well-positioned in the integrated facilities management services sector, but Chauhan was about to unleash a series of shrewd moves. "I felt that to have the critical mass and to be large was no more an option, but a necessity," he says. "There was no room for me to remain in the small to medium space -to be a US$100 million company- we had to have the critical mass, because of the challenges that the business was facing." At the time (2010), EFS had 2,000 people on the books, enjoyed 76% of contract retention, and 21% revenue growth. However, Chauhan's vision was only beginning to take shape.

Today, EFS is a regional leader in delivering integrated facilities management services with its network of 26 operating companies in 21 countries across the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Turkey. With 97% client retention rate, it enjoyed an AED3.5 billion contract backlog, 26% revenue growth, and 7% profit increase in the last year alone. Interestingly, that is the same year which the company's media pack describes as a period of challenges and introspection, since EFS experienced a 18.76% drop in gross margins driven by difficult market conditions, economic slowdown, and emerging competition. Two interesting points are to be noted here: firstly, Chauhan does not shy away from stating the unpleasant facts, and secondly, the market difficulties haven't dramatically affected his plans, as EFS has already achieved the status of a large company. However, being a large business is no longer enough for Chauhan. "We have definitely established ourselves amongst the large, but this large is still far from where I want to be," he says. "To be successful and sustainable in the long-run, we need a quantum leap in our approach, and that is exactly what we have done this year. Besides some obstacles, we have enjoyed a 90% growth this year. We've been growing by 25%, and by any global standard, that is considered extraordinary. There has been a lot of work in progress to develop our capabilities to take on mega projects, and that is what has led us to this 90% growth. Three core mega projects have come our way. In the past, we did have some misses, but eventually everything happens for a reason." ›››

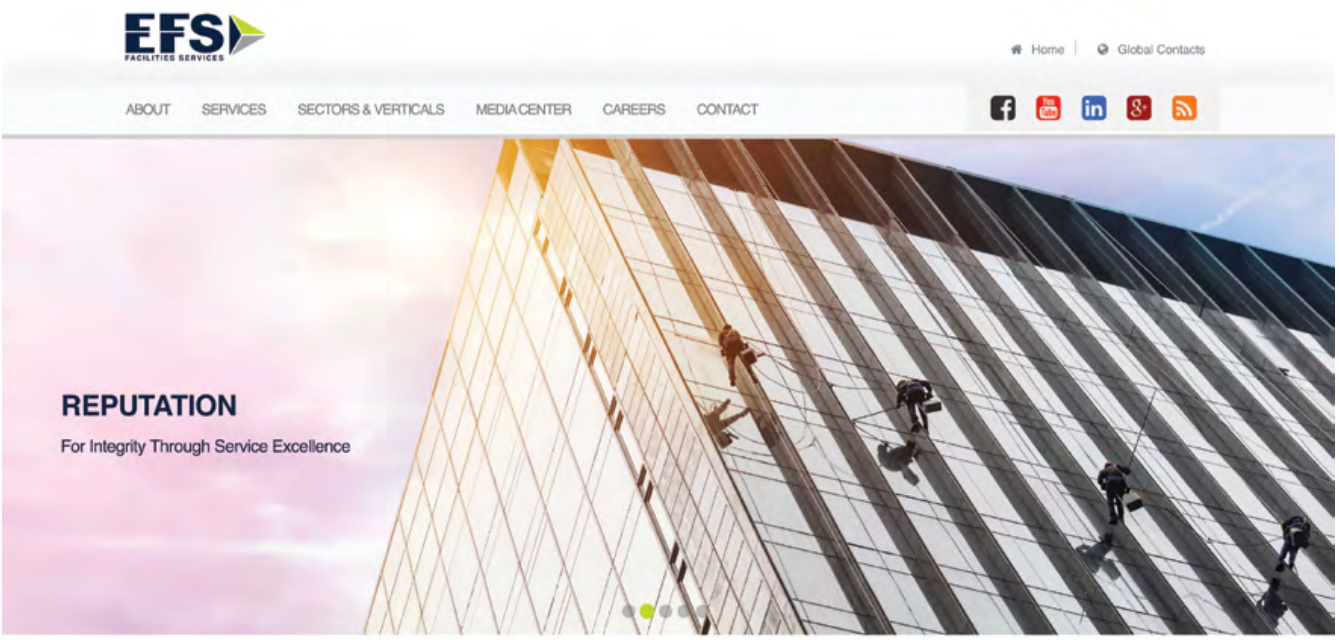
"THERE IS A LOT OF INDIVIDUALISM THAT COMES IN WHEN ORGANIZATIONS ARE UNDERGOING TRANSFORMATION."

The reason for the current dissatisfaction is in the details of Chauhan's grand plan which is only now being fully revealed- it includes spurring social change by empowering individuals to pursue their own potential. To achieve that, his eyes are set on building a $1 billion organization. "I seek socialism in capitalism," he says. "As a $1 billion organization, my business would employ about 100,000 people. These people and their families would enable me to make an impact on a larger percentage of the population. If you can create your good in others' good, how better can it be?" His belief is strongly rooted in the company's unique ability to influence the blue-collar worker segment, which forms the majority of EFS' 15,000-strong workforce. "I believe that CSR is embedded in this role, because of the structure of the business itself- there is a large section of people who are at the lowest part of the self-actualization curve," Chauhan explains. "So, with the success of this organization, we are doing better for everyone, and mostly for this section of people. When I talk to an average cleaner, there are two things in life that he wants to have- to make sure to send money to his family, and to own a house of his own. Furthermore, 90% of people who earn AED500 per month have dreams to finance their sister's marriage ceremony, to have their own house, and then to get married. When employing people, how often do managers discuss these things? But here, we try to do that."

In 2012, EFS adopted "People, Passion, Precision" as its mantra, not just as a marketing slogan, but as a fundamental part of its internal purpose. Having aligned his employees towards achieving one goal, Chauhan then focused on building organizational systems and structures. "You can pick and choose the right people but for them to flourish you need to create the right ecosystem," he adds.

"I REALIZED THAT I NEEDED TO BE A PART OF A LARGER BUSINESS, WHICH IS IN A SUNRISE INDUSTRY, SO I DECIDED TO LEVERAGE MY EXPERIENCE AND JOIN EFS."

"Every organization must have the right structure. Then, you need to focus on building systems, technology and processes in order to achieve success. These are fundamental basics. Global knowledge, regional presence, and local experience have become pillars of our organization. Then I again ask people where they can find themselves in this." In helping others, Chauhan is firm to point out those who have helped him along the way too- from a chance encounter with the Chairman of EFS in a hotel bar in Dubai nearly a decade ago, when he got the offer to take on the challenge of transforming the company, to his shareholders, clients, and employees today. "Your choices in life come from your personal conviction, which does not only come through your own stubbornness, but through others believing in you and letting you succeed and collaborating with you," he says. "That eventually leads to the formation of your conviction. Success is not an individual



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story, but a mix of many collaborative approaches coming from different people- your colleagues, your clients, your shareholders, and so on. You need multiple endorsements to be successful, and it does not necessarily mean money. It includes the impact you create, and the others buying into it, which eventually evolves into a pyramid. CEOs are the agents of the company's success, and they cannot put themselves ahead of the company. It is the institution that matters. Many have done that, trying to create their personal brand, without realizing that their personal brand's sustainability lies in the overall sustainability of the company's brand. CEOs lead companies, but in this pursuit, they must not lose the balance. The horse must not become the brand. I am being careful, because there is a lot of individualism that comes in when organizations are undergoing transformation."

Today, EFS' goal is to continue integrating automation, technology, and processes in order to create an integrated management system- the last part of Chauhan's machine for making a quantum leap. This was preceded by the phase of stabilizing the business (2010-2012), and then transforming it (2012-2016). "In the transformation stage, we started expand our service lines and our geographical presence, changing our client mix, and many other things, which have taken the organization to the next level," he says. "In achieving this, we have carefully chosen clients who haven't kept us in the cycle of payments, which is usual in this part of the world, but it has been maximum 60 days. That has helped us to keep reinvesting in our business. Also, our shareholders have been very strategic in their approach. They weren't looking for any cash dividends or cash payouts, but they wanted us to reinvest in the business. In addition, we've built strong relationships with the banks to support our usual working capital requirements. Business without the alignment of bottom line and cash flows can never be a sustainable business. One of my principles has always been that three alignments are important. Firstly, zero tolerance for top line growth without cash flow sustainability. Secondly, a consistent year-on-year growth. Consistency is critical to any sustainability. Lastly, it's about alignments of all stakeholders- employees, clients, suppliers, and shareholders. They all have to have a common vision. It is important for a CEO to be trusted by employees and respected by clients."

However, over the last two years, the growth pace hasn't been as strong as expected. "The facilities management is not a capital intensive business; however, it does require investments in the times of austerity when you are playing on low margins, meaning in times when you don't have enough profit

Tariq Chauhan, Group CEO, EFS

"YOU NEED MULTIPLE ENDORSEMENTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL, AND IT DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN MONEY. IT INCLUDES THE IMPACT YOU CREATE, AND THE OTHERS BUYING INTO IT, WHICH EVENTUALLY EVOLVES INTO A PYRAMID."

generated internally to support developmental projects," Chauhan says. "This business is now going through a rapid paradigm shift, from a conventional to a digital model, and, for me, digital is again about a mindset change. I am not overwhelmed by this, although the price of our success is the extraordinary pressure that the core team has had to take on, and the pressure on me to keep those members engaged. But, if I was not personally convinced and able to take the risk, I wouldn't have reached this stage."

Therefore, the company is still on its growth trajectory, and Chauhan exhibits nothing but patience and conviction. This wisdom, as in many other cases, comes from experience. Chauhan's career started in banking in 1987 in Oman, and saw him working for three different banks and operating in 11 different countries. He moved to the UAE in 1995 to start managing a high-network investment portfolio for Elfina Banking & Financial Investments Co., which would eventually become his own company. With the wisdom of hindsight, he describes it as a challenging period, but it did not prevent him from making further entrepreneurial attempts. Later, he started up other businesses, including KOL Corporation, an IT company providing e-business integration, supply chain and real estate solutions. "Unfortunately, the 2007/2008 [period] shook me completely, and I was near financial collapse," he says. ›››

EFS at the IFMA event, April 2018

"IF I WAS NOT PERSONALLY CONVINCED AND ABLE TO TAKE THE RISK, I WOULDN'T HAVE REACHED THIS STAGE."

"Then I decided that I had to focus on capital, and if I had to do that, I needed partners. I needed to work with people, not by myself. So, having gone through those previous experiences, and having realized that the capital requirement was critical for building a sustainable business, I knew that chasing $1 billion on my own was not feasible against the backdrop of one of the biggest recessions in the past 75 years. I realized that I needed to be a part of a larger business, which is in a sunrise industry, so I decided to leverage my experience and join EFS."

In less than a decade Chauhan has grown the company's portfolio to include more than 300 governmental and international organizations, delivering over 75 service lines across 15 business verticals. In doing so, however, the emphasis was on building solid foundations and defenses from any future market downturn. "We diversified our operations," he says. "More than 10% of our businesses must not be in one single country. No single contract should be larger than 10% of our business. We have also brought diversity in terms of ethnicity of employees as well. That helped us to be sustainable

Tariq Chauhan, Group CEO, EFS

"WE HAVE ENJOYED A 90% GROWTH THIS YEAR. WE'VE BEEN GROWING BY 25%, AND BY ANY GLOBAL STANDARD, THAT IS CONSIDERED EXTRAORDINARY."

long-term and against market dynamics. I'm not growing in all countries; in some, I'm trying to consolidate, for example. You should keep your company above markets. Preparing the core of your organization for tough times, being able to take shocks, to mitigate risks, and to preserve a certain level of sustainability starts with doing that to yourself first. That is exactly what I did from 2012 to 2016."

Having witnessed and successfully navigated two economic slowdowns, Chauhan ends our conversation by advising other entrepreneurs to remain calm, focused, and patient. "In 2008, we weren't prepared, and it was a reminder for people to wake up," he concludes. "So, when the recent recession came to be, fortunately, we were well informed, we had the past to remind us, and that helped us prepare. Recessions are a part of life, and serve for companies to build their own character, the overall organizational bloodstream. So, markets are affected by it, but companies should not be."

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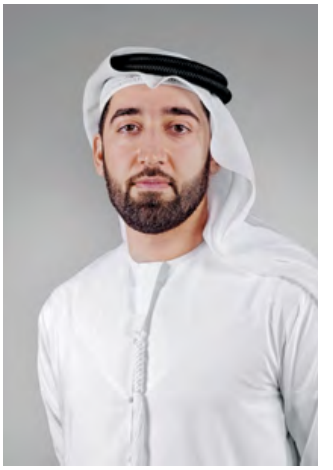


Abdulaziz Al Jaziri, Deputy CEO, Dubai Future Foundation

Designs on the future

AREA 2071

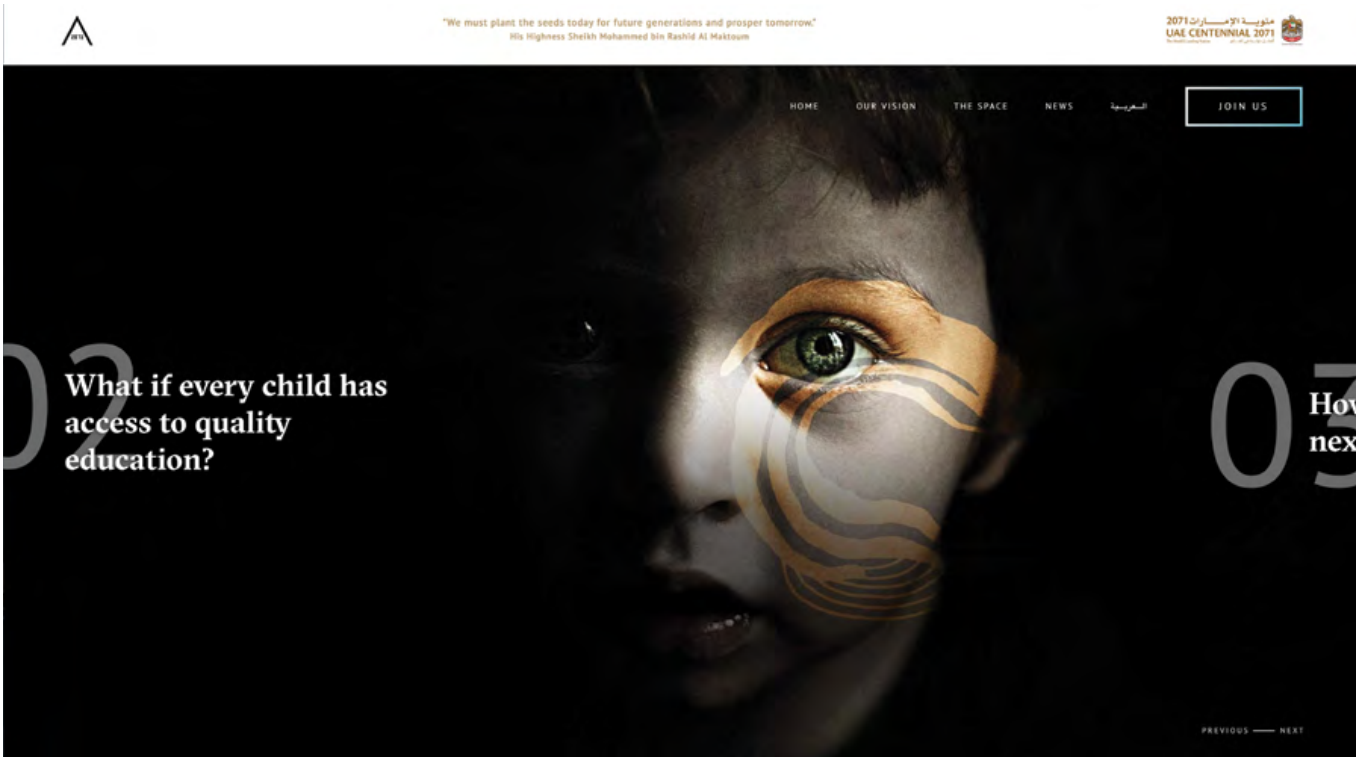
Dubai Future Foundation Deputy CEO **Abdulaziz Al Jaziri** explains the vision for the path-breaking initiative launched by Dubai and the UAE **by ABY SAM THOMAS**

As someone who has been involved with Area 2071 ever since it was first announced in 2017, Dubai Future Foundation Deputy CEO Abdulaziz Al Jaziri remembers a meeting with a global consulting firm during the initiative's early days, where he and his team presented its aim to be an ecosystem to "design the future." In response, the consultants asked for a benchmark on which Area 2071 was being modeled on, and Al Jaziri and his team replied that, well, there hadn't been anything like this done *ever* before in the world.

Now, this little anecdote should, I feel, serve well as an indication of the pioneering nature of this particular initiative being led by Dubai and the UAE, and why, by virtue of this factor alone, it can be hard for many among us to understand what Area 2071 is all about. With this in mind, it perhaps makes sense to go back to the origins of this initiative, which Al Jaziri says were through a speech delivered by H.H. Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince, and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, at the conclusion of the Mohamed bin Zayed Majlis for Future Generations in early 2017. At the event, which had about 3,000 Emirati youth in attendance, Sheikh Mohamed noted how surveys had revealed that 70% of Arab youth wanted to come and live in the UAE. "The reason is that 47 or 50 years ago, Allah blessed us with a wise leadership that laid the sound foundation and infrastructure for the launch of nation-building and development. Now, we breathe fresh air, and live a happy life. Yet, we have to make further efforts, and develop a long-term vision, and plan in a sound way to reach the set goals, and enable the coming generation to live happily and safely just like you do." It was this idea that provided the basis for the UAE Centennial 2071 project, which H.H. Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai, launched in March 2017 as a five-decade government plan that aims to make the UAE, by the time of the 100th anniversary of its founding in 1971, "the world's leading nation."

This is, of course, a deceptively simple premise, but, as an ambitious plan that's focused on setting up future generations of the UAE with continued success and prosperity, its visionary aspect cannot be denied. But how can this actually be realized? "It's not just about being the best at things," Al Jaziri replies. "We truly believe that you, being the leading nation in the world, means that you have the most outsized contribution to humanity." And it is to realize this grand dream that Area 2071 has come into being- it is, as its official website declares, "a physical manifestation of this vision, with the sole purpose of creating positive global impact." In terms of its actual location, Area 2071 is located at Emirates Towers in Dubai, with the first

IMAGE CREDIT AREA 2071 | WWW.AREA2071.AE



"WHAT AREA 2071 IS TRYING TO BUILD IS AN ECOSYSTEM THAT CHANGES WITH TIME, BUT AN ECOSYSTEM THAT'S FOCUSED ON SOLVING UNIVERSAL CHALLENGES."

phase of the space having been officially inaugurated by Sheikh Mohammad in May this year. But describing what the space actually is remains a fairly difficult task, according to Al Jaziri. "It's not a startup ecosystem," he says. "It's not an incubator. It's not an accelerator… It's not [just] a government play. It's much more than that." Indeed, having had this conversation with Al Jaziri, I have now come to the conclusion that Area 2071 is not just one of those things he has listed- it's better described as a combination of all those things, and much, much more.

Area 2071 wants to bring together the government, private sector, youth, academia, entrepreneurs, and startups to work on how the world should be in the future. This community is thus tasked with thinking up solutions to some of the world's most pressing questions and challenges- and this will also involve an innovative reimagining of the various sectors that will drive the future, such as education, transport, healthcare, etc. "What Area 2071 is trying to build is an ecosystem that changes with time, but an ecosystem that's focused on solving universal challenges," Al Jaziri says. This, in turn, should explain why Area 2071 has tied up with both local and international partners to help facilitate this redesign of the world as we know it- this list of allies includes the United Nations, IBM, Proctor & Gamble, SAP, Emirates, Ernst & Young, Pfizer, Wamda Capital, GEMS Education, and other prominent entities. Its physical location at Emirates Towers is also especially significant- the office tower today plays host to everything from the Office of the Prime Minister of the UAE, to the Dubai Future Accelerators, to the Youth Hub, and much, much more. Now, all of these different entities at Area 2071 are here to reimagine either themselves or their respective industries- but that doesn't mean they are going to be working in isolation either.

Under the umbrella of Area 2071, the common location at the Emirates Towers Boulevard means that all of the different players housed there will now be walking distance away from each other, which will allow for collisions between the entities to happen –sometimes in a literal sense- that will ›››

Area 2071

"IF YOU ABIDE BY THE PRINCIPLES OF THIS SPACE, OF YOU BEING OPEN TO CHANGE, OF YOU BEING OPEN TO WORKING WITH THIS ECOSYSTEM, THEN, SURE, THERE'S A SPACE FOR YOU."

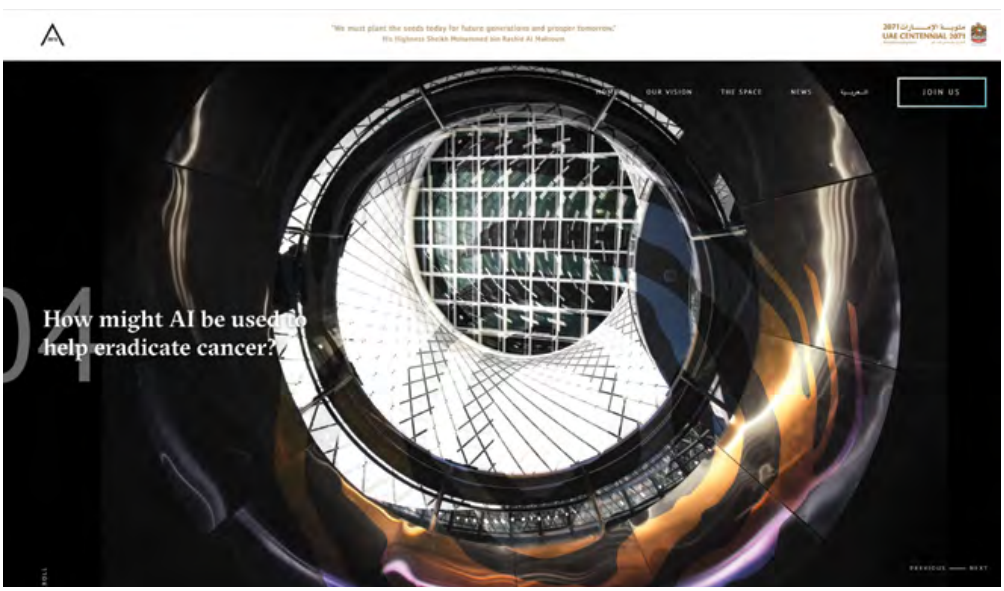
IMAGE CREDIT AREA 2071 | WWW.AREA2071.AE

enable the collaborative aspect envisioned for this space. "So, if a startup [at Area 2071] needs to work with a government entity, or if it needs to work with a private sector entity, they can just walk towards them," Al Jaziri notes. "What I really love about this -and I hear it from our partners; I don't hear it from my team- is [hearing] that GEMS going to SAP, or Pfizer, or Ernst & Young, and saying how can we work collaboratively." Indeed, Area 2071 encourages all of the entities it has onboard to interact with each other, learn from each other, and, indeed, work with each other. The openness of the space is rather forthcoming, and while one may assume it to be a detractor in terms of interest, the fact that Area 207 is getting pretty crowded should serve as an indication of its attractiveness as a concept. "After we launched Area 2071, we haven't done any business development," Al Jaziri says. "All of these partners have been flooding in, coming to us, to talk to us, and seeing how they can work with us. And we always say, if you abide by the principles of this space, of you being open to change, of you being open to working with this ecosystem, then, sure, there's a space for you. If you just want to close doors, and work by yourself, this is not the space for you. If you are open to working with everyone in this ecosystem, then this is home."

At this point, I'm going to wager that for most of us, the fact that Area 2071 is focused on a future that is, to put it quite simply, so far ahead in time, can be a reason for not being able to comprehend it. Al Jaziri agrees with this notion, but he also notes that it is the far-reaching aspect of Area 2071 that makes it such a landmark initiative. The north star, Al Jaziri explains, is the UAE's vision to be the leading nation of the world by 2071- and Area 2071 is simply bringing together the people and the companies needed to realize this future. "They're not looking at how much is this going to cost us, how much is it going to bring us, what's the return on investment," AL Jaziri says. "I think everyone here believes in that vision of His Highness that you need to come together to redesign the future, and the fruits of your labor are going to come to life then." And while communicating what Area 2071 is may seem like a challenge now, Al Jaziri is firm in his belief that when we see actual results and outcomes come out of this space a few months down the line, its significance will be better ascertained then. After all, the efforts in the reimagination of existing entities and sectors have already begun, and so have the creative collaborations that Al Jaziri and his team hoped for. "I think at the beginning, we were anxious about the space, how would people understand and perceive it, and the support we're going to get," Al Jaziri remembers. "But we got all that and beyond; things that have been happening have been enormously successful. And just saying we're running out of space -I mean, we can actually pick and choose our partners, depending on what our needs are- means success for us. Now, we're at a stage where we actually know the vision- I think, [earlier,] it was a bit more of walking through a foggy space of how this is going to come to life. Now, everything's clear; our mandate is clear- our vision is clear for the future."■

Area 2071

AREA 2071 WANTS TO BRING TOGETHER THE GOVERNMENT, PRIVATE SECTOR, YOUTH, ACADEMIA, ENTREPRENEURS, AND STARTUPS TO WORK ON HOW THE WORLD SHOULD BE IN THE FUTURE.



THE FUTURE OF CITIES

TAPPING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF EXPONENTIAL TECHNOLOGIES

by DR. PETER H. DIAMANDIS

If you could build a city from the ground up using first principles, how would you do it? What would it look like?

By 2050, two-thirds of the population, more than six billion people, are expected to live in urbanized areas.

Exponential technologies will radically change the way we build and organize our cities in the future.

In this article, I will cover mass urbanization trends, building future cities, and exponential technology implications.

Considering the transformative power of exponential technologies, is it better to take a top-down approach when designing cities, or a bottom-up approach?

Let's dive in.

THE UN ESTIMATES THAT CONTINUING URBANIZATION AND POPULATION GROWTH WILL ADD 2.5 BILLION PEOPLE TO THE WORLD'S URBAN POPULATION BY 2050.

MASS URBANIZATION

Cities currently house over 50% of the world's population, and generate 80% of the world's GDP.

The UN estimates that continuing urbanization and population growth will add 2.5 billion people to the world's urban population by 2050, with nearly 90% of the increase concentrated in Asia and Africa.

While the city population is growing dramatically, the footprint of the city (the number of square kilometers it covers) will grow at a faster rate, ultimately causing the city densities (people per square kilometer) to decline.

The expected increase in urban land during the first three decades of the 21st century will be greater than the cumulative urban expansion in all of human history.

This poses a unique challenge for sustainability endeavors, as low-density cities tend to produce higher carbon emissions than higher-density cities of a similar population size. By 2050, the UN projects that demand for water and energy will increase by 55%. By 2035, the demand for energy will increase by 33%.

As people migrate to cities, existing infrastructure will need to be improved, or we will face significant shortages.

Technology has the potential to dramatically reduce the downsides of urbanization.

With big data, ubiquitous sensors, computer intelligence, and transportation technology (autonomous cars, flying cars, Hyperloop, and so on), we can imagine central systems that are far more efficient and offer far greater performance than the ones around today.

BUILDING FUTURE CITIES

Four recent projects in this area have caught my eye:

1. SIDEWALK LABS

Sidewalk Labs is Alphabet's urban development organization that seeks to imagine what cities would look like if they were built "from the internet up."

In 2012, Sidewalk's subsidiary Intersection began converting old payphones into free, technologically advanced access points, complete with video call capability and screaming-fast Wi-Fi. Over the next several years, 7,500 "links" will be installed throughout New York City.

In October 2017, Sidewalk announced its plans to build a tech-centered neighborhood southeast of downtown Toronto called Quayside.

Waterfront Toronto, Sidewalk's partner in the project, said that the city will be "a testbed for emerging technologies, materials and processes that will address these challenges and advance solutions that can be replicated in cities worldwide."

2. BILL GATES & BELMONT PARTNERS

Bill Gates recently announced his commitment of US$80 million to build a "smart city" just outside of Phoenix, Arizona with the help of Belmont Partners, a real estate investing group.

In a press release, the company described the city as a "forward-thinking community with a communication and infrastructure spine that embraces cutting-edge technology, designed around high-speed digital networks, data centers, new manufacturing technologies and distribution models, autonomous vehicles and autonomous logistics hubs."

Unlike Sidewalk's project in Toronto, this city would literally be built from the ground up– currently, the 24,800-acre site is a patch of empty land in the desert.

Grady Gammage, a spokesperson for the Belmont Partners, argues that this fact gives the company a unique advantage: "Envisioning future infrastructure from scratch is far easier and more cost efficient than retrofitting an existing urban fabric."

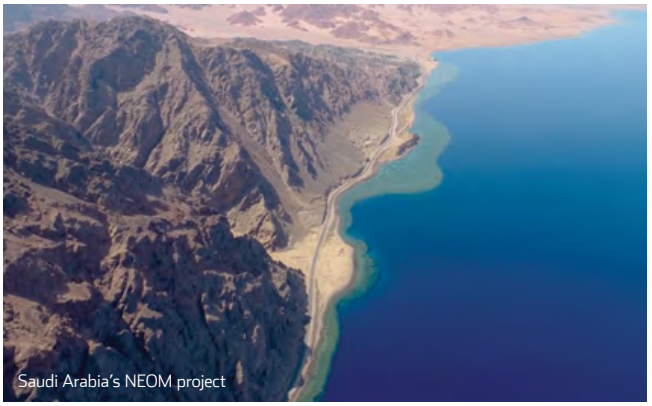
Eventually, the city (currently called Belmont) will boast 80,000 homes, 3,800 acres of industrial, office, and retail space, and 470 acres for public schools.

3. DUBAI'S "SMART DUBAI 2021" PLAN

Over the next decade, Dubai will look more and more like it came from a sci-fi movie.The city has laid out *2021 goals* that include:

› 3D-printing 25% of the city's buildings
› Making 25% of transportation trips automated and driverless
› Installing hundreds of artificial trees that use solar power to provide the city with free Wi-Fi, screens with mapping information, and ports for charging phones
› Integrating passenger drones that can carry individuals into their public transportation system
› Becoming one of the top 10 sustainable cities by 2020
› Becoming the happiest city on Earth

With this top-down approach, Dubai is setting a prime example for other governments around the world to follow. As other nations see Dubai's tourism and efficiency exponentially increase, I'm confident that other cities will follow suit. ›››


Saudi Arabia's NEOM project

And, as cities begin to intelligently incorporate big data into their infrastructure, they will become more efficient, sustainable and prosperous.

4. KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA'S NEOM PROJECT

Saudi Arabia is also redesigning the ideal future city with NEOM, a $500 billion independent economic zone currently under construction in a 26,500 sq. km. area in Tabuk.

This tech utopia, part of the Saudi Vision 2030 plan, will be powered solely by sustainable energy. Economic incentives in nine sectors aim to reduce regional dependence on oil, while an open source approach invites global data scientists and entrepreneurs to catalyze urban innovation.

Other goals in the NEOM road map:

› Automate and democratize access to government services
› Free highest-speed Internet and free online continuous education for residents
› Net-zero carbon footprint on all buildings
› A transportation system built in anticipation of future mobility platforms, with a layout equally suitable for pedestrians, cyclists and commuters

Saudi Arabia is already demonstrating how legacy regulations and linear systems must adapt to our exponential future.

In November 2017, Saudi Arabia granted the first citizenship to Sophia, a humanoid robot by Hanson Robotics. In June 2018, many Saudi women drove for the first time, as a decades-old ban was lifted by royal decree.

How will futuristic, open source, utopian cities like NEOM and Dubai interface with linear, slow-moving governments? How will the rise of such global innovation hotbeds rebalance economic activity and investments?

IMPLICATIONS AND BIG QUESTIONS

The implications of exponential technology on cities are vast. In our lifetimes, we will see exciting developments that blur the lines between science fiction and reality.

SAUDI ARABIA IS ALSO REDESIGNING THE IDEAL FUTURE CITY WITH NEOM, A $500 BILLION INDEPENDENT ECONOMIC ZONE CURRENTLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN A 26,500 SQ. KM. AREA IN TABUK.

If I was starting a city from scratch, here are the questions I would ask and think about. What about you?

› Would you begin with a Massively Transformative Purpose (MTP) for the city?
› Would you incorporate a city-wide Token/Coin and do an ICO for city services?
› Would you make human-driven cars illegal?
› Would all-autonomous cars allow the elimination of all parking lots, parking garages and street parking?
› Do you need traffic lights?
› Would you make the city and all transportation 100% renewable electric, with maximum solar penetration?
› Would you put a Hyperloop station at the center of the city plan?
› How would you leverage AR & VR for creating citizen avatars that potentially disrupt transportation even further?
› Would you require vertical farming to generate 50% of the food supply?
› Would you offer wireless gigabit services for free within the city footprint?
› How would you enable movement of human capital to encourage innovation?
› How would you deliver education? (Wait for my next article for my thoughts on this.)

We must ask all these questions as we adapt to large and fast-growing city populations.

Some cities, like the ones I've mentioned above, have a head start on this with their proxy MTP announcements. Will they attract better talent, or dominate future trade?

How will these implications change the geopolitics in an oil-based region like the Middle East?

To me, one thing is crystal clear: the future of cities is an exciting place for innovation and disruption. ■

This is the first in a four-part series by Peter H. Diamandis, M.D., co-founder and Executive Chairman at Singularity University, on how exponential technologies will create abundance and opportunities for entrepreneurs and governments alike. Dr. Diamandis will be in Dubai on Oct 29-30, 2018. Contact team@a360dubai.com with comments or feedback.

Dr. Peter H. Diamandis

Dr. Peter H. Diamandis is an international pioneer in the fields of innovation, incentive competitions, and commercial space. In 2014, he was named one of "The World's 50 Greatest Leaders" by *Fortune Magazine*. In the field of innovation, Diamandis is founder and Executive Chairman of the XPRIZE Foundation, best known for its $10 million Ansari XPRIZE for private spaceflight. Diamandis is also the co-founder and Vice-Chairman of Human Longevity Inc. (HLI), a genomics and cell therapy-based diagnostic and therapeutic company focused on extending the healthy human lifespan.
He is also the co-founder and Executive Chairman of Singularity University, a graduate-level Silicon Valley institution that studies exponentially growing technologies, their ability to transform industries and solve humanity's grand challenges. In the field of commercial space, Diamandis is co-founder/Co-Chairman of Planetary Resources, a company designing spacecraft to enable the detection and prospecting of asteroid for precious materials. He is also the co-founder of Space Adventures and Zero-Gravity Corporation. Diamandis is *The New York* Times bestselling author of *Abundance – The Future Is Better Than You Think* and *BOLD – How to go Big, Create Wealth & Impact the World.*
He earned an undergraduate degree in Molecular Genetics and a graduate degree in Aerospace Engineering from MIT, and received his M.D. from Harvard Medical School. www.diamandis.com

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BRING IN THE NEW BLOOD [THE HOW-TO]

THE LOWDOWN ON **HIRING FRESH GRADUATES** AT YOUR ENTERPRISE THIS SUMMER

by SUHAIL AL-MASRI

As you approach your hiring pipeline and you sum up your needs for new talent to be added to your workplace, consider the abundant resource that is available more and more every summer: fresh graduates. Although this group of job seekers is well-educated, is highly eager to establish their career, and is aggressively competing in the market, some companies remain reluctant towards them. Here are a few reasons why hiring more fresh graduates may be a highly beneficial business decision.

1. COMFORT WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES

No doubts, a big advantage of hiring a fresh graduate is their ability to adapt to the new and innovative technologies that are constantly developed, specifically work-related software and applications that could facilitate processes and tasks at work. A big portion of the current workforce has begun their careers prior to the big advancements in technologies that have unfortunately replaced job roles and individuals. The new and upcoming generations tend to be more familiar and dependent on technologies and are more likely to adapt and introduce advancements that can boost overall organizational performance.

Without doubt, technology is a cornerstone of business success nowadays. The Bayt.com *Ideal Workplace in the Middle East and North Africa Survey* showed less than four in 10 employers promote the use of advanced technology in their workplace, despite that fact that 83% of job seekers feel that a workplace should promote this aspect. In addition, the Bayt.com *Middle East Skills Report* forecasts that "technology and computer skills" will remain the most important skill in 10 years.

If the company is a startup or has a limited budget for salaries, then it's a good opportunity to hire fresh talent and train them to grow with the company. Even larger companies with clear structures and job descriptions can easily benefit from fresh graduates.

HIRING FRESH GRADUATES GRANTS YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHAPE THE INDIVIDUAL INTO YOUR CURRENT NEEDS AND TO BECOME PART OF YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE.

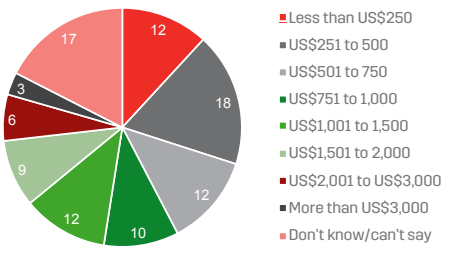
2. QUICK LEARNERS

Hiring fresh graduates grants you the opportunity to shape the individual into your current needs and to become part of your organizational culture. Since most fresh graduates have limited work experience, they are often eagerly seeking to learn and adapt to new work environments. Fresh graduates are often perceived as a "blank canvas," which means they are always open to new ideas and opportunities. This should make the onboarding, training, and teamwork processes much smoother.

3. LOWER SALARIES

With little to no experience, fresh graduates aren't expecting high salaries. They are stepping into the job market to learn more about how to perform the job and get hands on experience of the job. In fact, the Bayt.com *Fresh Graduates in the Middle East and North Africa Survey* showed that "lower expectations on salary" is one of the main reasons behind why some industries hire more fresh graduates than others, according to 42% of respondents.

First salary received/expected



GRAPHS © BAYT.COM

YOUNGER PROFESSIONALS WHO HAVEN'T EXPERIENCED OFFICE POLITICS WILL HELP CREATE A NEW EQUILIBRIUM AMONG YOUR TEAMS.

This indeed doesn't mean unfair compensation for fresh graduates, as there are many tools out there, such as Bayt.com Salaries, which help job seekers evaluate the competitiveness of their job offers and compensation packages. It simply means that hiring a fresh graduate doesn't break budgets and can still yield very impressive outcomes in terms of productivity and growth potential.

4. NEW PERSPECTIVES

Having the young generation in your workplace means that there is room for having new innovative and fresh perspectives. Unfortunately, only 30% of respondents to the Bayt.com *Ideal Workplace in the Middle East and North Africa Survey* believe that their workplace encourages innovation and creativity. Fresh graduates can be one of the resources that bring in creativity, which is needed for every organization. They can bring in many new ideas that could take increase productivity at the workplace.

5. DIVERSITY

Diversity at the workplace plays a vital role in an organizational success. Hiring fresh graduates and young professionals is one way to increase the diversity of your teams. University graduates come from different backgrounds and have had different experience that developed their skills. Diversity is also seen as a critical element in the ideal workplace and a positive influence on company culture, team dynamics, and overall employee satisfaction.

6. LACK OF OFFICE POLITICS

Office politics can create delays, tension, and decreased productivity at any company. Younger professionals who haven't experienced office politics and haven't been in the job market to know what it entails, will help create a new equilibrium among your teams. In most cases, they will come in with a neutral and open-minded attitude and will want to impress the employer by focusing on performing their best and avoiding unnecessary fuss.

GETTING THE NEWBIES IN

There are cases in which companies aren't sure when to hire fresh graduates. First, if the organization has employees with specific skills who need an assistant or someone in a junior position, then fresh graduates are the perfect fit. They will learn from the experienced employees on how to perform the job and work closely with them.

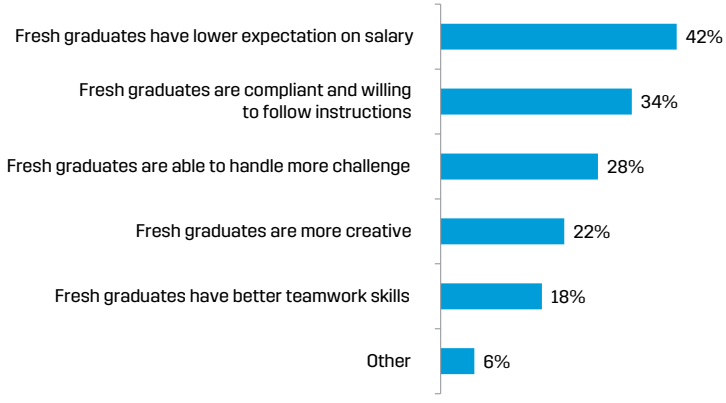
Also, if the company is a startup or has a limited budget for salaries, then it's a good opportunity to hire fresh talent and train them to grow with the company. Even larger companies with clear structures and job descriptions can easily benefit from fresh graduates. Employers tend to look for job roles with small business risk or roles that handle new or temporary projects and assign them to fresh graduates.

Alternatively, offering an internship opportunity benefits you and the fresh graduate. Internships mitigate the risk of hiring an individual who the organization isn't fully sure of. Within the internship period, the hiring manager can observe performance, learning potential, workplace ethics, and other qualifications that the interns possess. Internships can help the hiring manager predict future performance instead of giving an unfair judgment from the fresh graduate's CV.

In a Bayt.com poll, titled *Internships in the Middle East and North Africa*, more than seven out of ten employers (73.6%) stated that internships allow them to ›››

Reasons to hire fresh graduates

Lower expectations on salary (42%) and being more willing to follow instructions (34%) are the main reasons why respondents believe that some industries hire more fresh graduates than others.



identify talent for future positions. At the same time, internship opportunities help fresh graduates to get hands-on experience and further develop skills and qualifications needed for the job market and the industry.

Another way that companies usually follow to have a successful experience with fresh graduates is by having training schemes that create a smooth transition for students between university and work. Some companies usually invest in hiring and retaining candidates who have a strong academic background and little to zero years of experience. These programs usually last a year or two and they offer students the chance to rotate around different business sectors before settling for their final career path within the company.

Sometimes, hiring managers focus solely on the CV and interview, and in some cases, overlook the right candidate. Therefore, it is recommended for hiring managers to further explore the potential of the fresh graduates' applicants pool. To hire the top talent, employers are advised to be aware of the following common mistakes:

1. NOT TREATING THEM AS YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Some employers fail to treat fresh graduates as young professionals and often perceive them as amateurs or students. In fact, many fresh graduates are serious about their career and are approaching every opportunity they come across with excitement and determination to develop their skills and impress the company. Therefore, employers are recommended to treat fresh graduates exactly as they treat experienced employees.

Within the internship period, the hiring manager can observe performance, learning potential, workplace ethics, and other qualifications that the interns possess.

INTERNSHIPS MITIGATE THE RISK OF HIRING AN INDIVIDUAL WHO THE ORGANIZATION ISN'T FULLY SURE OF.

2. THE WRONG IMPRESSION

First impression plays an indirect yet critical role in the hiring process. It can attract the most attention to one candidate or push away the interviewer from another candidate. These distractions lead to hiring the wrong talent and fail to give the hiring manager the opportunity to further explore real qualities and traits.

Fresh graduates are new to the job search and interviewing process, and often find it difficult to give in their best during an interview. Therefore, employers are encouraged to be comforting and thorough in their selection process to minimize stress, and to avoid relying on first impressions.

3. NOT DISCOVERING POTENTIAL

Some fresh graduates have had some experiences in internships or leadership programs, while others might not. However, their quality cannot be measured by past experiences and most recent job performance. Thus, they need more opportunities to widen their skills set and get on site training. Hiring managers should evaluate their willingness to learn and adapt to new environments.

As fresh graduates enter the job market and workforce with little experience, they are just short of training from management and seasoned employees to unleash their creativity and potential. Learning from previous experienced employees with the creativity and innovation that the younger generation holds can be a huge asset to all organizations to reach their objectives. They are also a huge segment in the Middle East and North Africa region, which affords companies more choice when hiring. On Bayt.com, over 32 million job seekers are registered on the platform, many of whom are fresh graduates and young talent. Employers regularly navigate through the database but also make use of precise filtering tools to ensure they don't compromise on relevancy and qualification, even with young talent.

Hiring the younger generation is a reality that organizations have to make use of at one point or another. They are the upcoming professionals that could lead organizations into innovative and creative spaces. ■

Suhail Al-Masri is the VP of Employer Solutions at Bayt.com, the #1 job site in the Middle East with more than 40,000 employers and over 30,600,000 registered job seekers from across the Middle East, North Africa and the globe, representing all industries, nationalities and career levels. Masri has more than 20 years of experience in sales leadership, consultative sales, account management, marketing management, and operations management. His mission at Bayt.com goes in line with the company's mission to empower people with the tools and knowledge to build their lifestyles of choice.

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HUDDLE UP
LOGITECH RALLY

Logitech Rally is a premium, modular conference cam that delivers studio quality video, clear audio, and automated video conferencing. Rally features Ultra-HD 4K video, modular audio components, PTZ capabilities that capture every seat in the room, and Logitech RightSense technologies that automatically frame people. So, what makes Rally different from traditional video conferencing systems? It can be tailored to your meeting space. Rally separates the speakers from the microphones- when speakers are mounted near the display, the audio is better aligned with video, and voices of far-end participants come from the front of the room, which is what people intuitively expect. Basically, conference participants get a live listening experience. Thoughtful cable management also makes setup and installation a breeze. Logitech Rally is compatible with almost any video conferencing service, such as BlueJeans, Google Hangouts Meet, Microsoft Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and more.

Logitech Rally modular conference cam

Logitech Rally automated video conferencing

IMAGE CREDIT LOGITECH, LG

GET IN THE GAME

LOGITECH G512 KEYBOARD

Logitech G512
mechanical gaming keyboard

Logitech expands its high-performance gaming gear with the addition of the G512 mechanical gaming keyboard. The keyboard offers three different key switch choices -Tactile, Linear, and the new GX Blue- to fit your personal player preferences. The Tactile key switch provides discernible actuation for gamers who prefer direct feedback, while the Linear version delivers a smooth keystroke. The new GX Blue key switch provides audible "click" feedback during actuation that you can feel and hear. The Logitech G512 is powered with four lighting zones using the free Logitech Gaming Software (LGS), which can be customized across approximately 16.8 million colors. With its slim, durable design, the keyboard is sturdy on-the-go. It has an anodized and brushed aircraft-grade 5052 aluminum top case, with an integrated USB cable connecting the USB 2.0 pass-through port to its own input for 100% power throughout. The mechanical gaming keyboard is available in Carbon Black, and it's the gear you want to get your game on.

STYLE ON CUE

LG Q STYLUS

LG Q Stylus is a mid range smartphone packing premium features. It's a handwriting input smartphone equipped with a no-nonsense stylus to add more convenience and functionality beyond the typical keyboard experience. The intelligent palm rejection system ensures that accuracy is never an issue, even when resting your hand on the display. Even with the display off, the LG Q Stylus will recognize and record handwritten notes, which is ideal when sudden flashes of inspiration hit. Beyond notes and memos, the stylus can also be utilized to personalize captured images and videos to create animated GIFs. LG Q Stylus also has advanced camera technology like QLens, which allows you to capture an image of a product, and instantly get more information on where to purchase that item, or learn about similar products. QLens is intelligent enough to recognize images of food, fashion, celebrities, and even landmarks, making online shopping a breeze. And don't worry, QLens takes great photos too. It's sporting an 8MP front camera and 16MP rear lens. The Phase Detection Auto Focus (PDAF) feature makes the camera 23% faster than conventional auto focus, while Portrait Mode delivers great-looking bokeh selfies. Additional features include USB Type-C fast charging, IP68 water and dust protection, and MIL-STD 810G compliance. The Smart Rear Key fingerprint sensor not only provides easy-to-reach security, it also doubles as the selfie camera shutter button.

LG Q Stylus

You can get all of this in a sleek metallic body, with a 6.2-inch FHD+ FullVision display. The 18:9 screen ratio, thin bezel, curved tempered glass, and optimized body width all work together to make the phone fit comfortably in just one hand.

#TAMTALKSTECH Tamara Clarke, a former software development professional, is the tech and lifestyle enthusiast behind *The Global Gazette*, one of the most active blogs in the Middle East. *The Global Gazette* has been welcomed and lauded by some of the most influential tech brands in the region. Clarke's goal is to inform about technology and how it supports our lifestyles. See her work both in print regional publications and online on her blog where she discusses everything from how a new gadget improves day-to-day life to how to coordinate your smartphone accessories. Visit www.theglobalgazette.com and talk to her on Twitter @TamaraClarke.

'TREP TRIMMINGS
THE EXECUTIVE SELECTION

From better goods to better wardrobe bests, every issue we choose a few items that make the approved executive selection list. This edition includes an eyewear collection to consider for your summer ensemble, a luxury brand with a riveting story to tell, and more.

Sama eyewear

Sama eyewear

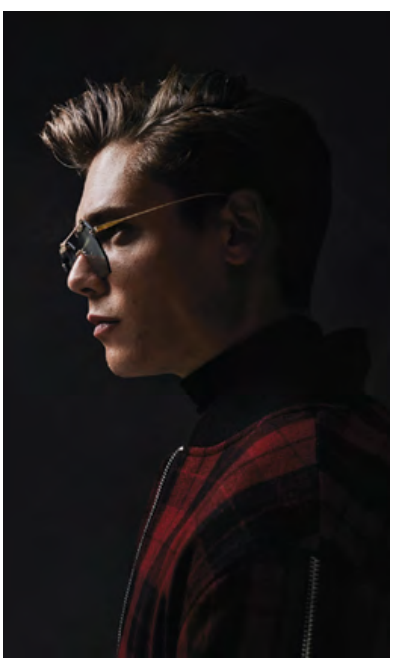
Bremont ALT1-C

STEPPING UP
BREMONT

Bremont is giving a new take on the ALT1-C, a core model in the brand's lineup. As the first watch designed by founding brothers, Nick and Giles English, it set off a series that now incorporates polished cases and different dial colors. And now, a modern approach to the timepiece has been launched, inspired by the British Royal Air Force (RAF). Running on the BE-50AE chronometer, it offers a power reserve of 42 hours, encased within a 43 mm satin-brushed Trip-Tick case. Flip the watch over to appreciate the brand's craftsmanship in showcasing movement. The collection offers two different dial variations- a blue dial (which is a nod to the British RAF), and a silver dial with black sub-dials. For those with an eye for detail, you'll notice that the Arabic numerals traditionally used on the dial have been replaced by baton-style indexes for a stylish, subtle touch. For a chronometer that can go from the boardroom to a night out, you won't go unnoticed with this. www.bremont.com

SHADES ON
SAMA

Fresh out of Los Angeles, luxury eyewear brand Sama is now in the Middle East. Designed in California using custom Japanese acetate and other materials, these showstoppers can help you beat the heat and accentuate your look at the same time.
www.samaeyewearshop.com



IMAGES COURTESY BREMONT, SAMA. NOUS, ROSSANO FERRETTI

EDITOR'S PICK

A GOOD HAIR DAY AT ROSSANO FERRETTI DUBAI

I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times I have written about beauty entrepreneurs, and even then, we mainly talked about business plans, funding rounds, or marketing strategies. These monthly beauty reviews, however, have taken me out of my comfort zone, both on paper and in real life. The reason is that, on ordinary days, my skincare routine is pretty basic, and my makeup is hardly visible. But, on those other days when we attend various high-profile gatherings and glamorous events, all of that changes, with my hair paying the highest price. Yes, like many other women, I treat it with ample heat styling, which leads to it being weaker and with dry, brittle strands that flake and break off.

Having recently grown my hair out, I was happy to keep the length, but I wanted to bring it back to a healthy form. Therefore, I booked a haircut appointment at the Rossano Ferretti Hair Spa in Dubai's Jumeirah neighborhood. The renowned Italian hairstylist is responsible for one of the most distinctive haircutting techniques to date, The Method, which he developed together with his sister, Lorenza, more than two decades ago. The Method brings out the natural beauty of each client's hair by taking into consideration its texture and fall to produce a bespoke haircut for each and every client. It delivers the so-called "Invisible Cut," meaning that the hairstylist takes off between 12% to 18% less of your hair than a traditional haircut, and cuts it in a way that allows it to fall with natural movement.

Rossano Ferretti Hair Spa, Dubai

Located on Jumeirah Beach Road, Ferretti's first salon in the UAE (there is one in Abu Dhabi as well) was clean, modern, and flooded with natural light, and I was welcomed by one of the brand's Method Directors, Christina Preinstorfer. She gave me an in-depth consultation not only about the style I wanted for my hair, but also about my typical maintenance. Then, she performed the well-known "Invisible Cut," and soon enough my hair looked healthy, shiny, and strong again. And if you think that your summer plans will prevent you from making an appointment at Rossano Ferretti salons in Dubai or Abu Dhabi, know that the brand has over 20 hair spas located around the world.

By Tamara Pupic

www.rfhairspa.com

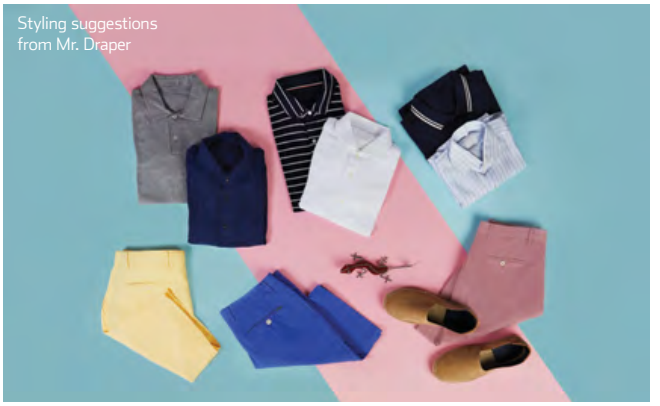
Nous jewelry

STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

NOUS

Launched in May 2018 by Christina Noussis, Nous is a luxury brand that curates distinctive jewelry and accessories from around the world. It aims to empower local artisans by providing them with an outlet to exhibit their pieces, thereby allowing them to share their stories of culture and traditions, while also supporting their respective communities. The online platform currently features three collections –The Bian Collection, The Stained Collection, and The Silversmith Collection, all of which take in influences from local cultures, ranging from ceramic fragments found at the bottom of the sea bed in Vietnam, to silk-making process and handmade ceramic pieces produced from a pottery technique called Raku. Going forward, Noussis sees the company expanding to a lifestyle concept store, offering not just jewelry, but also homeware, statement accessories, and lifestyle products. "We want to share more of what this world has to offer, and celebrate the talents behind them."

www.bynous.com


Styling suggestions from Mr. Draper

Visible spectrum

THE GENTLEMAN'S (EASY) GUIDE TO COLOR MATCHING

by MR. DRAPER

The addition of color can make or break an outfit. In the wrong hands, it can be garish, distracting, and downright disastrous. And yet, when it's done properly, the use of color can not only theme an outfit, but also add a dash of daring bravado. So, when it comes to selecting the right colors to go with which outfit, how exactly do you decide? Using color matching theory as our guide, we've pieced together the ultimate painting-by-numbers guide to help you nail your color combos each and every time.

Us men aren't renowned for our grasp of colors. While women seem to be born with a natural sense of what colors work and which ones will clash, most guys seemed to skip that particular lesson. In fact, science is against us in this regard. Color blindness affects around one in 12 men (8%) worldwide, compared to 1 in 200 women. That's a lot of blokes hamstrung by genes even before they even get started.

For the remainder, it's a lack of understanding, confidence, and commitment that's generally their undoing. But not anymore. With these color matching essentials under your belt, you'll soon be ready to mix and match brave new color blends that you might never have considered before.

It's all about that base

The base color of any outfit is what you'll build the rest of your look around. As a general rule, black or white are the safest baseline colors to go for. Some may argue that neither are strictly colors, but from a wardrobe perspective they're crucial because they form the basis of most classic combinations. The same could be said for beige. As a base color, it has more scope and possibilities than you may think. Beige goes extremely well with black, green, red, and brown– and that's just for starters.

Play it too safe with your baseline combinations though, and you'll run the risk of looking bland and unadventurous. But trust the theory, and the world can be your oyster. So, if you've ever wanted to push the boat out and experiment with colors like pink or purple, then knowing which base color goes with a host of other colors will definitely give you the confidence to go out there and try something new. A pink shirt with a navy blue suit looks the business, for example. Or, for a more casual look, you could try a purple polo with beige shorts.

Start to think of your wardrobe as the equivalent of your very own swatch chart. You wouldn't redecorate your house without checking that all the swatches matchup, would you? Well, it's exactly the same with clothes. You could even start to see yourself as a human canvas on which to paint your own individual style and combinations. But, when it comes to clothing, we're aiming for color coded realism, rather than abstract chaos!

Color combinations– putting it all together!

The fundamental principle to follow when selecting your clothes and accompanying accessories is to choose colors that harmonize with one another. Plus, you'll need to take into account your own individual coloring. Skin tones and hair color can all look very different when matched with different clothes. It's a well-known fact that red hair doesn't go well with pink. It's also hard to carry off yellow with certain complexions. But these colors are exciting, and, if you can unlock the key to each combination, we guarantee you'll start to have a whole lot of fun with your wardrobe again.

But enough of the theory, let's put the plan into action and try out some actual clothing and color matches. Placing the base or main color first in our combinations, we've balanced out a selection of clothing you can piece together that will perfectly complement your core wardrobe items.

1. CREAM CHINOS

Chinos are the Roger Federer of menswear; they never seem to age, and they just keep on serving up winning combinations. They really are an essential base color layer, from which you can build the most stylish of outfit ideas. With such a neutral trouser, you can afford to experiment with your choice of shirt. We're talking pink cotton shirts, burgundy or black polos– think outside the box! For a real suave statement piece, you'll want to slip on your blue blazer (more on that later!), over a fresh white shirt and a grey, fine-knit sweater for a simple –but effective– chino killer combo.

2. DARK DENIM JEANS

Dark jeans give you options. They're smart enough to partner with a button-down white shirt with a subtle print, an unstructured grey marl jacket, and a patterned pocket square. This whole ensemble perfectly balances sophistication with a relaxed vibe. And they're casual enough to switch the shirt for a dark navy or black T-shirt for a more athletic alternative. Either way, your dark denims give you the freedom and flexibility to throw on your favorite white sneakers and trusty black leather belt to complete the look. This really is the gold standard of hassle-free styling.

3. LIGHT DENIM JEANS

Here's the rub with light denim jeans; they really do give you the best of both worlds.

Mr. Draper: some say he wasn't born, but tailored. A treasure trove of information, and author of the gentleman's rulebook. Effortless style, and permanently fashionable. Elusive, but always appears when you need him. Let us know if you spot him! www.mrdraper.com | www.instagram.com/mrdraperae

IMAGES COURTESY MR. DRAPER

Dress to impress with your jeans as the base, combined with a darker denim shirt up top (yes, we did just suggest double denim!), overlaid with a grey V-neck sweater and finished with black leather Chelsea boots for the ultimate smart casual look. On the flipside, if you're aiming for an even more relaxed style, you can go for the classic light jeans and white sneakers combo, with a white T-shirt on top and a grey hoodie outer layer. Simple!

4. NAVY BLAZER

We have to mention the navy blazer, a particular Mr. Draper favorite, as one of the most versatile base items in our color coordinated wardrobe selection. This style icon does all the hard work, making your clothing choices an absolute breeze. Heading out to a flash restaurant? No problem, your essential navy blazer will look amazing with a complementary pair of lighter blue chinos, classic white button-down shirt, a pair of dark suede loafers and finished with a colorful pocket square. Or how about that date you've been planning? Simple. Dig out those dark denim jeans again, but this time pair them with a vibrant monochrome shirt (red, yellow, green, or blue are perfect), a smart pair of brown leather Oxford shoes– all tied together by your multi-purpose navy blazer.

5. COLORFUL SHORTS

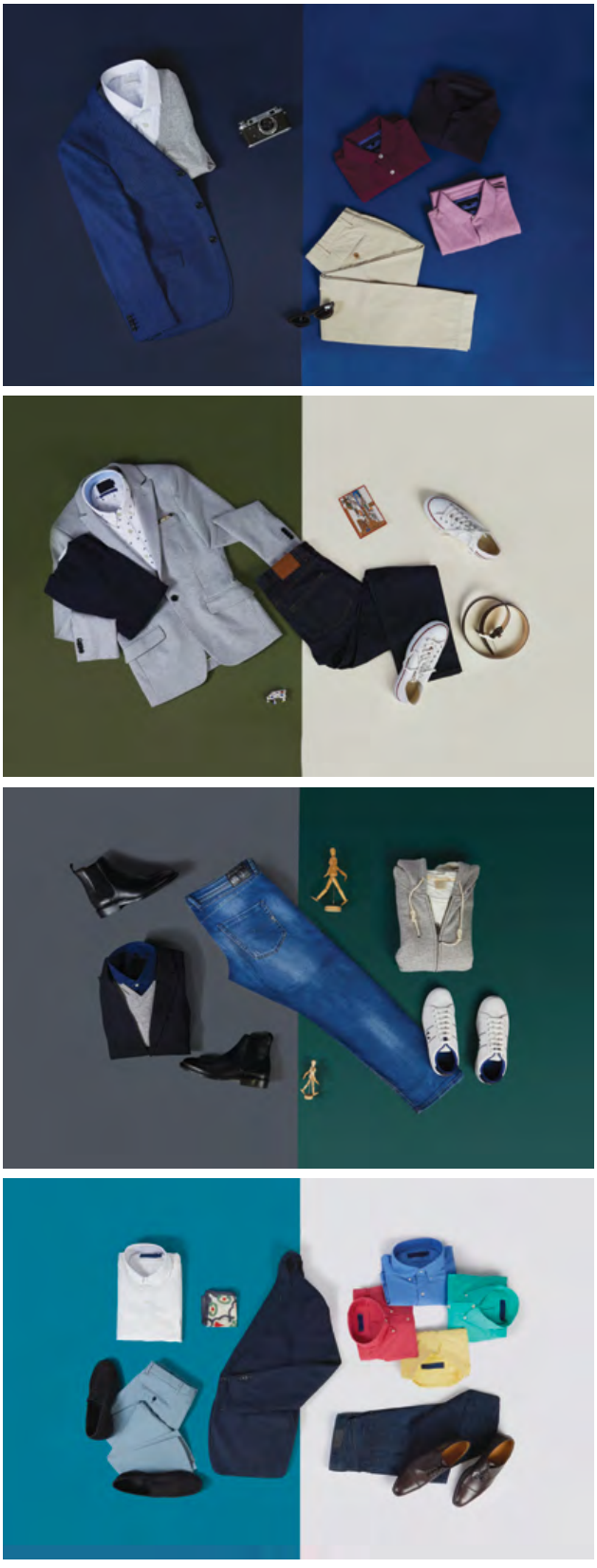
There is a time and a place for colorful shorts. If the sun's shining and the beach is beckoning, that's generally their cue. As a guy, this is one of those rare opportunities to make a bold statement with your color choices. Bright yellow shorts go brilliantly with a short sleeved, navy linen shirt, or a subtle grey polo shirt. Otherwise, a bright blue pair of shorts can be teamed with a smart white shirt for a dazzling contrast. Or offset them with a navy and white striped polo for a nautical twist. Finally, would sir care for the salmon? Shorts, that is! This option goes great with a navy polo or striped, light blue shirt to achieve the ultimate preppy style. Any one of these outfits will be finished perfectly with a pair of light tan espadrilles.

6. WHITE SHIRT

We challenge any man to show us a wardrobe that doesn't include a white shirt. Aside from the obvious black accompaniment –whether this be suit, dress pants, or even black jeans– you can also build an outfit around a classic white shirt with a variety of other darker and lighter tones. Like your chinos, this blank canvas gives you the chance to play around with what suits your style best. Partner with chinos, dark jeans, or a navy blazer for those smarter occasions. Or, when you're heading to the beach or an al fresco lunch, team your white shirt with colorful shorts, or more colorful chinos (sky blue, salmon or green) and loafers.

Whatever your regular clothing selections might be, by adding some must-have base items to your wardrobe, and applying some color matching logic, you can quickly and easily begin building up your layers of colors. So, give it a go, and take a fresh look at your wardrobe with a completely new and more colorful perspective. Armed with these handy hints and tips, isn't it time you brought some color back into your life? Join Mr. Draper today, and let our dedicated stylists redefine your style. ■

Styling suggestions from Mr. Draper



Bullies at work

Stamping out abuse in the workplace can be an uphill battle for everyone involved **by MANFRED KETS DE VRIES**

Ted, a senior VP at a large media company, was famous for publicly deriding and humiliating others. Working for him was like walking on eggshells, as he could fly into a rage over the most trivial matters. He would also impose deadlines designed to set his staff up for failure. To top off his bullying behavior, he expected his staff to work 24/7, leading many to complain about stress-related problems. Ted's management style sapped the morale of his division, which was afflicted by a disturbing absenteeism rate and high turnover.

When we think of bullies, we tend to remember the ones we knew as kids. Unfortunately, bullying doesn't end in high school. Some of these bullies-in-training turn into full fledged ones in adulthood. Although there can be a fine line between a tough boss and an abusive one, bullying generally refers to being subjected to repeated emotional or even physical abuse. Bullies deliberately manipulate, belittle, intimidate, control, or undermine their victims. And in our digital age, the bully's playing field has now extended to cyberspace.

To determine if you work for a bully, ask yourself the following questions: Do I regularly feel intimidated, criticized, and insulted? Have there been occasions when I have been humiliated in front of my colleagues? Have I been called names? Are my efforts constantly undervalued? Do I dread going to work? Is working for my boss making me feel sick? If your answers to these questions are affirmative, there is a good possibility that you are working for a bully.

Many organizations have a "resident bully," someone who's often (but not always) in a position of authority. According to a 2017 survey by the Workplace Bullying Institute, 19% of adult Americans have experienced abuse at work, and another 19% have witnessed it. Bullying is a silent epidemic, causing stress-related health problems, including debilitating feelings of anxiety, panic attacks and clinical depression. In some instances, bullying can even lead to suicide.

THE BULLYING PERSONALITY

The personality makeup of the bully is difficult to pin down. There may be a relationship between bullying and narcissistic personality disorder, the latter characterized by an exploitative way of dealing with the world and the perception that one is entitled to special treatment. Given bullies' frequent lack of empathy and remorse, some even ascribe psychopathic characteristics to them. Furthermore, it is fair to say that most bullies fall among the autocratic personality types which include a strong need to control and dominate others.

MOTIVATIONS

Why do bullies behave the way they do? One explanation is that they're looking for attention. Being noticed makes them feel important. In addition, they may be motivated by feelings of envy and resentment. Bullies are typically insecure and don't need very much to see other people as threats. They may also be projecting their own feelings of vulnerability onto their victims. In order to avoid feeling ashamed and humiliated for their own shortcomings, they go to great lengths to shame and humiliate others.

DEVELOPMENTAL OBSERVATIONS

Many bullies had a disturbed childhood. They often grew up in homes with little warmth and positive adult attention, raised by emotionally and physically abusive caretakers. Such an environment would have quickly taught them that vulnerability leads to abuse and that the best defense is to lash out. By becoming bullies themselves, they gain more control over their lives and compensate for the lack of attention (or the abuse) they experienced at home.

MANAGING THE BULLY

Despite the prevalence of workplace bullying, surveys show that the majority of employers do far too little, or even resist taking action when bullying behavior is identified. Why is that? The easiest answer is that culprits could be in top management. But even when that's not the case, a fair amount of denial, rationalization, and even tacit acceptance of bullying can be observed.

Those in power may turn a blind eye because many bullies are perceived as "rainmakers" contributing to profitability. In such cases, bullies are tolerated so long as they ensure short-term company success. But this neglects the potential costs in terms of an organization's culture, not to mention that health deterioration, stress reactions and depression among employees can all impact the organization's long-term bottom line and survival.

Top executives who realize the danger of bullying and want to do something about it are in for a challenge. It may be difficult for bullies to unlearn what has become ingrained behavior over time. And if bullying has already become part of the organizational culture, the challenge is even more formidable.

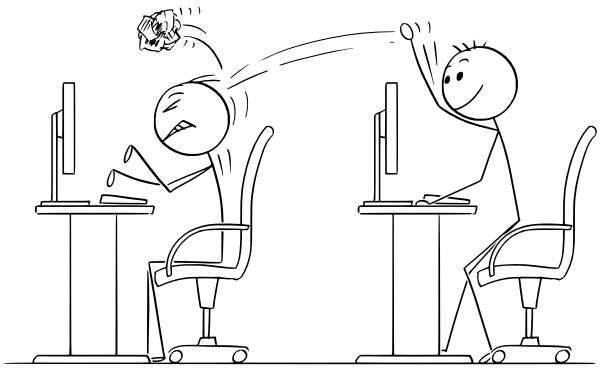
If coaching is sought as a way to deal with bullies, coaches should note that bullies have limited self-insight and empathy, which makes changing their behavior all the more problematic. Coaches would do well to start with a surface-level discussion of simple actions that warrant change before exploring the underlying dynamics for the dysfunctional behavior.

THERE MAY BE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BULLYING AND NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER, THE LATTER CHARACTERIZED BY AN EXPLOITATIVE WAY OF DEALING WITH THE WORLD AND THE PERCEPTION THAT ONE IS ENTITLED TO SPECIAL TREATMENT.

Equally challenging is putting some kind of "treatment plan" in place. For example, coaches may consider a behavioral carrot-and-stick approach: The bully should be made aware of the consequences that will follow if their dysfunctional way of relating to others doesn't change. Another approach could be to agree on one negative behavior pattern that needs to be replaced with more positive behavior. Once this change has occurred, other seemingly harder to modify behavior patterns could be next in line. In this educational journey, bullies should realize the negative impact of their actions and take responsibility.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN: BEING BULLIED

What should you do if you are the target of a bully? The wisest strategy is to completely avoid such people. But if that's not an option, the challenge becomes not to play their game. Don't allow yourself to be baited or get emotionally hooked. If bullies are denied a reaction, there is a chance that they may stop.



If bullies continue their unpleasant behavior, another strategy would be to set boundaries. You should make it clear to them that their behavior will be documented and that they may face some form of disciplinary action. Furthermore, you should ask your co-workers to support you, to serve as witnesses and also to document what's happening. However, bullying is often sustained by the silence of bystanders unwilling to help. You should inform such people that this stance could be viewed as another form of bullying.

When building a case for HR, it is crucial to demonstrate how bullying affects the productivity of the people working in the organization. You need to make a very clear and convincing business case to senior management that the bully (in spite of his or her contributions to the bottom line) will be just too expensive to keep in the long-term.

Finally, if you're being bullied, you would be wise to build a personal support network to bolster your feelings of confidence and resilience, as bullies are experts at creating self-doubt. Of course, there are always going to be instances where top management is complicit in encouraging bully-like behavior. In that case, the final strategy may be to quit this toxic environment. Staying would only make you sick.

Whatever bullies try to do to you, keep in mind Eleanor Roosevelt's wise statement: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." ▪

Manfred Kets de Vries is the Distinguished Clinical Professor of Leadership Development & Organisational Change at INSEAD and the Raoul de Vitry d'Avaucourt Chaired Professor of Leadership Development, Emeritus. He is the Founder of INSEAD's Global Leadership Centre and the Programme Director of The Challenge of Leadership, one of INSEAD's top Executive education programs. Professor Kets de Vries is also the Scientific Director of the Executive Master in Coaching and Consulting for Change (EMCCC). His most recent books are *You Will Meet a Tall, Dark Stranger: Executive Coaching Challenges; Telling Fairy Tales in the Boardroom: How to Make Sure Your Organisation Lives Happily Ever After;* and *Riding the Leadership Rollercoaster: An Observer's Guide*.

Facilitating change

Leading the transition from **female empowerment** to **gender inclusion**

by LAUDY LAHDO

As a woman in a leading position, I am very pleased to see that the conversation on women in the workplace has evolved from female empowerment to gender inclusion. Progressive and leading businesses realize the strategic benefit of creating an equal-level playing field for both men and women. We are, as a society, moving from female inclusion being a tactical consideration to a strategic directive by senior leadership. I am especially proud as an Arab-Australian woman of the great advancements in inclusion underway across the Middle East, with leading women from the region owning the charge. Female empowerment has enabled women to break into the workplace; now that we are here, the goal is to advance our positions within the corporate world.

There are many ways and opportunities to facilitate this change, not just for female leaders, but also women in general to step up and move forward within their working lives. Here are three of my favorite and especially compelling thoughts on inclusion in the workplace:

1/ Choose your seat wisely

From an inclusion perspective, I think that choosing your seat wisely is a fundamental consideration for involvement in strategic meetings. You should ensure that you are faced in front of, or very close to the key decision maker(s). This is vital to ensuring that when at the table, you are in a position where your points of view can be heard and appreciated. This non-verbal message of where you choose to sit also indicates that you have relevant and worthy ideas and insights to contribute. It is not uncommon to see women contributing to discussion with a "buffer" on her contribution- typically some apologetic phrase, such as: "I don't know if this is relevant here," or "I could be mistaken, but…" Instead, sit in a "power seat" and deliver your points of view with confidence.

Organizations such as the 30% Club are making excellent strides in paving the way for more female leaders to be present on the boards of leading multinational organizations. Female leaders on the board will soon become the new norm, and it is my hope that with this sustainable framework being implemented at the board level of market-moving corporates, inclusion across all levels of organizations will become a systemic standard practice, because there is clearly a case for business.

2/ Be the change you want to see in the workplace

Effecting positive change in the workplace begins with yourself. If we all sat around and waited for policy changes to occur before we took notice and adopted the change, we would be getting nowhere extremely quickly. Change starts with an individual who notices a gap and endeavors to fill it. Removing unconscious biases is integral to designing behavioral change. Small changes in the workplace can lead to the removal of these biases, and create opportunities for both men and women to succeed and play to each other's strengths. This scenario is the ideal working model in an office environment. For example, the law in the UAE stipulates 45 calendar days for women working in the private sector for maternity leave. As the General Manager of Servcorp, I use my authority to ask the pertinent question to my female mother-to-be employees: "How much time do you need?" Allowing women to take the time they require allows them to fully "return" to work both physically and mentally after bringing their new child into the world. Given the proper resources and ability to take the time required, "we" don't have to have this bias that women need to take a backseat in their careers because of motherhood.

Another way to be a behavioral designer is for each of us to acknowledge that we have the potential to become an agent of change to and for ourselves. This not only means supporting others, but for women to take steps to their own self-empowerment, by recognizing and overcoming our own mental barriers and self-imposed restrictions, which may be inadvertently preventing us from reaching that level of inclusion in our places of work. It is an adage, but very relevant: change starts from within.

3/ Find your opportunities, and take advantage of existing resources

I am a proud board member of Reach, a mentoring program that aims to help women advance in their careers. Mentoring is a great platform for career advancement, not just for the mentee, but for the mentor as well. By ensuring a proportionate focus on accessibility to senior professionals and cross-sector mentors and role models for both men and women alike, there is much inspiration, ideas, and insights that can emerge. Mentorship provides many positive attributes for both the mentor and the mentee through increasing leadership skills, boosting confidence, and improving communication skills. I encourage women to look for opportunities to grow and advance through programs like Reach.

EFFECTING POSITIVE CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE BEGINS WITH YOURSELF. IF WE ALL SAT AROUND AND WAITED FOR POLICY CHANGES TO OCCUR BEFORE WE TOOK NOTICE AND ADOPTED THE CHANGE, WE WOULD BE GETTING NOWHERE EXTREMELY QUICKLY.

I would like to end with an inspiring story that is an entrepreneur's dream. Servcorp, where I lead as a General Manager, today is a large multinational corporation and the global provider of flexible workspace solutions. What is lesser known is that our company was founded many years ago as the vision of one man, our founder and CEO, Alfred Moufarrige. His vision was brought to life through organic and sustainable growth. He has long since understood the value of inclusion, and has developed an entity that sees men and women in leading positions. Now, with over 160 locations globally, we are proud to say that most of our leadership team are female. In fact, 80% of our global workforce are women. We have also just rolled out a global co-working template in the region that allows for a collaborative working environment with leading infrastructure and resources to help drive businesses forward.

CHOOSING YOUR SEAT WISELY IS A FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATION FOR INVOLVEMENT IN STRATEGIC MEETINGS. YOU SHOULD ENSURE THAT YOU ARE FACED IN FRONT OF, OR VERY CLOSE TO THE KEY DECISION MAKER(S).

The way we work is changing and how we work is changing thanks to technology, and the multitude of resources that we have now to take an innovative idea and bring it to life. Through our collective actions to pave the way for great inclusion, the economy becomes more sustainable and the opportunities for greater work life balance are available to both women and men. ▪

Laudy Lahdo is the General Manager of Servcorp. During her tenure in this position, she has helped grow the company from just one office in Dubai's Emirates Towers to 14 locations spread across the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Turkey. She is playing an instrumental role in building a strategic relationship with the Department of Economic Development (DED) in Dubai, a first of its kind, and continues to work with the DED on regulations and compliance for the local market in the industry. She has led a team in working with several leading international law firms and corporations including Sotheby's, Rolls-Royce, *Bloomberg*, Dow Jones Indexes and Tiffany & Co, as well as local SMEs, some of which have grown to become multinationals. A founding member of the Dubai Capital Club, a member of the Australian Business Council of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, as well as the Dubai British Business Group, Laudy has built a strong foundational network for Servcorp. Laudy also serves as a board member of Reach, the first non-profit organization in the Middle East dedicated to structured mentoring and leadership development for female professionals. Established in 2013, Reach has seen more than 200 women at various stages of their careers. www.servcorp.ae www.reachmentoring.org

BACK TO WORK

Getting back on track after a career break **by LOUISE KARIM**

WE OFTEN HEAR OF PEOPLE STRUGGLING to reenter the workforce after a career hiatus. People who have taken career breaks for elder care, personal health issues, and most commonly for full time parenting- the responsibility of which largely weighs on women. Returning to work thereafter is undoubtedly hard. Employers can be hesitant to hire people with a gap on their resume, while returnees may have doubts about their competency, especially if they have been out of work for a long time. These barriers lead to a lost talent pool, and significantly contribute to the gender gap in mid to senior positions. In more general terms, the impact on the economy is tremendous: US$28 trillion could be added to the global economy if women participated in the workforce equally to men.

A recent survey by LeanIn.Org and McKinsey revealed that 43% of educated women exit their jobs at some point to tend their homes. Of these, up to 90% would eventually want to resume working, but only 40% return full time. In the UAE, the average of mothers looking to resume work adds up to 77% of the female population, rising to 98% if the work schedule offered flexibility.

In light of these statistics, returning to work might seem daunting. Luckily, there are inspiring stories from all over the world, of women who have taken breaks and returned stronger than ever. Perhaps one of the most famous examples is Brenda Barnes, the former CEO of PepsiCo, who took a seven-year career break and returned as COO, and then went on to become CEO of the Sara Lee Corporation.

The reality on the field is that there is still much to do in terms of changing employer mindsets. The good news is that there are some key steps that talented mothers can take to increase their chances of success. Here's a list:

1. GO PUBLIC WITH YOUR JOB SEARCH Reach out to your ex-colleagues, clients, friends and family. Tell everyone you know of your interest to return to work. While most of these conversations will not land you a job interview, there will be at least a handful that can ultimately lead to a dream job opportunity.

2. BE CONFIDENT Whether you've been away from work for a few months or a few years, getting back into the workforce can be nerve-racking. If you're interviewing at a new company, remember that a confident demeanor can go a long way towards leaving a positive lasting impression on the HR. If you're looking to return to a company where you were previously employed, know that although your confidence may have diminished, your ex-colleagues will remember you for the quality of your work before your career break.

3. KNOW YOUR STUFF One of the biggest concerns that employers have with regards to returnees is that they will not be up to date with the latest advancements, processes, and practices in their industry. This may mean that interview questions will be a bit more difficult, as the hiring manager looks to see if you know your stuff. The best way to prepare yourself is to stay connected throughout your career break. This means making sure that you are staying on top of the latest trends, and keeping up with news and key influencers in your industry.

4. ASSESS YOUR SITUATION Although you may feel ready to return to work, it is important that you take a step back to evaluate what you are particularly looking for and whether your interests and skills have changed. Also, ask yourself whether the job you are applying for is suitable to your new home life. What may have been right for you pre-career break may not necessarily be the best fit for you now. Start by reviewing your support network and openly discuss how the home will operate when you return to work. Having a clear sense of what the deal breakers are will help you narrow your search, and avoid wasting precious time.

5. HONE YOUR CV Avoid leaving a big gap in your CV, even if your break was for a significant amount of time. Instead, an option could be to include a "relevant experience" section that highlights how you have developed characteristics that are considered desirable for an employee in your industry. If you are uncertain on how to structure your CV, you can seek advice from a job coach or attend workshops.

6. CONSIDER RETURNSHIPS Around the world, returnships have become increasingly popular, creating a bridge back to senior roles for experienced professionals who have taken an extended career break. In the region, however, this concept is fairly nascent though we have begun to see world-class companies in the UAE such as EY, IBM, and Visa start to realize the important benefits that come with offering returnships. This means that we are likely to see this offering grow tremendously in the coming years. Returnships are a win-win for both parties, because they give mothers a chance to see how they will balance work and home life while giving employers an opportunity to test the waters before offering a full-time contract.

Taking a career break is more common than you may think. Bridging this disconnect is what drove Mums@Work to its inception in 2016. We recognized a need to change perceptions and show companies that a woman's ability to have a successful career does not change, just because she has children. ■

Living in Dubai since 2009, Louise Karim has led teams at leading regional and international companies including DABO & Co, The Dubai World Trade Centre and Emirates Airlines. Representing a vast number of global brands including Virgin, Coca-Cola and The Four Seasons, Louise, a natural communicator with a drive to achieve, specializes in developing digital plans, which deliver strategic results. 2016 saw Louise take a shift in her career path, when she joined the Mackenzie Jones group to develop and lead the Mums@Work business. Louise's insight into the target market through her own personal experience of juggling her role as a mother while still sustaining a successful career is an integral part of the partnership with co-founder David Mackenzie. www.mumsatwork.ae

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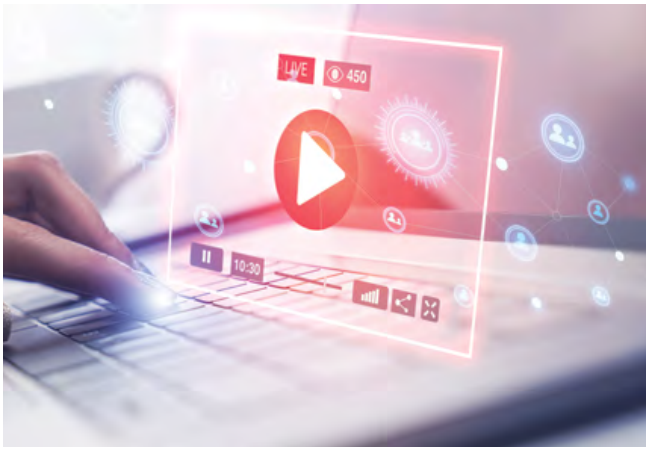


Disrupting the status quo

The OTT market is changing the ways content is created, desired, discovered, and consumed

by ARUN PRAKASH

BILL GATES FAMOUSLY SAID that "content is king" in 1996, and that became a guiding principle for the internet age. But it has never been more accurate than when it comes to describing millennials around the globe today, and their expectations when it comes to mobile video.

Unlike previous generations, mobile consumers now have:

Accessibility Anything happening anywhere in the world is available to them in real time.

Awareness Social media has taught them to be savvy, and access to global content has given them heightened expectations when it comes to production quality of shows.

Aspiration As today's youth are constantly aware of global fashion trends, consumer goods, and retail trends, they have sought to become true global citizens that wear, buy, and consume the same. This is also true for their entertainment consumption.

Affordability More consumers have rising disposable income, reduced costs for mobile data, and over-the-top (OTT) premium content is able to benefit from both these trends, and deliver more options and opportunities for consumers.

These are realities that will only continue to evolve in the Middle East and around the world. Of course, we have first-hand knowledge of this at Viu, Vuclip's OTT service, with our users each consuming an average of 1.2 to 1.8 hours of content per day. By keenly listening to consumers and observing their habits to draw conclusions, as well as applying a conscious effort not to be tripped up by so called industry best practices, we have been able to bring a fresh new approach to OTT content in the region.

GLOBALIZATION OF LOCAL CONTENT, AND LOCALIZATION OF GLOBAL CONTENT

Video content isn't concerned with borders or language. If people like something that airs in another country, they often have the means to watch it. But even better than just watching a dubbed, low-quality version, now they can watch shows that were successful in one part of the world that have been tailored to air as localized versions with high production value.

A recent example of this includes *Tollywood Squares*, our Indian reboot of the global franchise, *Hollywood Squares*. This also marks the first major CBS game show to be produced in India.

Viu also recently teamed up with the Endemol Shine Group to produce a localized, ten-episode season of *The Bridge*, a crime drama that was already popular in Europe and the United States. This adaptation will take the original premise and make it unique for the local audience, appealing to the diverse arrays of people, cuisines, and ethnicities that call Malaysia and Singapore home, highlighting both the diversity and similarity between the two countries. This will affect every aspect of the series, with both sides speaking local languages.

This is in addition to shows such as India's *What the Duck*, a cricket-centered comedic talk show, and Indonesia's *The Publicist*, a romantic drama series, proving to be highly popular outside of their respective countries with expat communities around the world.

LIFTING UP LOCAL TALENT AND CONTENT

We've also found that the engagement of local talent and key opinion leaders in developing unique content has been a winning formula.

We first identify, nurture, and provide an opportunity for local talent. Once we do that, we can empower them with the financial and technical support to create high-quality content that showcases their talent. And then we can distribute it on Viu, where an audience of millions is ready to enjoy it around the globe.

For an example of this, Viu conducted a recent pitching forum in Indonesia, where we held auditions in five cities across the country and received hundreds of submissions, before picking *Halustik* by Sally Anom as the submission that we will turn

What The Duck on Viu

IMAGE CREDIT VUCLIP

Arun Prakash is the President and COO of Vuclip. www.vuclip.com

The Publicist on Viu

into an original series. This annual event helps us develop top talent and gives us ideas on how to raise the status of the entire Indonesian content industry.

On a similar note, we noticed that the amount of time spent watching shows during Ramadan increased every year, so this year we developed specific content to watch during this time. This brought eight Arabic shows to Viu, many of which were developed by social media creators throughout the region.

RANGE OF CONTENT FORMATS AND LENGTHS PROVE POPULAR

In addition to the trends above related to content development and consumption, we've also noted that the smartphone generation isn't as concerned about historic video formats, such as what defines a clip versus a TV show versus a movie. Now, the video will fit into the consumer's life and habits, and not the other way around.

This is why most Viu content has various lengths, including movies such as India's *High Jack*; mini-series such as *It Happened in Hong Kong*, and our Ramadan series in the Middle East; 30 to 50-minute run time shows, such as Indonesia's *The Publicist*; and then there are *What the Duck Googlies*, which are short form 3-5 minute clips from the very popular *What the Duck* series.

IN CONCLUSION

The OTT market is changing the ways content is created, desired, discovered, and consumed. We have a unique opportunity to spotlight amazing talent within our own regions, make dramatic content and localize shows from other regions, and experiment in ways that traditional ratings-driven television era never allowed.

And as the audience grows, and their expectations change, and more people use their access to find and share their voice, vision, and talent with the world, we look forward to being there to help give them a platform and an audience.

Everything changes so rapidly, but when you boil it all down, we're giving more people more access to hear more voices, and tell more stories- and I can't wait to see them all. ■

IT'S GETTING HOT IN HERE

Worried about a summer slowdown in your e-commerce business? Here's **how to plot a (better) business strategy** for when the region travels

by SARAH JONES

Summer in the Middle East can be aptly described as stepping into a hot oven. This season brings unique challenges to every dweller in the region. With the hottest temperature reaching over 50 degrees, residents see this season as the best opportunity to leave the country and cool down somewhere else in the world, making it even more challenging to forecast the demands of our consumers and service them too. So, how do we at Sprii gear up to prepare for this season, keeping in mind that we have targets to hit, and growth to deliver? Here's an explainer:

1 PRODUCT MIX AND CHANGING TRENDS We're in hyper-growth mode at the moment, so, planning in our business is key. Summer isn't easy as consumers demand change– whether that be the products they're shopping, or the hours they're ordering or wanting to speak to us. Summer is the peak season for travelling, so we need to ensure inventory is plentiful across all our travelling categories, whether that be basic necessities like feeding bottles and strollers, or last-minute sunscreens and soothers. Aside from the travel focus, demand in other categories changes dramatically as well. One example of this is toys- no one would want to be jumping around on a trampoline in their garden under the scorching heat of the sun, right? So instead we're fully focused on pushing our range of indoor toy wonders for excitement instead. Therefore, from a sales perspective, this season can be considered slightly bipolar. Sales skyrocket, because consumers shop their travel essentials, and at the same time, plummet because consumers are off travelling. This makes daily sales forecasting, staffing, and planning much more challenging than other times of the year.

Sarah Jones is the founder and CEO of Sprii, the Middle East's #1 shopping destination providing everything for mums. www.sprii.com

2 BUSINESS PARTNERS Brands and business partners going on vacation is another challenge during the summer. Large percentages of all workforces in this country tend to take the summer months as an opportunity to leave, recharge, replenish, and gear up for the next busy season. E-commerce, however, sees none of this slowdown, so proper planning is the key to survive. At Sprii, we are still shipping 24 hours a day, seven days a week; however, when you're dependent on third parties to process your orders, or logistics to deliver your packages, smaller workforces test us in all areas as we never want to let the service levels drop or the delivery times extend.

3 WORKING HOURS AND STAFFING Shorter working hours during the month of Ramadan brings with it additional challenges. Hiring in new staff to create shift patterns to cover our 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. customer service hours that are still running seven days a week is a must. The hours people are ordering with us also takes a real turn– orders scale up late in the evenings and overnight, and we always want to be replying and processing within a few minutes of receiving every order. So, what's the solution? We quite simply need to get more creative and more efficient and plan well weeks in advance.

Executing an experience

Maintaining brand and **product quality** on an international scale

by SLOAN KAMENSTEIN

When we made the strategic decision to expand our brand internationally in 2015, we recognized that doing so required an in-depth look at how we were going to maintain the Sloan's Ice Cream experience in markets that were, at the time, wholly unfamiliar and thousands of miles away.

Three years later, we have six locations open across Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and are sharing our proprietary Sloan's experience with entirely new cultures. But, that road hasn't always been easy– it's been paved with learning curves and challenges for both our corporate team and our franchise partners in the Middle East, as we strive to strike a balance between maintaining the brand's personality and product quality, and adapting the concept for new markets.

As we continue to grow our presence in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, here are a few best practices I've found on how to maintain a brand on an international scale.

1/ BE DISCERNING WITH PARTNER SELECTION

It's easy to get stuck in a mindset of quantity over quality when developing a brand internationally –brand recognition is key in helping a concept find success in any market– and many brands set goals to grow a certain percentage annually. In my experience, however, we've found that focusing on quality franchise partners has brought us the most success in developing our brand in the Middle East.

Beyond finding franchise partners that share our values, behaviors, and attitudes, we have paid significant attention to searching for franchisees who have ties to the Middle East business community. Clout can be extremely important when it comes to real estate, importing goods, and other vital functions, so those existing connections can carry a lot of weight in helping to get things accomplished.

When vetting partners that are existing business owners, it's important to observe the way they support their current business ventures, their existing development schedules, and how many other brands they currently own or operate to get an idea of their overall track record of performance. We have also seen success in allowing our existing international franchisees that are interested in growing their portfolios the opportunity to build their presence in other countries where they have established operations and business experience. By sourcing from your current network, you can better ensure that the product quality and brand experience will be the same as your brand expands into new markets.

2/ ESTABLISH OPEN LINES OF COMMUNICATION FROM THE ONSET

I'm sure it's much to the chagrin of most business owners that they can't be everywhere for their business at once. But, as a business continues to grow and expand, business leaders need to loosen the reigns and let others take control of some aspects– especially when expanding the presence internationally.

Within the franchising industry, this means trusting your franchise partners with the successful execution of your business in a new market. For us, this starts with extremely open lines of communication between both the corporate team and our franchise partners.

When an individual becomes a Sloan's franchisee, they are looking to us for all of the answers as to what to do, how things should look and how their business should operate. From the beginning, we strive to be attentive in enforcing our

BY ESTABLISHING AN OPEN DIALOGUE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, YOU CAN BUILD A RAPPORT WITH THE PARTNER TO HELP ENFORCE BRAND STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES IN THE FUTURE.

Sloan Kamenstein is the founder and owner of Sloan's Ice Cream. Kamenstein's rise to prominence stemmed from years of culinary practice in some of the best kitchens in the world, including London's Le Cordon Bleu culinary school and kitchens throughout France. Sloan's Ice Cream is known for its toy covered walls, colorful décor, and delicious sweets. The first shop opened in 1999 in South Florida and the brand began franchising in 2012. Since that time, it has grown to 11 locations in the United States and six in the Middle East.

standards and in helping the franchisee find the resources that they need on the local level. This includes a robust initial training process, daily and weekly check-ins, and visits to the international stores multiple times per year.

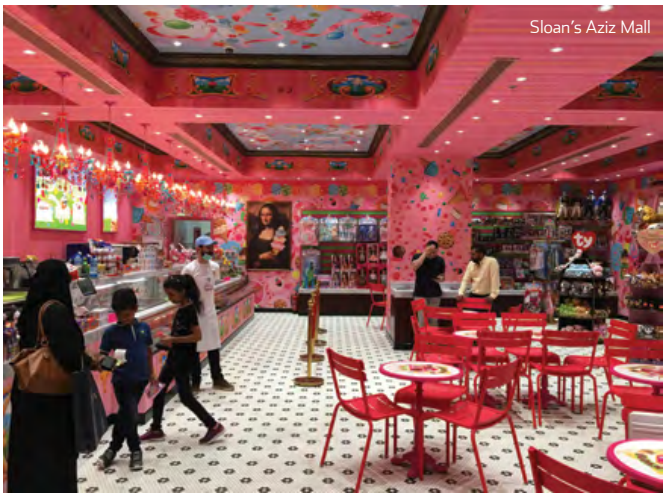
By establishing an open dialogue from the very beginning, you can build a rapport with the partner to help enforce brand standards and guidelines in the future.

3/ KEEP AN OPEN MIND ABOUT PRODUCT ALTERNATIVES OR SUBSTITUTIONS

We go through great lengths to maintain the same Sloan's experience that we established in the US on an international scale, as that's proven to be very successful in the Middle East with our brand and others. That being said, very few concepts can expand into new markets – let alone countries– without making some alterations to the products or services that they offer. Varying cultural norms, product availability, or local laws can all affect a brand's offerings in international markets.

For example, when shipping food products internationally, you have to take into account the shelf life of those products. In some cases, we've had to find alternatives or sample local products that meet the brand standard, and are easy to obtain by the local franchise partner.

Additionally, there may be instances in which international partners find products at a cheaper rate locally than what it would cost to import them from the US. While we always encourage our partners to save money where they can, it is extremely important to maintain the quality that Sloan's is synonymous with and follow the quality control process. This includes sharing pictures and samples of the substitute product so that our corporate team can ensure guests at any location are all receiving the same overall Sloan's experience.


Sloan's Aziz Mall

Replicating the brand experience and product quality on an international scale can be difficult, but with the right business partners, open lines of communication and an open mind, you can find continued success in international markets. ■

FRANCHISING YOUR BRAND

A checklist to keep in mind when you are approaching franchisees for your brand in the Middle East

by JOBY BERETTA

Once your homegrown F&B concept has proven to be successful with the first outlet or two, it may be time to consider franchising to further its growth. Here is a basic checklist of points to keep in mind when franchising out your brand.

PART ONE
PREPARING TO FRANCHISE

If this is the first time you are considering franchising, before approaching any franchisees, there is some homework you need to do beforehand:

1. Protect your brand

First, you will need to make sure your brand name has been registered as a trademark in the relevant territories in which you are looking to franchise. As a bare minimum, a clearance search should be undertaken to make sure the proposed name isn't already in use by a third party in those countries. Remember that here in the Middle East, there are some restrictions on registering certain products; for instance, alcoholic drinks.

2. Build your manual

The next step to creating a franchise is to develop the franchise manual. This document essentially sets out the way in which the franchisee should operate the business under the brand. There are various consultants out there that can assist with this if you need professional help.

3. Perform due diligence

As the franchisor, you will want to undertake sufficient due diligence in relation to both the proposed territory (e.g. the competition, specific local laws, etc.) and the franchisee (e.g. checking public records, their financial accounts, background checks on the shareholders, etc.) The franchisee will also be doing similar due diligence on you and your brand, so you may wish to prepare a standard pack of information for franchisees, which is a legal requirement in some countries in Europe and around the world.

PART TWO
BUILDING THE FRANCHISE AGREEMENT

The final piece of preparation for franchising is to ask your franchise specialist lawyer to prepare a template agreement for you. It is market standard for the franchisor to prepare this, and you will need to decide your approach- i.e. putting forward a fair and reasonable short form agreement, or going for a more "belts and braces" franchise agreement. ›››

Key points to consider in the franchise agreement include:

1. Term/Renewal
You will need to decide the initial term (often 5-10 years) and terms for renewal (including whether it's mutual, or subject to the franchisee meeting certain criteria).

2. Territory
Here in the region, the franchisee often requests exclusivity for one or more countries in the GCC, but that will obviously come at a cost. Alternative options are to grant rights to a single country, but give a first right of refusal on additional countries.

3. Development plan
Is this franchise agreement going to be for a single outlet, or a development agreement which provides the framework for multiple outlet agreements? If the latter, what is the roll-out plan/ development schedule for the territory i.e. how many outlets to you expect the franchisee to roll out?

4. Fees
How are you going to structure the fees? For example: is there a territory fee, a royalty fee, an outlet fee, a training fee, etc.? How are these paid- i.e. upfront, or on opening of outlets, or quarterly, etc.?

5. Tax
Remember to set out who pays for any applicable taxes such as VAT on the fees, and whether the fees will be grossed up for any taxes, including withholding tax? Find out which of your entities will be entering into the franchise agreement, and if tax advice has been obtained on this in relation to this particular territory.

6. Franchisor obligations
What will you be offering in terms of support/training for the franchisee? Will this be provided from your own country, or will you travel to the franchisee? This will impact the tax advice, so it should be decided upfront.

7. Granted rights
Will the rights be exclusive (bearing in mind the commercial agency laws in the UAE and wider Middle East, which may protect the franchisee)? Also, will any of the rights be subject to amendment (e.g. removal of exclusivity) for failure to perform (e.g. failure to meet the development plan)? Will there be separate rights for development and operation of the outlets?

8. Specific assignment or termination rights
Do you want any specific rights of termination? Are your IP rights restricted in duration in any way (e.g. patented systems/licenses from third parties)? Do you need any specific rights of assignment e.g. upon sale of the brand/intra-group reorganizations?

9. Sub-franchising
What rights, if any, will the franchisee have to sub-franchise in the territory? Will such sub-franchises be on an agreed form of sub-franchise agreement attached to the main franchise agreement? Will you be a party/have third party rights to directly enforce against the sub-franchisees?

10. Specific restrictions on the franchisee
Are there any specific restrictions on the franchisee e.g. no internet sales/no re-sales to discount shops/malls? What restrictions (if any) are you expecting to place on the franchisee in relation to franchising/ operating a competing business, and how long will this last, and which brands does it apply to?

11. Competition law issues
Consider whether any particular restrictions on the franchisee could give rise to competition law issues (e.g. restrictions on exclusivity, setting of prices, non-competition, etc.).

12. Governing law and dispute resolution
What is the preferred approach for governing law and dispute resolution i.e. courts or arbitration (applicable rules, seat, language)? Consider applicable mandatory local laws in the territory. Is the country where the franchisee is located a signatory to the NY Convention on Arbitration? Do the local courts have power to assume jurisdiction on matter of public policy?

13. Applicable foreign laws
Are there any applicable anti-bribery laws (e.g. US FCPA and/or UK Bribery Act) or data protection laws (e.g. GDPR) that you are required to pass down to the franchisee?

14. Right of step-in
Do you want the option to step-in upon termination of the franchise agreement, to the extent possible, taking into consideration the foreign ownership restrictions onshore in the UAE and elsewhere in the region?

15. Specific requirements
Do you have any other specific requirements such as purchasing of equipment/special ingredients from you, the process for approval of suitable sites, format of monthly reporting, etc.?

Joby Beretta is Director of The Bench, an award-winning innovative legal services provider offering cost-effective legal services, legal recruitment, and lawyers on demand. The Bench was set up in the UAE in 2016 based on client demand in the Middle East for a boutique firm focusing on the technology, media and telecom, and hospitality sectors. www.thebenchlaw.com

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A COALITION OF THE WILLING

The five roles you need to make your corporate venturing program a success

by DADO VAN PETEGHEM and OMAR MOHOUT

We probably don't have to convince anyone that the world is changing faster than ever. That technology is evolving exponentially, and that consumer behavior and economic markets are radically changing as a result. We're clearly up for a challenge in our companies. Many organizations are falling behind the rapidly changing customer, market and technology landscape. As a result, their business models are being challenged by the new players on the block. To prevail in this new world, you need a faster clock speed than the market. Unfortunately, most companies are behind the curve. And we all know it won't slow down from here; on the contrary, it will continue to accelerate.

Having the opportunity of working with a lot of different organizations, I believe that corporate venturing can help you to move faster, together. A brilliant misquote of Mark Twain, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated," describes to a tee the state of larger companies and corporations today. Corporations and small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) are in the best possible position to leverage their brand, talent, resources, network and scale to defend and even grow market share. However, corporate venturing is already happening in many companies and industries, but not necessarily in the right way.

Let's first begin with defining corporate venturing. It is about setting up structural collaborations with external ventures/parties to drive mutual growth. The problem arises when corporates think startups are evil, and vice-versa. Everything depends on the clear intent and expectations of both parties.

Your corporate venturing program requires some of the brightest people in your organization. You will find people with broad backgrounds and skillsets to be suitable for the roles you need. You need to form a "coalition of the willing," people who are 200% committed, and have a passion to set up collaborations.

To address your first concern, you don't need a completely new team to run this program. We're defining roles here, some of which will be performed by multiple people, while others are done by the same person depending on their skillset. You will likely get the best results when people can focus on one role, but this is not feasible for all organizations. Try to find the best with the people that you have.

Here are the five roles we defined as crucial to making your corporate venturing program a success.

1/ Fleet manager

The fleet manager is the primary responsible for your corporate venturing activities. This person is deeply involved in the overall corporate strategy, and helps direct it based on their experience and learnings from turning the mothership into a fleet.

This person needs to both understand the framework of the corporate world, and the radical new approaches that startups employ. Ideally, this person has experience with both, but if you can't find someone like that, then pick the startup side over the corporate side. It is easier to learn how to function in a corporate, since they move slower and often in more structured ways, than it is to execute on the startup side.

The fleet manager's main responsibility is to ensure the program gives the maximum possible ROI for all parties involved. This is not just about short-term financials, but growth in all areas.

He or she needs to ensure that when a new venture becomes part of the family, there is a plan ready to help them add and receive the maximum amount of value. This plan will be created together with the "connectors"- more on that in a moment.

Other responsibilities of the fleet manager are reporting to the corporate management, proposing new ventures, negotiation with new ventures and setting targets. The fleet manager is connecting the dots between the speedboats and the mothership.

YOUR CORPORATE VENTURING PROGRAM REQUIRES SOME OF THE BRIGHTEST PEOPLE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION. YOU WILL FIND PEOPLE WITH BROAD BACKGROUNDS AND SKILLSETS TO BE SUITABLE FOR THE ROLES YOU NEED.

2/ Mentors

Mentors are a key to success. They guide the ventures in their strategic decisions and daily operations. Like the fleet manager, mentors must understand how to execute like a startup. You may find some of these people inside your organization, but it is more likely that you will need to find external mentors in startups and scaleups.

The mentor role is intentionally loosely defined, because there are no perfect solutions. Mentorship requires chemistry and a genuine interest in what the venture is trying to accomplish. Simply paying some tech guru to help your venture won't get you the kind of results you're hoping for.

Ideally, a venture will have multiple internal and external mentors to guide them. We would advise against setting this up through structural meetings. Instead, let the connection grow organically and see what kind of setup they prefer. If either party is unhappy with the relationship, there are no strings attached to find other mentors. Different stages and challenges for the ventures will require different types of expertise anyways.

Avoid focusing only on the big "known" names in the industry who will attract startups, but also try to bring in hands-on experts as mentors that can really deliver detailed expertise.

THE FIVE C'S OF CORPORATE VENTURING

WHAT YOU NEED TO SET UP A CORPORATE VENTURING FRAMEWORK IN YOUR COMPANY

1. COALITION
Selecting the right team and competences is of crucial importance to make your corporate venturing activities successful. What type of roles do you need to put in place?

2. CONFIGURATION
Corporate venturing comes in many forms and it's important to choose the right configuration for your company and maturity in collaboration with ventures. Where to start?

3. COMMUNICATION
How are you going to signal the market about your activities and collaborations, and what channels are you going to set up to enable that?

4. CODE OF CONDUCT
Defining the partnership and behavior of both parties involved in the very beginning of the collaboration can avoid difficult situations later on. What do you need to take into account?

5. CULTIVATION
Evaluating the collaboration from both sides is needed to continuously learn & adapt to meet each other's expectations. What are the right KPIs?

3/ Connectors

While mentors help the ventures deal with obstacles and opportunities, connectors help create those opportunities. These roles can be performed by the same people, if the mentor shows a deeper involvement on both the corporate and venture side. ›››

Connectors need to be able to identify, judge and create valuable connections between the ventures and internal or external parties. Together with the fleet manager, the connectors will create a plan to do this in a structural way.

When a new venture joins, you're at a make-or-break moment and many corporates get this wrong. They often acquire a venture, and then start thinking afterwards about what they can do to create a valuable and mutually-beneficial relationship.

We urge you to come up with a plan for this beforehand, along with ownership and accountability. The connectors create this plan together with the fleet manager, so that all ventures are supported in a structural way.

The plan can consist of simple steps like:

› Onboarding process in the assets the corporate provides.
› Contact details of go-to people inside the corporate for things like distribution or event organization.
› Pitch events to introduce the venture to the organization.
› Invitations for upcoming company events.
› Encouraging employees with similar ideas to approach the new ventures.

4/ Scouts

Your scouts are the people responsible for finding interesting ventures to invest in or to collaborate with. You can compare this role to sports scouts that spot and track young or undiscovered talents. Observant people with a passion for networking are perfect for this role. You will find people like these across different departments in your organization and probably primarily in business development.

The more people that can help you spot opportunities, the better; as long as they have the strategic insight to spot the kind of ventures which is the vision of the program. They also shouldn't be afraid to bring up radically new ideas. Scouts can use platforms such as ProductHunt and AngelList to find opportunities, but they should primarily be out in the field as often as possible. Scouts report their findings to the fleet manager, who can then move in to negotiate and potentially set up the collaboration.

5/ Evangelists

Do not only rely on scouting opportunities; you will need evangelists to "signal" the market. They will spread the word on what you're trying to accomplish with your corporate venturing program.

While your fleet manager has the right vision for this, chances are they may have their hands full running the program and won't always be available for this.

Your evangelists spread the story, both online and offline, to put you in the market and claim your corporate venturing position. This may invite the right parties to collaborate with and add value to the program. So, going to events, speaking at the right conferences, communicating about the outcome of collaborations, etc. are of vital importance to attract the right parties.

Evangelists need to be advocates, ambassadors, and great storytellers. Some of your most outspoken scouts will be evangelists, but there is a difference between networking and seeing opportunities, and marketing a story across different channels.

The team described above should connect optimally with people in the business units (which can be innovation/digital/startup leads for the units), and each party needs a clear role. The best approach to set up successful corporate venturing is matching people in the field (drivers), who know the needs of the customers with a central unit (enablers) for coherence and inspiration.

The end goal of your corporate venturing program is to generate impact on your organization on many different levels- business, innovation, culture, etc. This implies that it's important to infuse the collaborations within the business as much as possible, to avoid it becoming a separate unit acting as a black box. ■

This is an edited excerpt from the book *Corporate Venturing: Accelerating Growth Through Collaboration with Startups* by Dado Van Peteghem and Omar Mohout. The book is now available to buy from: www.corporateventuring.co

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BUILDING TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

We need to think about **talent** the way we think about sales **by JUGAL PARYANI**

Talk to founders of any growing business and you will find one common pain point- lack of access to top talent with the right skill sets. Even the most successful companies in the Middle East are not immune to the region's skills gap, a widening mismatch between the demand for skills, and the supply of talent that has them. This, of course, isn't a problem unique to the region. But with one of the youngest populations in the world, it's more important now than ever that we see significant investments in education and learning to prepare our workforce for tomorrow. But what can business leaders do today to prepare for tomorrow? It starts by rethinking talent management.

Everyone's looking for senior developers, digital marketing managers, and seasoned sales professionals- but where do they all come from? There's a culture of talent poaching that's becoming exponentially more expensive, rather than building sustainable talent structures.

69% of employers say that their inability to attract and retain middle-skills talent frequently affects their company's performance. There's another way to solve that problem.

USING SALES STRATEGY FOR TALENT MANAGEMENT

Sales strategy typically works in funnels, with teams helping prospective clients move across key milestones in a sales process, thereby building a pipeline of revenue based on the likelihood of deals closing.

CREATE STRUCTURED PROGRAMS THAT WATCH YOUR STAR PERFORMERS AND SUPPORT THEM TO ACCELERATE THEIR GROWTH, WHETHER IT MIGHT BE FOR SKILL OR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.

This way we can manage sales processes, predict revenues and make plans for the future. More companies need to start thinking the same way in terms of managing talent and that starts with building talent pipelines.

Adopt a funnel approach where revenue is the jobs you're looking to fill, milestones are skills that need to be developed, and leads are potential candidates. Using talent pipelines, companies can solve major challenges for mid-to-senior level requirements by developing junior employees' skills relevant to their business.

CRAFTING YOUR TALENT ROAD MAP

In most companies, revenue targets are typically set on a quarterly or monthly basis, and with younger companies, even weekly, to align the overall company strategy and goals. Yet most companies don't have set plans for talent. Talent projections can be mapped out in a similar way- what should your team look like in 6, 12, 18, months?

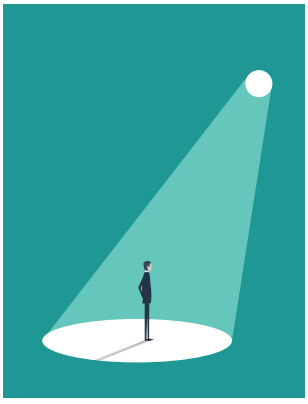
It's imperative that those plans are aligned with revenue targets, road maps of your products and where you see your competitive advantage materialize.

Jugal Paryani is the VP of Marketing at Oliv, leading performance and growth marketing strategy with the aim to help youth employment rates in the Middle East. He recently led the company rebrand from InternsME's to Oliv, crafting the brand story, design guidelines, and garnering media support. Jugal was a guest lecturer at the University of Toronto, Canada, and has delivered talks at AstroLabs, UAE. He is regularly invited to panels on marketing, startup growth, and tech events such as Social Media Week Dubai, Thomson Reuters' 150th Anniversary in MENA and Dubai Eye 103.8 Radio Station. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics, Books, and Media Studies from the University of Toronto, Canada. www.oliv.com

BUILDING TALENT PIPELINES

Start setting up talent funnels with milestones that structure early-stage careers at your company. This starts with building frameworks across your hiring process- defined job descriptions, candidate experience, hiring KPIs and insights, career pathways and people analytics.

These milestones should be varied depending on the career paths outlined- for a developer, it might look like shipping a product feature end-to-end, for sales, it might be leading new revenue streams, or for marketing, it might be setting up growth engines, and so on.



PREDICTING LEADERS AND CHAMPIONS

There's no reason to map out milestones if they aren't going to be tracked. Use milestones and the pace in reaching them to identify star performers, similar to using probabilities on deals in your revenue pipelines.

Create structured programs that watch your star performers and support them to accelerate their growth, whether it might be for skill or leadership development.

PLANNING SUPPLY BASED ON COMPANY GOALS

Once you've set up talent pipelines and have a reasonable idea on what your team might look like down the line, you can start mapping data points against your talent road maps.

Are you on track? Where are you still seeing mismatches between demand and supply of skills needed? How can you pivot your talent pipeline strategy to correct course? It will need the investment of your time to answer these questions to make sure your business is ready for tomorrow.

ADOPT A FUNNEL APPROACH WHERE REVENUE IS THE JOBS YOU'RE LOOKING TO FILL, MILESTONES ARE SKILLS THAT NEED TO BE DEVELOPED, AND LEADS ARE POTENTIAL CANDIDATES.

MAKING TOMORROW EASIER

Bringing in that early stage talent and developing it actually helps solve another challenge looming over businesses today- employee retention. Studies show talent that have gone through a company's internship program are 34% more likely to stay at the five-year-mark compared to external hires.

That means with effective talent pipelines, not only are you developing talent relevant to your business, but are also more likely to retain that talent after those skills are developed.

Government and education sector intervention necessary to close in on the skills gap often lags behind, and given the pace of technological innovation rapidly increasing, businesses can no longer afford to rely on market forces for talent, but begin developing the skills needed internally.

Or else risk become obsolete, just like the hundreds of jobs at risk. ■

IMAGE COURTESY DUBAI CHAMBER

flydubai and VUL9 signing an MoU at the first edition of Dubai Startup Hub's Market Access program in 2017

MAKING (REAL) DEALS HAPPEN

DUBAI STARTUP HUB LAUNCHES SECOND EDITION OF MARKET ACCESS PROGRAM

Dubai Startup Hub (DSH), the entrepreneurship initiative of Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, has kicked off the second edition of Market Access, its program that aims to bridge the gap and facilitate deals between startups, SMEs, and leading companies and government entities in Dubai. DSH has called on startups and SMEs to submit ideas and solutions that solve key challenges faced by prominent companies and organizations in the Emirate.

DP World, Emirates NBD, Sanofi, and NIKAI Group are the four large enterprises participating in the second edition of the program, and the companies have also listed projects or core challenges they are facing, with an aim to attract solutions that can be implemented within their entities. DP World is looking for smart technologies to be implemented within its headquarters including those related to virtual reality, face recognition and urban farming. Emirates NBD is seeking solutions that can enhance customer service and operational efficiencies, in addition to new banking products for retail, SME and corporate customers and digital only offerings for millennials, among others. Sanofi, a biopharmaceutical company, aims to attract solutions to enhance relationships with its customers, and global conglomerate NIKAI Group is looking for products and services in the areas of technology, digital transformation, blockchain, logistics, education and healthcare.

"Following a very successful first edition of Market Access, we are aiming to broaden the scope of participants and attract startups and SMEs with new ideas and cutting-edge solutions," Dubai Chamber's Manager for Entrepreneurship Strategy Natalia Sycheva said in a statement. "This unique program provides an ideal platform for participants to market their solutions and products and benefit from new growth opportunities," she added. Selected candidates are offered an opportunity to tailor their ideas to meet specific needs, gain experience, and network with industry players, while also getting the chance to secure real deals for their enterprises.

www.dubaichamber.com/dubaistartuphub/marketaccess

From operator to service provider

The role of telcos in achieving tomorrow's digital future **by HANY FAHMY ALY**

In recent years, the world has plunged head-first into a technological transformation that has altered almost every aspect of our lives. This is the new normal, and we foresee the continuation of this trend into the future. As the world grows more digitally dependent, the role of telcos in achieving the connected future will continue to evolve at a rapid pace. While connectivity is found at the center of all things digital, telecoms operators must endeavor to increase their agility and versatility as service providers, delivering disruptive services and solutions that will catapult the digital transformation ahead of the competition.

Particularly in business, and for the ever-growing SME category in the region, the digital future will rely on the provision of a comprehensive suite of services– from basic connectivity to high-end ICT solutions. Currently, SMEs represent 94% of the total number of companies operating in the UAE. As SMEs continue to function as the backbone for the business landscape and economy in the UAE and across the region, telcos will become the nerve center of a digital future, supporting the stark majority of businesses by facilitating innovation and transformation from every angle. Achieving this will depend on the ability of operators to adapt to the convergence of life, mobility, economy, governance, and environment under an overarching technological umbrella, and to embrace a change of mindset with a visionary approach towards digitalization.

In so doing, telcos must overcome obstacles associated with achieving the digital vision for the future– especially as they pertain to SME operations. These obstacles revolve around data monetization, operational efficiency, converged access, and adding value. As telcos' business models evolve, they must be able to monetize services and streamline operations on a fundamental level; from there, they must develop a converging framework for customer access and devise new strategies to offer customers more as their needs change. The SME sector is constantly changing to fulfill new demands and adapt to the business landscape– and in the coming years, overcoming these obstacles to keep pace with SMEs will require operators to focus on three key business components: connectivity infrastructure, digital media, and information and communication technology (ICT) solutions.

In the digital revolution, infrastructure plays an integral role as the foundation for digital uptake and technological transformation. It facilitates connectivity and acts as a major instrument in the economic, social, and digital development of cities and countries. Next is digital media, which acts as the primary vehicle for moving beyond traditional services of voice and data connectivity. It presents an opportunity to capitalize on new, revenue-generating business strategies that will come as natural next steps in the digital transformation. Finally, ICT solutions are fundamental: they are the tool that operators have always had and will, in the presence of evolution and adaptation, continue to be telcos' most valuable asset.

By zeroing in on key components like these, and addressing how they can be adapted to best serve enterprises and other customer segments, operators can expect to see continued growth as the digital transformation unfolds.

A new business model that caters to the demands of businesses, and particularly SMEs, will ensure that ICT players stay ahead of the pack in terms of maintaining a competitive edge and establishing a leading position in the digital transformation. The crucial aspect of this adaptive phase is the willingness to expand beyond connectivity and become true service providers, embracing the vital role of telcos in the technological takeover. In order to maximize and optimize resources, competencies, and experiences, operators must channel their efforts to become more versatile and agile in their role.

In line with these sentiments, du is working towards implementing these strategic changes as it prepares for the digital future in the UAE. Particularly in terms of the smart city agenda, which will revolutionize Dubai as a global innovation hub, du is laying the groundwork for SMEs to lead the smart city transformation through innovation and technology implementation. With initiatives like Dubai Pulse, a central operating system for the city's smart services and technologies; and Smart Concierge, which helps businesses solve visitor management problems through blockchain technology, du is providing the value-added services that support the smart city future for both the public and private sectors. With a focus on SMEs, which are already acting as a driving force behind the digital transformation in the UAE, du is thus making strides towards the successful shift from operator to service provider. ■

Hany Fahmy Aly is Executive Vice President – Enterprise Business at du. Hany brings more than 18 years of experience to his position at du, where he heads up the company's Enterprise Business division. His past experience leaves him well-positioned to do this, having worked in diverse sectors such as marketing, sales, customer experience and relationship management, with a strong foundation of financial skills. Prior to joining du in 2013, Hany worked with Vodafone in Egypt, where he spent 13 years working up to the position of Chief Business Officer. Hany started his professional career with Procter and Gamble in Egypt. Hany holds a Master of Business Administration from Columbia Business School in New York, from which he graduated with honors.

Isobel Abulhoul Obe, CEO & Trustee - Emirates Literature Foundation and Director - Emirates Airline Festival of Literature, and Dr. Farooq Wasil, CEO & Global Head - Affordable Schools, GEMS Education

Dr. Fatima Al Aydaroos, Space Science Senior Specialist, UAE Space Agency; Fatima Al Kaabi, Youngest Emirati Inventor; H.E. Dr. Maryam Matar, Chairman, UAE Genetic Disease Association; Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, Director General, International Center for Biosaline Agriculture; and Maya AlHawary, Chairwoman of Board of Governors and Director of Planning at Dubai Carmel School

Winners of the National Treasure Business Excellence Awards 2018

Sustainable growth

National Treasure Conference 2018 focuses on socially responsible entrepreneurship

Gathering experts in healthcare, education, sustainability, women entrepreneurship and social enterprises, the second edition of the annual National Treasure Conference was held in April 2018 at the Amity University Dubai. Hosted under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Cabinet Minister and Minister of Tolerance, and President of UAE Genetic Disease Association, the conference focused on sustainable growth, entrepreneurial opportunities and socially responsible ventures in the region.

The event kicked off with an opening note by Dr. Maryam Matar, founder and Chairperson of the UAE Genetic Diseases Association, who addressed the need for supporting ecosystems that enables STEM careers. The conference also emphasized on taking strides in the education realm, particularly on building inclusive institutions to achieve sustainable development. It also explored how technologies such as AI can be sustainable in building future smart cities, plus the shift in healthcare to build business models that are more patient-centric using new technologies such as mobile apps, virtual care centers and personalized interactions with health specialists. Some of the speakers included Dr. Fatima Al Aydaroos, Space Science Senior Specialist of the UAE Space Agency, Heather Henyon, founder of WAIN, Helen Al Uzaizi, CEO of Bizworld UAE, Dr. Lance E. De Masi, President of the American University in Dubai, Isobel Abulhoul OBE, CEO and Trustee of the Emirates Literature Foundation, and Dr. Raza Siddiqui, CEO of Arabian Healthcare Group.

The conference ended with the National Treasure Business Excellence Awards 2018, which recognized prominent entities and entrepreneurs in their fields. Neha Shaikh, founder and Chief Innovation Officer of National Treasure, commented, "The series of excellence awards is much more than recognizing successful organizations or individuals; it is an encouragement and motivation to our winners to excel further in their respective fields. The winners were shortlisted and selected for extraordinary work towards youth, sustainability, women empowerment, society and innovation."

IMAGE CREDIT NATIONAL TREASURE

CUT YOUR LOSSES

Five easy ways startups can manage debts from day one

by PAUL BRYSON

Starting your own business often means getting into debt. You might have a little equity of your own for the setup, but chances are you'll also be using a loan, a credit card, or even a few investors. And as startups generally don't see profit for three to five years, this means you'll be in debt to some degree until business takes off. So, here are five easy ways to keep on top of it– along with a few warnings to keep in mind.

1 STAY CALM AND ACCEPT IT

A lot of articles focus on managing debt once you're already in it. But there's no better way to avoid problems than by preparing for what to expect in advance.

Setting realistic expectations about being in debt can take off some of the pressure. New business owners have enough to worry about in terms of setting up shop, finding new clients, pleasing investors, and doing the work. Worrying unnecessarily about debt is only going to detract from focus on growing the business and create an obstacle to success.

Research experts CB Insights found, in a recent study of 101 startups, that the top two reasons for failure were running out of money (29%) and a lack of market need (42%). These reasons are inexorably interlinked– not only with each other, but more importantly with a lack of forward thinking. It demonstrates the importance of making sure you're spending your money strategically, while also keeping business focus on filling a market need. As a startup, this is where your focus needs to be, not on fretting about debt.

As entrepreneur and author Tim Ferris wrote in *The 4-Hour Work Week*: "It is far more lucrative and fun to leverage your strengths instead of attempting to fix all the chinks in your armor. Focus on better use of your best weapons instead of constant repair." Accept you will be in debt at some stage, and concentrate on those tasks which are going to bring profit.

2 ASSIGN A BUDGET (AND ANALYZE IT)

A 2016 study in the UK showed that some 9% of startups had no set budget, which means these businesses are setting themselves up for trouble. Why? Because assigning a startup budget doesn't just mean planning on how to spend your money, but also how to control your costs.

Setting a startup budget means identifying both setting up and ongoing business costs from day one. These will be a mixture of variable and fixed expenses, such as office space, staff wages, utilities, equipment, and marketing. But don't just guess at these numbers. Do your research to make sure you haven't underestimated anything.

Remember that in the UAE it is not always easy for startups to get access to credit in the first place: according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, loan applications are rejected between 50 and 70% of the time. This can be a good thing in the sense that it is more difficult to get into debt– but one thing you should not do is take out loans from less reputable sources to help with your setup costs.

Setting a startup budget helps identify those costs essential to getting your business running, as well as giving you a spending plan that allows you to grow while paying off your debts. By creating this kind of budget, and analyzing it on an ongoing basis to allow for movement in the market and the economy, you're giving your business the best chance of success.

3 CONSOLIDATE WHAT YOU CAN

Many startups get their start through funding from multiple sources. Research based on data of the fastest growing companies in America showed

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that over half had financed through a bank loan, while other main sources included credit cards and angel investors. And with each debt there are ongoing requirements, repayments to the creditors, and the threat of penalties for missed payments.

Managing just one source of funding is tough enough, let alone dealing with multiple streams. Burdening your startup with unnecessary stress and time-consuming accounting, when its focus needs to be on earning money, is a good way to find yourself with spiraling money problems.

Pulling all of your debts into one consolidation loan is a great way of managing them. It means turning several repayments (all at different times of the month) into a single payment, which makes it easier to keep track of your financial situation and set your budget accordingly. Depending on which consolidation loan you opt for – secured or unsecured– the interest rate may be lower too, although, given the risks involved in taking on a secured loan against assets such as your house, car, etc., it would be wise to talk to a professional debt consolidation service provider to discuss your options.

It's easy to let multiple debts (and repayments) get out of control. Consolidating them into a single loan is a great way of managing your total debt and will allow you to better stick to your budget. Which also relates to an important warning: avoid taking on unnecessary loans when your startup is in its fledgling phase if you're not confident you'll be able to pay them back in time. Take time to think very carefully about which expenses are vital to the running of your business, and which can wait.

4 TRIAGE YOUR PAYMENTS

Remember that in business, everything is relative. Shikhar Ghosh from Harvard Business School has illustrated this by pointing out that not all company "failures" are equal. If failure means literally liquidating all assets, then the rate is around 30-40%. However, if it is defined as simply falling short of a projection, the rate is up in the 90-95% region.

This applies to debt, too– not all of them are equal. Some are essential to the survival of your business, while others are a little more flexible. So, manage them better by prioritizing which are the most important, and which can wait a little longer.

Priority debts are the ones that will cause you serious problems if they remain unpaid. These could include things like utility bills, rents, mortgages, and taxes, or in more extreme cases possibly even court fines and bailiff action. They might not be the largest debts, but they are the ones that you absolutely must take care of first, otherwise you could be facing penalties of anything from loss of power, to bankruptcy, or even losing your home.

Any non-urgent debts can wait until you've taken care of the important ones. These non-priorities might include things like bank loans, credit cards, or overdrafts, where you might be able to pay the minimum amount required until you can afford to pay more. The consequences of non-payment with these will also be less serious than your priorities, with small fines the most likely, so this will again help take the pressure off, although repeated non-payments will still lead to serious consequences, so consider this only a very short-term fix to get you out of trouble.

Write a list of all your debts and highlight those where the consequences of non-payment will be catastrophic for your business. Also include those debts with the highest interest rates. Make these your priority repayments and clear them as soon as possible. Meanwhile, pay as little as you can on the non-urgent payments until such time as you can spare the money to clear them too.

5 CUT BACK ON ALL UNNECESSARY EXPENSES

It's easy to get into debt by chasing a vision. And you wouldn't be alone: according to the Institute of International Finance, global debt hit a record high of US$233 trillion in the third quarter of 2017- and the largest chunk of this, $68 trillion, belongs to non-financial companies.

> ASSIGNING A STARTUP BUDGET DOESN'T JUST MEAN PLANNING ON HOW TO SPEND YOUR MONEY, BUT ALSO HOW TO CONTROL YOUR COSTS.

But if debts are beginning to stack up to an unmanageable level, you need to think about where you can scale back operations. This not only means identifying priority debts (as above), but looking at every expense and figuring out what is essential and what can go or be reduced. For example, having the latest technology might not be essential for most startups, in which case you could look at moving to second-hand equipment, or even explore leasing, which could allow for more updated technology with a lower upfront cost.

There are always expenses you can cut back on. Second-hand or leased equipment is usually an option, and you can also investigate cheaper utility alternatives, more flexible working arrangements (staff working remotely equals lower office overheads), and reducing your service offering to a more manageable level until you can invest more as the business grows. And don't get yourself into worse debt by putting extra expenses –such as advertising costs– onto your credit card.

Keep it simple

As stated in the *Small Business Survival Book*, "Just about every business faces difficult financial periods at some time. Despite the best of business plans, tough times can result from things beyond your control." So, debt is an often unavoidable part of being a startup. But developing a smart, cost-effective business mindset will keep you out of trouble– putting you in a great position to manage your debt, and keep your startup fighting fit. ■

Kuwait Vision 2035

DRIVING OPPORTUNITY

THREE RECOMMENDATIONS TO HELP SPUR ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN KUWAIT

by JARED WILLIS

In recent years, there has been a strong trend amongst oil-rich nations in the Middle East to diversify their economies in order to reduce dependence on oil and its cyclical swings. This policy is presented in Abu Dhabi's Vision 2030, which aims to create a secure, open economy through sustainable diversification, as well as in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, unveiled by HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2016. In Kuwait, Vision 2035 aims to transform Kuwait into a commercial and financial hub, and among other targets, aims to create 3,500 small businesses. The concept of diversification in this context goes beyond simply increasing the number of sectors taking part in economic activity- it also involves fostering innovation and encouraging entrepreneurs, small businesses, as well as foreign direct investment (FDI).

The opportunity for a country such as Kuwait is clear. There is a homegrown phenomenon of local concepts in food & beverage (F&B) and retail, often taking advantage of avid use of social media amongst Kuwaitis to promote and distribute products and services. The innovation is not just in the creativity behind the businesses, but includes finding unique workarounds to the challenging bureaucracy and business environment dominated by international brands and large conglomerates. Kuwait's extreme connectivity enables firms to sell and promote their products and services through innovative mediums such as Instagram and WhatsApp.

KUWAIT VISION © NIGEL HUNT

Berkeley Research group (BRG) recently studied the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kuwait to explore ways the government can better align its support of SMEs to the aspirations and strategic goals of Kuwaiti entrepreneurs. Our study noted that due to the relatively high purchasing power of Kuwaiti nationals, subsidies, and other government programs to support the private sector, many of these F&B and retail businesses are highly profitable in Kuwait but their business models are not duplicable elsewhere. Our study also looked at the phenomenon of Kuwaiti businesses that aim for global markets from the outset. Many of these find Dubai a more suitable business environment, because of its easier (albeit more expensive) and more open regulatory environment, and larger talent pool.

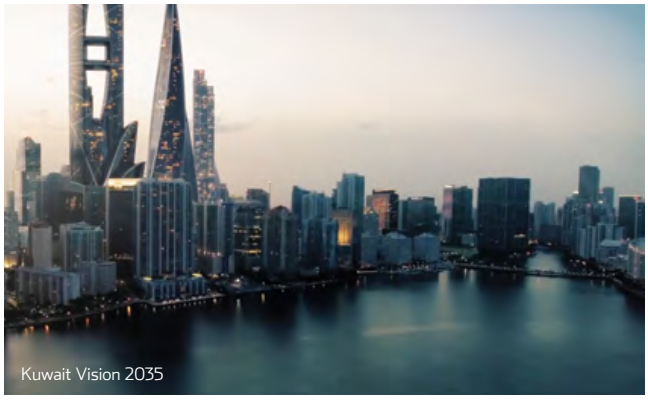
Our study concluded that Kuwait's support of entrepreneurs risks failing to achieve the country's ultimate economic goal of diversifying sources of income, as many of the small businesses in F&B and retail are not scaling up into global businesses. As a result, oil earnings remain the most dominant driver of revenue into the country. In addition, many of the high value and scalable businesses are relocating out of Kuwait, and so, the country is losing out on the value, either in jobs or spillover effects, created by their innovations.

Nevertheless, by drawing on lessons learned from other "clusters of innovation" such as those in smaller European countries or Singapore, we found that Kuwait has an opportunity to be strategically focused on areas of local strength—the country's economic vision can be accomplished by properly capitalizing on these phenomena, and aligning government support with the needs and aspirations of local entrepreneurs.

One key source of income is Kuwait's budding reputation as an F&B and retail cluster. Large numbers of GCC nationals and expats could be attracted to visit Kuwait by leveraging Kuwait's existing reputation and marketing it in target markets, as well as by providing incentives. Examples of this include discounts on Kuwait Airways for weekend trips to Kuwait, and establishing a website (e.g. www.visitKuwait.com) that organizes information on local festivals and activities, promotes Kuwait's traditional restaurants and coffee shops, as well as pop-ups of Kuwaiti retail stores that may be Instagram-based and managed from home. A small and coordinated investment could go a long way towards encouraging visits by high-spending tourists to increase the country's revenue and bolster the energy and investment in small businesses.

A second way to capitalize on the homegrown F&B and retail phenomenon in Kuwait would be to encourage large Kuwaiti conglomerates to identify and partner with SMEs to help them expand into regional and global chains in the Middle East and beyond. The possibilities are worth exploring as an investment and partnership of this nature would merge the key strengths of the Kuwaiti private sector.

AN OVERHAUL OF THE ENTIRE ECOSYSTEM IS REQUIRED, FROM PRIMARY EDUCATION TO EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, FROM UNIVERSITIES TO SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH BODIES.


Kuwait Vision 2035

A final recommendation involves implementing protocols to create and retain high-value and high-risk entrepreneurial ventures in Kuwait. This is more complicated as not only do the business and regulatory environments have to keep up with global competition, but it has also become easier for other countries to attract Kuwait's top talent through their economies of scale. To combat these issues, Kuwait needs to better coordinate its strategic efforts around education and R&D in areas it thinks it can add value. An overhaul of the entire ecosystem is required, from primary education to extracurricular activities, from universities to scientific research bodies, all supported by the presence of multinational corporations.

The seeds of success are already in place, yet it will take strong leadership, a sense of urgency to act, an appetite for risk-taking, and a coordinated effort for the current initiatives to bear fruit. Fortunately, Kuwait has a relatively small population, and the resources are in place that will allow it room to maneuver. In a region filled with so much hype and cynicism, Kuwait has an opportunity to set an example of how a country can overcome the "resource curse," and combine its historic reputation as a hardworking and innovative business community with its natural resources to both maintain its high standard of living, and support the needs and aspirations of local entrepreneurs. ■

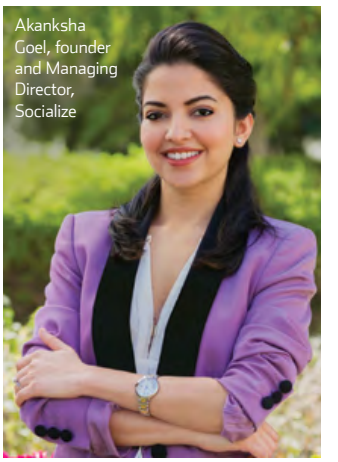
Jared Willis serves as General Manager of Berkeley Research Group's (BRG) Kuwait subsidiary. He has extensive experience and expertise working on and managing strategy-related engagements in the Middle East and particularly within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, facilitating the best approaches and methods from both the private and public sectors to solve complex business and public policy challenges. Willis is fluent in Arabic and has advised Middle Eastern governments, non-governmental organizations, and private businesses. He has managed several large projects involving teams from diverse business cultures operating around the world. He has worked with Middle Eastern businesses on marketing strategy, branding, and export opportunities to the United States. Willis has experience in public policy strategy and reform, economic and foreign policy, governance issues, entrepreneurship ecosystem development, business environment reform, healthcare, energy, construction, banking and finance, and intellectual property. www.thinkbrg.com

Changing the game

Founder Akanksha Goel on the evolution and growth of her digital media agency Socialize **by PAMELLA DE LEON**

For a company that started out as a one-woman show, Akanksha Goel, founder and Managing Director of Socialize, centers the company's accolades to its team: "The truth is, an entrepreneur starts a business, but it is the team that makes it successful." In 2010, Goel recalls launching the company at a time when social media was dubbed as "Web 2.0," and social networks weren't considered as marketing channels. Socialize sought to fill the gap in the market by being an agency that "could help brands connect with the region's increasingly digitally savvy consumer, and harness the untapped potential of the then-emerging social platforms." With a clear vision of the solution, Goel set out "transliterating the vision into a tangible service offering that clients could understand." The founder emphasizes on the significance of choosing the right people to "maintain the integrity, the purity, and thus the success of the Socialize value proposition," and thus, has been closely involved in recruiting and onboarding talent. This selectiveness also extends to clients the company works with: "To win in a world that is rapidly changing, due to the disruptive forces of technology, brands need to be nimble. Nimble brands need agile agencies, and agility is impossible in an environment constrained with hierarchy or predefined bureaucracy. Our tight selection of clients and people enabled us to create an ecosystem of like-minded individuals, that came together to do great work, taking Socialize from just a startup to becoming one of the region's most widely recognized independent agencies."

The company's first-mover advantage, says Goel, was the catalyst for their growth to being a one-stop shop for a client's digital marketing needs. Building a strong foundation of "process-driven operations" was essential: "We've adopted a full-service-agency business model and built a truly integrated offering that covers everything from planning and ideation, to creative and technical execution, to social strategy and digital media buying." With a 40-person strong team and a regional client base including Sony, General Mills, Mercedes-Benz, Bioderma, GEMS Education and Singapore Tourism, Socialize rose at a time when social platforms were being perceived as a way to interact with customers, and not as critical tools to drive business. On its strategy, Goel explains, "Everything we know in marketing today started with the introduction of radio, and then television. These were the tools that allowed us to reach millions of potential customers, and we believed that if we could get our message in front of people- that motivational, emotional message that caused people to change their minds, that would create business results. Today, that is still true, but the platforms have changed. The message, the creative [content] is still important- but the single platform is no longer available for the single message. The platforms are fragmented across different digital and analog tools, with brands needing to tailor their message for the target audience and for the platform. Finding the intersection between the appropriate message and ideal platform is key. And the most personal platform we have is mobile- especially in a region that has moved to mobile at record speed and spends more time within social networking apps than anywhere else in the world. This makes the social newsfeed the most valuable media entity for brands, to reach and engage potential customers. And this social newsfeed, is our playground. At Socialize, we help brands leverage social platforms and tools to effectively reach the right audience, with the right message, at the right time– and when done right, this has the power to instantly convert online social engagement into offline business actions."



Akanksha Goel, founder and Managing Director, Socialize

'TREP TALK

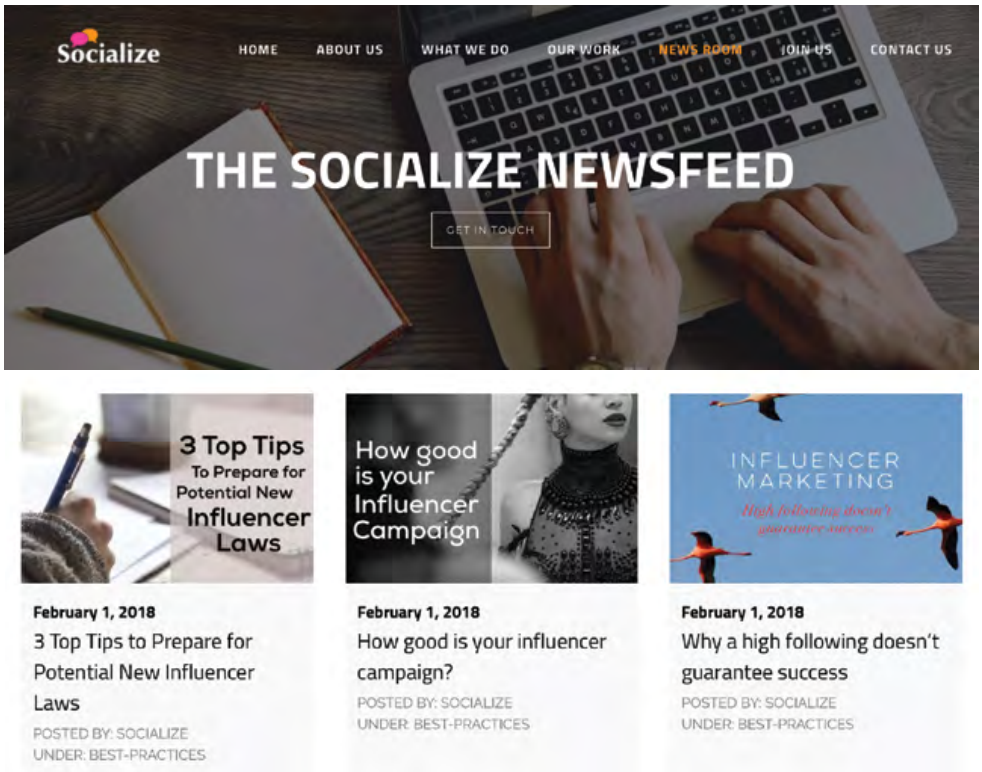
Akanksha Goel, founder and Managing Director, Socialize

What's your advice to early-stage entrepreneurs?

"My first tip is simple: dare to try. Only those who dare, succeed and only those who succeed make a difference. While it is comfortable to continue doing what you have always done, the way it has always been done, you need to have the audacity to follow your dreams if you wish to lead and create. Do not be afraid to say you do not know. We cannot know everything and as strong as we may be at our skills, we are as easily brought down by refusing to accept our weaknesses. Surround yourself by people who are passionate and believe in your cause and values. It is easier to teach someone technical skills than to teach them to care. Listen. Information is everywhere. Knowledge is power and in every piece of knowledge, there is an opportunity, which could make your (next) success. My last tip comes from Sir Richard Branson, 'If you don't know how to do something, say yes and learn how to do it later.' Opportunity favors the bold."

IMAGE CREDIT SOCIALIZE | WWW.SOCIALIZEAGENCY.COM

So, how has Socialize actually gone about doing this? Goel reveals its strategy to be something she calls "ART + SCIENCE." "ART stands for thumb-stopping creative," she says. "In a region where people spend so much time on mobile, a brand's content/message/story needs to stand out while their audience is scrolling. Our creative team specializes in creating this content that is built for the mobile newsfeed. SCIENCE stands for innovative media, harnessing the power of real-time social data to target audiences with military precision, allowing our personalized messages to be seen by the right people, at scale– driving measurable business growth for clients." An example of Socialize's modus operandi can be seen in a recent project it did for a client. For Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East, Socialize created an automotive bilingual chatbot called Kamal that "brought the car showroom directly" to the Messenger app. Their target was the younger consumer who'd rather scroll through a newsfeed than through a showroom, while also placing a high importance on speed and convenience of communication- which is why Socialize decided on making use of a messaging app like Messenger for this project. Using AI and natural language processing, customers were able to make use of the chatbot to virtually explore the full range available from the automaker, and get model recommendations based on habits, among others, to get real-time personalized engagement.



"OUR TIGHT SELECTION [...] ENABLED US TO CREATE AN ECOSYSTEM OF LIKE-MINDED INDIVIDUALS, THAT CAME TOGETHER TO DO GREAT WORK, TAKING SOCIALIZE FROM JUST A STARTUP TO BECOMING ONE OF THE REGION'S MOST WIDELY RECOGNIZED INDEPENDENT AGENCIES."

Socialize office

And what Socialize has been doing has caught global interest too. We Are Social, the global socially-led creative agency, announced in June 2018 that it had acquired a "majority stake" in Socialize. The acquisition would extend We Are Social's reach to the MENA market, adding to its 11 offices across nine countries, while also increasing its employee count to over 700. As of writing, the transaction is subject to regulatory approval from relevant UAE authorities. Socialize would continue to operate as an independent brand under Goel's leadership, while leveraging We Are Social's global infrastructure and agency ecosystem. Though the company has been approached for acquisitions or partnerships over the years, Goel noted that they had sought for a fit that would "complement our vision, escalate our brand, and provide growth opportunities, while also valuing Socialize's unique strengths and culture." It was important for the team to bring on a partner that would help them scale, and not someone who would "rescue" them. Key criteria, says Goel, was finding a partner that would "give us the freedom to continue being Socialize," and We Are Social's leadership team was someone they'd share similar passion and vision for the future with.

One's leadership prowess is exemplified by the qualities one tries to live by, and when asked about the kind ›››

of qualities that have led to where she is today, Goel lists three main ones. First, having a constant desire to know more. As someone who loved to study and research how tech changes consumers' lives, Goel says she's also compelled as to how companies and brands respond and react to such changes. Next is having attention to detail, which Goel says, drives her and her team forward as their business involves building brands. "It takes years to build trust, and one careless logo placement to shatter it," she says. "I am a strong believer that the key to success is in the details, in these little things, and it is important, when laying out the broad strokes, to pay attention to these little details. History is full of stories where a single detail has changed the destiny of millions, and in today's digital world, we remain conscious that it all comes down to the smallest pixel in the end." And finally, being a good listener is essential, says Goel, as it's important to have an open mind to listen to her team, clients and mentors. "I'd say that half of what I know today, I learnt on the job, and the other half, I've learnt by listening to others. Having the humility to constantly listen and seek advice allows you to benefit the most, after all, 'You don't know, what you don't know.'"

"WE'VE ADOPTED A FULL-SERVICE-AGENCY BUSINESS MODEL AND BUILT A TRULY INTEGRATED OFFERING THAT COVERS EVERYTHING FROM PLANNING AND IDEATION, TO CREATIVE AND TECHNICAL EXECUTION, TO SOCIAL STRATEGY AND DIGITAL MEDIA BUYING."

Taking in her years of doing business in the UAE, Goel also notes the range of factors, which contributed to molding her to not just being an entrepreneur, but being a great leader of an organization too. "The transition from entrepreneurship to leadership is never an easy one, as one needs to transit from being passionate about doing only one thing and doing it well, to being able to manage everything, and still doing that one thing, which defined you as an entrepreneur in the first place, well." She regards being a great leader as knowing one's strengths, having the humility to acknowledge one's weaknesses, and finding the right people to complement you in your moments of weakness. Another vital trait Goel emphasizes on is empathy: "Our business is based on fulfilling an existing need, or solving a client's problem. It's impossible to identify a need or a problem without the ability to put oneself in in another person's shoes; be it client or employees." And her mantra to leading her teams and achieving targets? Goel believes that the key is for every team member to "understand the bigger picture and the importance that they personally play in the achievement of this target." No detail should be left unnoticed, says Goel, as even the most menial of tasks contributes to the success or loss of a campaign. She also says that her other principle is to "never let evolution slow us down." With the changes in the industry, Goel says, "As we grow, we need to maintain our agility. So, I regularly encourage my team to think on their feet and make decisions quickly. Being able to pivot on a dime is a quality that wins games and evolves business strategies."

Socialize team

AKANKSHA GOEL'S FIVE STEP PLAN TO BEING SUCCESSFUL IN YOUR INDUSTRY

1. OBSERVE
Everything you need to know is already out there and never before have we had such easy access to information.

2. PLAN
It is important to have a plan, but equally important to know sufficient planning is *enough* planning.

3. LEAP
Innovation is what happens outside of your comfort zone. Take the first step and trust yourr team/agency to be able to learn and improve along the way.

4. IMPROVE
Test and iterate constantly. Accept data with an open mind, even if it means going back to the drawing board.

5. REPEAT
Innovation is a virtuous circle. You are never finished-you're just at the start of something else.

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"WE GOT FUNDED!"

Bahrain-born food tech enterprise Eat, UAE-based insurtech platform Aqeed.com, and Egypt's online couture rental startup La Reina reveal the details behind their latest fundraising rounds **by SINDHU HARIHARAN and PAMELLA DE LEON**

EAT
www.eatapp.co

Eat, a Bahrain-born regional restaurant reservations platform, has raised an undisclosed amount of investment led by VC firm Middle East Venture Partners (MEVP). Existing investors Tenmou, Pinnacle, and 500 Startups also took part in this round, and with this, the total funds raised by Eat are now at US$3.4 million. "MEVP's investment [the current round] will help us accelerate our growth, and expanding our offering across the Middle East, as well as scale our team size and product portfolio," says Nezar Kadhem, founder and CEO, Eat. Besides helping Eat accelerate its growth, the entrepreneur believes that MEVP's expertise in SaaS, scheduling software, and restaurant technology can aid them in scaling the platform. From an investor perspective, Walid Mansour, Partner and Chief Investment Officer, MEVP, believes Eat offers a strong product and is backed by a model that is "sustainable and valuable in the medium/long run." He considers the startup "a true success story out of the Bahraini entrepreneurship ecosystem," and notes: "Eat is well poised to become the leading provider of tech solutions to F&B players across the MENA- beyond its current core markets, and beyond table management."

Following Kadhem's own tedious experience in early 2013 in trying to make a reservation at a restaurant, Eat is a result of the entrepreneur's efforts at finding a better way to do the same. "Reservations over the phone are time-consuming and frustrating; if I can book an Uber or reserve a hotel room online, why can't I do the same for restaurants," asks Kadhem. Launched in 2014, Eat now covers the entire MENA region, with customers in Bahrain, UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, among others. Eat also claims to have paying customers based outside the region, from over 35 countries globally, and reports to have "seated more than 3.5 million customers to date, generating over $250 million worth of orders for restaurants in mainly two countries so far- Bahrain and UAE." On the supply side, Eat says it has grown its restaurant base four times over the last 12 months, and monthly revenues by over 250%. "Currently, our business model includes selling our SaaS product, and making a commission on each actualized online reservation," Kadhem notes.

"EAT IS WELL POISED TO BECOME THE LEADING PROVIDER OF TECH SOLUTIONS TO F&B PLAYERS ACROSS THE MENA- BEYOND ITS CURRENT CORE MARKETS, AND BEYOND TABLE MANAGEMENT."

Elaborating on the fundraising process and the team's takeaways from it, Kadhem says that the process is (not surprisingly) a "long and tedious" one, and the time from the initial contact to having the funds in the bank can take up to six months, and often longer. "Therefore, we have made it a point to maintain relationships and open communication with all major VC funds in the region before any fundraising takes place," he says. "We typically send a report every quarter to every major VC, updating them on Eat's progress and achievements. That way, when the business becomes the right fit for the VCs, they typically reach out to us, which was the case with MEVP." As for the negotiation skills that entrepreneurs need to work on to close a deal on favorable terms, the founder is emphatic that it all depends on leverage. "It really helps when more than one VC is involved, as this allows for counter offers. Also, cash in the bank is leverage, allowing you to extend the negotiation process, or decline the offer

Eat team

IMAGE CREDIT EAT

Eat's restaurant manager product

and search for a new VC, all while continuing to run the business. Having no money means there is immense pressure to just accept the offer due to urgency," he explains.

A tactical decision-making sense is another positive that seems to have worked to Eat's advantage right from its early days- in fact, as early as the time of its launch. "Dubai has the highest number of fine dining restaurants, compared to all other GCC countries," Kadhem explains. "As a result, restaurants receive cold calls all day, and have been become extremely selective and unforgiving; a less than stellar product will find it very difficult to get a meeting. As a young startup, we knew we needed a user base that was more forgiving; a core group that allowed us to test our technology, and that would give us crucial feedback. So, we decided to launch in another market, just an hour flight from Dubai, but far away from competitors. We launched in Bahrain. It had almost 20% of the number of restaurants in Dubai, but it was perfect; we could launch uninterrupted and work our way to a solid product. That strategy worked; we managed to acquire 92% of the fine-dining market, including the Four Seasons Hotel." Then,

"RESTAURANTS PLUG INTO US, AND WE ACTIVATE ONLINE RESERVATIONS FOR THEM ACROSS A MULTITUDE OF THE LARGEST B2C CHANNELS, INCLUDING TRIPADVISOR, GOOGLE, AND TIME OUT... NO ONE ELSE IS DOING THIS."

moving to Dubai eight months later, Eat was also able to project its market leadership in Bahrain as a selling point to restaurants "that previously would have refused to speak to an unknown startup."

While its fundraising strategies seemed to have worked in the startup's favor, Eat is now working on its vision for its extended growth. "We're positioning Eat to become a platform for restaurants to

Walid Mansour, Partner and Chief Investment Officer, MEVP

acquire users online," notes Kadhem. "Restaurants plug into us, and we activate online reservations for them across a multitude of the largest B2C channels, including TripAdvisor, Google, and *Time Out*... No one else is doing this." He adds that their "robust table management system and consumer facing app" is also a plus, and so is their availability and brand recall globally. "We have paying restaurants in major markets like Australia, USA, and UK, but also in smaller geographies like Malta, Guam and Ibiza," he says. Given its food tech focus, I can't help but ask Kadhem if we'd soon see Eat make an entrance in a related vertical- food delivery, where it'd have to compete with the likes of Deliveroo and Uber Eats. He replies, "At this stage, it makes more sense for us to focus on our vertical and keep building on our offering to become more rooted at the restaurant level. It will be easier to enable online delivery, as well as other verticals such as automated marketing, loyalty, etc. at a future stage once we've completed the ecosystem part."

In line with this thought process, the company's short-term goals are to develop the product, and grow the team that would help them expand- especially in other GCC countries. Having said that, the company also claims to have something "exciting" in store for their users in the medium-term. "We've been working on eat0x- the world's first blockchain product in the food tech space," Kadhem says. "eat0x will address major challenges in our space, including payments and filling seats when restaurants need it the most." We'll have to wait and watch to see how this plays out though- keep your eyes on Eat! ›››

Nezar Kadhem, founder and CEO, Eat

'TREP TALK

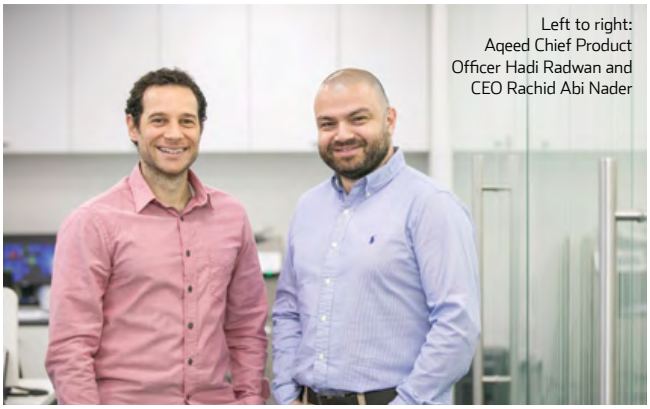
Nezar Kadhem, founder and CEO, Eat

What are your three top tips for the region's startups to secure investments for their ventures?

1. **Get traction.** "Before you even begin thinking about pitching, grow your business. Get some traction in the industry, and focus on creating a product or service people want."

2. **Become a part of the ecosystem.** "We understand running a startup is difficult, but it's incredibly important to make the time to attend conferences. It helps to show up and make your presence in the ecosystem known. We make it a point to attend regional conferences such as STEP, GITEX, etc., whenever we can. Over time, you start to see the same faces, and the industry starts to feel more familiar."

3. **Share your updates with relevant stakeholders.** "It's okay, and even encouraged, to be transparent about your results. Whether you do this on the web through an official blog post, or by sending quarterly reports to some of the biggest investors in your industry, it's great to let people know what you are up to."



Left to right: Aqeed Chief Product Officer Hadi Radwan and CEO Rachid Abi Nader

AQEED

www.aqeed.com

Having the "DNA of a startup, and the strength and stability of a corporation," sure sounds like something every fledgling venture out there would envy, and Aqeed.com, a new UAE-based insurtech platform, claims to be blessed with such a structure. Aqeed, a technology company focused on helping consumers understand, manage, and buy insurance on their platform, is founded by the shareholders behind international reinsurance corporation Barents Re, and Equitrust, a group company of MENA's media and advertising enterprise Choueiri Group. Launched in April 2018, raising an investment of US$18 million in funding from their founders, Aqeed's management is led by experienced industry hands including CEO Rachid Abi Nader (previously a Lead Consulting Director, Insurance, Middle East at PwC), and Chief Product Officer Hadi Radwan, formerly head of M&A with a leading insurance group in Dubai.

"Insurance is one of those industries being disrupted globally," Radwan says. "It is being revolutionized thanks to new technologies allowing the reinvention and digitization of the business. However, insurance in the Middle East is still lagging behind." Referring to the current perception of the industry as being "complex," he says Aqeed was built to accelerate the digital transformation of the conventional sector in the region, and align it with global trends. Being focused on consolidating their presence in the UAE, as well as entering Saudi Arabia and other Middle East markets, CEO Abi Nader says, "We are also in the process of hiring the right talents, and investing in the latest insurance technology… Our objective is to go beyond the traditional and online distribution model, and invest heavily in bringing the latest insurtech innovation- from artificial intelligence, machine learning, internet of things (IoT), telematics, as well as business process enhancement and automation."

With regard to the monetary boost for the startup right at its inception, Radwan and Abi Nader say they are fortunate to have two tier-one corporate shareholders who are bringing much more than just funds to Aqeed. "Insurance companies and customers would like to work with companies that potentially will still exist in the coming few months," Abi Nader says. "The same applies to our teams- they want to work in a startup environment full of new challenges, however, they want sustainability and security at the same time."

"INSURANCE IS ONE OF THOSE INDUSTRIES BEING DISRUPTED GLOBALLY. IT IS BEING REVOLUTIONIZED THANKS TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES ALLOWING THE REINVENTION AND DIGITIZATION OF THE BUSINESS. HOWEVER, INSURANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS STILL LAGGING BEHIND."

Sharing a few key takeaways from their experience in launching Aqeed, Radwan says that raising money "can be an intimidating process" that needs to be managed well. "It is critical that you articulate to investors what pain point you are solving, how you are solving it differently than what already exists in the market. More importantly, investors have to be convinced that the return on their investment is a substantial multiple to compensate for their opportunity cost," he says. "Our shareholders were very conscious about having the business case nailed to perfection. That is why we had to build a fully working platform before committing any money to the project." From the investor's point of view, Patrick Thiriet, Chief Strategy Officer, Choueiri Group says the company is "delighted" to partner

'TREP TALK

Hadi Radwan, Chief Product Officer, Aqeed.com

What are your three top tips for the region's start-ups to secure investments for their ventures?

1. **Validate your business.** "Make sure you have nailed the product-market fit before asking for money. I have seen a lot of entrepreneurs pitch for funding before proving that their idea solves a real problem. More importantly, validate your idea before seeking investment. A cool technology alone will not cut it."

2. **Be transparent with your prospective backers.** "Tell your investors how you will be using their money and what is your expected cash runaway. It is crucial that you are very transparent and candid with the investors. They hate being taken by surprise."

3. **Nail your demo.** "While fancy graphics on a pitch deck is nice, there is nothing more powerful than a product in action. Investors have seen plenty of pitches with a lot of standardized presentations. Be different!"

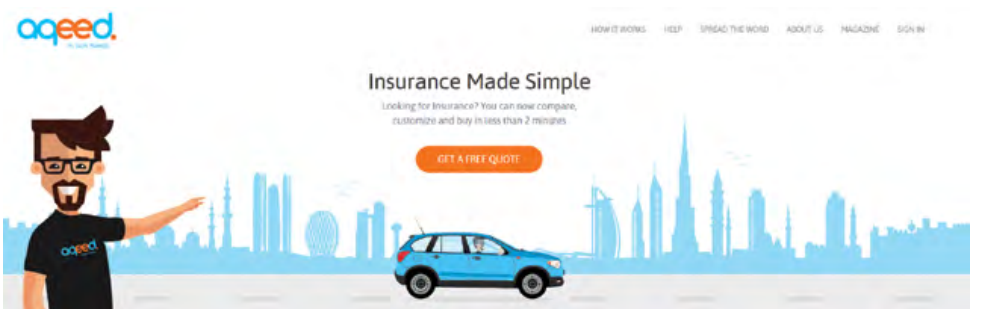


IMAGE CREDIT AQEED

with Aqeed in their endeavor to ease the life of MENA consumers. "Our capacity to reach out to those consumers in the region is certain to be an asset, as they gain traction with their unique offering," he adds.

Having kicked off with motor insurance, Aqeed allows customers to buy and compare car insurance in a matter of minutes on their platform, and at the time of writing, a mobile app is also in the works to facilitate the process further. Customers can make use of a dashboard that'll allow them to access documents and policies in force, contact insurance companies, view how much they are paying, and get notified of their upcoming renewal dates. The team is also planning to add home and travel insurance products to the portfolio soon. "The typical MENA customer expects to be well informed about the options available to them, pay the right price, and be properly taken care of when they have a claim," says Radwan. And with Aqeed's emphasis on showcasing its "key pillars of simplicity, transparency, and accessibility" in the region's insurance space, addressing these needs figures high on the startup's agenda. Good times ahead!

Members of the Aqeed team

LA REINA

www.lareinagowns.com

Founded in 2016 by Ghada El-Tanawy and Amr Diab, La Reina, an online platform for couture rental, has raised US$1 million in a Series A funding round led by venture capital fund Algebra Ventures and global investors 500 Startups. The Egypt-based couture rental platform allows women to rent their evening and bridal gowns, wherein its business model is based on partnership with clients, working hand in hand with dress owners, as the startup receives a rate upon consignment. El-Tanawy had the idea for the enterprise after facing difficulties in finding the right designer dress for her budget at her own wedding, and sought to develop a digital solution for the problem. The company's USP, Diab says, is its distinctive offering in Egypt- in the past two years, according to El-Tanawy, La Reina counts having 250 clients and 80 brides, with the dress owners themselves collecting $3.5 million. "Now that the concept itself is gaining momentum, our USP is in how systematically we operate," Diab says. "Our process secures the safety of each dress through standard paperwork and insurance. On the other hand, our USP in comparison to new competitors is in the diversity and volume of our inventory."

"WE AIM TO BECOME THE BIGGEST FASHION CLOSET IN EGYPT THROUGH REACHING THE THRESHOLD OF 5,000 ITEMS BY NEXT JANUARY."

With respect to the investors they got on board for La Reina, the founders have known 500 Startups since 2016, with the startup having benefited from its expertise on digital strategy and marketing. As for Algebra Ventures, El-Tanawy noted that the initial meeting itself made it clear that the two entities shared similar visions. "We consider them more of partners rather than investors," he notes. With the newly acquired capital, the founders intend to utilize it on finding talent, with a long-term outlook on being a player in the local fashion industry. As for their future plans, Diab says, "When you think online fashion in Egypt, La Reina should become the answer. We continuously work towards the day when renting becomes a daily choice for millions of Egyptian women." El-Tanawy adds, "We aim to become the biggest fashion closet in Egypt through reaching the threshold of 5,000 items by next January. This would not only mean a revenue worth of EGP8 million for the dress owners; but also, a humble boost for the local economy, and a starting point for an underrated business model."

Amr Diab, founder, La Reina

Ghada El-Tanawy, founder, La Reina

IMAGE CREDIT LA REINA

THE INVESTOR'S VIEW

Ziad Mokhtar, Managing Partner, Algebra Ventures

Why did Algebra Ventures decide to get on board as investors for La Reina?

"When a tech startup is taking steps to transform an industry as big as fashion, this attracts our attention. This is happening because La Reina offers a 10x improvement in what someone can wear for any specific amount of money. When such a startup is also led by founders, like Ghada and Amr, who are visionary, smart, and resourceful, we get excited.

Fashion is sizable, it is a multi-billion dollar industry. Shifting consumption behavior from owning to sharing can turn around the whole industry. Being early-stage investors, we aim to realize substantial returns on a successful exit."

Off the beaten path

Dawaami founder and CEO **Kamal Al-Samarrai** is all set to wage war against industry incumbents with his new online platform that aims to disrupt the recruitment sector **by TAMARA PUPIC**

Kamal Al-Samarrai, founder and CEO, Dawaami

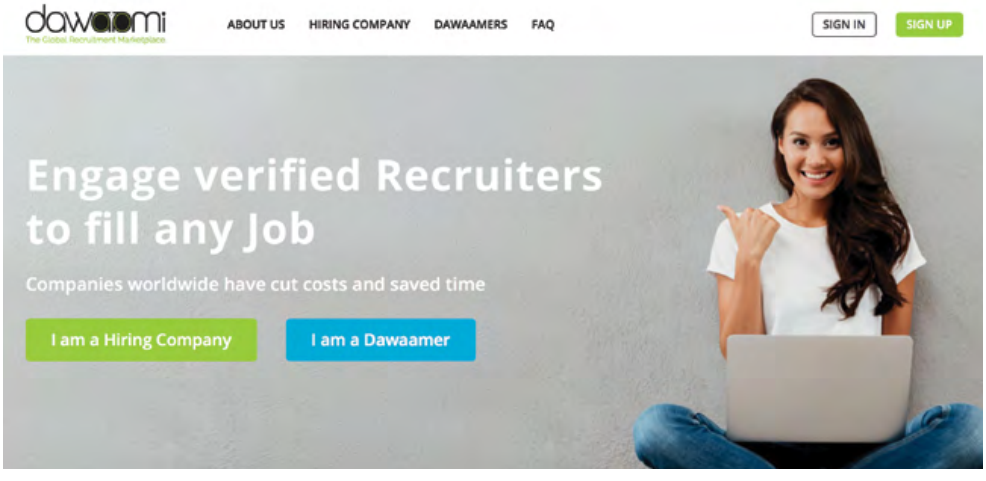
Frustration is a risky state to be in, especially if you are an entrepreneur. To Kamal Al-Samarrai, a Dubai-based banker-turned-entrepreneur, it has served as inspiration to overcome limitations of the global recruitment industry by launching Dawaami, an online marketplace disrupting the sector.

But, in doing so, he aims to first put one entrepreneur out of business- himself.

In 2012, Al-Samarrai launched Dawaam, a Dubai-based specialized recruitment agency, out of his living room, and self-funded and grew it to employ 12 people and fill around 160 roles for 87 different clients per each of its peak years- 2014 and 2015. With 12 years of banking experience behind him, including stints at Merrill Lynch in London and Abraaj Capital and Al Mal Capital in Dubai, it wasn't an arduous task. "In 2012, my idea was that since Dubai had started to move up again, it would need more staff," he remembers. "I had banking experience, and I knew a lot of people, so I decided to start a recruitment company. Business was much easier at that time. I remember that we were sending CVs out, people were hiring, and the business grew really well until about the end of 2016. Our USP was the so-called Dawaam promise –a one-week promise– meaning that in a week, we would send you interviewed candidates specifically for the role you need, and not just people from a database. The problem with traditional recruitment in this part of the world is that, firstly, a lot of the big, international groups have contracts with big, international recruiters from abroad. Secondly, local companies that own 90% of the rest of the business have massive recruitment teams internally, because they hire a lot across the board. Thirdly, those small companies that you can go after source Asian recruitment teams that will charge much less than 15% of the annual salary. So, if they have one sales guy here, and the whole recruitment team in India, they can charge 5% or one-month salary. That was killing our margins." However, Al-Samarrai managed to find a niche in catering to medium-sized enterprises that employ 50 to 100 people, and appreciated a personalized approach in recruitment. He describes them as businesses "where the CEO is easily accessible, the HR can speak directly to the CEO, they know what they are looking for, and they don't mind paying that small recruitment fee to get the right person."

Recruiters and executive search firms usually get paid a fee of the candidate's annual starting remuneration, which ranges from 5% to 35%, and is billed on the first day of employment. In difficult times, however, it is a burden for smaller companies looking for ways of cutting cost. For that reason, the impact of the slower market conditions on Al Samarrai's business has been evident over the last two years- the client list has reduced dramatically to just 37 names. "My traditional recruitment business is doing okay only because of the relationships I've built," he says. "The people who work for me have built their relationships with certain clients that continue to give us roles, because they trust us. We've been here for five years, we know the market well, we know the right people. We not only give you a candidate, but we have guarantee periods for them. And that is what big groups here still don't understand about recruitment. They sign up lots of recruitment firms,

"WE NOT ONLY GIVE YOU A CANDIDATE, BUT WE HAVE GUARANTEE PERIODS FOR THEM. AND THAT IS WHAT BIG GROUPS HERE STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND ABOUT RECRUITMENT."



WWW.DAWAAMI.COM

and when they get a job, they send it to all of them. Everyone ends up chasing the same people. We are small, personalized, and we want to grow, but we need the support of the groups here. If those big groups work only with big recruitment players, then the middle market doesn't work. For all those reasons, my client list hasn't changed over the last year at least. And that is the reason why I started my new business, and why I am really excited about it. I want to disrupt my current business model, because it's old and archaic. Dawaami will be the largest recruitment company that doesn't have any recruiters."

This irritable situation has given rise to Al Samarrai's mission to lower the time and the cost of recruitment. Launched in May 2018, Dawaami is an online marketplace that connects recruiters and hiring companies globally. It not only cuts out the middleman, but it also embeds a bidding system that enables the two parties to conduct real-time auctions, setting the terms of each interaction as per their own preferences. "Throughout my six years in recruitment, I have started to understand the faults in recruitment, from my own perspective, and from the perspective of HR managers," Al-Samarrai explains. "Firstly, HR managers have to sign terms of business, which takes time and effort. Secondly, you are stuck with the same fee with that recruiter, no matter what you look for, a driver or a CEO. Thirdly, when an HR manager has a job opening and goes to a recruitment company, you don't know who will be the recruiter actually working on it. All those three things are a problem. On the other hand, as a recruiter, I also have to

"WE DON'T PAY THE RECRUITER STRAIGHTAWAY, BUT WE HOLD IT FOR 60 DAYS FOR OUR 100% MONEY BACK GUARANTEE."

sign terms of business with companies, which takes too much time and effort. Then, I know that there are roles that I can fill, but I cannot reach them because I don't have terms of business with them at that very moment. Lastly, my fee is fixed regardless of the time and effort that particular job opening might require."

He continues, "When I realized all these three points, I started to think how to change this industry. So, I thought, what if I could design a platform that both a hiring company and a recruiter agree to sign up to, and they are governed by the principles of the site? A hiring company places a job on the site, posts it for free and anonymously, and recruiters start to bid on that job, depending on how much they want to bid for- a percentage of the annual salary, or a fixed fee. Also, they can bid on the jobs that they think they can do, allowing them to specialize for certain roles. A hiring company can pick and choose up to five recruiters work with on any one role. It makes recruiters to work for them more efficiently, because they can pick the exact specialization that they need. So, if you sit in London and want to open an office in Dubai, but you don't have any recruiters here, you can hire them via our platform without signing terms of business, and you can pick and choose a fee that you want. It's important to say that the HR manager is still protected by the system. When a hiring company hires someone, we invoice the hiring company, but we hold the money in escrow. So, we don't pay the recruiter straightaway, but we hold it for 60 days for our 100% money back guarantee. On the 61st day, we pay 50% to the recruiter, and on the 91st day, we pay the other 50%. So, the hiring company is protected for 90 days which is better than most guarantee periods that you have. For recruiters, it's the other way around- I can work with any company I want that posts on there, and for the fee that I want. Those are the struggles that I've had as a recruiter. As a recruiter, if I could go on a platform where there are enough clients giving me roles, without the limitations of the contracts that I have and the geography I operate in, I could do it all day and night. If I could access job openings globally, I wouldn't stop. It is about not being limited by constraints of a traditional business, like any recruiter is right now."

When it comes to revenue generation, and consequently profit, Dawaami charges a percentage of the recruitment fee. The business model seems to be too simple to be overlooked by major recruitment players, which is a question Al-Samarrai gets asked a lot. "People ask me why LinkedIn isn't doing it," he says. "It's a database that connects people, we are not. LinkedIn would have to change their business model from B2C to B2B. We are a very niche B2B marketplace that connects HR managers to recruiters. Also, this is a US$350 billion industry globally, it's a huge market that is controlled by a few who don't want to change it. Adecco made $22.7 billion in revenue last year, Hays was at around $7.2 billion. So, why would they change it? What incentive do they have?" But Al-Samarrai has that spark the incumbents miss, and that is how we end our interview. "Dawaam has been a means to an end, Dawaami is a passion," he concludes. ■

'TREP TALK

DAWAAMI FOUNDER AND CEO KAMAL AL-SAMARRAI'S TIPS FOR ENTREPRENEURS

1. Be mindful of who you do business with

"Contracts are often not respected here, so make sure to know your clients before you do business with them. Notice how they do business with you, how quickly they sign a contract, whether they come to see you, and so on. All of those can be warning signs. The more warnings signs add up, the more you want to avoid the client."

2. Take care of your finances

"Avoid taking loans from banks. I would have closed my doors long time ago had I been in debt to a bank. The pressure that amounts on you is huge, just to pay your staff, let alone paying a bank on top of it."

3. Get the best people around you

"Loyalty is very important, and I look for that in people that I have around, because times will get bad, and you need people who will stick around while you are going through that. I've lost some good people over time, because I couldn't afford to keep them. But it is important how they leave- they should do it with honesty and openness. People forget how much a business means to an entrepreneur, and how hurtful it is when someone they trust and is key to them leaves them."

Left to right: WakeCap co-founders Rami Nassouh, Software Engineer, Roy Gilsing, Industrial designer, Rene Wassenburg, Electronic Engineer, and Hassan Albalawi, founder and CEO

Safety is productivity

Dubai-based tech startup WakeCap aims to disrupt the construction industry by focusing on the wellbeing of the workers *actually* on a project site

by SINDHU HARIHARAN

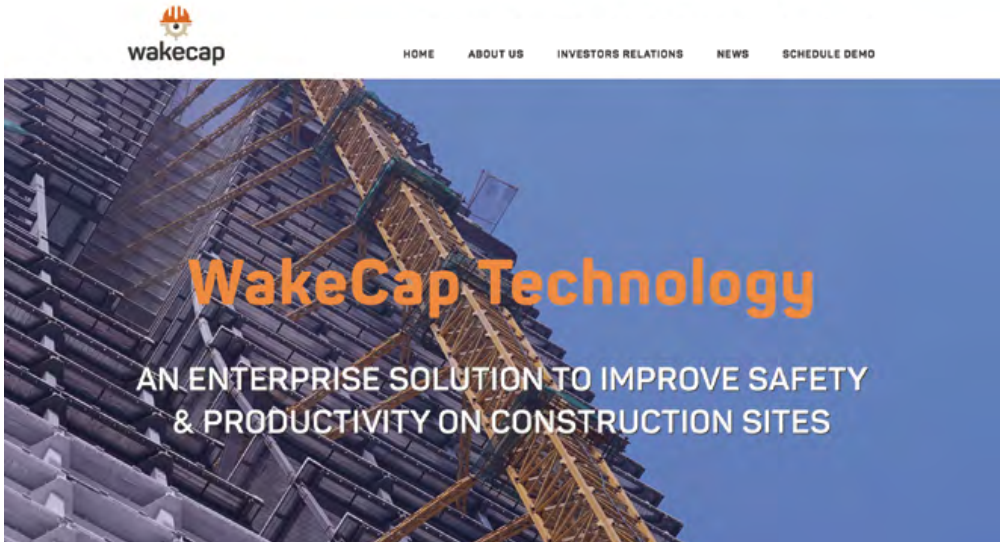
From drones to 3D printers to augmented reality, there's no dearth of technologies impacting the way traditional industries function, and even though most of these may sound as fads or luxuries, there's no denying that the world at large (including the MENA region) is closer than it has ever been to implementing such solutions. However, if you take the construction sector -pretty much the lifeline of the GCC economy- it'd be safe to say that it is perhaps quite behind its peers when it comes to embracing and deploying smart technologies, with the industry not being very welcoming of new digital solutions that often need upfront investment, though their benefits are spread out long-term.

"We noticed that construction is still running on the same foundations as it was a 100 years ago, and it's getting worse," says Hassan Albalawi, founder and CEO of WakeCap Technologies, explaining the origin of his Dubai-based construction tech startup. "We have a global productivity problem on our hands, and much of it is due to the slow, outdated information sharing, and the reliance on inefficient manual processes on site." WakeCap believes that labor is the largest (and also the least understood) component in the construction world, and the enterprise aims to connect and streamline tools, equipment, and workers at the job site. Started as a response to a near-death incident faced by its founder Albalawi -an incident that inspired him to find a way to detect the drowsiness levels of onsite laborers- WakeCap's mission is to empower the construction worker with technology.

To achieve this, WakeCap makes use of mesh network technology, which works in combination with integrated sensors attached to the construction helmets. These sensors are able to extract data that pertain to the safety and productivity of the workers, which include attendance, live-location, and common accidents. "Our technology is currently patent pending," Albalawi says. "In the future, we plan to roll out more productivity features, such as tracking tags for equipment and machinery on construction sites, where the dynamic environment demands real-time knowledge of all the moving parts." Launched in August 2017, the startup is currently finalizing the development of their product in the form of a pilot with Consolidated Construction Contractors (CCC), one of the largest construction players in the Middle East. "Our pilot with CCC is taking place on the Opera Grand Tower Project, a 70-storey building in Dubai, where the management will be able to achieve total worksite visibility over their 400 workers, improve communication and injury response times, as well as reduce time spent on collecting data on worker attendance, location and project progress," Albalawi says. By focusing on fine-tuning its product and securing new projects where the technology can be deployed, the company aims to "start generating revenue as of early 2019."

Speaking of goals, one look at the core team's skills, and their respective contributions to the business, and you'd believe WakeCap is well-equipped to meet their business goals. The technical mind behind the product, Albalawi, is supported in development by three senior software, electrical, and industrial engineers, Rami Nassouh, Rene Wassenburg, and Roy Gisling- all of whom collaborated to win the third place in the *Stars of Science* competition television show-well-equipped, for a helmet that was able to detect drowsiness levels of the people wearing them. Further,

IMAGE CREDIT WAKECAP | WWW.WAKECAP.COM



Badis Glaied, the business development professional, helped Albalawi work out the early stages of the market analysis, business development, and investor relations tasks, and the entrepreneur, through the region's ecosystem platforms and activities, also met co-founder Ishita Sood, who's been integral in establishing the company's operations in Dubai, closing investments, and working on the pilot as well. "Currently, our team has nine members, all based in Dubai, except our three senior engineers, who are working remotely from the Netherlands and Lebanon," says Albalawi. He notes that in this early stage, having a small team proves to be quite beneficial to the fledgling venture, since they are able to have an "active and direct communication with each other, [and able to] see the impact of your work in the company."

In a region (and specifically in the UAE, as a nation) that is characterized by a skyline dotted with numerous construction works in progress, the WakeCap solution could well be a big boon by enabling automation and digitization of a number of tasks. "Firstly, attendance is automated by detecting every time a worker enters the worksite or leaves it, thereby ending long check-in/out queues," says Albalawi. "WakeCap transmits real-time count and location of all workers on-site without having to spend valuable time doing visual checks. WakeCap sensors detect whether a worker is being inactive and provides real-time, accurate, and automated data collection on the number of construction workers deployed for specific work activities." If you think that it's just the bosses that benefit from WakeCap, you'd be wrong. "Workers receive automatic alerts when entering pre-defined danger zones or unauthorized worksite areas, while management receives a phone notification of this event, along with the name and zone of the worker," explains the entrepreneur. "Additionally, WakeCap streamlines evacuation of workers by activating the simultaneous alarms on their WakeCap hard hats no matter where they are located on the site… Through the data collected, we can quantify productivity and improve safety to deliver projects on time and under cost."

"WORKERS RECEIVE AUTOMATIC ALERTS WHEN ENTERING PRE-DEFINED DANGER ZONES OR UNAUTHORIZED WORKSITE AREAS, WHILE MANAGEMENT RECEIVES A PHONE NOTIFICATION OF THIS EVENT, ALONG WITH THE NAME AND ZONE OF THE WORKER."

WakeCap co-founder Ishita Sood pitching at 1776 Challenge Cup

WakeCap helmet

As for the impact that the enterprise hopes to have on the industry as a whole, the team is keen on altering the status quo of the state of productivity in the sector. "Construction's poor productivity leads to 98% of the construction projects incurring cost overruns or delays, due to the lack of connectivity, slow information sharing, and a lack of automation on site," notes Albalawi. Further, making the spaces more safer for workers is also on the top of the enterprise's agenda. "Most accidents occur because a worker was not where he was supposed to be; moreover, according to a study conducted by Deloitte, workers are reluctant to wear an additional piece of equipment [to tackle safety]," notes the entrepreneur, explaining why they put in that additional effort in integrating their technology into workers' helmets. However, in terms of a measurable market, the entrepreneur admits that industrial IoT wearables in construction is an area that does not have a known or calculable size via publicly available data. "Using a bottom up approach of 542,000 construction workers and 30 million square meters of total project area in Dubai, we estimate the serviceable GCC market to reach a number of US$1.4 billion, that includes only Dubai, KSA, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, and others," says the founder. WakeCap's product and services are offered on a weekly, monthly or annually subscription basis. ›››

WakeCup team

"We would charge a one-time fee for the helmets and then a subscription fee based on the number of workers, the construction site, and the desired features," he adds.

The startup's objective to disrupt the convetional industry is also slowly but surely being recognized by global and regional players. An endorsement for the startup's product first came from global entity HAX Accelerator, a seed stage program focused on hardware startups that selects startups for investment and offers on-site support and mentoring in Shenzhen, China. Besides honing their product during the program, WakeCap also received $175,000 in funding from HAX. "In seed funding, we have raised $300,000 from CCC, we have another commitment of $400,000 from other sources that is yet to be signed [at the time of writing]," says Albalawi. Further, the startup also managed to impress the who's who of Dubai's business community as it emerged the top winner of the third cycle of the Dubai Smartpreneur Competition, organized by Dubai Startup Hub, the entrepreneurship development arm of Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry. "It was an exhilarating experience for us," says Ishita Sood, co-founder and COO, WakeCap, who was part of the team that showcased the product at the challenge. "There were more than 300 applicants for the competition, and we got shortlisted to top 50, and then top 10. We didn't expect we would win." She adds that the enterprise also benefited greatly from the resources provided throughout the competition, as well as the networking opportunities. "The team at the Dubai Startup Hub was really encouraging and helpful," she notes.

"WE PLAN TO ROLL OUT MORE PRODUCTIVITY FEATURES, SUCH AS TRACKING TAGS FOR EQUIPMENT AND MACHINERY ON CONSTRUCTION SITES, WHERE THE DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT DEMANDS REAL-TIME KNOWLEDGE OF ALL THE MOVING PARTS."

Even as fundraising remains a key issue for startups working on solutions across industries, Albalawi's views on investor appetite for product/hardware startups such as theirs, comes as no surprise. "Investors in the MENA region are reluctant to back hardware startups, and that has been our biggest challenge yet," he says. "With regards to this aspect, investors are mostly worried about the problems that frequently arise when mass producing hardware, which could ultimately cause a startup to fail." But to allay any such concerns from the investors' side, the team is also in talks with helmet manufacturers to manufacture and manage the supply chain of helmets. Another challenge that the startup foresees and is working to counter, is the reluctance on the part of construction companies to take a bet on new technologies. "One of our objectives for our pilot is to quantify labor productivity and safety, which we believe when shown how much a construction company can save by using our technology will help us penetrate the market," says Albalawi. Finding the right people with the right background to expand the team is also something that the startup has its struggles with.

As for the way ahead, WakeCap is focused on their pilot with CCC in the short-term in order to finalize the development of their product, and begin manufacturing the product. In the long-term, the company's priority is to deploy their technology in the various construction projects across the MENA region, and also to expand to other industries such as oil and gas. "We are ambitious about the expansion of WakeCap, because the construction productivity crisis is a global issue," Albalawi says. "Previous worksite technologies have failed, because they demanded time and attention for learning, using, and troubleshooting, thus affecting other work processes and eventually causing their rejection by field personnel." Stating that WakeCap has taken all of these considerations into account, Albalawi makes a declaration that may well put the product and its benefits into context for you. "We aim to disrupt the construction industry, without disrupting the construction work," says the entrepreneur. ■

'TREP TALK

Ishita Sood, co-founder and COO, WakeCap

What's your take on MENA's current entrepreneurship ecosystem?

"More and more startups are emerging from the MENA region. Everyone is trying to do something new and different. The entrepreneurship ecosystem is definitely rising, and I feel the support system is very strong too, in terms of ease to setup your venture and getting the right platform. In the last one year, we have attended multiple startup events, where you meet all kinds of people and you learn a lot from these events, be it the corporate initiatives for innovation and development, or meeting individual people for mentorship. However, the system lacks robustness. Fundraising in the region is a bit difficult for startups. The valuations are much lower, and the rate at which the commitment from the investors materializes to real investment is very low. This market still has a lot to learn from other emerging markets."

What are your top three tips for an entrepreneur to start a business in MENA?

"[First], investigate deeply the problem you're trying to solve. [Second], form a good team. [Finally], land your first customer."

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Moving with the times

Collaboration is key as old and new business models collide in traditional industry sectors

by EELCO VAN KEIMPEMA

The sharing economy, whilst still in its infancy in the GCC, is rapidly gaining momentum across the region. This growth is an encouraging sign that the region's investment to become a tech- and innovation-friendly environment is paying off.

For traditional business sectors, however, it also represents a significant challenge. For most, their business models have been able to evolve and adapt over long periods of time, and until recently this was perfectly acceptable– but this is the age of digital disruption.

Insurance companies are certainly among those which need to move with the times– ours is a sector which is not renowned for technological innovation, but which now must quickly adapt in order to meet the changing face of demand. Those businesses which are complacent will soon find themselves left behind, selling services which are no longer fit-for-purpose.

The sharing economy has seen particular growth across five main industry sectors: transport, financial services, household services and accommodation. A report by Strategy& found that in 2016, more than US$10.7 billion was spent on sharing economy platforms across the region, mainly in the UAE.

For companies working within this business model, flexibility is key. For example, they might typically be expected to include on-demand or pay-as-you-use micro cover in response to the growing number of peer-to-peer, small-scale, or short-term transactions.

While meeting these changing needs is, of course, a major test to the status quo, it also represents a future opportunity for insurance companies that take an innovative approach. The concepts of insurtech and digital disruption are impossible to ignore for insurers if they want to stay alive– and this demands an ability to introduce new products and innovations at a pace previously unthinkable.

It's little wonder that insurtech has ruffled feathers among traditional industry competitors, but those who resist change will most certainly pay the price. So how should the sector respond?

I believe both insurers and startups will need to change their collective mindset and approach to extract maximum value from working together, and to overcome differences in culture, workforce, agility, and technology.

From a recent roundtable debate AIG held for key industry leaders to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing business in the UAE's sharing economy, it was highlighted how this region already has the key ingredients in place needed to ensure a successful sharing economy. The UAE is highly urbanized, with a population that is largely tech-savvy. Importantly, customers are already reacting positively to the services on offer.

An important point which was noted is that sharing economy platforms capture far more data than traditional companies do. They are able to provide a more accurate, real-time measure of the risk exposure looking forward, which is naturally an advantage for insurers to design better-fitting products and mitigate risks more accurately. This represents a huge opportunity for insurance companies to develop solutions, which truly respond to the needs of these fast-moving markets.

One significant challenge when it comes to insuring within the sharing economy, is how personal and business lines of insurance can become blurred. Creating new, innovative insurance products for these markets will require close cooperation and risk expertise from across the personal (personal auto and personal insurance) and commercial (public liability, professional liability and employer's liability) areas.

Insurers therefore need to develop the overall innovation agenda within their business models, and then determine where startups or the sharing economy sit within it. Traditional businesses need to embrace innovation as part of their everyday businesses, and this means it needs to be embraced by everybody in the organization as part of the corporate culture.

The sharing economy may only be in its infancy here, and its effects on many industries are yet to be fully understood. However, it's clear from our observations and discussions that we need to find a common ground between traditional business models and those which are only just emerging. For insurers, a clear understanding of which parts of a company's offering requires cover is key.

For those insurance companies which are up to the challenge, and which are able to rethink some of their products to suit the sharing economy model, I believe there are exciting times ahead.

As a global leader in the insurance sector, AIG is committed to strong collaboration with sharing economy businesses, and our experience to date has been overwhelmingly positive and fruitful. Companies in the sharing economy sector are keen to engage and be listened to because the resulting solutions will be a win-win for all stakeholders, as old and new worlds come together. ■

Eelco van Keimpema is Head of Commercial Insurance Middle East & Africa at AIG. To download a full copy of the AIG White Paper, please visit https://goo.gl/y5GSpc.

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