

**COME TOGETHER /**

SPERO PANAGAKIS, CO-FOUNDER,  
BB SOCIAL DINING

**MAKING HISTORY /**

ANGHAMI BECOMES FIRST ARAB TECH  
COMPANY TO LIST ON NASDAQ NEW YORK

**PROGRESSING TOWARD PARITY /**

WINNERS OF THE TIE WOMEN GLOBAL  
PITCH COMPETITION

# Entrepreneur®

## MIDDLE EAST

# RIDING THE WAVE

## **RAMY/ ASSAF**

CO-FOUNDER  
AND CEO, **ZBOONI**

This entrepreneur  
is capitalizing  
on the surge of  
digitization in  
the MENA region

# 10 Great Ideas

A celebration of  
innovations, individuals,  
and initiatives  
that impress with  
their ingenuity





SAVOUR  
SWIM  
**DISCOVER**  
STAY  
CHILL

**SIGN UP & SAVE 30% ON STAYS, DINING & SPA WITH FREE BREAKFAST**  
WINTER IS THE NEW SUMMER

RAFFLES | BANYAN TREE | FAIRMONT | SO | SOFITEL | RIXOS | MANTIS | MGALLERY |  
25HOURS | MÖVENPICK | GRAND MERCURE | NOVOTEL | MERCURE | ADAGIO |



| [ALL.COM](https://www.all.com)

MONDRIAN | PULLMAN | SWISSÔTEL |  
IBIS | IBIS STYLES | IBIS BUDGET |

**All** ACCOR  
LIVE  
LIMITLESS

# CONTENTS / MARCH 2021

18

## INNOVATOR RIDING THE WAVE

Ramy Assaf

The co-founder and CEO of Dubai-headquartered social commerce platform Zbooni is capitalizing on the surge of digitization in the MENA region.

32

## 10 GREAT IDEAS

A celebration of innovations, individuals, and initiatives that impress with their ingenuity.

24

## INNOVATOR COME TOGETHER

BB Social Dining co-founder Spero Panagakis on how his restaurant is bringing a sense of community to Dubai's F&B scene.

54

## START IT UP ECOSYSTEM

Progressing toward parity  
The winners of the TiE Women Global Pitch Competition share their thoughts on building a more equitable startup ecosystem.

16

## IN THE LOOP

Making history  
Abu Dhabi-headquartered Anghabi becomes the first Arab tech company to list on NASDAQ New York.

62

## START IT UP Q&A

Ahead of the curve

Digital solutions company WaysMaze is taking advantage of the digital transformation wave that's sweeping over the MENA region (and beyond).

58

## START IT UP START UP FINANCE

"We got funded!"

A look at the stories behind the recent fundraising announcements made by MENA-based ventures, StarzPlay and Foodics.

28

## TECH SHINY

#TamTalksTech

Gadgets and doodads that you might've missed out on, sourced by a tech aficionado. Yes, it's okay to want them all... and no, it's not our fault.

14

## EDITOR'S NOTE

By Aby Sam Thomas

30

## CULTURE TRAPPINGS

"Trep gear

The executive selection for the entrepreneur on your list that has everything. Okay, maybe for a little self-reward as well.



IMAGE COURTESY 1309



رقم الترخيص / 2012101997 / 2101102218 Terms and conditions apply

**It's Worth** Transferring  
your salary

**Get Miles**



Welcome miles up to 50,000 miles with the MasterCard World Credit Card in partnership with Kuwait Airways and many other benefits.

kfh.com 180 3333



    @kfhgroup

# Entrepreneur®

## MIDDLE EAST

EDITOR IN CHIEF **Aby Sam Thomas** [aby@bncpublishing.net](mailto:aby@bncpublishing.net)  
 CEO **Wissam Younane** [wissam@bncpublishing.net](mailto:wissam@bncpublishing.net)  
 DIRECTOR **Rabih Najm** [rabih@bncpublishing.net](mailto:rabih@bncpublishing.net)  
 CREATIVE LEAD **Odette Kahwagi**  
 MANAGING EDITOR **Tamara Pupic**  
 STARTUPS SECTION EDITOR **Pamella de Leon**  
 EDITORIAL DESIGN **Christian Harb**  
 DIGITAL SOLUTIONS DIRECTOR **Mahdi Hashemi** [mahdi@bncpublishing.net](mailto:mahdi@bncpublishing.net)  
 GROUP SALES DIRECTOR – B2B GROUP **Joaquim D'Costa**  
 COLUMNIST **Tamara Clarke**  
 INTERN **Aalia Mehreen Ahmed**

CONTRIBUTORS  
**Raffaella Campagnoli**  
**Fida Chaaban**  
**Tamara Clarke**

Images used in *Entrepreneur Middle East* are credited when necessary. Attributed use of copyrighted images with permission. All images not credited otherwise Shutterstock.

### SUBSCRIBE

Contact [subscriptions@bncpublishing.net](mailto:subscriptions@bncpublishing.net) to receive *Entrepreneur Middle East* every issue



PO Box 502511 Dubai, United Arab Emirates  
 P +971 4 4200 506 | F +971 4 4200 196

For all commercial enquiries related to *Entrepreneur Middle East* contact [sales@bncpublishing.net](mailto:sales@bncpublishing.net)

All rights reserved 2021  
 Opinions expressed are solely those of the contributors.  
*Entrepreneur Middle East* and all subsidiary publications in the MENA region are officially licensed exclusively to BNC Publishing in the MENA region by Entrepreneur Media Inc.  
 No part of this magazine may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher.

Printed by United Printing and Publishing  
[upp.ae](http://upp.ae)

# Entrepreneur

## MIDDLE EAST

ACCESS FRESH CONTENT DAILY ON OUR WEBSITE!  
[entrepreneur.com/me](http://entrepreneur.com/me)



ESPORTS  
**Gaming Studio Sirius Play Debuts Starlite Racing In The UAE, Highlighting The Growth Of The Country's Esports Ecosystem**

Founder Chad Lau believes the UAE is a strategic location to create a successful esports ecosystem with the potential of it being played at a national level.

Just Added →



RELATIONAL TIES  
**Turning Point: How The Abraham Accords Between Israel And The UAE Are heralding A New Era Of Business**  
 Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry brings together a couple of experts to advise on the high bilateral business potential that exists for Israeli and UAE companies and investors.  
 Tamara Pupic 12 min read

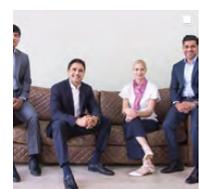
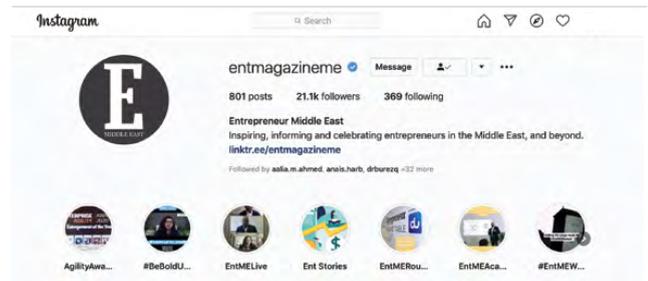


SPONSORED CONTENT  
**Penny Hoarder Issues "Urgent" Alert: 6 Companies Are Overcharging You 12**  
 How many times have we fallen for this?



In addition to our print edition, we're bringing you all sorts of industry news on our web mediums. Joining us online means getting relevant business and startup content in real-time, so you're hearing about the latest developments as soon as we do. We're looking forward to interacting with our readers on all of our social media and web platforms- like any thriving business, we're looking to give and take. #TrepTalkME is already happening on all of our digi platforms, and all good conversations go both ways. See you on the web!

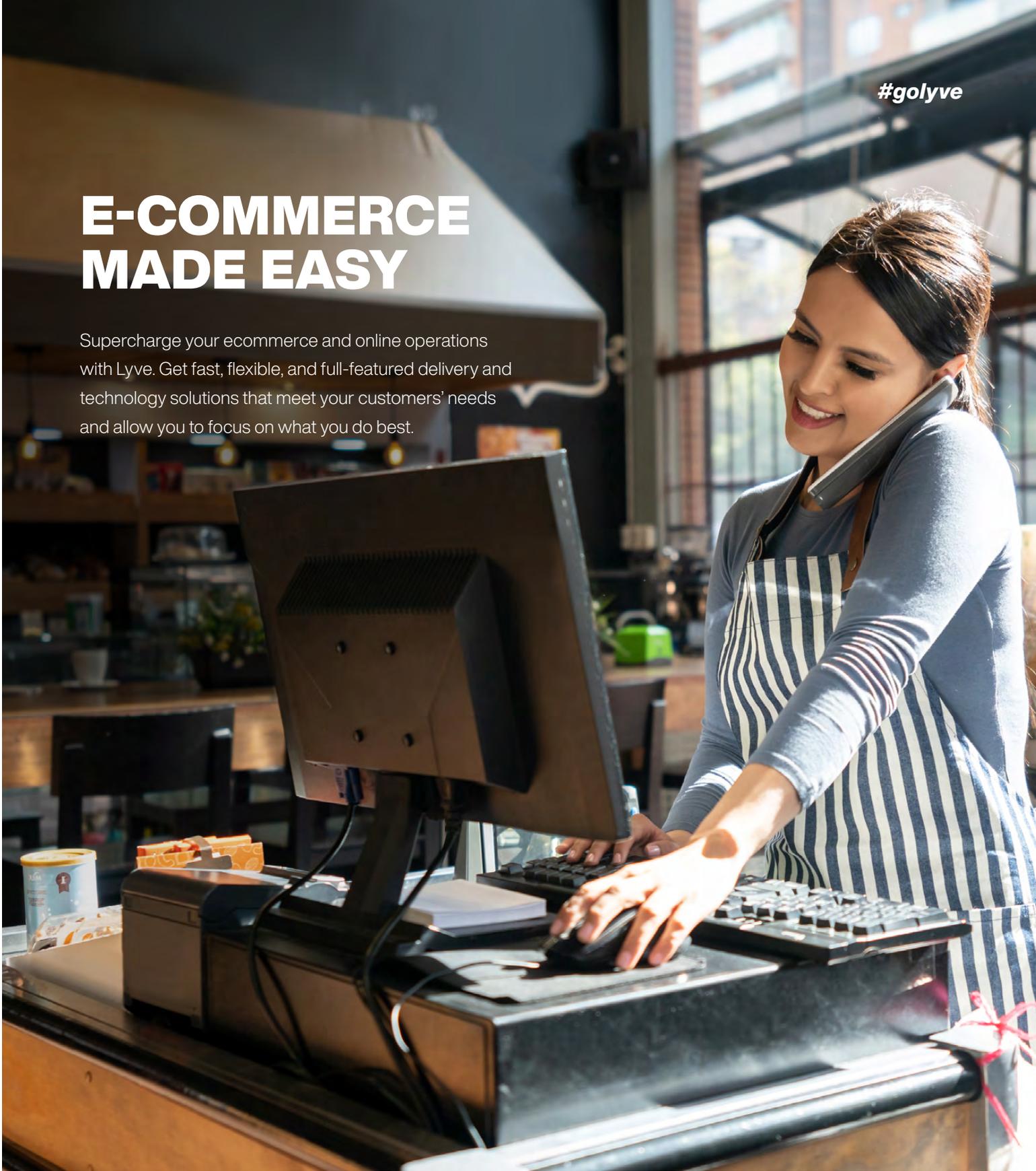
- EntMagazineME
- @EntMagazineME
- Entrepreneur-me
- EntrepreneurMiddleEast
- EntMagazineME
- EntMagazineME
- EntMagazineME



#golyve

# E-COMMERCE MADE EASY

Supercharge your ecommerce and online operations with Lyve. Get fast, flexible, and full-featured delivery and technology solutions that meet your customers' needs and allow you to focus on what you do best.



Go Lyve Today →



**Lyve**<sup>™</sup>

[lyveglobal.com/ecommerce](https://lyveglobal.com/ecommerce)



Shot at Forest Villa, Sobha Hartland

**IN THIS PART OF CENTRAL DUBAI  
THE TREES FAR OUTNUMBER  
THE HIGH-RISES.**

Enter one of the greenest nooks of Dubai, right in the heart of the city. Explore 2.4 million sq. ft. of dedicated open and green spaces. While there's a generous amount of green spaces outdoors, you'll find ample space indoors as well. And if you feel the need to step out of this exclusive community, you're only minutes from Downtown Dubai. At Sobha Hartland you're always at the centre of infinite experiences.

VILLAS | GARDEN HOUSES | APARTMENTS

**Book @ 2%, and move-in now.**



*Minutes from  
Downtown Dubai*



*2.4 million sq. ft.  
open greens*



*Waterfront  
living*



*Self-sufficient  
gated community*



**SOBHA HARTLAND**

MBR CITY, DUBAI



*Baker*<sup>®</sup>

ICONIC  
home



Dubai Design District, Bldg. 8, 1st Floor

T +971 4 552 2920 | E-Baker@iconichomeuae.com | www.iconichomeuae.ae



#ih\_uae



@iconichomeuae



# Timeless Elegance

Where modern French art de vivre meets ancient Egyptian charm.

Book your stay at [sofitel-dubai-theobelisk.com](https://www.sofitel-dubai-theobelisk.com)

PARIS - LONDON - ROME - DUBAI - SYDNEY - MEXICO CITY



S O F I T E L  
HOTELS & RESORTS

ALL ACCOR  
LIVE  
LIMITLESS

DUBAI THE OBELISK

# EYES ON THE PRIZE

KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, YOUR EGO IN CHECK, AND GET ON WITH IT



I can personally state that Habib's behavior has been a welcome departure from the inflated egos that seem to be more the norm than the exception in our business ecosystem, and it's been especially encouraging to see how he has stayed true to his principles through all of the twists and turns of his entrepreneurial journey.

Indeed, Habib has consistently kept his ego out of the way when running his business, and it's a strategy that has clearly worked out well for him. And Habib's tactic is one I hope that all of us -entrepreneurs and otherwise- will employ as we make our way through the current circumstances of our world.

While our aim should always be to bring our best selves forward in whatever we set out to do, we should remain mindful of not letting our egos rule the show.

Whether we are entering a negotiation for a potential deal, or simply running a staff meeting with our teams, checking our egos at the door before joining such interactions will allow for honest and authentic discussions to happen, which can help the realization of successful outcomes for everyone involved.

Perhaps more importantly, this will enable the creation of environments where the focus is on the greater good, and not just on individual gains- and that's something worth putting in the effort for. **E**

**“F**or us at Anghami, we just want to inspire people. That has been our personal journey; we want to be an inspiration to others [in the MENA region] that you can build something big from scratch, from nothing, by simply innovating, believing in your people, and working hard.”

This was one of the things that Anghami co-founder and CTO Elie Habib told me after I learned that his Abu Dhabi-headquartered enterprise was going to become the first Arab tech company to list on the NASDAQ New York Stock Exchange.

Now, while there's no denying the fact that this was a historic moment for the MENA entrepreneurial landscape, I still couldn't help but be struck by how Habib chose to paint this occasion as a rousing win for the region, and not just as a personal victory.

But Habib's behavior won't come as a surprise to those of us who have interacted with him ever since he launched Anghami with co-founder Eddy Maroun in 2012- that was also the year in which he publicly declared that “ego has no place in a startup,” and it seems pretty obvious that Habib has continued to believe in that ethos to this day.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Aby'.

Aby Sam Thomas  
Editor in Chief  
[@thisisaby](#)  
[aby@bncpublishing.net](mailto:aby@bncpublishing.net)

# Find the right freelancer, faster.

A platform that connects you to  
a pool of freelance talent within the  
tech, media and education industries.

Make it happen at

**marketplace**.ae

brought to you by





## MAKING HISTORY

Abu Dhabi-headquartered Anghami becomes the first Arab tech company to list on NASDAQ New York

In a milestone moment for the MENA entrepreneurial ecosystem, Anghami, one of the region's leading music streaming platforms and services, has entered into a merger agreement with Vistas Media Acquisition Company Inc., a publicly traded special purpose acquisition company in the United

States, that will result in it becoming the first Arab technology company to be listed on the NASDAQ New York stock exchange.

With the transaction expected to close in the second quarter of 2021, it pegs Anghami at an initial pro-forma enterprise valuation of approximately US\$220 million. A statement from the company noted that this value has been reached by calculating 2.5x 2022 estimated revenues; one of Anghami's competitors in this space, the Stockholm-headquartered Spotify, has a current revenue multiple of 6.5x revenue.

Founded in 2012 by CEO Eddy Maroun and CTO Elie Habib, Anghami was the first music-streaming platform in the MENA region, with it now being one of the leaders in the market, offering more than 57 million songs, to more than 70 million registered users, with around one billion streams per month. It is currently backed by leading MENA venture capital firms and strategic shareholders, including media groups and telecommunications companies, that collectively own approximately 68% of Anghami, with the balance owned by the founders.

One of its most recent investors, the Dubai-headquartered asset management and investment banking platform, SHUAA Capital, and Vistas Media Capital Singapore, the parent of the sponsor for Vistas Media Acquisition Company Inc., have gathered commitments of a combined \$40 million - \$30 million from the former, and \$10 million from the latter - in PIPE (private investment in public equity) financing for this deal. The listing on NASDAQ is expected to

allow Anghami to scale the company's user base, as well as invest in technology to build on its data play.

Talking to *Entrepreneur Middle East*, both Maroun and Habib were ecstatic not just about what the announcement meant for their company, but also what it signified for entrepreneurs in the MENA region. "For us at Anghami, we just want to inspire people," Habib said. "That has been our personal journey; we want to be an inspiration to others that you can build something big from scratch, from nothing, by simply innovating, believing in your people, and working hard."

"This is a very important and strong message we are sending here to the region," Maroun said. "We're used to importing things, and we always look up to the Western world [in this respect], but this time, I think we're validating the fact that we in the Middle East can also build world-class products, we can have world-class companies, and we can reach the US or any other market. So this is very important for us, this is a very big statement for every dreamer, every believer, in the region that, yes, we can make it happen, and that, really, impossible is possible."

For entrepreneurs in the MENA region wanting to follow their lead in terms of building a successful, sustainable business, the co-founders of Anghami doubled down on the importance of having (and remaining true to) a vision aimed at realizing just that. "You have to be obsessed with what you're doing- it's more than just believing," Maroun said. "Be ready to sacrifice a lot, but if your hard work is consistent, I think you can make it happen."

Habib agreed with Maroun, adding that Anghami's listing on NASDAQ also heralds the company's "Chapter 2," wherein it aims to become the foremost media and music company across the region and emerging markets. "We are the first Arab tech company to list on NASDAQ, but we hope we are not going to be the last," Habib noted. "We hope we're going to be one in a long list of companies that will end up showing new generations here that, yes, you can build and grow successful businesses in this region." **E**



## Philips and VPS Outline Vision for ‘Healthcare of the Future’ in a Post COVID-19 Era



Philips, a global leader in health technology and VPS Healthcare, an integrated healthcare service provider, have partnered to prepare for the post-COVID era of healthcare.

A strategic white paper entitled **“Above and Beyond: Reshaping Healthcare after COVID-19”**, developed jointly by Philips and VPS Healthcare, advocates the Healthcare-as-a-Service (HAAS) model that will ensure asset-light, opex-driven systems allowing patients to receive the care they need when they need it without exhausting resources.

The challenges of quickly mobilizing resources to cope with the surge in COVID-19 patients alongside regular patient traffic, forced healthcare organizations to adopt new care delivery methods which are fast becoming the standard norms. However, in order to facilitate and sustain the changes, healthcare organizations need to implement alternative care models. The whitepaper explores the importance of collaboration between various players in the healthcare sector in order to enable a robust HAAS model.

With the COVID-19 pandemic impacting healthcare systems, pushing them to their limits to cope with the overwhelming demand for critical care services around the world, regular patient care had to be postponed. Telehealth solutions such as tele-radiology, remote patient monitoring and forming more efficient care ecosystems are among the many lessons the current crisis has bought to light. The partnership between VPS Healthcare and Philips unveils innovative solutions for affordable, high-quality care for patients and communities, tailored to local needs.

During the pandemic, VPS Healthcare has been at the forefront and joined hands with the UAE government and health regulatory bodies to combat the spread of pandemic in the nation.

The healthcare group setup an RT-PCR Laboratory at their flagship facility Burjeel Medical City and played a pivotal role in the National screening program. The group provided necessary care and solace to COVID-19 patients at its facilities across the UAE.

The whitepaper explores potential business partnerships and solutions that will result in dedicated companies offering à la carte clinical, technological, administrative or financial services, to public and private healthcare organizations via subscription-based or pay-per-use HAAS frameworks. Such multi-provider models will avoid duplication of resources and ensure flexibility and scalability of localized care delivery during crises and disasters.

Together with VPS Healthcare and in line with Philip’s purpose to improve the health and well-being of 2 billion people per year by 2025, healthcare-as-a-Service is the way forward. Different players in the healthcare ecosystem can work together to pool resources and effectively deliver healthcare on-demand. The healthcare expert is also looking at expanding its commercial presence in the Middle East and beyond in partnership with VPS.

With its unique position between Africa, India and Asia, the UAE is perfectly positioned to be a strategic hub for HAAS solutions. The country also has access to international talent that is the foundation of such resource-optimization models.

**‘Above and Beyond: Reshaping Healthcare after COVID-19’** whitepaper is based on insights gained from a range of leading industry experts from Philips and VPS Healthcare, and supported by published material.

Download the full whitepaper:

<https://www.philips.ae/healthcare/resources/landing/philipsvpswhitepaper>

# RIDING THE WAVE

## RAMY / ASSAF

The co-founder and CEO of Dubai-headquartered **social commerce platform Zbooni** is capitalizing on the surge of digitization in the MENA region

by AALIA MEHREEN AHMED

**A**ll too often, entrepreneurial ideas spark from a personal experience or observation about a particular gap in a given industry. Such was the case with Ramy Assaf, co-founder and CEO of Dubai-based social commerce platform, Zbooni. “Around 2016, my wife had started her own small business selling hats via an Instagram page,” he recalls. “And if customers wanted to order from her, they would send a message either by direct message or through WhatsApp.” For Assaf, who, at the time was working with venture capital firm Middle East Venture Partners (MEVP), it was his wife’s online millinery that showed him an untapped opportunity in the business realm. “A few things stood out to me about the state of commerce, and how it was evolving rapidly into new social channels,” Assaf remembers. “Digital platforms were able to reduce the barriers to entry for small businesses. If you could set up an Instagram page and use WhatsApp, you could be in business. However, the notion of accepting payments, tracking orders, and managing customers, all remained pain points. Zbooni was born out of observing these experiences, and finding solutions that would help people start, run, and grow a business.” The initial concept for Zbooni, therefore, was quite straightforward: a digital marketplace for microbusinesses. And, thanks to Assaf and his team, Zbooni (which means “my customer” in Arabic) quickly progressed from being just an idea, to a startup that very recently raised US\$5 million in a Series A funding round by an undisclosed London-based investment fund. >>>

A portrait of Ramy Assaf, a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a blue and white striped button-down shirt. He is standing with his arms crossed against a plain, light-colored background.

**“[The pandemic] created a giant tailwind to our business through the acceleration of demand, as businesses realized that they needed to be better equipped online.”**

Officially launched in 2017 by Assaf and Ashraf Atia, Zbooni aims to help small and medium enterprises to solve two major issues related to setting up an online presence: the need for a direct connection with a bank, and the requirement for specific software to enable digital payments. Resolving each of the two issues was a process Assaf likens to having been as tedious and turbulent as “building a Frankenstein’s monster.” He explains, “Firstly, when a business wants to go online, that means that they need to have a direct relationship with a bank or a payment gateway, which can be a painful process. It takes way too long, and the requirements to set up are structured in a way that is just very complex to deal with for an average SME. If the business gets past that part, they then have to obtain and use software that their customers can pay through. They need an interface, like a website or an e-commerce page, or a point-of-sale solution. It’s far too complicated! Our business model is to provide a bridge for SMEs, enabling them to get online painlessly.” With this idea in mind, Assaf and his team have designed Zbooni as an app-based platform that needs to be downloaded only by merchants, not end customers.

However, it is key to mention here that Zbooni is not a payment gateway in itself, but that it enables access to one by partnering with leading payment gateways. “We built an app for the merchants to use,” Assaf elaborates. “This gives them the ability to control and manage their store, create orders, manage their product catalogs, create invoices, etc. For merchants’

end-customers, it is easier to check out from mobile websites, because it’s frictionless, and provides a more seamless customer experience.” As of January 2021, Zbooni has enabled its merchants to serve more than 150,000 end-customers. The start-to-finish process for a given transaction is quite simple to understand: the merchant’s digital store, or “eStore”, is available for the end-customers to view from any browser. When a purchase is made via Zbooni, the merchant sends a link to his/her customers, and they will then be brought to a payment checkout page that is also workable on any browser. Finally, in order to complete a payment, the customer can pay using a Visa, Mastercard, Apple Pay, or Mada card without having to download any app. However, the firm does not offer delivery services; the onus for that lies only on the merchant. “We use a marketplace model, which means that they (the merchants) are selling through Zbooni,” Assaf says. “They don’t have to go through all the hoops. We provide a store within our marketplace, and payments are managed by us as the operator. We take a very small commission per transaction, and relieve a lot of the pains involved for our merchants.”

**“OUR BUSINESS MODEL IS TO PROVIDE A BRIDGE FOR SMES, ENABLING THEM TO GET ONLINE PAINLESSLY.”**



A banner for the Zbooni website. The background is a close-up photograph of hands holding a light-colored rose, with a soft, blue-tinted overlay. In the top left corner is the Zbooni logo. In the top right corner, there are navigation links: MARKETPLACE, RESOURCES, TERMS, and العربية. The main text reads "Tools to start your business online" with "start" in green. Below this, in smaller text, it says "Accept payments, build a store, and create invoices. Get setup in minutes, for free."



Zbooni co-founders  
Ramy Assaf and Ashraf Atia

**"AN INTERESTING PATTERN WE HAVE SEEN AMONGST SMES IS THE INCREASE IN BUSINESSES PROVIDING SERVICES AND PRODUCTS AIMED AT HEALTH AND WELLBEING. THREE OF THE TOP FIVE BIGGEST SELLERS ON ZBOONI IN 2020 WERE DIET PRODUCTS, SELF-IMPROVEMENT WORKSHOPS, AND FASHION STYLING."**

Having been incubated at Facebook, the startup is today backed by regional and international organizations, including Chalhoub Group, MEVP, and B&Y Venture Capital. As a company that is entirely dependent on merchants shifting to online selling and/or mobile-first commerce, the global coronavirus pandemic that kicked off in 2020, despite being a dark and ominous cloud for several businesses, provided Zbooni with multiple silver linings. "What we had been preaching for the previous two years, about going cashless and digital,

suddenly became front-and-center for most businesses," Assaf notes. "Prior to the pandemic, the region was behind the rest of the world when it came to using cash. Now, the Middle East's consumers have caught up and graduated to contactless forms of payment— that is a trend that is irreversible." The hastened shift to cashless payments and online selling, amid increased social distancing measures nationwide, meant that there were an umpteen number of microbusiness merchants that could've potentially been rendered jobless if they didn't quickly adapt to the new technological changes. But that's where Zbooni came in and changed the story— from brick-and-mortar merchants who had never sold online before, to startups and well-established businesses that needed better digital tools to adapt to the ever-changing business landscape, the startup's offerings proved to be a lifeline for all of them. At the same time, Zbooni also upscaled its team by bringing in

newer members, and its technology was upgraded to better serve its merchants and their end-customers, without having to make major changes to its overall model. "We had ambitious plans going into 2020, but of course, we didn't anticipate a pandemic," Assaf says. "It created a giant tailwind to our business through the acceleration of demand, as businesses realized that they needed to be better equipped online."

The subsequent measures taken to ensure increased ease and better performances were aplenty. "When the pandemic began to take hold, we provided our merchants with certain relief, such as waiving fees for their first AED5,000 in sales," shares Assaf. "Most importantly, Zbooni enabled local businesses to interact and transact with their customers digitally, without having to invest heavily into tech infrastructure, web design, or costly payment systems. We're really proud that as a team we could positively support local businesses, and help them through their time of need." The results of such minimal but quick pivots reflected in Zbooni's 2020 performance. From increased customer growth, to more demand from merchants, to a considerable expansion of services, the startup was able to thrive in a pandemic-stricken year. >>>

### 'TREP TALK

#### Zbooni co-founder and CEO

**Ramy Assaf** shares his tips for entrepreneurs looking to pitch their ideas to investors

#### Be clear and concise

"Focus on being very articulate about your value proposition and business model. Give them the information they need in a concise and clear way. If they pass, just move on quickly. The right investor will emerge."

#### A "no" isn't the end of the road

"Don't get too downbeat if investors don't get onboard. They don't necessarily know more than you. If you really believe in your idea, then keep going. Always remember that what your customers think is more important than what investors think."



The Zbooni team

“We accelerated rapidly over the course of the year and experienced customer growth of over 600%,” explains Assaf. “An interesting pattern we have seen amongst SMEs is the increase in businesses providing services and products aimed at health and wellbeing. Three of the top five biggest sellers on Zbooni in 2020 were diet products, self-improvement workshops, and fashion styling. We also took the opportunity to expand the services we offered and truly become a hub for SMEs to start, run, and grow their businesses. Zbooni has flourished as a result of the entrepreneurial spirit of the merchants who we are partnered with.”

But while Assaf may point toward Zbooni’s partners to explain his startup’s growth in an otherwise tumultuous year, one cannot discount the role the CEO himself played in attaining the same, especially when it comes to spearheading the company’s culture during this period. “When it came to managing as a leader during a time of crisis, I clearly wanted to ensure that employee health and safety was a priority,” he explains. “We have always been flexible in terms of allowing a work-from-home culture, and so we were well adjusted to operating that way going into the lockdown. We don’t force people to be in the office at all, but we did expand our physical office space in 2020. This included doubling the office size, so when people do choose to come to the office, then they feel more comfortable.” In a year

**“WE ACCELERATED RAPIDLY OVER THE COURSE OF THE YEAR AND EXPERIENCED CUSTOMER GROWTH OF OVER 600%.”** —

that saw hundreds of thousands of people lose their jobs, and the very fabric of team cultures being scrutinized more deeply, it is heartening to see that the team at Zbooni weathered the storm successfully- *and together*. “The challenges presented in 2020 ultimately brought us a lot closer as a team. We let people spend time with their loved ones and have some space, and we trusted them to continue to deliver- which they did.”

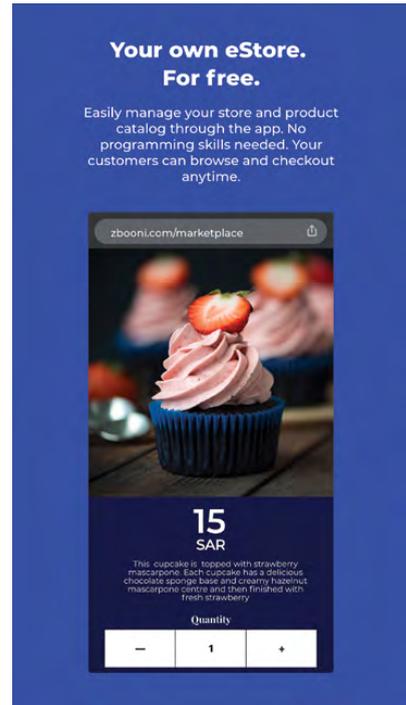
The leadership skills of a CEO are undoubtedly what furnish the various facets of a given company’s culture, and Assaf’s expertise in this domain can perhaps be attributed to the lessons he learnt working in the venture capital industry. “Working at MEVP, or any VC firm, is a very interesting dynamic,” he explains. “You have the privilege of seeing hundreds or thousands of businesses and entrepreneurs pitching their plans. You get exposed to ideas, problems, and solutions you wouldn’t have ever considered before. It’s like a crash course that sharpens

your business senses.” But not everything about the VC culture could entice Assaf to carry on with a career in it. In a strange and almost ironic turn of events, it was precisely Assaf’s role as a VC that led him to becoming an entrepreneur. “You’re expected to provide some ‘filter,’ and give a recommendation on why a business idea is a good opportunity, or not a good opportunity to the firm- I hated that part,” he says. “Mainly because it assumes the VC somehow knows more than the rest of the market. At the end of the day, it’s just opinions about the future, which nobody knows. I feel more comfortable as an entrepreneur, because it’s more fulfilling to operate a business, and get your hands dirty solving real problems, rather than just talking about them.”

Unleashing his entrepreneurial spirit is thus what has helped Assaf shape Zbooni into the startup that it is today. Having been in the startup ecosystem for a good few years now, Assaf has had a first-hand view on how the landscape has changed over time. “In terms of the MENA’s overall investment/startup landscape, it’s a complete 180-degree-turn from where it was a decade ago- running a startup now or starting your own business is the norm!” he

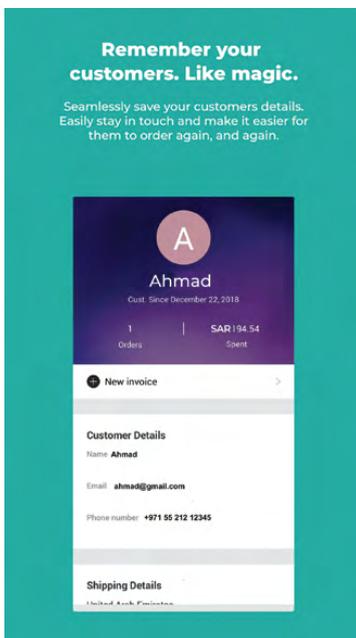
observes. “People are fully awakened to the fact that a corporate gig isn’t as stable as it once seemed. Losing your job, or having your company fall from grace, can happen very rapidly. The only security you have is to control what you can, and that’s to be in the driver’s seat of your own career. I expect we’ll see this manifest into a lot more talent having the courage to start their own businesses, which in turn will result in much more investment into the region.”

Given this viewpoint on the future of the MENA entrepreneurial landscape, it is perhaps unsurprising to learn that Assaf and the Zbooni team have very clear goals for their own future as well. “As with all online businesses, there is a continuous need for improvement- every opportunity must be used to enhance the experience for our customers,” Assaf says. With the aforementioned \$5 million investment now at their disposal, the team is looking to further develop its team and services, while also working on expanding into the region. “We have a series of plans for Zbooni,” Assaf says. “It mostly involves making more significant investment into the product itself. We believe that as our customers evolve, and as their needs mature, the product should as well, so we continue serving them as their business grows. We’re upholding our promises to merchants to continue to innovate, and provide the solutions they need, which truly drive positive impact to their business. We are also looking at geographically expanding our presence in Saudi Arabia, and see that as an opportunity to drive a lot of change and transformation.” With the sudden surge in the digitization of SMEs over the course of the COVID-19 crisis last year, and the SME industry itself gaining high prominence in the MENA region, it will be fascinating to see how Zbooni further evolves in its efforts to make e-commerce more accessible for microbusinesses. “Over the past 12 months, we’ve gone from primarily being a payment solution for businesses, to now offering a broad suite of tools that enable merchants to better under-



Zbooni app

stand, engage and transact with their customers,” Assaf says. “This is the focus for us over the coming months- to continue to develop best-in-class products that help SMEs start, run, and grow their businesses.” **E**



Zbooni app

## ‘TREP TALK

### Zbooni co-founder and CEO

Ramy Assaf shares his tips for small businesses wanting to make it big in the market

#### 1/ The customer comes first

“Focus on delighting your customers- even if that means doing it the old-fashioned way, like writing ‘thank you’ cards.”

#### 2/ Never lose sight of the customer’s needs

“Focus on what your customers are really looking for, even if others are advising you to do differently!”

#### 3/ Test, test, and test again

“Be willing to test your ideas (and embarrass yourself in the process!)”



# Come / together

SPERO PANAGAKIS

---

**The co-founder of BB Social Dining** on how his restaurant is bringing a sense of community to Dubai's F&B scene **by PAMELLA DE LEON**

**T**ucked amidst lush foliage and rather discreet signage, BB Social Dining is a three-story restaurant located in Gate Village at Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC). The homegrown concept is set in a space that was once previously an art gallery, which has resulted in an intimate, quirky atmosphere, with its spiraling staircase, black and white floor tiles, mustard upholstery, cozy booths and tables, and an al fresco

dining terrace. Much like the Arabic word its name is derived from (“habibi”), the restaurant wants to embody harmony and love in its community, which is why BB brands its style of food as “social dining.” Fusing culinary inspirations from the East, West, and Middle East, BB encourages its diners to design and share their dishes that consist of baos, bowls, bites, BBQ specialties, and, yes, distinctive desserts too. And in order to cater to a variety of preferences, the restaurant promises an inclusive approach for all kinds of diners, with its offering including vegan, vegetarian, and meat-based dishes.

BB is the brainchild of a founding team bringing six decades of hospitality: chef Alex Stumpf at the kitchen’s helm (who was the previous head chef of Peyote), while Shabnum Stumpf and Spero Panagakis (both formerly of Zuma) manage everything else relating to the business. As co-founders with diverse fields of expertise, the trio note that they prioritized setting distinct roles for themselves within the F&B brand very early on so as to avoid any conflict in responsibilities. “We are strong believers that as owner-operators, we have to appreciate all developments when creating homegrown brands in order to stand behind it 100%,” says Panagakis, who has been positioned as the front-of-the-business man. “Each one of us has their talent, and we thrive on driving the different teams, so they appreciate that. Each department has a certain skillset that impacts the business just as much as the next department.” The co-founders are also keen to develop their team’s skillsets, saying, “It is important that you cross train your employees in every department. This way, you create cultural teamwork and understanding, so the brand is always at the forefront, and not just a per team department only.”

This is clearly an aspect that the co-owners regard highly, with Panagakis pointing out that BB is a result of teamwork, dedication, and inclusivity. “We’re not a single-bodied operation, we all work together, and we have created something unique that our patrons love.” The business also prides itself on avoiding a silo mentality, with each member of the team knowing the business inside out to ensure operations run efficiently. “It also means that whenever there is an area for growth, it’s immediately recognized and acted upon.” This strategy also explains the management’s *modus operandi*. “A good leader always recognizes that they’re only as good as their team!” Panagakis declares. “Our leadership strategy is reflective of our brand strategy: we want to create a community for our team, where they have the ability to be creative and playful, whilst working too.” >>>



Having an innate sense for community is also what the co-founders state makes BB stand out amongst the crowded F&B space in the UAE. “We are always of the belief that within every community, there is a place for everyone. By design and concept, BB fits in at a price point that was new to the market, and supported a wider reach on a demographic that had not yet been tapped into.” As a social eatery and bar located within the bustling DIFC community (which houses a variety of high-end licensed restaurants, mid-markets and casual dining options), the BB team sought to build its reputation based on its noteworthy menu and charming ambience: “Our principal was to offer an all-inclusive, not exclusive menu that supported the polished mid-market category, and one that supports all occasions- from a formal dining experience, through to your everyday business lunch or afternoon break... It was a matter of creating something that was ‘needed’ in the market, and that we knew customers would appreciate.”

Of course, as with any business, the journey wasn’t without hindrances. One of the team’s biggest hurdles came during the restaurant’s construction stage. “We are built over three floors, and there is extension civil work that needed to be done in a specific way to comply with regulations,” Panagakis explains. Eventually, it delayed the project by six months. “This hurdle and delay had a knock-on effect, as rents are still payable even though we were not trading.” The silver lining? The co-founders took it as an opportunity to learn the importance of performing proper due diligence, no matter what they’ve seen, heard, or are recommended with. And that’s the advice Panagakis wants to share with his fellow upstarts in the market: “Always make sure you do your homework thoroughly on all suppliers, landlords, and research every dotted line on every offer to ensure you are protected in the process to avoid penalties or fees that fall out of your control.”

This outlook to continuously learn whilst facing difficulties has proved useful as the brand faced the impact of the COVID-19 crisis of 2020. Ac-

ording to research data by Eat App, in March 2020 alone, restaurants across the region saw an overall 60% decrease in customers. “With constant fluctuations in numbers, restrictions, and this pandemic being wholly unprecedented, we’ve had to learn as we go along. It’s been a learning curve for us all.” It’s worth noting that it was amidst the UAE lockdown mandate that the brand diversified its revenue by launching a delivery and takeaway service utilizing a cloud kitchen space. With food delivery as an option, the brand managed to reach out to a wider audience and introduce the restaurant to prospective customers that would usually only be achieved through word-of-mouth. “Through our partners at Deliveroo, we managed not only to open two other satellite brands -Soule Soups and The Little Katsu Shop- as well as expand these three brands to our new satellite kitchen on Hessa Street.”

The brand’s new kitchen-to-delivery approach has thus not only strengthened BB’s presence, but also ensured sufficient cash flow to survive under the strict restrictions that comes with having dine-in guests. Panagakis adds that being in the UAE has proved to advantageous, with the country’s government being quick to handle the situation from the onset. This meant that BB was able to open its doors again sooner than most- which has had its advantages and disadvantages. “As a business, whilst we want to come out of this situation as quickly as possible, as a community-driven restaurant, we also have a social responsibility to our customers to do the best we can. We want BB to be a safe space for those who come to us.”

Given the current environment, it can be easy for entrepreneurs to feel overwhelmed by the challenges one can face in this domain, but Panagakis still commends the MENA region’s market for its F&B scene. “It’s constantly growing, there’s so much diversity, and a sense of community you don’t find in other places around the world.” Though, of course, as with anywhere in the world, the region comes with its own set of issues. To this, Panagakis advises, “You have to really learn about

## **‘TREP TALK ME** **TIPS FOR ENTREPRENEURS FROM** **SPERO PANAGAKIS, CO-OWNER** **AND CO-FOUNDER, BB SOCIAL** **DINING**

### **1/ Find a niche, and stick to it**

“This should be true to you, and something you know the customer will enjoy.”

### **2/ Divide and rule**

“When co-founding a business, create clear boundaries and separate roles. This will lead to smoother operations and no crossovers.”

### **3/ Listen to your customer**

“What does your clientele want? How can you give them what they want? Answering these kinds of questions leads to customer loyalty.”

### **4/ Your team is your backbone**

“It’s impossible for a business to function well without a good team in place. Choose people who are reflective of your values, and who really understand the message you are trying to send.”

### **5/ Push boundaries**

“Whether it’s building a three-story restaurant in DIFC, or starting a business at home, being creative and taking a calculated risk can lead to a great outcome.”

all the regulations and rules beforehand to avoid any delays or penalties that can arise from mistakes, or a seemingly minor detail being overlooked. Other than that, people here are helpful and there’s always someone willing to lend a helping hand.” With that in mind, is now still a good time to start a business in the MENA region? Panagakis responds with an affirmative. “I think now is as good a time as ever to start a business here. Obviously, with precaution though. It’s important for new, homegrown businesses to identify where there is a gap in the market, and to capitalize on that.” **E**

"WE ARE ALWAYS OF THE BELIEF THAT WITHIN EVERY COMMUNITY, THERE IS A PLACE FOR EVERYONE. BY DESIGN AND CONCEPT, BB FITS IN AT A PRICE POINT THAT WAS NEW TO THE MARKET, AND SUPPORTED A WIDER REACH ON A DEMOGRAPHIC THAT HAD NOT YET BEEN TAPPED INTO."



# #TAMTALKSTECH

GADGETS AND DOODADS THAT YOU MIGHT'VE MISSED OUT ON, SOURCED BY A TECH AFICIONADO.  
YES, IT'S OKAY TO WANT THEM ALL... AND NO, IT'S NOT OUR FAULT.

## TIME TO TRAIN HONOR WATCH ES

The new and improved Honor Watch ES boasts a large 1.64-inch AMOLED display with a diverse library of watch faces. The watch offers an impressive screen-to-body ratio of 70%, a highly responsive touchscreen, and a side button, which makes it easy to navigate. Clocking in at 326 PPI pixel density with 16.7 million colors, the HD display is easy to read and automatically adjusts its brightness depending on ambient light levels.

The wearable is sized for daily wear measuring 10.77mm thick, 30mm wide, and weighing in at just 21g. Its slim and lightweight design, along with the silicon strap and the curved edges, comes in three vibrant color options: Meteorite Black, Coral Pink, and Icelandic White. With 12 animated workout courses as well as 95 workout modes, wearing Honor Watch ES is like having a personal trainer on your wrist.

Honor Watch ES



Honor Watch ES



## GET IN THE GROOVE HUAWEI FREELACE PRO

Huawei FreeLace Pro features extra-long battery life, noise-cancelling technology, and fast charging. Its built-in 150mAh 3C lithium-ion polymer battery lasts up to 24 hours on a single full charge, and you can use your PC, tablet, or smartphone to charge it via a USB-C port. Two built-in high-sensitivity microphones enable Active Noise Cancelling, whereby one microphone picks up the noise outside of the ear, and the feedback microphone picks up the residual noise in the ear canal. In addition to dual-mic active noise cancellation, the Huawei FreeLace Pro has a three-microphone adaptive system that enables noise cancellation for phone calls as well. The device also features a large 14mm dynamic driver unit and an independent bass tube for more detailed three-band sound to help you enjoy your music and get you in the groove.

Huawei FreeLace Pro



HP Pavilion  
x360 14

## FORM AND FUNCTION HP PAVILION X360 14

The HP Pavilion x360 14 has been designed with a focus on sustainability- besides making use of an ocean-bound plastic bottle in its construction, the device is also EPEAT Gold Registered and Energy Star Certified. In addition to being more environmentally sound, the HP Pavilion x360 14 is packed with features to help you work, learn, and play better. The device features a simplified version of OMEN Gaming, which allows you to check system vitals, download wallpapers, earn rewards,

and so much more. With the addition of Amazon Alexa Skills, you can also drop in on other supported devices, stay in touch with friends and family using hands-free calling, and control smart home devices as well. The HP Pavilion x360 14 gives you a bigger screen too thanks to its four-sided micro-edge bezel, which enables up to an 88.92% screen-to-body ratio. Suffice to say the HP Pavilion x360 14 will meet (or perhaps even exceed) your professional and entertainment needs.



**#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 [theglobalgazette.com](http://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. In this issue, we present our picks from Zadig & Voltaire's womenswear range, a new scent for your collection, and a cool new timepiece for your next hiking trip.

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

ZADIG & VOLTAIRE SPRING/  
SUMMER 2021

Aptly named "The Real Wardrobe," the house of Zadig & Voltaire has curated an entirely sustainable capsule range for its SS21 collection. Under the leadership of Zadig & Voltaire Creative Director Cecilia Bönström, the brand's goal was to use natural and ecologically certified materials for the entire line. And that, they did- it has

sourced sustainable materials such as silk, organic and recycled cashmere, organic cotton, and environment-friendly yarn to create this urban, chic line. The looks are modern and androgynous, which include a lightweight trench with a prominent collar, faded high-waisted jeans, and boots in bright colors. Whether you're in the board room, or getting ready for your next Zoom, don't be afraid to show off the real you with this label's pieces. [zadig-et-voltaire.com](http://zadig-et-voltaire.com)

Zadig & Voltaire Spring/Summer 2021



IMAGE CREDIT ZADIG & VOLTAIRE | NITE WATCHES | MARGISO RODRIGUEZ | BO BARBERSHOP



Nite Watches



## FOR THE TOUGH ONES

### NITE WATCHES

UK-based watch brand Nite Watches has made its debut in the UAE market. The brand, specializing in tritium tube and military watches, solidified its reputation with its NATO codification reference issued in 2015, which was followed up by it earning a contract to supply the British Special Forces. Focusing on functionality and precision engineering, Nite Watches create timepieces for people with a thirst for adventure- it's worth noting here the brand was once sported by Abu Dhabi Crown Prince H.H. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Its collection is made up of four watch series, incorporating green, blue, and orange tritium, and each one is tailored to suit the needs of its enthusiasts. We're a fan of the MX10 series, an ideal choice if you're keen on hikes and trails during the day or throughout the night. Powered by its Swiss-made movement, the model features 100m water resistance, and a sleek, stainless steel case.

[Nitewatches.com](http://Nitewatches.com)



## EDITOR'S PICK

### BÔ BARBERSHOP by ABY SAM THOMAS

Named after its co-founders Bilal Kabbani and Oliver Zaitoun, Bô Barbershop is one of the newest additions to the men's grooming niche in Dubai. Tucked away in The Bay Gate building in the city's Business Bay neighborhood, Bô Barbershop greets you with plenty of character and charisma as soon as you enter its Fadi Sarriddine-designed interiors. Maybe it's because of the potted plants that can be seen all around the place, or perhaps it's due to the blatantly obvious homages to the great outdoors that are littered within the space, but Bô Barbershop is almost instantly welcoming, emanating a sense of warmth that puts you in a relaxed state of mind the minute you walk in- and yes, the specialty coffee that they offer you (that's from Dubai-based roastery, Nightjar, by the way) certainly adds to that feeling. So, when you finally find yourself seated in one of the barbershop's three Belmont chairs, you just *know* you're going to be treated to a fine grooming experience- after all, all of the barbers here -led by Zaitoun himself- are extremely well-versed in the art of style and sophistication. Their process is precise, the products they use are immaculate, and they are tuned in to their respective customers- that's the reason for the healthy banter that you're bound to hear when you come to Bô Barbershop. At the end of it all, you're looking good, and you're feeling good, and Kabbani and Zaitoun hope that you'd also be looking forward to your next visit to Bô Barbershop by then- I can confirm that their wish came true in my case! [bobarbershop.com](http://bobarbershop.com)

# 10 Great Ideas

A CELEBRATION OF  
INNOVATIONS, INDIVIDUALS,  
AND INITIATIVES THAT IMPRESS  
WITH THEIR INGENUITY

by **ABY SAM THOMAS**

**E**ver stumbled upon something and think, “Wow, that’s a great idea!” That’s the feeling we sought to achieve for ourselves as we went about building this collection of 10 great ideas. From entrepreneurs who are bringing something fantastically new to the market, to enterprises that are venturing into spaces that were hitherto unexplored, the people and ventures showcased here are following through on some pretty inventive concepts, and while this is by no means an exhaustive list of all the great ideas out there, we are still pretty excited to see how our selection pan out in the long run.

# 10 Great Ideas



IMAGES COURTESY 1309



# 1309

**WITH ITS CURRENT** line of contemporary abayas, the Qatar-born ready-to-wear label 1309 may seem, at first glance, like just another fashion brand launched out of the Middle East. But dig a little deeper, and one will soon find that founder and Creative Director Ghada Al Subaey is on a mission to build something more substantial with 1309, which is a reference to her mother's birthdate. "1309 is more than just a fashion brand," Al Subaey declares. "It is a concept, a community we are trying to build, values that we are trying to promote... At 1309, we believe that the world doesn't need 'just another fashion brand' that adds to the toxic waste generated by the fashion industry. Rather, fashion brands now need to adopt ethical work practices, and

have solid social and environmental responsibility." And Al Subaey is putting her money where her mouth is—sustainable approaches govern 1309's work and business practices, which can be seen in its sourcing of sustainable material and fabric for its designs, as well as in its efforts to be inclusive of women of all body sizes. "I landed on this idea [for 1309], as I don't find the things that I want to wear out there in the market," Al Subaey says. "This is because I am not a stick-thin woman, so most of what brands have to offer do not fit me as well as I would like it to. There is a lot of variety out there that is based on trends, but does not suit the type of body that I have. A lot of women's clothes out there are trendy, but not really comfortable to wear.



Ghada Al Subaey,  
Creative Director, 1309

**“At 1309, we believe that the world doesn’t need ‘just another fashion brand’ that adds to the toxic waste generated by the fashion industry.”**

When we design clothes at 1309, we want our designs to fit women of all body types, and we want women to feel comfortable wearing them, and to feel good about themselves- as opposed to just wearing them to adhere to trends, or get attention.” And the market is being very receptive to what 1309 offers,

Al Subaey says- especially since it has managed to stand out from its peers in this space. “In the Gulf, there are usually a lot of ready-to-wear designers and abaya designers,” Al Subaey explains. “Usually, the abaya designers are very traditional, while the ready-to-wear designers are very Western. Whereas 1309 is trying to understand and design clothes for the modern Arab women of today, rather than copying other Western brands. We really try to understand and cater to our customer’s needs, for example being mindful of their needs, the trends, the weather in the Gulf region, etc.” And given how customers are already responding to 1309, it shouldn’t come as a surprise Al Subaey is dreaming big in terms of her enterprise’s future. “We are surely developing, and the goal is to become a 100% sustainable brand,” she reveals. “We want to grow the brand into homeware and beauty, as well as grow our 1309 community, and create an entire ideology and a universe of products around it.” [1309studios.com](http://1309studios.com)

## **PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON 1309 FOUNDER GHADA AL SUBAEY ON HOW TO SPARK A GREAT IDEA**

**1. Look out for the needs of the market** “To create a successful business, it is crucial to spot and cater to the gaps in the market, and be as innovative as you can, because in reality, there are a lot of things/concepts/ideas missing from the market. There are a number of products that people wish would be available in our market. There will always be a demand for things in the market that makes people’s lives easier. So, you should always think about that and ask people around you: what are they looking for, what will make their life easier, what is it that they feel is missing from the market? This applies to every industry, whether it is fashion or technology.”

**2. Be invested in your idea** “The most important thing is that whatever you do, you should be passionate about it. Because being an entrepreneur is not easy, it is a huge responsibility, and the passion for your work and business is what is going to get you through the hard times, and it is the same passion that will take your business to where you want it to be.”

**3. Make it a point to stand out** “It is important to be unique. In a very visually condensed society, where we see a lot of ads and social media visuals popping up in our face multiple times every day, create something that stands out. Do not copy someone- be innovative, create something new, and stand out. It is important to have a unique and genuine brand story, and a distinctive set of values that humanizes your products and your brand for people. This is what will get them to believe in your brand, and back the idea behind it.”

"WE WANT OUR  
DESIGNS TO FIT  
WOMEN OF ALL BODY  
TYPES, AND WE  
WANT WOMEN TO  
FEEL COMFORTABLE  
WEARING THEM, AND  
TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT  
THEMSELVES- AS  
OPPOSED TO JUST  
WEARING THEM TO  
ADHERE TO TRENDS,  
OR GET ATTENTION."



# SAPHYTE

**AS A CUSTOMER** relationship management (CRM) software platform, Saphyte's inclusion in a list of great ideas may seem quizzical to some- after all, it's fair to say that there are plenty of such solutions to be found in the market at large. But Saphyte founder Ali Homadi says his enterprise stands out by being the first, if not the only, homegrown company in the MENA region that provides a digital ecosystem -which includes CRM tools- to its clients. "I think our 'great idea' is really about creating a product and a service that would provide genuine growth to local businesses in the MENA region," Homadi explains. "I think everything that we're doing now is anchored on that business ethos. The product being the software, and the service being the support we give to our clients, the training we provide to their workforce, the first few phases of implementation of the software, and the regular updates we provide to that software to ensure that it matches the demands of the market, and it allows for a smooth usage for our clients. I think the innovation also lies there- we always look for gaps in the market, so we can create new features or fix existing ones to make our clients' experience better than before, and at the same time, provide them a competitive advantage in their respective industries."

Homadi points out that while most other CRM providers in the region are only focused on selling their offerings, Saphyte is upping the ante by creating software that really helps businesses grow- and one can see the company is walking the talk, be it with its provision of free implementation services, or the one-on-one training it offers its clients. "There's been massive support so far from local businesses," Homadi says. "Most of them are really thankful for the technology we've provided as it has helped them cut costs, make their processes smoother and faster, and in general, improve the well-being of their teams, as the technology has significantly simplified their tasks." And with Homadi and his team going the extra mile to help clients simplify their CRM strategy and maximize the technology they have, it becomes a lot easier to understand why the regional market is responding to Saphyte quite positively. "We are not just another implementation partner, unlike other CRM companies in the region," Homadi declares. "We really own the tech, and this is a whole new level of service for the region's businesses."

saphyte.com



IMAGES COURTESY SAPHYTE



**PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON  
SAPHYTE FOUNDER ALI HOMADI ON  
HOW TO SPARK A GREAT IDEA**

**1. Fight for it** “The marketplace is a harsh environment for new ideas, and they will be constantly tested. Ideas will never reach their peak and their highest potential unless you fight for them.”

**2. Always look at what you can do to provide genuine impact to others** “Most companies just come up with an idea, and try hard to sell that idea. They’re sales-focused, not impact-focused. If you can start with an idea that will really, genuinely provide impact, that’s a good start.”

**3. Continue to innovate** “Ideas can become better when you learn to collaborate with others. Listen to them, but always remain judicious. Never forget to weigh the pros and cons of people’s suggestions.”

**4. Collaborate** “Most companies are afraid to collaborate with others, thinking it can lead to complications in the future. While this may be true, always go back to the first two suggestions: will the collaboration provide more impact to other people? Will it lead to improving the ‘great idea’ for the better?”

## KINOYA

**AS A RESTAURANT** that's aiming to "change the Japanese cuisine narrative in Dubai," Kinoya has been garnering a lot of attention ahead of its launch in April this year, and that's being almost singularly driven by the fact that long-time UAE resident Neha Mishra -whose Instagram account, @astoryoffood, boasts of more than 14,000 followers- is spearheading the venture. A home cook who became renowned for the ramen she made, Mishra used to host supper clubs that had patrons raving about the food they got to enjoy in them, and it's this cultish following she's built in the UAE (and beyond) that is now waiting with bated breath for her to open Kinoya. "Personally for me, good or even great food happens when the person making it believes that there's potential for people to enjoy eating it," Mishra says. "The idea to make ramen everyday wasn't a byproduct of another thought- this was always the *only* objective, and there was a demand, so, I guess it felt like a great idea to open a restaurant, and do it every day."

Mishra says she is launching Kinoya along with a silent partner, who's someone she got to meet thanks to her aforementioned supper clubs. "The prospect of opening a restaurant landed on me, rather than the other way round," Mishra reveals. "I was making ramen for private guests six days a week over the course of three years, and I eventually met someone who wanted the same thing that I did in terms of a restaurant. It was organic and gradual, I felt ready, and meeting a like-minded person just confirmed that Kinoya should be the evolution of what I had started." And the response to Kinoya's upcoming launch seems to be confirming Mishra's notion- it might well be one of the most anticipated openings of the year. "The reception so far has been beyond my dreams," Mishra says. "People are excited, they are supportive. I am a homegrown brand, and a lot of people are rooting for Kinoya's success. Will it actually be successful? All I can say is that if it's not, then it won't be for the lack of trying." [kinoya.ae](http://kinoya.ae)

### PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON KINOYA CO-FOUNDER NEHA MISHRA ON HOW TO SPARK A GREAT IDEA

#### 1. Be your own champion

"Be passionate about what you do, what you want to do."

#### 2. Don't expect a joy ride

"Get ready to put in the work. You will have to make a lot of sacrifices, and you'll have to be really tunnel-visioned."

#### 3. Be clear about your goals

"Stop thinking about how much money you will make. Of course, that would be nice, but if that's your first thought, you're setting yourself up for disappointment."



IMAGE COURTESY KINOYA



**AS A COMPANY** that specializes in digital communications for hotels and resorts, the Dubai-headquartered Staytus probably didn't shock anyone when it launched Hotel Chat, a web-based service it billed as "the world's first chat platform built exclusively for hospitality." But what made this announcement particularly noteworthy was the fact that Staytus was allowing hotels around the world to use Hotel Chat for free- permanently.

To understand why Staytus did this, founder and CEO Troy Simoni points toward what drove his company to build Hotel Chat in the first place. "We have watched the steady growth of chatting in our clients' properties over the last several years, but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we watched the chat numbers go through the roof, even while hotels were less occupied," Simoni notes. "We knew this was a fast-growing trend, and one that was going to be here to stay. So, we looked at our existing chat platform, and realized it was not good enough. We tore it apart and rebuilt it from scratch, with the goal of making it the best in the world for hotels, resorts, and guests."

According to Simoni, what guests want/ need is entirely different than what hotels and resorts want/need- so, he and his team decided to build two separate chat systems, and then connect them to each other as Hotel Chat. Guests, for instance, are concerned with speed, ease, and simplicity- as such, there are no frills in-

involved with them using Hotel Chat; they simply scan a QR code or hit a link, and that will see them immediately connected to their hotels. "On the hotel side, the needs are completely different," Simoni says. "Hotels and resorts need team collaboration tools, tools to enable fast and accurate responses to guests, monitoring systems, management oversight, record-keeping, alerts and escalation paths- they also need high security and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance. Hotel Chat provides all of these, along with apps and web interfaces for the hotel to allow team-wide oversight of guest requests and feedback, and enable high-quality engagement with guests."

Given all of these features, Hotel Chat does sound like something that *could* radically transform communications between hotels and guests- but the platform would need to be actually used by the industry at large if Staytus is to prove that supposition. And that was when Simoni and his team made the decision to offer Hotel Chat free of charge. "We wanted to remove every possible hurdle to ensure the broadest possible worldwide adoption," he explains. "It was a big gamble to give up that revenue, but we believe by offering the world's best chat platform for hospitality, we'll build awareness and goodwill in the market- which we hope will lead to increased sales of our other guest communications products." Only time will tell if Staytus' bet pays off- but one cannot deny the inventive nature of the idea regardless. [staytus.com](http://staytus.com)

## **PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON STAYTUS FOUNDER TROY SIMONI ON HOW TO SPARK A GREAT IDEA**

**1. Find a pain point that annoys you a lot** "If you are aware of something that creates friction in your personal or professional life, you are much more likely to be able to design a workable solution for it that others will also find useful. Also, your passion and experience will serve as fuel to drive you farther and faster."

**2. Break down the problem** "Don't think about products; think instead about experiences. Put yourself in the shoes of individual people on all sides of the issue, then consider what would be ideal for each person in each situation. Once you have those pieces of the puzzle, look for ways to bring them together."

**3. Don't do it alone** "Find a partner in crime, someone who maybe has different experience, different skills, or even a different way of thinking than you do. A partnership with creative tension can multiply your ideas, and a partnership with complimentary skills can extend your executional capabilities and your network of resources."

**4. Get ready to be rejected** "No great idea didn't get laughed out of the room more than once. Humans are attached to the status quo and find new ideas preposterous, unachievable, or even threatening. The automobile, the airplane, and the internet were all belittled at the outset. Keep that in mind, and persevere! At first, only you will understand the power of your idea, but when it finally gets momentum, everyone will say, 'How could we have done without it?'"

# 60 DAY STARTUPS

**AS A PROGRAM** that helps female entrepreneurs turn their early-stage ideas into revenue-generating businesses in 60 days, 60 Day Startups sounds like a great idea, sure- but the fact that this premise has been actually put into practice is what makes this a really great idea. Founded by Nida Sumar and Mashal Waqar, both of whom have run businesses of their own in the MENA region, 60 Day Startups came into being over the course of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020. Sumar originally conceived the idea, then reached out to Waqar in September, one thing led to another, and the two ended up putting together the whole program, overview, and planning for 60 Day Startups in one sitting- albeit a full day of it.

Nida Sumar, co-founder,  
60 Day Startups



At this point, it's safe to wonder why they did all of this, and the two women are very clear about the reasons behind their venture. "We felt a huge gap when it came to non-tech heavy startups (and that's not to say that they're not tech-enabled) and access that female founders have in terms of resources and mentors," Sumar and Waqar explain. "We built 60 Day Startups to change that- we want to see a future where women entrepreneurs are running sustainable, revenue-generating businesses. Our program equips founders with practical advice, toolkits, resources, and mentors, and every aspect focuses on revenue growth in the program. There's also a huge community aspect to the program, because we understand how lonely the entrepreneurship path can be. This program is what we wish we'd had when we were starting off. We're antithetical to the typical mindset of raising investment too early on, and we want to ensure female founders can grow their businesses, regardless of funding."

Note here that Sumar and Waqar don't have a particular vendetta against fundraising- on the contrary, it's the systemic bias against female founders in the investment landscape that is making them want to equip their program participants better. "Because funding is not available on an equal basis, opportunity and support must be offered within the ecosystem on an unequal basis (i.e. more of it) until there is a shift," they explain. "Who knows how long that will take- so, in the meantime, we have removed focus from fundraising completely, and moved it to creating the best kind of capital for any business: revenue. Conscious decisions need to be made by those who care to change the numbers. We do, and that is why this program exists." The program's focus on businesses that are not necessarily centered on tech is also purposely done, note Sumar and Waqar. "There's a huge chunk of women entrepreneurs who are in their early stages, and may be on the track to building solid businesses, yet don't get the kind of exciting response that tech startups do. We felt this gap, and so we decided to tackle it by building a program."

Of course, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and so, perhaps the greatest validation of 60 Day Startups' offering is in what it has been able to do with its first cohort of entrepreneurs, as an entirely virtual program. "The response from the community and the ecosystem has been absolutely amazing," Sumar and Waqar say. "Word of mouth quickly spread, and we got close to 100 applications, despite being a completely new program. As we went full swing, so many folks in the ecosystem stepped up to partner and support us and our startups, because they believe in the mission, and in giving back. That's been the most incredible part of it." Six female founders were selected to be a part of this first cohort- Sumar and Waqar intentionally kept the number of participants low for the program this time around, but they confirm that its future editions, done twice a year, will be larger. And what happened at the end of it all? "Our founders spent 60 days working day

IMAGES COURTESY 60 DAY STARTUPS

in and day out to build their revenue and reach solid numbers,” Sumar and Waqar reveal. “Five of them reached their revenue goals by the end of the program- the last one wasn’t able to do so owing to the scale of the business she’s trying to build, but she too is well on her way to realizing her own revenue goals as well.” But perhaps the beauty of 60 Day Startups is that its success cannot be defined in just a monetary aspect- and that ties in to what Sumar and Waqar has as a long-term vision for 60 Day Startups. “Ultimately, the goal is to have a thriving, active, and supportive community of women entrepreneurs running sustainable businesses- a strong ecosystem of female founded businesses that are not only active contributors to the economics of the region, but also built on the values of giving back to the community in general and supporting each other.” [sixtydaystartup.com](http://sixtydaystartup.com)

**WE HAVE REMOVED FOCUS FROM FUNDRAISING COMPLETELY, AND MOVED IT TO CREATING THE BEST KIND OF CAPITAL FOR ANY BUSINESS: REVENUE. CONSCIOUS DECISIONS NEED TO BE MADE BY THOSE WHO CARE TO CHANGE THE NUMBERS. WE DO, AND THAT IS WHY THIS PROGRAM EXISTS.”**

Mashal Waqar,  
co-founder,  
60 Day Startups



## **PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON** **60 DAY STARTUPS CO-FOUNDERS NIDA SUMAR AND** **MASHAL WAQAR ON HOW TO SPARK A GREAT IDEA**

**1. Find a problem** “Maybe it’s one you’ve experienced, maybe others have, maybe it’s one that folks have yet to realize they will experience. Is this something others have tried to tackle, or are already tackling? This is an interesting phase, because the canvas is blank, and you can brainstorm different approaches, and tweak as you go along. When ideating, it can sometimes be helpful to start with areas and spaces you’re familiar with, versus completely new spaces and industries.

**2. Figure out your why** “Building a business is hard work, and often, the nights are long, and money is tight. It is easier to find a job that pays well at the end of each month. That is why figuring out your why, which is often bigger than money or fame, is important. It allows one to persevere in the face of the challenges on this journey- not giving up is easier when you know what is driving you.”

**3. Get to work** “Too often entrepreneurs get stuck in the promise of perfection, putting things off at every point of decision-making, refining and re-refining until their idea of perfect is met. Inaction and procrastination is the enemy of success- set yourself tight deadlines, and get disciplined about meeting them, and staying accountable. Get to work as soon as possible, talk to a lot of people to get feedback on the problem you want to solve, ask questions, seek mentors, figure out your finances, start that social media page, get that logo sorted, set up a call with a lawyer to discuss licensing options, get samples ready, and start selling very quickly. The sooner you start, the sooner you will know how you need to tweak your product or service. While you focus on starting quickly, you also need to get creative, and learn to do things very, very inexpensively.”

**4. Back yourself up** “Surround yourself with people who want to support you, and have a positive and encouraging approach. As an entrepreneur, your greatest resources are your time and energy, care for those two things really well, and having people that don’t add positive value to your life is a really bad investment of time and energy.”



# KITCH

**PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON**  
**KITCH CO-FOUNDER WALID HAJJ ON HOW TO**  
**SPARK A GREAT IDEA**

**1. Get your head in the game** “My advice is to get out there, and take risks. Get exposed to the world, and what it offers.”

**2. Persist and persevere** “Find a passion, and focus on it. Eat it, drink it, and sleep with it. The simplest things in life can turn into big ideas if you dig deep enough.”

**3. Just do it** “Finally, don’t be afraid to try. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said: The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

**WALID HAJJ** is perhaps best known for being the founder of Cravia, one of the Middle East’s leading food and hospitality groups that brought franchises like Zaatar W Zeit, Five Guys, Cinnabon, and Seattle’s Best Coffee to the region. So, when this entrepreneur, who’s been in the restaurant business for more than two decades, decided to join hands with Veda Holding founder Fahad Alhokair to launch Kitch, billed as “the region’s first hybrid, delivery-focused, cloud kitchen, and premium storefront operator,” with a cool US\$15 million in privately raised capital, well, it’s easy enough to understand why most of us had to sit up and take notice of this new venture. But even if one were to look at Kitch on the strength of its idea alone, this company would probably still impress—after all, this is a business on a mission to, as its slogan goes, “reimagine restaurants.”

According to Hajj, who runs Kitch as its CEO, with technology driving the future of the F&B industry, his enterprise is offering restaurants the ability to start, grow, and build their businesses faster, cheaper, and with much less risk. But while Kitch claims to cater to restaurants run as either brick-and-mortar storefronts or as cloud kitchens, it does seem like the latter is going to play a more significant role going forward. “The business model of Kitch is going to be the future of both the global and regional cloud kitchen industry,” Hajj says. “Kitch aims to

deliver ‘the best in the world’ everywhere it goes, and be the best, hybrid delivery-focused cloud-kitchen and franchise operator. Our carefully curated portfolio will feature an exclusive mix of popular regional brands and international franchises, in addition to new, innovative brands that have been developed to meet the changing trends and demographics that affect the F&B industry. We believe we will be contributing to Restaurants 2.0, the new era of the restaurant industry that has been shaped by technology, data insights, and consumer experience.”

Having officially launched only in February of this year, Kitch is now all set to kick off its operations in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Five cloud kitchens have been already planned for the latter, and work is afoot for the brand’s further expansion in the region and beyond. “We are building Kitch to be not just a regional player, but a global player,” Hajj says. “The potential to grow Kitch, once we establish a strong base and have solid brands in our portfolio, is massive. The world is becoming smaller due to the advances in technology, and everything we need is within a touch of a button. With the assistance of social media platforms, we are able to understand and respond to the consumers’ changing preferences, as well as impact consumer behavior. Our goal is to make Kitch a \$1 billion business in next five to six years. It is ambitious, it is challenging, but it is achievable.” [kitch.cloud](http://kitch.cloud)

# B3 DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

**GIVEN THE COVID-19** crisis in the world today, there has been a strong focus on the need for innovation within the healthcare sector, and while this premise may be currently largely focused on battling the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, it's safe to say that this level of invention and ingenuity is required across all branches of medicine as well. This is the kind of philosophy that is governing the operations at healthtech startup B3 Digital Solutions, where founder and President Md. Azhar Siddiqui, along with his team located in the UAE, India, Ireland, and the UK, is aiming to contribute to improve the quality of life for people around the world by solving healthcare problems in collaboration with the global community in this industry. B3 Digital Solutions' key offering today is its iFARM platform, which is a precision medicine and healthcare analytics platform catered toward the treatment of cancer. Siddiqui describes iFARM as a custom-built clinical big data platform offering a number of user-friendly innovative solutions that use artificial intelligence models to manage different chronic health conditions, while also delivering value-based, long-term supportive and personalized healthcare. "Healthcare is no different from other industry reeling with complex challenges to maintain a balance

between the quality of service delivered to every individual at an optimal cost, and the wellness of the population in an ecosystem of different entities, all coordinating and collaborating to deliver the best outcomes," Siddiqui says. "We have tried to address aforesaid industry needs through a clinical, data-driven, decision support platform, with the federation of services and tools to digitize and build novel smart applications, following interoperability standards to integrate, code, and exchange clinical information laden with evidences at different points of care, seamlessly and accurately." And it does seem like Siddiqui and his team at B3 Digital Solutions are on the right track- besides being an enterprise whose solutions have been accepted by marquee healthcare providers in the region and overseas, global tech giants, major electronic medical record (EMR) vendors, and big pharmas, B3 Digital Solutions' offerings have also been validated through it being a part of catalyst and acceleration programs around the world like Startupbootcamp in the UAE, Technology Hub (T-HUB) in India, Health Innovation Hub (HIH) in Ireland, TheHill in the UK, and others. The road ahead is thus already looking bright, and Siddiqui, for his part, is looking forward to the journey of scaling up his business in the region, and beyond. [b3-ds.com](http://b3-ds.com)



## PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON B3 DIGITAL SOLUTIONS FOUNDER MD. AZHAR SIDDIQUI ON HOW TO SPARK A GREAT IDEA

**1. Test and validate** "If you think you have a great idea, put it to test- validate it before starting any development. Go ahead with the idea only if your target users say it would be a 'must-have.'"

**2. Build from the ground up** "If you're building a tech solution, avoid the temptation to outsource initially, and instead, hire a co-founder or a team with the requisite skills. Always think from a design perspective to avoid rework, and come up with a quality minimum viable product at the earliest."

**3. Money matters** "As a business, plan your expenses diligently and wisely to keep the show running."

**4. Failure is not the end** "Remember that even if you fail, you can learn from the hard lessons to spring back in to the game again."

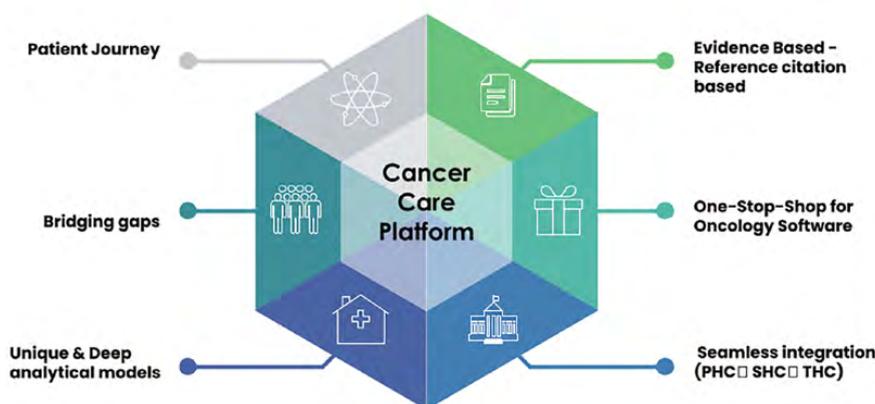


IMAGE COURTESY B3 DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

# INKOPIA

**HAVE YOU EVER** looked at a blank wall in your home or office, and wished you had some photography or art hanging on it? However, turning that thought into reality in the UAE is often difficult, be it because of the high costs being charged by suppliers and retailers for such décor, or even just the hassle involved in actually installing it. This is the problem being tackled by Dubai-based startup Inkopia, which aims to provide an end-to-end service for people wanting to jazz up their walls. All they need to do is head on to the Inkopia website, where they can purchase from a wide selection of photography, or upload their own imagery or artwork, and then create a bespoke product with that particular print. Customers get to choose the size and format they want, and they also have the option to select a frame for their piece- and they can do all of this from the comfort of their homes. Inkopia would then deliver the product, and if required, install it as well- this is why co-founder and

Director Jenny Moore calls her online platform's offering a "web-to-wall" service. "We have had a great response from individual customers across residential communities, online interior groups, and commercial entities," Moore says. "The feedback has been positive in celebrating that finally, there is a service offering everything in one place. Now, customers do not need to find a printer, source a framer, and hire a handyman to hang their wall art. We help cut down on sourcing, travel time, and back and forth [communication] with three or four other vendors. Instead, we do the hard work by offering these options all in one place on Inkopia." With the business now off to a good start, Moore says plans are underway for its further growth and development- besides building on the photography library the Inkopia site currently offers, she and her team are looking to expand the company not just in the UAE, but in neighboring nations as well. Onward and upward!



IMAGES COURTESY INKOPIA

**“WE HELP CUT DOWN ON SOURCING, TRAVEL TIME, AND BACK AND FORTH [COMMUNICATION] WITH THREE OR FOUR OTHER VENDORS.”**

**PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON**  
**INKOPIA CO-FOUNDER**  
**JENNY MOORE ON HOW TO**  
**SPARK A GREAT IDEA**

**1. Dig deep** “Great ideas for new businesses tend to be borne out of a deep understanding of a subject or industry, or frustration with not finding a product or service that caters to a specific need. Then you’re able to see a gap in the market, a solution to a particular problem, and plant the seed for a potential new business idea.”

**2. Look inward** “I think many companies should maximize the opportunities they have internally. Employees are usually an untapped source of innovation and invention. They know how the business works, understand the processes and mechanisms, and undoubtedly have ideas for how to improve, automate, and be creative in a way that’s relevant to the business, its customers, and the industry as a whole. When management is open to suggestions from internal individuals and can be open to change based on the output of brainstorming sessions, this can spark endless ‘great ideas.’”



# KIMRI

**FOUNDED BY** Sara Saleh, Kimri is an F&B brand that takes dates (arguably the Middle East's favorite fruit) and reinvents them as delectable gourmet treats with the addition of chocolate, nuts, and other ingredients. According to Saleh, Kimri is a representation of how cultures can be bridged through food, which is something she has personally experienced being the daughter of an Arab father and a European mother. As such, enticing flavor combinations are what make Kimri particularly appealing as a brand— for instance, one of its bestsellers pairs dates with raspberry and white chocolate.



“Kimri is the name given to dates when they are in the 17<sup>th</sup> week of their lifecycle,” Saleh says. “They are green in appearance, which is what inspires the brand’s signature color. As a foundation for the brand, the name Kimri reflects our young attitudes and our ever-evolving approach to creating new and innovative products. Based on these pillars, Kimri will be continually reinventing flavors and bridging cultures, whilst developing into a brand that is readily available for all consumers across the globe.”

As a venture that was a part of an incubator program run by Spinneys (one of the Middle East’s leading supermarket chains) for micro-F&B businesses in the

UAE, Kimri can today be found stocked on supermarket shelves around the country. The brand has thus come a long way from when Saleh thought it up about two years ago, but the entrepreneur is clear that she has only just started her journey with Kimri. And as for why she’s expecting big things ahead for her brand, Saleh’s reasoning is simple, but straightforward: “There is nothing like Kimri out there!” [instagram.com/shopkimri](https://www.instagram.com/shopkimri)

## PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON KIMRI FOUNDER SARA SALEH ON HOW TO SPARK A GREAT IDEA

### 1. Figure out your why

“It’s important to look inwards, and ask yourself what brings you happiness in life. This will help you establish how you would like to live your life, what values are important for you, and in what direction you’d like to dedicate your efforts towards.”

### 2. Find an untapped opportunity

“Another key aspect to sparking ‘a great idea’ involves mapping out the market, and then finding a gap in it. This is of great importance, as you will then be creating a product/service that will fulfil a particular consumer need.”

### 3. Try, try, and try again

“It takes a lot of dedication and persistence to be able to spark and build on a good idea. But always remember if one idea does not work out, there are infinite ones to be thought of still.”



IMAGES COURTESY KIMRI

# MIKAH

1984  MILANO



## love has no labels... coffee does!

Try our exclusive gourmet blends and become part of the Mikah coffee world. Choose a color and enjoy your precious coffee like you've never done it before!



[mikah.it](http://mikah.it)

# THE UAE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND PREVENTION

**WHEN THE UAE** Ministry of Health and Prevention (MOHAP) declared that it wanted to embed innovation in the culture of the UAE's healthcare sector in 2019, it's safe to say that the announcement was received with a fair amount of trepidation- after all, it's one thing to say you want to do things differently, it's another thing altogether to actually put that into action. Building a culture of innovation is bound to be hard for any kind of venture, and

one can expect it to be doubly difficult for entities as large and complex as MOHAP- but it is certainly doable, as is evidenced by the achievements the Ministry can now profess to, after following through on its Innovation Health Strategy over the last few years. Under the leadership of Chief Innovation Officer Saqr Al Hemeiri, this initiative has seen MOHAP launch over 100 projects that are aligned with its various themes. The implementation of the

strategy also saw MOHAP double down on its research and development efforts, which resulted in more than 900 papers being published both nationally and internationally. At the same time, more than 9,700 of MOHAP's employees were trained on topics relating to innovation, which resulted in the submission of over 10,000 innovative ideas with the potential to improve the entity's various offerings. MOHAP has also been active in reaching out to regional and international innovators, through activities that include everything from hackathons and exhibitions, to workshops and masterclasses. "Unifying the vision and aim for these initiatives, and aligning them with a strategic direction, has enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of our individual efforts and innovative contributions," Al Hemeiri says, as he looks back on all what MOHAP has accomplished as a result of its Innovation Health Strategy. "This has surely given our innovators a sense of unity and purpose in their work towards realizing our vision of an innovative healthcare system in the UAE. This unified vision will now form the foundation and platform for our new strategy to be launched for 2071 in alignment with UAE's Centennial Vision." [mohap.ae](http://mohap.ae)



**UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER SAQR AL HEMEIRI, THIS INITIATIVE HAS SEEN MOHAP LAUNCH OVER 100 PROJECTS THAT ARE ALIGNED WITH ITS VARIOUS THEMES.**

IMAGES COURTESY MOHAP



**PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON  
MOHAP CHIEF INNOVATION  
OFFICER SAQR AL HEMEIRI  
ON HOW TO SPARK A GREAT  
IDEA**

**1. Never work in silos**

"It is always important to collaborate and work with others- learning from their experiences and forming partnerships will be key to your innovative idea's success in the long run."

**2. The customer comes first**

"Design your ideas to be customer centric. In the case of healthcare specifically, involving patients from the initial design for the idea, and onward to its implementation will increase the chances of success for your idea, as well as its ability to tackle applicability challenges early on."

**3. Feasibility matters**

"We are all aiming for moonshots, but we need to know how to get there. Feasibility is key to ideas and concepts to become reality."

**4. Value is key**

"Whether it's cost savings, enhancements in efficiency, or improvements in quality of life, an innovative idea is defined by its ability to deliver value. Not only will this increase its appeal, stakeholders will more likely to back the idea then."

# STRATEGY / BITES

INSIGHTS AND INSPIRATION FROM SOME OF SAUDI ARABIA'S MOST NOTABLE BUSINESS EXECES **by RAFFAELLA CAMPAGNOLI**

Strategy Bites is a series of interviews that LIRA Strategy Partners founder and Managing Director Raffaella Campagnoli is conducting with some of Saudi Arabia's most notable business executives for Entrepreneur.com. In this edition, Paolo Lomonaco, Chief Financial Officer, Chalhoub Group gives his take on what it means to be doing business in the Kingdom.

## PAOLO / LOMONACO

Chief Financial Officer, Chalhoub Group



**Could you please tell me about your role, business, and its objectives within the Saudi market?**

Chalhoub Group is one of the leading partners for luxury across the Middle East. As an expert in retail, distribution, and marketing services based in Dubai, the Group has become a major player in the beauty, fashion, and gift sectors regionally. We count over 65 years of history in the industry, managing more than 300 brands, 750 stores, 20 e-commerce sites, together with 12,000 employees. Our expertise is based on different pillars: the distribution business for the beauty segment, which is seeing us as leaders in the GCC, especially in Saudi Arabia, and the retail one, where we have developed value owned brands like Level (shoes), Faces (beauty) and Tanagra (accessories) together with a number of franchising stores and joint ventures, which is positioning us as the largest luxury player in the region.

My role as Group CFO is not only supporting the shape of the overall group strategy, but also driving the business acceleration towards the new trends and opportunities the market is offering. In this perspective, we launched in 2017 a significant transformation project called SHIFT, with a vision of transforming the Group from being a traditional local luxury brick-and-mortar retailer into a hybrid retailer bringing luxury experiences at the fingertips of our customers everywhere. The main objective was to accelerate the Group responsiveness and agility towards the market evolution: digitalization, localization, development of enhanced customer experiences, composed by digital and in-store experiences.

## “My role as Group CFO is not only supporting the shape of the overall group strategy, but also driving the business acceleration towards the new trends and opportunities the market is offering.”

The Kingdom represents for us a key strategic priority, leveraging on our position of the leading luxury player in the country, our ambition in the long term is to shape the beauty and fashion industries in Saudi Arabia, and we are targeting to double the size of our local Saudi business in the next five years.

### As a Dubai-headquartered enterprise aiming to become a leader in the KSA market, how is your entity embracing the country's Vision 2030?

Well, Vision 2030 is the key reference point for our development in the Kingdom, because it embraces perfectly with our customer strategy based on focusing on people, making an impact, partnering, and respecting the planet. In this perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic really accelerated a transformation that we had already planned to implement considering the significant challenges on travel. We have seen a 20%+ sales increase in Saudi since 2019- this phenomenon has been driven by the so called ‘repatriation’ effect, which moved our national customers to buy in their own country: it's not Dubai, London, or Paris anymore as main shopping hubs for Saudi nationals, but their own country. This meaningful shift offered us the opportunity to capitalize on a deeper understanding of the market, and to accelerate the market entry strategy we had already shaped.

We have a locally dedicated team, and we are still hiring local talents- the understanding of consumers' behaviors, their preferences, their main shopping spaces are going to be driven by our Saudi team. This is the only way to win the market considering the impressive transformation happening both in the national culture and at infrastructural level. We are also searching for new national brands, not only to support the development of local talents in the region, but also internationally. We believe that the creation of strong local fashion and beauty ecosystem is one of the most important contribution we can offer according to Vision 2030 objectives.

We are also willing to double our e-commerce presence in the country in the next few years: this means not only reinforcing the existing partnership with players like Farfetch, but also investing in warehousing, logistic infrastructure, fulfillment, and e-commerce last mile service that will drive Chalhoub to enhance the local business experience on these capabilities. We are planning to open concepts, especially Level, in the Kingdom. This is going to be linked to the enhanced presence the Group is planning to have within the new projects the Public Investment Fund (PIF) is developing together with the local private entities.

We have recently launched our new loyalty experiential program, MUSE, for Saudi, together with a dedicated customer resource management (CRM) project. We believe the Kingdom will become one of the main hubs for the future of beauty and fashion shopping in the GCC. We want to get closer to our customers, have a direct relationship with them in an exceptionally unique manner. Last but not least, we might consider opening in the future a new, bigger office also in Riyadh, as the business focus is moving more and more to the capital; hence, we might need and additional space to the main office recently bought in Jeddah.

### What are the key challenges you are seeing when it comes to the business landscape in the Kingdom?

We completely embrace the Vision 2030 plan, and for this reason, we are confident that our challenges are soon going to be solved or transformed into opportunities. The main challenges we are facing can be summarized in two points:

**1/ Hiring talents Saudi Arabia** is still developing specific industry-related capabilities such as e-commerce, last mile delivery, fulfillment, merchandising, digital enhancement. So, now, we are recruiting international talents aimed not only to develop the current operations, but also to train and upskill the local workforce on those industry-focused competencies.

**2/ Identifying local digital transformation partners which could help us on local execution** In order to remain relevant, we are really designing new experience models based on a retail hybrid value proposition where the digital interaction constitutes a relevant element within the customer journey. Driving innovation and change means also identifying meaningful experienced partners on key drivers like training and development, technology delivery, analytics, and data scientists.

### What impresses you most about Saudi Arabia's plans for the future?

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is facing an impressive and unprecedented transformation, which is a human and cultural shift towards new opportunities for the country and its population. Chalhoub is willing to be part of this flourishing, driving the innovation and change within the beauty and fashion industries. I am sure that the enhancement of technology, the main facilitator of this evolution, will enable us to drive a faster, more agile, and relevant change to delight our customers through a great local Saudi team. **E**



Raffaella Campagnoli is the founder and Managing Director of LIRA Strategy Partners. With over 20 years of experience in strategy consulting in international firms, she was formerly the Managing Director at Accenture Strategy Middle East and Turkey for nine years. Raffaella left Accenture after 13 years at the company, during which she led transformation programs in multiple regions (Europe, US, Turkey, Singapore, Middle East), specialized in strategic planning, operating model transformation, zero based budgeting, digital transformation and innovation, ecosystem strategy. Raffaella has been leading impactful transformations in industries like travel and hospitality, fashion, consumer products goods, and retail, thereby developing a trusted network of partners and experienced professionals. [lira.partners](http://lira.partners)



Shivani Gupta (center), co-founder of Inochi Care

# PROGRESSING TOWARD PARITY

The winners of the **TiE Women Global Pitch Competition** share their thoughts on building a more equitable startup ecosystem **BY TAMARA PUPIC**

Does anyone else feel like the world seems to be following the “enough is plenty” formula with regards to initiatives that promote and advance women’s entrepreneurship? The increasing number of support programs for female entrepreneurs is especially evident within the glob-

al startup economy, which, as Ashish Panjabi, President of the Dubai Chapter of The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE), explains, creates nearly US\$3 trillion in value, a figure that is on par with the GDP of a G7 economy. The next statistic he shares -that the ratio of male entrepreneurs to female entrepreneurs has increased in 2019 to 10:7- signals that the encouragement of wom-

en’s economic empowerment does lead to some progress in attaining gender parity in the business world. However, Panjabi echoes a sentiment that perception and reality are often quite different, and adds that the TiE Dubai team do not find the 10:7 ratio satisfying, especially in the MENA region where, he adds, the real picture is even further from ideal.

Panjabi points toward a 2019 report by Arabnet and Dubai SME which found that out of 1,423 regional investments in startups across the MENA region, only 14% of deals were with startups founded by women. “Typically, the barriers that prevent women from running their own business range from the lack of access to funding, limited access to information or support, and the lack of confidence in being able to balance work and home responsibilities,” he notes. “In the MENA region, women play a huge role in maintaining the household. Additionally, the lack of available mentors or advisors, or not knowing where to find the right support, hampers the growth of businesses led by women. Women-led businesses are among the leading ventures that lack financial support. It is also common for women to be denied loans because of gender and cultural bias.” Such insights, coupled with global findings like Visa’s second annual *State of Female Entrepreneurship* report stating that 66% of women entrepreneurs find difficulty in obtaining funding, is what Panjabi says led TiE to launch the TiE Women Global Pitch Competition to support female founders.

Founded in 1992 in Silicon Valley, TiE currently has 15,000 members, including over 2,500 charter members in 61 chapters across 14 countries, who support its mission to foster entrepreneurship globally through mentoring, networking, education, incubating, and funding. Since 2003, the TiE Dubai chapter has been providing assistance and guidance to a community of more than 3,000 entrepreneurs through TiE Women, The Young Entrepreneur, Tie Hustle, and TiE Mentorship.

“TiE Dubai has also gone the extra mile to be a more inclusive member of the community,” Panjabi says. “Whilst most members and businesses were typically tech-driven, we are today running events or mentoring a wide range of businesses that represent the landscape of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the UAE.”

The TiE Women competition was run through the course of 2020, with its global finale staged by TiE Dubai in January this year. The contest received over 2,000 pitch applications, and 26 chapter finalists were selected from around the world. The jury comprising of Ingie Chalhoub, President and Managing Director, Etoile Group, Majed Al Suwaidi, Managing Director, Dubai Media City, Dubai Studio City, and Dubai Production City, Zanubia Shams, Co-Chairperson, Zulekha Healthcare Group, and Bollywood actor Vivek Oberoi, awarded the first prize of \$100,000 to Inochi Care, a medtech startup from TiE Kolkata that developed a device for multi-therapeutic wound healing. Its co-founder Shivani Gupta noted how being a female entrepreneur is also quite different from how the public often perceives it. “The public gets to see the outside picture and social media posts, which are all good and fair, but they don’t see what it takes to have that one victory. It’s not one day or one week’s work, it’s the work over months on end, dealing with challenges, troubleshooting the issues on a daily basis.”

Gupta also adds that although that the increasing support to female entrepreneurs is evident through, for instance, some of today’s funds investing primarily in companies with a female-majority



Natalia Mykhaylova, founder, WeavAir

“A LOT OF MY TIME IS SPENT IN CALLS WITH CUSTOMERS, SUPPLIERS, AND PARTNERS, WHICH IS HARD TO BALANCE WITH OVERSEEING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREAT TECHNOLOGY WE ARE WORKING TO BRING TO THE MARKET, SO I HAVE BEEN WORKING ON WAYS TO IMPROVE THE BALANCE.”

team, there is still “a long way to go to get rid of the mindset barriers regarding female entrepreneurs being able to balance professional and personal commitments and trusting in their long-term professional commitment.” How does she deal with it? Gupta replies that it’s a matter of just following the lessons entrepreneurship teaches anyone, ir-

respective of gender- i.e. there is no substitute for consistent hard work, that entrepreneurs should not hesitate to ask for help when needed, and that a strong and reliable team is the pillar to any organization.

When it comes to pieces of advice, Dr. Parul Ganju, the winner of the TiE Women Global Competition’s second prize, including a cash infusion of \$25,000, also shared a few. As the co-founder of Ahammune Biosciences Private Limited, Dr. Ganju’s main insights into how to win the entrepreneurial game could be summed up to purpose, passion, and perseverance. A member of TiE Pune, Dr Ganju and her team are aiming to redefine the dermatological therapeutics market by carrying out discovery-oriented innovative research in order to provide new therapies for skin diseases. Her entrepreneurial journey has been a rollercoaster ride that, she observes, is unlike how it might come across on social media. “People assume that entrepreneurship guarantees a lot of freedom,” Dr. Ganju says. >>>

**STAND A CHANCE TO WIN \$100,000  
IN EQUITY-FREE PRIZE MONEY**

“While it’s true that it’s not a 9-to-5 job, and there indeed is a sense of independence in entrepreneurship, it actually requires a lot of discipline. It really is a lifestyle that one has to imbibe 24x7. It comes with both responsibility and a lot of pressure. One has to stay self-motivated.”

Regarding the question of what else needs to be done to equalize the ratio of male entrepreneurs to female entrepreneurs, Dr. Ganju reverts to the problem of limited access to funding for women-led startups. “The data currently available speaks for itself, because it does take more effort for a woman to convince an investor to put the money into her business, and to assure them of her dedication to the business,” she says. “This mainly has got to do with the associated social expectations from a woman, as the primary contributor to household responsibilities and caregiver for the family. This makes some investors skeptical as they feel that demands from personal and professional commitments can pressurize a woman to abandon her business. However, with big conglomerates now appointing women in leading management roles, I think things are moving in a positive direction. More and more people are now ready to look up to women in diverse roles.”

The third winner of the TiE Women Global Competition, was Natalia Mykhaylova, founder and CEO of New York-based WeavAir. Having spent a decade in the healthcare sector, Mykhaylova discovered strong links between air pollution and health outcomes of patients with lung transplant, asthma, and allergies. Today, this insight is embodied into WeavAir’s proactive end-to-end software and hardware solutions for air distribution systems that prevent the spread of air contamination and infection, while saving energy and reducing operational and maintenance costs. Mykhaylova advises female entrepreneurs not to be afraid to think big with their ventures and to take risks, because “building a billion-dollar annual revenue company is just as hard a building million dollar one.” She adds, “Secondly, don’t be afraid to contact people and ask for help, even if you think that there is a low probability



Parul Ganju, co-founder and Director at Ahammune Biosciences Pvt Ltd.

of a response, because you might be surprised. Thirdly, be flexible and resilient, because there will be many challenges and barriers, but it’s important not to take them personally.”

Building a business has showed Mykhaylova that entrepreneurship is indeed “a lot less glamorous than it is portrayed in the media.” She adds, “I like to split my week 80:20, between doing day-to-day business activities and strategic long-term goals. A lot of my time is spent in calls with customers, suppliers, and partners, which is hard to balance with overseeing the development of the great technology we are working to bring to the market, so I have been working on ways to improve the balance. Problem-solving (both in business and technology) is a big part of every day and can be sometimes frustrating, but it is something I actually enjoy doing because nothing is more rewarding than finding a solution to a difficult problem. As a company, we are very collaborative, which we found really accelerates our business as we can get a lot more done with limited resources.” She also agrees that not enough funding is available for businesses led by women, especially for bigger rounds; however, times are chang-

**“WE HAVE A LOCALLY DEDICATED TEAM, AND WE ARE STILL HIRING LOCAL TALENTS—THE UNDERSTANDING OF CONSUMERS’ BEHAVIORS, THEIR PREFERENCES, THEIR MAIN SHOPPING SPACES ARE GOING TO BE DRIVEN BY OUR SAUDI TEAM.”**

ing, she notes. “I think the way women present their business is often different from how men do it, and that sometimes causes some bias for the investors,” Mykhaylova says. “Once we have a more equal split of the businesses run by men and women, I think many of these bias will be eliminated, especially given that women are known to have many advantages in running companies, like greater empathy and more efficiency in using time and multitasking.”

It seems perfect to end this feature with a note that times indeed are changing for women entrepreneurs across the MENA region; however, we will not put a dot here but a comma in order to continue keeping an eye on the progress of initiatives such is TiE Women. **E**

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES  
MINISTRY OF ECONOMY

# ABLF LIVE TALKS

THE VIRTUAL CONCLAVE

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF  
H.H. SHEIKH NAHAYAN  
MABARAK AL NAHAYAN  
CABINET MEMBER AND MINISTER OF TOLERANCE  
AND COEXISTENCE, UAE



## ARE YOU PART OF ASIA'S MOST POWERFUL CONVERSATIONS OF 2021?

Enter the cutting-edge, virtual venue of the Asian Business Leadership Forum - the ABLF City - to engage with Asia's top leaders, economists, strategists, thinkers and influencers as they identify solutions to urgent socio-economic challenges.

Participate in monthly Virtual Conclaves, world-class forums, roundtables, masterclasses, workshops and ABLF Partner Showcase Expo, for interactive dialogues with Asia's brightest minds.

UPCOMING CONCLAVE: APRIL 6, 2021; VIRTUAL VENUE: ABLF CITY.

REGISTER FOR FREE AT [WWW.ABLF.COM](http://WWW.ABLF.COM)

# “WE GOT FUNDED!”

A look at the stories behind the recent fundraising announcements made by MENA-based ventures, **StarzPlay** and **Foodics** by **ABY SAM THOMAS & AALIA MEHREEN AHMED**



Mirza Beg, co-founder and Managing Partner, Ruya Partners; Maaz Sheikh, co-founder and CEO, StarzPlay; Karin Baggström, co-founder and CFO, StarzPlay; Rashid Siddiqi, co-founder and Managing Partner, Ruya Partners

customer base. We have over 1.8 million subscribers, and aim to grow 30% this year, and reach four million subscribers by 2024.”

As for what makes StarzPlay stand out in the regional landscape, Sheikh points toward the content it hosts on its platform. “Our subscribers appreciate the premium content we deliver through our partnerships with leading global studios, and how we leverage advanced technology to deliver a seamless customer experience,” he says. “We are also aggressively focused on strengthening our original content— which the US\$25 million debt financing by Ruya will help us fast-forward.” Sheikh points out here that StarzPlay already has 2,500 hours of Arabic content, which was built in the last 18 months, and that he and his team plan to double this volume in 2021-22.

“In fact, we have already teamed up Image Nation for the first original Arabic production,” Sheikh adds. “There was a slowdown in production due to the pandemic, but we are progressing to deliver the project in 2021. We also launched our first original production, Baghdad Central, in partnership with Fremantle, which received an overwhelming response,

## STARZPLAY

[starzplay.com](http://starzplay.com)

StarzPlay, a MENA-based streaming video on demand (SVOD) service provider, has secured US\$25 million in its first independent debt financing from Abu Dhabi-based alternate investment firm, Ruya Partners. With StarzPlay already enjoying over 1.8 million paying subscribers in the region, the company said in a statement that it is aiming to use the investment to strengthen its geographic and customer reach and to acquire and produce original content, while maximizing

its long-term value for its stakeholders. The latest round of funds secured by StarzPlay adds to the \$125 million it has raised since it was founded, with the company hoping to follow through on its ambitions to lead into a potential IPO in the future.

StarzPlay currently enjoys a market share of more than 33%, and the ongoing global coronavirus pandemic hasn’t hurt its growth— in fact, the platform has seen its number of unique users growing by 141% over the course of 2020. And while there is stiff competition in the region’s SVOD space

from the likes of Netflix, Amazon Prime, and more, StarzPlay co-founder and CEO Maaz Sheikh told *Entrepreneur Middle East* that his enterprise has a significant advantage over the others.

“Being homegrown is our differentiating strength,” Sheikh says. “We are based in the region, understand the region, and deliver content that is relevant to our audiences here. We were the first entity in the UAE to secure an SVOD license when we launched in 2015. Since then, we have gained a 33% market share, and have year-on-year built our

showing that stories from the region resonate with MENA viewers. In addition, the pandemic has created organic demand for our service—in the last 12 months alone, we saw a 40% increase in subscriber numbers—and I am very excited about what the future holds for us.”

With StarzPlay being able to boast figures and prospects like these, it thus becomes easy to understand the reasons that governed Ruya Partners’ decision to fund the company. “To give you a broader perspective on our investment views, we believe that the private sector is going to drive much needed economic growth and diversification in the region, and as such, we look to back enterprises that are leading that charge in their space,” explains Rashid Siddiqi, co-founder and Managing Partner, Ruya Partners. “In StarzPlay, we like the underlying sector trends where over-the-top (OTT) video streaming has become the choice in home entertainment.”

According to Siddiqi, StarzPlay’s achievements are especially worthy when considering the fact that it is an enterprise that only launched in the region in 2015. “Within the high growth OTT sector, the management at StarzPlay has done an exceptional job of executing to plan, and positioning itself as the market leader in an otherwise competitive space,” Siddiqi says. “This is no small feat for a young company, and demonstrates the strength of the management team, and the moat they have been able to build around their business. We did a rigorous review of StarzPlay, and were impressed with its financial strength, business fundamentals, robust outlook for growth, and tremendous potential to expand its reach across the wider region.”

A similar thought process seems to have orchestrated Sheikh’s decision to move StarzPlay ahead on its growth trajectory with Ruya Partners’ investment. “Ruya Partners shares our vision for the tech entrepreneurial ecosystem of the region,” Sheikh says. “They understand our business model, appreciate our results, and believe in our future plans. Going for debt financing from within the country, with

a partner that values our operations and trusts our outlook, was an easy decision for us. The financing provides us the platform to go public in the next two to three years, and to double our business, expand our footprint, and create original content.”

The investment in StarzPlay also bodes well for the MENA startup ecosystem, with Ruya Partners saying it’s keeping an eye out for more innovative companies from the region that it can potentially fund. “We will continue to evaluate new opportunities in the region, and we see strong potential for tech related investments,” says Mirza Beg, co-founder and Managing Partner, Ruya Partners. “Our focus is on investing in private sector enterprises that are well positioned within high growth sectors, and where we can back a strong management team to take the business to its next level. As it relates to startups, given that we are a private debt investor,

we look for companies that have been through successful equity funding rounds (past Series A and B, if not C), and where we can see a visible path to profitability. For potential partnerships, we like to see consistency in the track record of the management team, strength of the shareholder base, and a proper governance structure in place.”

At this point, when asked for his advice for entrepreneurs seeking funds for their enterprises in our current circumstances, Sheikh underlined the importance of building a sustainable business, which will be what attract investors today. “As an entrepreneur, it is critical that you have a strong business model that is relevant not just for now, but for the long term,” Sheikh says. “When pitching, show that you understand the market, the challenges and opportunities ahead, and have a clear strategy for addressing unprecedented risks/challenges. Investors evaluate the understanding and ambition of the leadership, so strong management of your team of experts is important. You must demonstrate innovation, and have a strong tech-driven strategy, even more so as industries pivot to digitization. Show your agility, flexibility, and relevance to the market—now, and in the future.”

**“IN STARZPLAY, WE LIKE THE UNDERLYING SECTOR TRENDS WHERE OVER-THE-TOP (OTT) VIDEO STREAMING HAS BECOME THE CHOICE IN HOME ENTERTAINMENT.”**





**FOODICS**

*foodics.com*

Foodics, an F&B tech startup that provides a cloud-based point-of-sale and retail management platform for outlets across the MENA region, has raised US\$20 million in a Series B funding round led by Sanabil Investments, a firm wholly owned by Saudi Arabia’s Public Investments Fund (PIF). The round, which was co-led by Riyadh-based venture capital fund STV, also included investments from Endeavor Catalyst, Elm, and Derayah. Launched in 2014, the Saudi-headquartered startup provides a 360-degree software as a service (SaaS) ecosystem in its mission to ease and enrich operations for restaurant and retail owners using cloud technology. It provides services such as managing stocks, organizing staff schedules, increasing table turnaround time, and generating intelligence reports, among others. In a statement about

the funding round, Ahmad AlNaimi, Partner at STV, said, “The company is strategically positioned to become critical infrastructure for SMEs, and a de facto platform to connect digital players with offline retailers.” This latest round of funding has entailed a total of \$28 million raised by Foodics in recent months- a move that is expected to help the firm inch closer towards its goal of becoming the next Saudi unicorn, says co-founder and CEO, Ahmad Al Zaini. “Till date, we have successfully processed over five billion orders through the platform, and over 50,000 terminals while catering to over 10,000 F&B brands,” he explains. “Our software is available in English, Arabic, and French which makes it one of the most promising SaaS companies in the MENA region.”

With five main offices across Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and the UAE, Foodics caters to different segments within the F&B sector, including tra-

ditional dine-in restaurants, fast food outlets, bakeries, food trucks, and cloud kitchens, in addition to the retail sector. But Al Zaini remains wary that to move towards unicorn status requires the firm to expand its fintech offerings as well. “In order to offer a true one stop platform for owners to manage their business, a finance offering was always part of our vision,” explains the co-founder. Interestingly, the startup was very recently recognized as a fintech company by the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA), which is the central bank of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

With the fresh round of funding and the acknowledgment by SAMA, the startup aims to fast-track its fintech product development for the F&B retail sector. Unsurprisingly, however, Foodics also had to bear the brunt of the negative ripple effect felt by the F&B industry during the peak of the global coronavirus crisis last year. But by smartly pivoting

**“WITH CASH FLOW BEING AT A CRITICAL PAIN POINT FOR SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS DURING THE PANDEMIC, WE WANTED TO BE ABLE TO OFFER THEM A ONE STOP SHOP THAT ALSO COVERS THEIR FINANCE NEEDS AND ENABLES THEM TO ACCELERATE THEIR GROWTH RATE.”**

some of its offerings, in the form of Foodics Pay (a contactless payment platform), Foodics Now (an online ordering platform for restaurateurs), and Foodics Capital (an SME lending facility), the team was able to adapt to the new situation.

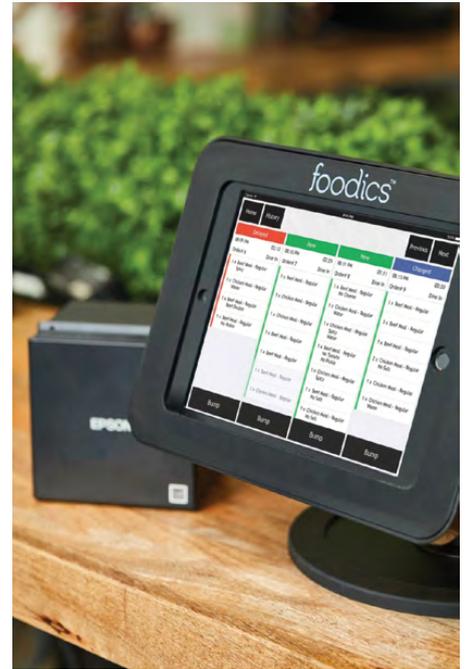
“With cash flow being at a critical pain point for small business owners during the pandemic, we wanted to be able to offer them a one stop shop that also covers their finance needs and enables them to accelerate their growth rate,” explains Al Zaini. “We speeded up the introduction of Foodics Pay, which allows contactless payments. We were able to reach five million transactions through Foodics Pay over the past five months.” With businesses across the globe shifting to cashless payments, this move stood Foodics in good stead through the crisis, especially as it looked to expand its fintech offerings too. “In 2020, fintech startups were able to fill the gap with solutions that required minimal human contact, thus complying with social distancing regulations while maintaining or even increasing the convenience level for their customers,” Al Zaini observes.



But this speedy move towards digitization wasn't only in the financial sector though. In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, the F&B sector also experienced huge changes in the way it traditionally functioned, with many restaurants moving towards the cloud kitchen model and having to adapt to digitally innovative ways to survive. In the midst of this shift, the Foodics team fast-tracked the product development of Foodics Now. “It is a new platform that allows restaurant owners to have their own online ordering platform, accept online payments, manage delivery as well as curbside pick-up orders,” explains Al Zaini of the new offering, which was created with the aim to better support the ecosystem for traditional/dine-in restaurants.

The startup's other new offering, Foodics Capital, was targeted towards helping small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Saudi Arabia and beyond. “We wanted to revolutionize SME lending, by enabling faster and more flexible lending than most of the lending facilities in the region,” Al Zaini elaborates. “To that effect, we set up Foodics Capital, in partnership with the KSA-based Maalem Finance, leading provider in Shariah-compliant consumer and SME financing.” Another interesting avenue of revenue generation for the startup came in the form of hosting educational webinars given by industry experts, where insights on driving meaningful transformation were shared with business owners.

With such precise, situation-based modifications it isn't particularly shocking to know that the team aims to expand Foodics' services beyond the MENA region to go international. “By 2022, our goal is to have 500 employees, and we are actively seeking extraordinary talents to join our team and grow together,” explains Al Zaini. “Our vision has always been beyond Foodics, with the aim to grow the ecosystem as a whole, under our mantra “growing together”. Our long-term goal is to allow restaurateurs to focus on their product, while we develop tools, data, and insights to help them make the right decisions.” **1**



## **'TREP TALK** Foodics co-founder and CEO Ahmad Al Zaini's tips for entrepreneurs

### **1. Do your homework**

“Always carefully consider the market size, the potential growth, as well as the product fit before entering the market.”

### **2. Validate your concept**

“Run your idea and concept past trusted people from your personal network, before setting off on the new venture.”

### **3. Decide carefully where to operate from**

“A good thing is that nowadays there is financial support available to help set up a business and create a website, as well as plenty of office sharing platforms to get started.”

### **4. People come first**

“Focus on attracting and retaining talented employees. Human capital is always a strategic competitive advantage any business depends on.”

Peter Koueik,  
co-founder and CEO,  
WaysMaze



**“WITH THE ADVENT OF THE INTERNET OF THINGS (IOT) AND BLOCKCHAIN, BUSINESSES AS WE KNOW IT ARE POISED TO CHANGE IN THE NEAR FUTURE.”**

ferent vendors if the work can be done with a single trusted company?”

With WaysMaze onboarding experts from various industries to cater to the different needs of businesses it serves, the startup has been able to work in sectors as varied as telecom, construction, banking, healthcare, insurance, payment solutions, advertising, and logistics. The company’s offerings have been put to use everywhere from smart home solutions in Japan, Singapore, and China, as well as at industry conferences such as GITEX and The Big 5 Dubai in the UAE. Leading the company is CEO Koueik, who has more than 12 years of work experience as a full stack software developer, while COO Angelopoulos brings in 10 years of experience as a sales and marketing professional in the FMCG sector. As for what’s driving the company’s growth, the co-founders point toward the technological advancements that govern the world today. “A digital transformation is in full effect, and we believe that almost all industries will have to shift to the new norm,” Koueik says. “With the advent of the internet of things (IoT) and blockchain, businesses as we know it are poised to change in the near future.”

Before launching WaysMaze, the co-founders decided to focus on establishing a strong client database, as they knew it was a common challenge for startups. “We agreed from the very start to invest heavily in our network,” says Koueik, making it a point to attend several conferences and events to communicate the brand’s vision to the right audience. Setting up, according to the duo, was straightforward. “We wanted a free zone that is relevant to our business ac-

## AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Digital solutions company **WaysMaze**

is taking advantage of the digital transformation wave that’s sweeping over the MENA region (and beyond)

by PAMELLA DE LEON

**W**ith the advancement of digital transformation in full effect in today’s industries, there’s a plethora of solutions now available that allow businesses to take off and achieve new levels of efficiency. And as companies rush to digitize their operations, a hurdle in the market becomes evident with companies having to look for different

suppliers for each of their digital needs. This was the scope of work that drove co-founders Peter Koueik and Karl Angelopoulos to launch WaysMaze Technologies, a one-stop shop company that provides digital solutions and services ranging from software development, to immersive reality such as virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), and more. As Angelopoulos puts it: “Why go through the trouble of looking for dif-

Karl Angelopoulos,  
co-founder and COO,  
WaysMaze



tivity. With flexible packages and great customer support, Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC) was the clear choice. Our business case was solid and relevant to DIFC.” For entrepreneurs setting up businesses in the UAE, the CEO advises them to choose to their location carefully -i.e. free zone versus onshore- and to ensure its relevance to your business. “As the saying goes, ‘The trend is your friend,’ so fintech, health-tech, blockchain, artificial intelligence, and general technology are encouraged.” As for making WayzMaze stand out from its peers in the market, the co-founders say their USP was clear from day one. “The one-stop shop approach has enabled us to position ourselves ahead of competition. Also, our board comprises of experts in their respective industries- this helped us to stand out.”

WayzMaze launched in January 2020, which, as we now all know, also marked the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. It could have hurt the startup, but thankfully, prior to kickoff, WaysMaze had already secured some potential clients they had worked with in the past, and that helped to keep the momentum going. “We were

strangely fortunate with the advent of the pandemic, as the digital transformation agenda was strongly accelerated,” Koueik says. “We launched WaysMaze at the very start of the COVID-19 crisis, so we ensured to adhere to social distancing right from the start, without having to undergo operational changes.” Operating with a B2B and B2B2C business model, the company launched with an ample list of services, ranging from incorporating IoT, blockchain services and smart home software development, to executing data science and big data management solutions.

WaysMaze’s offerings also feature AI applications, including machine learning, robotic process automation (RPA), natural language processing (NLP) solutions, and AI-powered chatbots and search engines to improve customer service. It also offers full stack development across multiple platforms, digital marketing services, and immersive reality and motion graphics services. As for clients, Koueik notes they deal with companies from various sectors, including global supply chain, automotive, airlines, F&B, and real estate. “We have delivered several big data manage-

**“BUSINESS NORMS ARE CHANGING QUICKLY. WHAT IS ADOPTED TODAY CAN BE OBSOLETE TOMORROW. WE SHOULD ALWAYS BE OPEN TO CHANGE.”**

ment and RPA projects, which led to significant ROI, in terms of productivity increase, downtime reduction and cost savings,” he notes. “We are currently in growth stage, doing our best to keep the momentum high,” adds Angelopoulos.

The duo share that the unforeseen circumstances brought on by 2020 also led them to a new understanding of the ecosystem. “Business norms are changing quickly. What is adopted today can be obsolete tomorrow. We should always be open to change. One of the greatest effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is that the room is no longer reserved for the big players. Startups and SMEs now have, more than ever, the opportunity to take part [in] the digital transformation market.” As such, Koueik encourages fellow entrepreneurs to adapt to the new digital transformation ecosystem. In 2021, the duo believes that there’s a lot of opportunity to be gleaned in business analytics (mainly in big data management services), and AI (“especially with machine learning and robotic process automation models that boost productivity”). They also point out how this year could see more demand for immersive reality, especially for solutions that enhance customer engagement.

Going forward, the company is planning to utilize digital marketing tactics to raise its business’ offering to a larger audience. The team is also planning to introduce a smart home solution, with the aim being to eventually provide home automation for the masses. “This is a separate business that is currently undergoing a fundraising process,” Koueik reveals. As for WaysMaze itself, the co-founders are hopeful about their future aspirations. “The digital transformation is going to shape the future in many ways. We want to partake in that future. Our vision is to transform WaysMaze into a powerhouse for innovation.” **E**

Mani Prakash,  
CEO, RadYes



## UNLOCKING SOCIAL COMMERCE

UAE-based **RadYes** can help transform your social media content into a sales transaction

by PAMELLA DE LEON

**W**ith the global coronavirus pandemic compelling people to stay in their homes, this has led to an amplification of the melancholia around restaurant-made dishes, especially on social media

platforms like Instagram. This, in turn, has resulted in social media playing a significant role in guiding consumer purchases—according to Instagram’s research in 2019, 130 million accounts tap on shopping posts to learn more about products every month.

As such, it’s only apt that brands jump to social media to become an inherent part of consumers’ daily screen time, while also making the purchase journey as seamless and efficient as possible. And this is where RadYes comes in—launched in January 2020, this Middle East social commerce platform wants to equip restaurants with tools to sell their dishes through their website and social media, including WhatsApp. Designed as a simple solution for restaurants to grow in the competitive market space without onerous commissions, RadYes is a fully integrated tool with multiple third-party partnerships for delivery, SMS, and payment gateways.

Leading the enterprise is CEO Mani Prakash, who started his career as a software engineer, which he deems as being quite useful now considering his realm of work. “It taught me a lot about thinking on a granular level about products, the way they are built and how an end user experiences them,” he notes. He transitioned to investment banking in the UK, followed by stints in Zomato and America’s, where he led key launches like online ordering and digital transformation. Prakash has seen the impact of the foodtech industry and how it’s transforming consumption, and it’s quite easy to see how this mindset aligns perfectly with RadYes’ vision. “RadYes, as a concept, was built from having intimate knowledge of how the foodtech industry has changed and helped restaurants, but also seeing just how much of a gap existed in the way restaurants were marketing themselves and selling their products,” says Prakash. “There is a real need

for brands to start adapting to the way customers are engaging and transacting with the brands they use.” RadYes was the result of a market gap and market maturity level, Prakash notes.

Having seen the sides of both brands and aggregators, the RadYes team can attest on how convenience was a much-needed factor in the consumer’s purchase journey. “Brands were pushing for more initiatives to stay connected with their customer base. However, they need the best-in-class tools, ‘aggregator-style’ thinking, agile platforms, and techniques to do so. Market maturity is a natural evolution of online commerce. Social and more importantly, conversational commerce is the next thing (in fact, it is the mainstream in the Eastern half of the world already). And brands need sophisticated and relevant tools for this type of commerce.” According to Prakash, empowering merchants to take ownership of their brands is the main driver behind all new initiatives at RadYes. Choosing UAE as a starting entry point was a natural decision—besides being a center of innovation in the MENA region, Prakash says that the country offered a matured market fit as well. “Business potential or product market fit was seen very early,” he says. “And with increasing market maturity, we are seeing exponential growth in signups and adoption.”

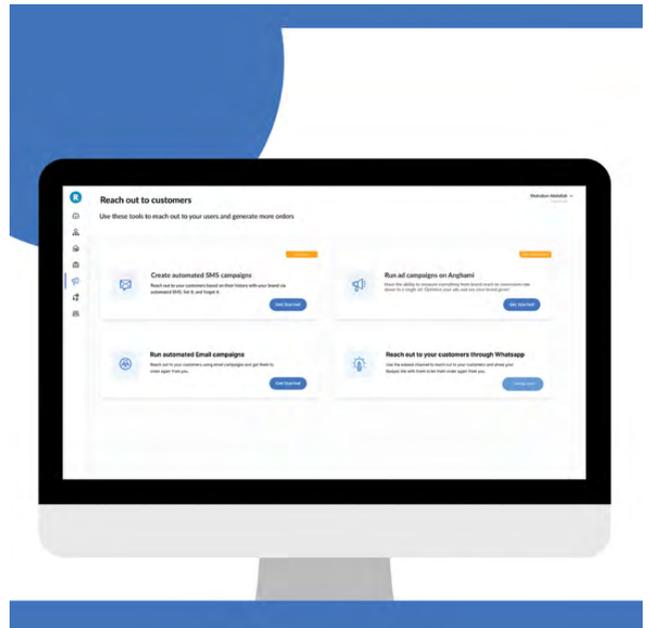
Indeed, with the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, restaurants faced government mandates to close or lessen dine-in options (with some even temporarily closing or shutting down as a result), and as such, RadYes presented F&B brands with an alternative revenue stream.

**“MARKET MATURITY IS A NATURAL EVOLUTION OF THE ONLINE COMMERCE. SOCIAL AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, CONVERSATIONAL COMMERCE IS THE NEXT THING (IN FACT, IT IS THE MAINSTREAM IN THE EASTERN HALF OF THE WORLD ALREADY).”**

The startup is, according to Prakash, currently in its hyper growth stage, given its timing in the market and the significant traction it has attained for itself. “COVID-19 actually helped us test the traction of our brand and product very quickly. Due to the shift in the operating model from dine-in to delivery, we had to scale and learn at the speed of light.” In under a year, the team built a “360-degree ecosystem,” consisting of a seamless platform, backed by over 100 partners across payment gateways, SMS gateways, logistics and last-mile providers, point-of-sale systems, and several others.

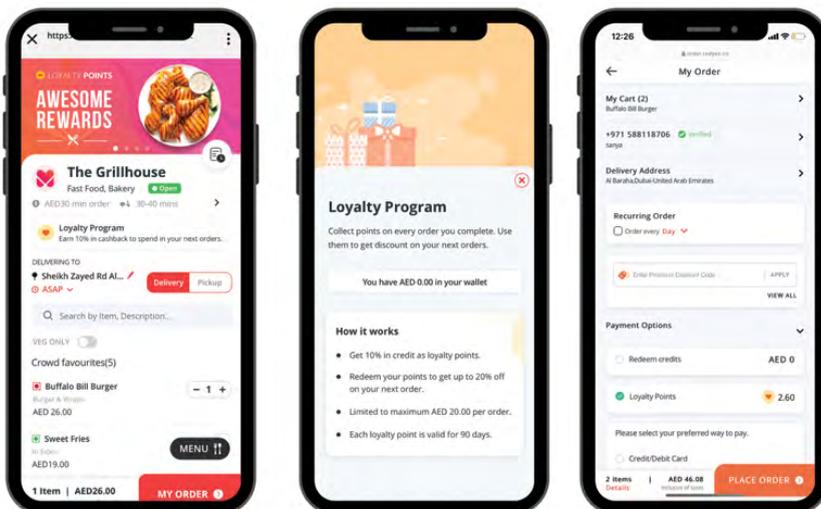
The COVID-19 pandemic also defined a large part of the company’s strategic approach. “It helped mature the market to a point where we’re not ed-

ucating customers on the importance of social commerce anymore; we’re educating them on how to do it well, and at a profit,” says Prakash. “It’s often said that problems are opportunities, and that’s the mindset here at RadYes. We had to learn to scale up very rapidly, which was a huge learning.” Currently, the brand is serving over 3,000 businesses across the F&B, retail, e-commerce, beauty, and pharmaceuticals sectors. As the markets open up, the startup is also building solutions for the new normal, like contactless dine-in products, and expanding in-house marketing services to keep up with the demand. “As the world learns to live with COVID-19, we need to make social and conversational commerce as easy to use as



possible, and so we have built one of the most actionable analytics dashboards and marketing toolkit for our customers,” he explains. “What stops brands from diving in headfirst into new marketing strategies is usually visibility into performance and ROI—we’re taking that blind spot away.”

As social commerce and conversational commerce continue to rise, RadYes wants to make it lucrative for brands to leverage these trends. “RadYes is a brand’s own social and conversational commerce layer. It helps brands to add a new and trackable dimension to their marketing activities: revenue.” Using RadYes’ services, brands can set up their own online stores across any digital platform (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tiktok, WhatsApp, Messenger, etc.), and run a host of advertising solutions directed towards revenue generation. “What’s more, they are able to deliver the orders, run post-order analytics, work with marketing experts, and build an agile marketing funnel, as they need. We are able to deliver this experience to our clients without having them to build expensive software, run multiple integrations with third-parties, or even having to pay commissions.”>>>



Its business model is pretty straightforward: RadYes has a subscription fee of US\$27 per outlet. Merchants then have the option to upgrade and avail of custom marketing support tools and services. “The thought is to ensure we remain a light investment for the merchants, so that they can continue to build their sales through the platform.” At the same time, the team at RadYes are committed to their clients’ brand empowerment and success. “Our transparent pricing, product roadmap, zeal to resolve any issues are all focused on this every day, and from every angle. We are here to solve a problem- and we are doing everything and more to that end.” It’s also easy to see the company’s commerciality, as Prakash notes, “The market has been waiting for ways to help them capitalize on their own brand value, rather than remain in the clutches of the aggregators. We have seen a lot of adoption coming from unlikely places- pure dine-in brands have adopted the delivery model with RadYes comfortably.” The company has also received interest from entities in retail, e-commerce, and pharma as well. “Clearly, there is a need gap that we are able to fulfill.”

And so far, the startup has been accumulating positive feedback. Merchants find the platform’s distinctive offerings

beneficial. Alaa Sayed, Deputy General Manager of Jollibee UAE, says, “We chose RadYes primarily because it is a user-friendly, unified, and has data-driven in-house touchpoints. They also served as our delivery consultant to reach our target market, and we’re glad to have them onboard.” Others utilized the platform’s end-to-end capabilities to the restaurant’s advantage, with Punam Jajodia, owner of NKD Pizza UAE noting, “Our brand’s social presence has grown multifold with RadYes, along with our reliance on the channel to engage hungry customers directly. We received end-to-end support from marketing our product, to fulfilling the orders, which was a pleasant surprise. The RadYes UI is intuitive, and the fee is consistent, leaving room for us to grow without any hidden costs or commissions.” Other customers include Krispy Kreme, Dunkin Donuts, TGI Fridays, and Mama’esh, among others.

As brands grapple with the new reality of the post COVID-19 world, I asked the CEO’s thoughts on what trends he feels would accelerate in 2021. Besides social and conversational shopping, he lists a focus on the return to performance marketing, as well as a rise in direct customer engagement with brands, and an increased focus on branding as businesses learn to rely on themselves for

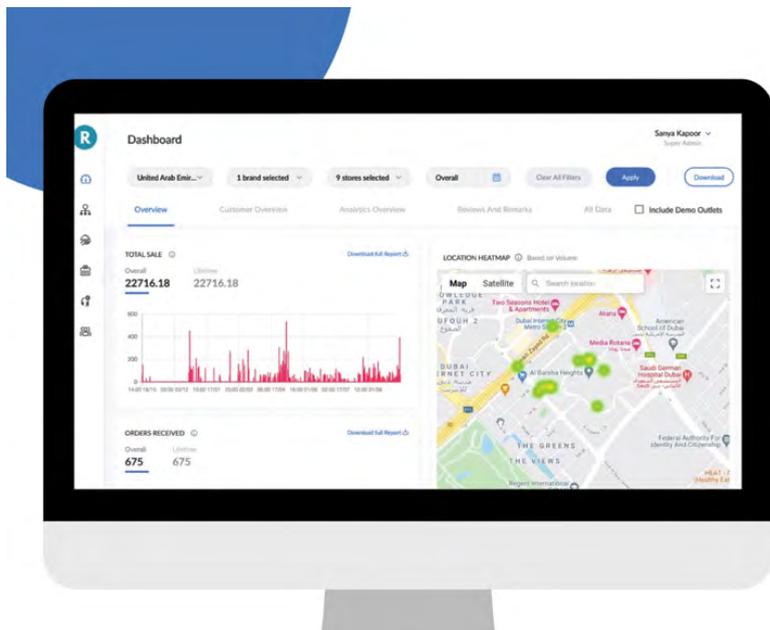
sales. Looking back on 2020, he reflects on RadYes’ milestones: “If I were to give you a snapshot, I would say that in under a year, we built one of the best social and conversational commerce platforms, built a complete ecosystem with more than 100 integrated, and gained the confidence of around 3,000 outlets across F&B, retail, beauty and pharma sector.” With such a steady headway on its first year (which was a feat, considering it was fraught with the repercussions of the pandemic), it’s exciting to see the brand’s thirst for more growth. “2021 is a big year for us in terms of expansion,” Prakash reveals. “Apart from the usual goals of hitting new markets and segments, our overarching goal this year is to become a social Shopify.”

**THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
RadYes CEO **Mani Prakash**'s tips for entrepreneurs entering the market post-COVID-19

- 1/ Take a leap of faith** “Believing that what you’re building has value is paramount. If you don’t believe in yourself, no one else will.”
- 2/ Don’t go at it alone** “Find the best guys for the job- especially at the foundational level. Entrepreneurship is not a battle to be fought alone.”
- 3/ Adapt to the world around you** “The world will keep changing, as 2020 has taught us. Don’t get married to one way of doing things- as the world changes, so must you.”

**4/ Be obsessed with your customer**  
“If the customer wants to use your product, the brands will too. Whoever is your end customer, get obsessed with finding out what they want and then finding a way to provide that. The rest will follow.”

**5/ Don’t be afraid to go big** “We live in a super competitive world, now more than ever. This is not the time to play it safe. Take calculated and educated bets, go big. Now is the time.”



# ENTREPRENEURS CAN SCALE AT THE UAE'S BEST TECH STARTUP COMMUNITY



Launch and scale your startup with the support of Dtec's extensive network of mentors, investors, partners, and exclusive services.

- 10,000 sqm business centre facilities
- Easy free zone business set-up with visa processing
- Subsidized business licenses
- Plug & play facilities and high-speed WiFi
- 24/7 access with ample parking
- Access to fundraising, acceleration & incubation programs
- Hot-desk, dedicated desk and office options available
- Conference facilities & meeting rooms
- Restaurants, cafés & social areas
- Access to events, mentorship & curated list of services



# PIVOTING FOR PROGRESS

Why **Careem** turned to a 0% commission model for its food delivery business **BY MUDASSIR SHEIKHA**

**T**hree months into 2021, and the word “recovery” is a tentative whisper for some in our region, and an enthusiastic shout for others. The enterprise I lead, Careem, is somewhere in between the two—after a tough last year, we’re thankful to be firmly on the path to growth and full recovery.

Our relatively new food delivery business played a big part in Careem’s recovery. As our customers stayed at home during lockdowns, Careem delivered food straight to their doors. This was made possible by our partnership with tens of thousands of resilient, adaptive, hard-working people in the restaurant industry.

But even with a sharp increase in demand for food delivery, restaurants in our region are struggling—they lost the majority of their in-dining customers due to lockdowns, and in some cases, were forced to shut down for good. Food delivery became a lifeline for both Careem and our restaurant partners. But at some

point, the food delivery business model no longer worked for restaurants.

We, like other aggregators in the Middle East, were charging restaurants a commission fee to be hosted on our Super App, providing them with delivery, payment processing, and customer care. Restaurants that previously could only reach a hyper-local market, could use our Super App to access more customers, resulting in higher revenues. They focused on making delicious food, and we focused on simplifying the customer’s experience with fast, reliable delivery, easy payment options, and attentive customer care.

Our commission fees, therefore, seemed like a fair deal on the surface. But here is where restaurants felt the pinch: the larger the order they received, the more they paid in commission fees, even though the services we provided remained largely the same. This meant that restaurants in our region were caught in a catch-22—heavily reliant on aggregators to stay afloat, but unable to retain value due to high commission fees.

At Careem, we have always been driven by a purpose to uplift our region. We are passionate about contributing to a healthier industry and ecosystem, and are big believers that fair play and transparency are key to unlocking the economic potential in our region. We want to see our partners grow, innovate, and support more families and communities. Our restaurant partners rely on us to connect them to our customers, but not at the expense of their own success.

So, we did what we do best—simplified working with an aggregator by designing a new approach that is sustainable for both restaurants in our region and Careem. We’ve introduced a 0% commission model. In place of the commission, our partners subscribe to a bundle package based on their needs. We charge for payment costs on cashless transactions to cover what credit card companies charge us, and a flat delivery charge to cover the cost of the delivery.

Our offering remains the same in this new model: discoverability to our millions of customers, reliable deliveries, seamless payments, and world class customer care. This means our restaurant partners can earn more, grow faster, and focus on the food while we simplify the rest.

This isn’t a one-off action though—this is the model we will be using now on. At Careem, our mission is to simplify and improve lives. The previous model we used with our restaurant partners did not live up to our mission; so, we pivoted. Our vision is to become the most trusted Super App in the region, and we know that restaurants, big and small, will grow to trust us as partners because our interests are now aligned with theirs. And when we’re aligned with our partners, our customers get access to wide selection, fast deliveries, and most importantly, high-quality food prepared with passion and love.

Careem is here for the long run; we believe in creating real value for all our stakeholders, and our 0% commission model is our way of doing just that.

Mudassir Sheikha is the co-founder and CEO of Careem. He grew up in Karachi, Pakistan, before graduating from the University of Southern California with a degree in economics and computer science, and then completing a master’s degree in computer science at Stanford. Mudassir’s career in tech started with Silicon Valley startup, Brience. Mudassir then moved back to Pakistan and co-founded DeviceAnywhere, a company that was acquired by Keynote in 2008, before joining management consulting firm McKinsey & Company in Dubai. In 2012, he left to form a new company with ex-McKinsey colleague, Magnus Olsson. The idea was not just to build a big business, but start one that would have a big impact, be meaningful, and with a mission to simplify and improve lives and create an awesome organization that inspires. From that came Careem. Today, Careem is the leading technology platform across the greater Middle East and was recently acquired by Uber in the largest industry transaction seen in the region. Careem operates in more than 100 cities across 14 countries with more than 1,300 colleagues and well over one million captains on its platform. [careem.com](http://careem.com)

A man in a white thobe and ghutra is shown in profile, looking out a window. The window is covered with a dense, golden string art pattern that creates a textured, shimmering effect. The lighting is warm, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The man has his arms crossed and is looking towards the left side of the frame.

# discover

 **ARADA**

At Arada, we build high quality communities.

Diverse neighbourhoods that come to life when  
people share, exchange and celebrate.

[arada.com](https://arada.com)

**50M**  
YEARS  
المسعود  
AL MASAOOD



# 50 Years of Growing Together

Al Masaood Group exemplifies everything that Abu Dhabi stands for. Indeed, the late Ahmed Al Masaood, our first chairman, was the first president of the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce, and Al Masaood was registered as company number 1 by the Chamber.

For half a century Al Masaood has contributed to the emirate's aspiration of being a modern, innovative, and sustainable economy. Our quest is to bring home the world's best brands that constitute essential and commercial building blocks in the making of a nation.

Together with our nation, its leaders, and its communities, we continue to grow together, deliver value and embrace heritage.

AL MASAOOD LLC

PO Box 322, Abu Dhabi | Tel. +971 2 201 7000 | Email [info@masaood.com](mailto:info@masaood.com) | [www.masaood.com](http://www.masaood.com)

