

**LAY OF THE LAND** / Terra founder  
Rashed Al Tayer **P.15**

**THE RECAP** / Enterprise Agility  
Forum 2022 | Smartpreneur 6.0 **P.26**

**DRIVEN BY PURPOSE** / Veganologie's  
Angana Maheshwari **P.61**

# Entrepreneur

**MIDDLE/EAST**

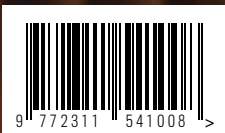
February 2022 / Entrepreneur.com

## AGAINST ALL ODDS

**SHAHNAZ  
BAGHERZADEH**

The founder of  
**Vivel Patisserie**  
on taking her  
Dubai-born  
enterprise global

**P.20**



*HRH Princess Maria-Olympia of Greece & Denmark*





RAFFLES

THE PALM DUBAI

رافلز النخلة دبي

*A Majestic Retreat Crafted by Masters*



*NOW OPEN*

RAFFLES.COM

RAFFLES HOTELS & RESORTS - A PROUD MEMBER OF THE ACCOR LIVE LIMITLESS LOYALTY PROGRAM, ALL.COM

DUBAI PARIS WARSAW JAKARTA SEYCHELLES SINGAPORE PHNOM PENH BALI SIEM REAP MAKKAH MALDIVES SHENZHEN MANILA HAINAN ISTANBUL UDAIPUR  
COMING SOON - LONDON BOSTON JAIPUR BAHRAIN JEDDAH MACAU MOSCOW

# RECOGNIZING THE **ACHIEVING WOMEN** OF MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA



## WOMEN SME LEADERS AWARDS 2022

**VIRTUAL EVENT**

**MARCH 29, 2022**

As a celebration of women business leaders across the Middle East and Africa, Mastercard has partnered with *Entrepreneur Middle East* to present the first ever Women SME Leaders Awards 2022.

We are inviting every women SME leader across all walks of life- individuals and organizations- to take part.

**There are no costs for attending or nominating at this event.**

*Good luck to all and let's celebrate women SMEs together!*



**NOMINATE NOW**

[WOMENSMELEADERS.COM](https://www.womensmeleaders.com) #WOMENSMELEADERS

**Entrepreneur**<sup>®</sup>  
MIDDLE EAST

# QX55

ALL NEW INFINITI QX55  
#UNFOLLOWTHE CROWD



INFINITI



المسعود للسيارات  
Al Masaood Automobiles

800 300 800

# Contents / February 2022

## FEATURES

P.20  
**Against  
All  
Odds**

Shahnaz Bagherzadeh, founder of Vivel Patisserie on taking her Dubai-born enterprise global.

by TAMARA PUPIC

P.26  
**The Recap**

The sixth edition of the Enterprise Agility Forum, held under the Industry Intel banner of Entrepreneur Middle East at the Dubai Exhibition Centre in Expo 2020 Dubai.

P.34  
**The Top 10**

Meet the startups who made it to the finals of the Dubai Smartpreneur Competition 6.0

## BUSINESS UNUSUAL

P.15  
**Lay of  
the Land**

Terra founder Rashed Al Tayer on embracing his roots.

by ABY SAM THOMAS

## STARTUP SPOTLIGHT

↓ **ANGANA MAHESHWARI** is the entrepreneur behind Dubai-based Veganologie, an enterprise that creates bags from recycled plastic bottles **P.61**





come as

you are.



434 rooms | co-working spaces | monkey bar | tandoor tina  
ernst | nomad dar bar | rooftop pool & sauna | spa | gym

# #hellodubai we are now open!

Overlooking the museum of the future, near dubai international financial centre, 25hours hotel one central boasts 434 rooms and suites in addition to flexible events and co-working spaces. A total of four characterful restaurants and bars take guests on a culinary trip around the world from northern india to the beer gardens of bavaria: this is where urban nomads meet desert flowers, where local heroes meet the well-traveled. Alongside rental of mini cars and schindelhauer bikes the hotel will also feature the extra hour spa, rooftop pool and dubai's first mixed-gender rooftop sauna.

enjoy  
**25% off,**  
book via  
[25hours-hotels.com](https://25hours-hotels.com)

@ / # 25hourshotels



dubai/one central  
twenty five hours hotel



↑ **DIWAMA, AN IMAGE RECOGNITION SOFTWARE MAKING USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TO AUTOMATE WASTE ANALYSIS**, came second at Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur Competition 6.0 **P.36**

## STARTUP SPOTLIGHT

### 64 Playing to Win

Dubai-based startup Boomer11 offers a gamified fan experience for sports fans in the Middle East.

by **AALIA MEHREEN AHMED**

### 71 On the Move

Digital billboards startup Override paves the way for delivering hyper-targeted advertisements on the roads of Saudi Arabia (and beyond).

by **PAMELLA DE LEON**

### 74 We Got Funded

The stories behind the recent fundraising successes of Saudi Arabia-based Lucidy and UAE-based Fit On Click.

by **PAMELLA DE LEON**

## 'TREPONOMICS

### 51 From Conversations to Conversions

Zbooni founder and CEO

**RAMY ASSAF** explores how c-commerce is revolutionizing sales.

### 53 Building a Foundation for Success

**MURTAZA HASHWANI**, Deputy Chairman of Hashoo Group, on the significance of how company culture can positively impact business goals.

### 55 Not Just a Passing Fad

Presitdge Group CEO **BRIAR PRESTIDGE** on why you (and your business) need to take the metaverse seriously.

# Entrepreneur

MIDDLE/EAST

**EDITOR IN CHIEF** Aby Sam Thomas  
aby@bncpublishing.net

**CEO** Wissam Younane  
wissam@bncpublishing.net

**DIRECTOR** Rabih Najm  
rabih@bncpublishing.net

**CREATIVE LEAD** Odette Kahwagi  
design@bncpublishing.net

**MANAGING EDITOR** Tamara Pupic  
tamara@bncpublishing.net

**STARTUPS SECTION EDITOR** Pamela de Leon  
pamella@bncpublishing.net

**FEATURES WRITER** Aalia Mehreen Ahmed  
aalia@bncpublishing.net

**DESIGN** Simona El Khoury

**DIGITAL SOLUTIONS DIRECTOR**  
Mahdi Hashemi mahdi@bncpublishing.net

**HEAD OF INNOVATION**  
Sarah Saddouk sarah@bncpublishing.net

**GROUP SALES DIRECTOR – B2B GROUP**  
Joaquim D'Costa jo@bncpublishing.net

**COLUMNIST** Tamara Clarke

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**  
Ramy Assaf, Fida Chaaban,  
Murtaza Hashwani, Jareer Oweimrin  
Briar Prestidge

### SUBSCRIBE

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

### COMMERCIAL ENQUIRIES

[sales@bncpublishing.net](mailto:sales@bncpublishing.net)

### ENTREPRENEUR.COM

Access fresh content daily on our website

[f](#) [t](#) [o](#) EntMagazineME [in](#) Entrepreneur-me



PO BOX 502511 DUBAI, UAE  
P +971 4 4200 506

All Rights Reserved 2022. 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. Images used in *Entrepreneur Middle East* are credited when necessary. Attributed use of copyrighted images with permission. All images not credited otherwise Shutterstock. Printed by United Printing and Publishing.

# LAUNCH YOUR IDEAS IN AN AWARD-WINNING TECH STARTUP COMMUNITY



At Dtec, thriving coworking spaces come with accelerator programs, funding, networking events, industry mentors, and exclusive benefits.

- 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

---

## A FOUNDER IS (NOT ALWAYS) A LEADER

Walking the talk is so much harder than it sounds

---



**A**re most entrepreneurs simply not cut out to be good managers? This is the question I found myself pondering after hearing yet another story of a MENA-based founder who treats their employees abysmally. The specifics of the tale don't really matter, in my opinion- it is, quite simply, a classic example of people at the top taking advantage of those who are "under" them in the organizational hierarchy. But after hearing quite a few stories like these from people working at startups in the region (many of whom, by the way, went on to leave those jobs), I am beginning to see that the inept leadership shown by the founders of these companies was a common element in all of these cases.

The entrepreneurs out there might find this a bitter pill to swallow, but the truth is that the founder of a company need not always have all the skillsets they need to lead it- and this is particularly true when a startup has moved past its launch and is ready to get started on its growth stage. At this point, a founder's inability to govern their enterprise can prove to be extremely costly for the business- especially when it comes to the talent lost owing to bad leadership. It's been often said that access to (good) talent is a huge challenge for many entrepreneurs wanting to scale their enterprises in the MENA; however, I wonder if we should also be considering whether the talent available here are being linked with (good) leaders too.

Now, I'm not saying all of this to encourage some kind of uprising against the entrepreneurs running startups in the region- on the contrary, my purpose here is to remind founders to be self-aware, and be sure that they are doing everything they can to make themselves the best possible leaders of their respective businesses. And if you find yourself lacking in that department (trust me, you'd know if you are), take the steps to correct that- whether it is to teach yourself to be accountable, or to simply behave better. After all, leadership isn't something you're born or bestowed with- it's something you need to learn. At the end of the day, as a founder, you may be able to call yourself the CEO of your enterprise, but remember, titles don't make leaders; actions do.

**Aby Sam Thomas**

Editor in Chief

  @thisisaby

aby@bncpublishing.net

**SERVICE  
PROVIDERS  
REFERRAL**  
PROGRAM

**ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT  
SETTING UP A BUSINESS IN DUBAI?**

**DO YOU NEED ADVICE ON  
PITCHING YOUR BUSINESS IDEAS?**

**DO YOU WANT GREAT ACCOUNTING  
AND LEGAL SERVICES RATES FROM  
TOP RECOMMENDED CONSULTANTS?**

**SCAN HERE**



To access Dubai Chamber's  
preferred service providers

**غرفة دبي**  
**DUBAI CHAMBER**

For inquiries, contact  
[solutions@dubaichamber.com](mailto:solutions@dubaichamber.com)



**Hotel&Catering**  
NEWS Middle East

hotelcateringnewsme



hotelcatering-news



hotelnewsme



hotelnewsme.com

hotelnewsme.com

MARCH  
22, 2022

| DUBAI |

#HCNMEawards22

**LEADERS** AWARDS  
2022  
**in** Hospitality

SUBMIT  
YOUR  
ENTRIES

FOR NOMINATIONS

SEYMONE L. MOODLEY

+971 4 420 0506

SEYMONE@BNCPUBLISHING.NET

FOR PARTNERSHIPS

AARON JOSHUA

+971 50 47 37 889

SALES@BNCPUBLISHING.NET

# Business / Unusual



← **RASHED AL TAYER** is the founder of Terra, a Mediterranean-themed restaurant in Dubai's Jumeirah neighborhood.

IMAGES COURTESY TERRA

## Lay of the Land

**Terra founder Rashed Al Tayer** on embracing his roots **by** **ABY SAM THOMAS**

↓ **THE DÉCOR OF TERRA** is rustic and minimalistic, paying homage to the meaning of Terra in Latin, i.e. earth, or land.



**“**When I create a concept, I put my heart into it.” It’s this line uttered by Rashed Al Tayer that I keep in mind as I recall my experience dining at Terra, the Mediterranean-themed restaurant that he founded just over a year ago in the UAE. Located in Dubai’s Jumeirah neighborhood, the eatery made an impression on me as soon as I entered its distinctively designed interiors- step into Terra, and you’ll find yourself welcomed into a space that has been carefully crafted to feel like a safe haven that’s sequestered away from the hustle and bustle of the city outside.

The décor is rustic and minimalistic, with the restaurant’s center marked by a hand-hammered column, and everything else -be it the terracotta floor tiles, or the abundance of leafy foliage- paying homage to the meaning of Terra in Latin, i.e. earth, or land. And this deference is reflected in the food that is served here as well- quality ingredients are proudly proclaimed as the stars of each dish that is put in front of you, with a special mention given to those that are locally grown and produced. Starting with the beef carpaccio rolls, and going all the way to the sticky dates pudding, the menu at Terra has been designed to ensure that every guest has a delightful gastronomic experience when they dine there. As Al Tayer put it: “Terra is very much centered around the people, and we value each guest that walks through its doors. The customer profile at Terra is the everyday person who appreciates authenticity, honesty, and attention to detail.”

It doesn’t surprise me when Al Tayer tells me that Terra is not his first foray into the F&B arena- besides founding two other concepts in the UAE, he has also acquired a venture here, and, since then, propelled it to its next stage of growth. But his career trajectory didn’t start in this domain. “After graduating from university in San Diego in the US, I returned to Dubai to begin my career working with my family in real estate,” Al Tayer reveals. “Although it was quite successful, I felt uninspired with each day going by signing contract after contract, and decided to begin an independent journey as an entrepreneur. The decision to venture into the world of F&B was a no-brainer, as I have always been passionate about cuisine, and dining out is a huge part of my lifestyle. Throughout my life, I was fortunate enough to

“

THROUGHOUT MY LIFE, I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO HAVE THE ABILITY TO TRAVEL FREQUENTLY, AND I SPENT THE MAJORITY OF MY TIME SEARCHING FOR UNIQUE F&B CONCEPTS IN EACH COUNTRY I VISITED.

have the ability to travel frequently, and I spent the majority of my time searching for unique F&B concepts in each country I visited.” Al Tayer recalls here that during his time in California, he had done a tour of over 35 specialty coffee roasteries that were located everywhere from San Diego to San Francisco to learn about different roasts and flavor, and it’s this experience that laid the foundation for his first entrepreneurial outing: a café in Dubai called Neighbors.

“My first concept, which launched in 2016, was Neighbors, which I intentionally founded on my own, in order to learn and grow as an entrepreneur within the F&B industry,” Al Tayer says.

“The idea came quickly, as I knew exactly what I wanted to create- a space that welcomed people to share the joyous little moments in life.” As a café specializing in artisanal coffee, Neighbors also serves unique dishes from around the world alongside freshly squeezed juices- Al Tayer highlights the fact that only fresh ingredients are used for all that it serves its guests. After Neighbors, Al Tayer launched SKM'D, which he billed as a healthy eatery serving all-day breakfast, lunch, and dinner, alongside specialty coffee, at Dubai’s very popular Kite Beach. Al Tayer also purchased an existing F&B concept called Boston Lane located in Dubai’s Al Quoz neighborhood, a space that he believed could be completely revamped, and thus, “elevate the hidden gem.” It’s thus after building Neighbors, SKM'D, and Boston Lane to what they are today that Al Tayer embarked on launching Terra. “Founding Terra was a milestone for me as an entrepreneur, as I had garnered enough experience to create a space that encapsulated my vision,” Al Tayer says. “For me, Terra is my soul, and a personal heaven. It is an authentic space that welcomes guests to come as they are.”

I first visited Terra in February last year, and I remember being taken aback by the number of people waiting to get inside the fully packed restaurant then- there wasn’t a reservations system in place at the time, which, incidentally, was a reiteration of Al Tayer’s philosophy that guests should be able to “come as they are,” whenever that may be. However, he has since changed this rhetoric, because, well, “we had guests driving all the way from Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, and we wanted to be able to accommodate all our guests and ensure they had a table.” That anecdote in itself should serve as an indication of how popular Terra has become, and Al Tayer believes that the



restaurant’s success is being driven by the good food it serves, as well as its amazing atmosphere. “I believe success is in the details, and we pride ourselves in being honest and authentic, which is hard to copy,” Al Tayer says. “The interiors at Terra is something I am particularly proud of. I believe in focusing on detail from top to bottom, which is definitely portrayed in the design. The finishing on the walls were done by an Italian artisan, and all the tiles were handmade in Italy. The bathrooms are fitted with vintage mirrors, and the sinks hand chiseled from Indonesian stone. Our open kitchen is one of the key elements of the interior, as it represents the honesty at Terra. Fresh ingredients are in plain sight, and all of the preparation is visible to the guests, as it would be in your own home.” ▶



66

## MY ULTIMATE DREAM FOR TERRA IS TO MAKE IT INTERNATIONAL

BY OPENING SEVERAL LOCATIONS IN PRIME SPOTS WORLDWIDE SUCH AS WEST HOLLYWOOD, LONDON, AND THE UAE.



↑ **TERRA**  
**FOUNDER**  
Rashed Al Tayer

Al Tayer says that the idea for Terra came quite naturally to him given his inherent passion for cuisine, with the concept also bearing influences from his travels to Greece, France, and Italy.

“One of the unique facts about creating Terra is that everything fell into place the moment I found the venue,” he says. “I immediately knew it was the space for my dream concept. To bring my vision to life, I focused immensely on the details, as I wanted each

aspect to be a reflection of the concept, or to hold meaning and represent the essence of Terra.” Al Tayer’s vision was translated into the restaurant’s warm and inviting interiors by Bone, a Dubai-based design studio founded by Achraf Mzily and Natalie Mahakian in 2018, and he also had a particular part to play in the food served at Terra as well. “I decided to create the concept for the menu independently at first, without a chef, to ensure each dish was uniquely Terra,”

Al Tayer reveals. “I personally tasted them over 50 times before finalizing the menu.” The Emirati entrepreneur thus has good reason to be proud of all the success that Terra is seeing today, but he’s not resting on his laurels- he’s already working on growing and expanding the concept. “For Terra’s next step, I will be opening a second location in Abu Dhabi later this year,” Al Tayer reveals. “My ultimate dream for Terra is to make it international by opening several locations in prime spots worldwide such as West Hollywood, London, and the UAE.” And that’s not all- Al Tayer has more ideas that he wishes to pursue as an entrepreneur. He has got a few projects under development at the moment- one of these is called Outset, which he describes as a “mother company” to unite all of his existing and future concepts, and pave the way for expansion into other industries like wellness, while still focusing heavily on F&B and hospitality. “I definitely see myself expanding my F&B operations to include more diversity with an artisan bakery, coffee roasters, Asian cuisine, and a brasserie,” Al Tayer reveals.

Meanwhile, Al Tayer is also working on concept he is calling CMPLX, which will be a set of seven warehouses in Al Quoz that will act as a -you guessed it- complex or central hub that will bring people in the community together to experience a number of different (and interesting)

concepts and activities. While I can sense that Al Tayer has got quite a lot in the works, he is choosing to remain tightlipped about sharing more details on them- an aspect that I believe is his predilection to let his work do the talking for him. Indeed, that’s the conclusion I make when Al Tayer tells me about what powers his entrepreneurial frame of mind. “I would say my key drivers are passion and curiosity,” he says. “Being able to bring my visions to life definitely drives me to continue my journey as an entrepreneur. I am thankful that I haven’t made any major mistakes in my career, and those I have had were pursued with the intention to learn. I personally like to take risks for the experience and to see the outcome, and I think this definitely sets my entrepreneurial approach aside.” When it comes to advice for his peers in the entrepreneurial realm, Al Tayer has a few simple, yet significant, pointers to share. “Always work to improve your offering, and impress customers with consistency by staying on track to gain trust, and build credibility and customer loyalty,” he says. “Show them what you have, and be honest across the board. Customers need to trust in what you offer- that’s number one.” But, perhaps most importantly, Al Tayer says that entrepreneurs need to remember to stay true to who they are. “Be yourself, and be authentic,” he concludes. “Be passionate, and don’t give up!” ■

A man in a white thobe and ghutra is looking out a window. The wall behind him is covered in a string-art pattern of thin, golden-brown threads. The word "discover" is written in large, white, lowercase letters across the middle of the image.

# 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)

# AGAINST

# ALL

# ODDS

→ **VIVEL IS A FAMILY-OWNED CHAIN OF PATISSERIES** with eight stores in the UAE (six in Dubai, one in Abu Dhabi, and two in Al Ain), and a joint venture in Tokyo, Japan.

## SHAHNAZ BAGHERZADEH

**The founder of Vivel Patisserie**

on how her Dubai-born enterprise has evolved from a way to earn a living to a family-owned business that's gone global **by TAMARA PUPIC**





IMAGES COURTESY VIVEL

↓ **SHAHNAZ BAGHERZADEH OPENED HER FIRST VIVEL STORE IN DUBAI IN 1992,** and is one of the first women in the UAE to open a business at the time.

# “I have never given up.”



It is clear from the outset of my conversation with Bagherzadeh that she is still focused on building a legacy, and not yet reflecting on it. “I always try to be better and better, as well as to open in new markets,” she adds. “For instance, I’ve been working on opening our store in London for three years, giving presentations, and organizing the tastings of my cookies.”

In a sense, Vivel’s success is a nod to Bagherzadeh’s grandmother, who had taught her to make sweets, long before Bagherzadeh had to migrate from Iran, owing to the revolution that began in the country in 1978. “When the revolution happened, we had to leave the country,” she explains. “At that time, my older son was in high school, and the younger one in primary school, and by the age of 13, they would have had to serve the army. I didn’t want that life for my children, and I didn’t believe that Iran had a good future after the revolution.” Leaving her nation in such circumstances proved to be an extraordinary source of energy for Bagherzadeh to go on and do the impossible—she was among the first women to start up a business in Dubai in the 90’s. “We discovered that the only place to where we could move easily was Dubai, UAE, and that it would enable us to move to any other place that had a future later on, like the US and Canada,” Bagherzadeh recalls. “However, in time, I realized that the only place that I actually wanted to live in was Dubai.”

Vivel’s current offering is a collection of about 400 sweets and pastries that are handmade using the highest quality ingredients. Over the years, Bagherzadeh has improved her recipes by studying the finest European and Middle Eastern delicacies, although she insisted on preserving a strong Persian influence in all that Vivel offers. “My recipes had been healthy even before it became a trend,” Bagherzadeh explains. “I have always insisted on less oil, less sugar, and more healthy ingredients.” She remembers how her pastries served as a powerful point of entry into a new country, and later on, as a community-building tool. “I started making my cookies in my small, tiny kitchen,” Bagherzadeh says. “And then a very good friend of mine suggested that I should start selling them, and for me, it was important to be able to pay for my home and my children’s education, which, of course, was not easy at all.” To make ends meet, she used her living room as a classroom for two years, where she taught women—a maximum of eight per group—keen on learning her cookery secrets. Talking

“It was not an easy life, as I would take care of my family since early in the morning, give women-only cookery classes, and then make cookies for orders until late in the night, and it was like that for a long time.” This statement by Vivel Patisserie founder Shahnaz Bagherzadeh offers a peek into what it took for her to build a business whose pastries are today sold from the UAE to the US. The period she refers to was in 1988, when her family moved from Iran to Dubai (“which had only two streets back then”), and at the time, she was simply trying to make ends meet out of her small, corner kitchen. “Women need to believe in themselves and never give up,” she says. “I have never given up, and I wish I could meet H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, one day, and thank him for opening the doors for businesses from around the world to Dubai, but even more for allowing me to create Vivel that went from Dubai to the whole world.”



← **VIVEL'S CURRENT OFFERING** is a collection of about 400 sweets and pastries that are handmade using the highest quality ingredients.

“

WE DISCOVERED THAT THE ONLY PLACE TO WHERE WE COULD MOVE EASILY WAS DUBAI, UAE, AND THAT IT WOULD ENABLE US TO MOVE TO ANY OTHER PLACE THAT HAD A FUTURE LATER ON, LIKE THE US AND CANADA. HOWEVER, **IN TIME, I REALIZED THAT THE ONLY PLACE THAT I ACTUALLY WANTED TO LIVE IN WAS DUBAI.**

about life in Dubai back then, Bagherzadeh remembers the city as being “very small,” and that she would make a plate of cookies, and then carry it herself to Deira Tower to sell it for AED10 or AED20. Soon, word got around, and she started receiving orders from the InterContinental Dubai, one of the city’s oldest landmarks, and its famous Persian restaurant, Shabestan.

“At the same time, I also started my training with the French chefs at the InterContinental Dubai on how to make professional patisserie, because I didn’t want to do only homemade recipes from my grandmother,” Bagherzadeh says.

Today, Vivel has eight stores in the UAE (six in Dubai, one in Abu Dhabi, and two in Al Ain), and a joint venture in Tokyo, Japan, but her very first store opened its doors in Dubai in 1992. “At that time, Dubai had two shopping malls, Al Ghurair Centre and Dar Al Riqa, on the Al Rigga Road, which was the only street where people would go shopping back then, and I wanted to open a store in a small, classy mall because I knew that women from the UAE royal family could not go to a big shopping mall,” she says. “So, I chose Dar Al Riqa, because it had just a few shops, and I opened a wonderful coffee shop in the back. I was there whenever anyone from the royal family would come.” Bagherzadeh’s son Ehsan Hosseini, who has been the Managing Director of Vivel since 2005, chimes in here to note that his mother’s success in registering a company in the UAE in 1991 was only due to her relentless determination to carve out a better life. “She was probably one of the first women in Dubai, or the UAE as a whole, to open a business at the time,” Hosseini says. “It was quite unusual to see a woman opening a business then, but she would person-

ally walk into all these government institutions, where they hardly ever saw a woman, and where the majority of the workforce were men. It was all a big taboo that she had to break at the time. She did it all with a lot of energy and heart, and eventually, with a lot of persistence and will, she would get everything she needed to set up her business. In the end, they could not say no to her. Then, almost in an instant, she became a sort of a celebrity, and even today, if you speak with most local, Emirati families, people who are today in high positions in the government or in the business sector, they all remember her from back in the day.”

**T**he clarity of her determination, coupled with her ferocious hard work, seemed to have shielded Bagherzadeh from both societal barriers and self-doubt, and that led her to start eyeing international expansion for her business. “Long time ago, I said that I wanted my cookies to be everywhere in the world,” she says. “I first opened our store in Montreal, Canada, and a few years later [in 2003], I was invited by my friends from Montreal to visit them in New York over Christmas, which I saw as an opportunity to present my cookies there, although they told me that it would be impossible to get an appointment at pâtisserie shops on the busy, Christmas days.” Having brought six boxes of Vivel cookies and sweets with herself, she looked over a list of the 15 best patisserie shops in New York. “I chose not to start from the end of the list, but to present my cookies at the six best rated patisserie shops in New York,” Bagherzadeh says. “One day before Christmas, I had two boxes left, and I decided to skip shop number two, and go straight to the best one.” ▶





“Women need  
to believe  
in themselves.”

← VIVEL PATISSERIE FOUNDER SHAHNAZ  
BAGHERZADEH and her son, Ehsan  
Hosseini, Managing Director of Vivel

That shop belonged to acclaimed French pastry chef and chocolatier Jacques Torres (who'd go on to become a mass-market chocolate master fondly referred to as Mr. Chocolate), and outside of whose shops, one could see long queues even back then. “Once I had finally reached the counter after standing for two hours, instead of buying chocolates, I said that I wanted to see Mr. Torres,” Bagherzadeh recalls. “As expected, they said that it was not possible, since I didn't have an appointment. They took a box of my cookies and just dropped it below the counter. Then, I stayed in the other line for another two hours and again asked to see him, but I added a request not to put my box of cookies below the counter. I left my number at the hotel where I was staying, and left.”

Some days later, she got a message from Torres saying: “Everybody says that my chocolate is heaven, and I want to tell you that your cookies are heaven too.” Bagherzadeh says that it was hard to arrange a meeting because she had to go back to Montreal and then to Dubai, but on her last afternoon in New York, she went back to his shop to leave her last box of cookies for him. “The shop was empty but still open, and he was there only because he was trying to fix the chocolate machine, before leaving for the airport himself,” she says. “He greeted me with a hug, and I told him, “You are the number one, and I believe in my cookies so much, so I want them to be only with the number one.” That moment heralded the beginning of a partnership and friendship that saw Bagherzadeh display her delights at Torres' shops, and even attend the opening of his second chocolate factory and flagship store, Jacques Torres Chocolate, in downtown New York City on Hudson Street in 2004. “The friend who helped me in New York cried when she saw my photo in the news [from the opening of the factory],” Bagherzadeh says. “She congratulated me on the success, saying that she couldn't believe that I had achieved so much from my tiny, corner kitchen in Dubai.”

**“I AM PROUD THAT MY SON IS NOW THE MANAGING DIRECTOR, AND I AM ALSO PROUD THAT I HAVE THE SAME PEOPLE WORKING FOR ME EVEN AFTER 30 YEARS. WITHOUT ALL OF THEM, I AM NOTHING.”**

**T**oday, just as back then, Bagherzadeh has little doubts about her own stamina, or her winning mindset. “I still work on opening new shops and presenting my cookies,” she says. “I am proud that my son is now the Managing Director, and I am also proud that I have the same people working for me even after 30 years. Without all of them, I am nothing.” As for what's next, Vivel's expansion into Doha, London, and Los Angeles is on the cards, she says. “I believe in myself and my cookies so much,” Bagherzadeh reiterates, and when I ask her to share her final advice for all the entrepreneurs out there, she replies, “Work hard, believe in yourself, and never ever give up.” ■

→ **ENTREPRENEUR MIDDLE**

**EAST EDITOR IN CHIEF** Aby

Sam Thomas opening the Enterprise Agility Forum 2022, before inviting Dubai Chambers Vice Chairman H.E. Faisal Bin Juma Khalfan Belhoul to deliver a keynote address.

**THE RECAP**

# ENTERPRISE AGILITY FORUM 2022

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CONTINUUM IN PERSPECTIVE

An **Entrepreneur**® Industry Intel event



**DUBAI SMARTPRENEUR COMPETITION 6.0**

دبي للمشاريع الناشئة  
**DUBAI STARTUP HUB**  
AN INITIATIVE OF DUBAI CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

PHOTOGRAPHY: KAPTURISE



EXPO  
2020  
DUBAI  
UAE

OFFICIAL BUSINESS INTEGRATION PARTNER

غرفة دبي  
DUBAI CHAMBER

**T**he sixth edition of the Enterprise Agility Forum, which was held on January 20, 2022, under the Industry Intel banner of *Entrepreneur Middle East* at the Dubai Exhibition Centre in Expo 2020 Dubai, saw an audience of more than 200 people come together to discuss and debate key themes pertaining to the region's startup ecosystem.

Staged with the support of Dubai Startup Hub, an initiative of Dubai Chamber of Commerce, as well as Life On Screen, the Enterprise Agility Forum 2022 also played host to the finals of the Dubai Smartpreneur Competition 6.0, which saw three promising startups awarded a total of AED150,000 in prizes.

With *Entrepreneur Middle East* Editor in Chief Aby Sam Thomas acting as the emcee for the event, the Forum was launched with a keynote address from Dubai

Chambers Vice Chairman H.E. Faisal Bin Juma Khalfan Belhoul, founder and Chairman of Ithmar Capital Partners. Commenting on the location chosen for the finals of Smartpreneur 6.0, H.E. Belhoul said, "There is no better platform than Expo 2020 Dubai for our finalists to pitch business solutions that are challenging the status quo while transforming existing industries, as the mega event is showcasing cutting-edge innovations from around the world."

H.E. Belhoul's speech set the stage for a panel discussion titled "From The UAE, To The World," which put the spotlight on entrepreneurs who launched businesses in the UAE, and are now making their presence felt around the world. Thomas moderated the discussion featuring Munch:On co-founder and COO Dana Baki and grubtech co-founder and CEO Mohamed Al Fayed, both of whom shared their particular perspectives on the intricacies of scaling a business from their respective bases in the UAE. ▶

# ENTERPRISE AGILITY FORUM 2022

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL  
CONTINUUM  
IN PERSPECTIVE



**“SCALING REGIONALLY CAN BE A CHALLENGE, BECAUSE OF DIFFERENT REGULATIONS IN EVERY COUNTRY ACROSS THE REGION.”**

↑ **MUNCH:ON** co-founder and COO Dana Baki

## Looking back on her journey as an entrepreneur in the UAE,

Baki highlighted the value that accelerators and incubators can bring to startups in their early days, while noting that Munch:On had gotten to be under the umbrella of in5, the Dubai-based enabling platform for tech, media, and design startups. “Being accepted into in5 opened so many doors for us,” she said. “The UAE’s startup ecosystem was very nascent at the time, so being part of an accelerator like that was truly a gamechanger for us. We did have a bit of an issue opening up a bank account, but otherwise, the ecosystem here has been incredibly supportive, and such a great launchpad for [us to grow] everywhere in the region.”

Al Fayed agreed with this notion— even when he was just starting out his business in Dubai, he was clear that it’d be a springboard for his enterprise to grow into other markets. “From day one, it has always been a global plan for us, and Dubai is perfectly suited for that,” he said. “It has always been embedded in the company’s DNA that we stand for global footprint.” He further elaborated on how the forward-thinking attitude

within the UAE’s ecosystem creates trends that are often followed in other parts of the world. “We were very fortunate to have been pioneers within our industry, and the UAE has been a great bedrock for that,” he added.

↓ **GRUBTECH** co-founder and CEO Mohamed Al Fayed



**“DIGITAL TALENT IS SCARCE AS IT IS, AND EVERYONE IS LOOKING FOR IT.”**

**W**hile discussing the hurdles that came with the decision of global expansion, both Al Fayed and Baki shared important pointers for other budding entrepreneurs wanting to follow in their footsteps. “Scaling regionally can be a challenge, because of



→ **DUBAI CHAMBERS**

**VICE CHAIRMAN**

H.E. Faisal Bin Juma  
Khalfan Belhou, founder  
and Chairman of Itmar  
Capital Partners

different regulations in every country across the region,” Baki said. “So that is something you need to keep in mind when you start scaling from anywhere in the MENA region. Even if you have a very scalable product, it will take you some time to establish it legally in every new country.” Baki also noted the challenges of fundraising within the region. “Attracting international investors can also be a challenge, but that will get better— we need to be aware that we are growing together with the market itself,” she explained. “It’s still in a nascent phase, but the world has started paying attention, so it will be easier to raise money in the future.”

**Meanwhile, Al Fayed touched upon the importance of having the right employee fit before deciding to scale.** “Recruiting the right talent can be a challenge in Dubai,” he noted. “Digital talent is scarce as it is, and everyone is looking for it. So, that can get expensive very quickly! And now with the COVID-19 crisis, you have to get very comfortable with working remotely, and sometimes never getting to meet a developer or product manager or any of the members of your team. But you need to ensure there are cohesive

fabrics that keep everyone aligned and aiming for the same North Star.” But Al Fayed also pointed out that these issues were not exclusive to the UAE or the Middle East. “It is a bumpy ride, but it’s meant to be bumpy, and it would have been like that if we started anywhere else in the world!”

As the panel discussion drew to a close, both speakers also shared the lessons they’d learnt through the mistakes they’ve made in their respective entrepreneurial journeys. “You’re always going to make mistakes!” Baki reminded the audience. “If you are a tech startup, always do a manual test before building any tech. The other important point I’d like to share is that if there is a looming decision that needs to be made, it is better to get it done now and deal with the repercussions, rather than putting it off for later.” On the other hand, Al Fayed cautioned entrepreneurs against constantly risk-mitigating. “Instead of always thinking of the worst-case scenarios, and making sure your runway lasts as long as it needs to, you need to spend equal time or more preparing for success,” he said. “Things can get uncertain and gloomy, but you have to believe that you can bat it out of the park!” ▶



OFFICIAL BUSINESS INTEGRATION PARTNER

غرفة دبي  
DUBAI CHAMBER

دبي للمشاريع الناشئة  
DUBAI STARTUP HUB  
MEMBER OF GOVERNMENT OF DUBAI

DUBAI SMARTPRENEUR  
COMPETITION 6.0

# ENTERPRISE AGILITY FORUM 2022

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL  
CONTINUUM  
IN PERSPECTIVE

An **Entrepreneur** Industry Intel event



## FROM THE UAE, TO THE WORLD



**BADER ATAYA**

Co-founder and Chief Growth  
Officer, KITOP1



**DANA BAKI**

Co-founder and Chief Operating  
Officer, MUNCH:ON



**SKY KURTZ**

Co-founder and CEO,  
PURE HARVEST FARM



**MOHAMED AL FAYED**

Co-founder and CEO,  
GRUBTECH



### ↑ PANEL DISCUSSION: FROM THE UAE, TO THE WORLD

Left to right: *Entrepreneur Middle East* Editor in Chief Aby Sam Thomas, Munch:On co-founder and COO Dana Baki, and Grubtech co-founder and CEO Mohamed Al Fayed

## DUBAI FUTURE DISTRICT FUND CEO

SHARIF AL-BADAWI with *Entrepreneur Middle East's* Managing Editor Tamar Pupic during the fireside chat titled "Funding Dubai's Future"

## DIWAMA

won second place at the Dubai Smartpreneur Competition 6.0 (opposite page)



Besides the panel discussion, the Forum also hosted a fireside chat titled "Funding Dubai's Future," which had Dubai Future District Fund CEO Sharif Al-Badawi engage in conversation with *Entrepreneur Middle East* Managing Editor Tamara Pupic. As the man at the helm of an AED1 billion fund aimed at supporting seed- to growth-stage startups in Dubai, Al-Badawi is leading efforts to support the directives of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, to establish 1,000 tech companies in the country within five years, while also increasing startup investments from AED1.5 billion to AED4 billion. "As an investment team, we have put our target on the UAE's economy in 2050, because there are a lot of reports out there explaining how economies will look like then, as well as the potential changes that might happen," Al-Badawi said. "In venture investing, the return horizon is important, how long it takes, and so, one of the main reasons why the Dubai government is putting together a fund like this is that there are gaps in the funding ecosystem, but even more because there are gaps in the horizon of investments- what we call patient capital versus 10-year cycles that most of the VCs today have. That prevents them from investing in areas with heavy research and development or ventures solving hard problems, because those will take longer to materialize, and will require more capital to see it through."

Al-Badawi added that the amount of AED1 billion is just the beginning for the Dubai Future District Fund, as it has been envisioned as a permanent fund. "We are here for the long run, and our focus is on the longer-term horizon, so the AED1 billion anchor will be split between trying to capitalize more funds in the region, and investing directly in the startups where we see that funding gap," he said. "Firstly, we want to anchor new and emerging fund managers, because we know that when there are more fund managers, founders will have more options, and they

**"DON'T GET  
CAUGHT UP  
IN THE HYPE,  
AND DON'T  
CHANGE YOUR  
PHILOSOPHY  
BASED  
ON THAT."**

will find a better fit for themselves among the investors that they talk to. Empowering new fund managers is an input that creates ecosystem growth as an output. Secondly, we aim to bring in more international investors. We are so lucky that we have started seeing that wave coming in, because just several years ago, when I started investing here, it was hard to try to get anybody to look at this region. Now, we don't even need to push for it, as we're seeing more international investors here every day.

And thirdly, we will continue to support the investors who have been supporting the ecosystem from the beginning."

Al-Badawi added that the second pillar of the Dubai Future District Fund will focus on supporting programs, competitions, and everything else that lies at the bottom of the startup investing pyramid. "We'll be doing selective investments there," he said. "This one is very sensitive to explain, because we want to empower venture capitalists here, and not cannibalize their efforts. As a government, we should not be going into every US\$100,000 check, but there are cases where gaps exist, so we will fill in them." Focusing on Series A to Series C investments will be the Fund's third pillar. "That is when the institutional rounds start, and there is plenty of capital in that space and at that stage already, but it is not covering every sector meaningfully enough," Al-Badawi explained. "From our strategic relationships as the Dubai Government, we have a lot of leverage to offer to these startups, and if you have



← **EDUPLYMENT** won first place at the Dubai Smartpreneur Competition 6.0

ever tried to build a startup here, you'll know that it's very difficult to navigate some regulatory hurdles. So, by virtue of our relationships with our shareholders, such as the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) and Dubai Future Foundation, there is a lot that we can do to help these kinds of companies, and lay out a plan to make it a lot easier for them in the future."

Al-Badawi also revealed that his team has already started creating fundraising strategies for Dubai Future District Fund's permanent fund, with the vision having it being open to public on a tokenized platform "so that any qualified investor who will want to invest in the Dubai index, they will be able to do so," he explained. "This is all a precursor for eventually, when the fund becomes profitable, in let's say 10 to 15 years from now, we will be able to take this entire vehicle public on the exchange. Therefore, we will be a public fund." Finally, when asked to share his advice for entrepreneurs aiming to build successful businesses out of Dubai, Al-Badawi urged founders to always remain focused on their core visions. "Stay grounded on your first principles," he said. "What you read in the news isn't always happening in the scene. There's righteousness in following the fundamentals. So, don't get caught up in the hype, and don't change your

philosophy based on that." Al-Badawi also went on to highlight the need for more diverse participation in venture funds. "You need to diversify the pool," he said. "That way, you'll be able to see different opinions and markets that you're missing out on."

**T**he Enterprise Agility Forum 2022 also staged the final ceremony of Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur Competition 6.0, which saw the contest's 10 finalist startups - Aiotize, Digital

Energy, Diwama, EduPloyment, Hamples, Hydro Wind Energy, Manhat, One Moto, PalletPal and Soul Artists-pitch their business ideas in front of a jury comprising of Talabat CEO Tomaso Rodriguez, Mumzworld co-founder and CEO Mona Ataya, DIFC FinTech Hive Executive Vice President Raja Al Mazrouei, and Bayzat co-founder and CEO Talal Bayaa.

EduPloyment, a global online recruitment platform for upskilling blue-collar workers with English language skills and offering them job

placements, was declared the first place winner with a cash prize of AED75,000. The second place, which offered a cash prize of AED50,000, was awarded to Diwama, an artificial intelligence-based image recognition software that automates waste analysis and drives recycling revenues for waste management companies. In third place was Soul Artists, a global online peer-to-peer platform to discover and book performing artists and musicians for events and occasions, which was awarded AED25,000. **E**



← **SOUL ARTISTS** won third place at the Dubai Smartpreneur Competition 6.0

# ENTERPRISE AGILITY FORUM 2022

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CONTINUUM IN PERSPECTIVE

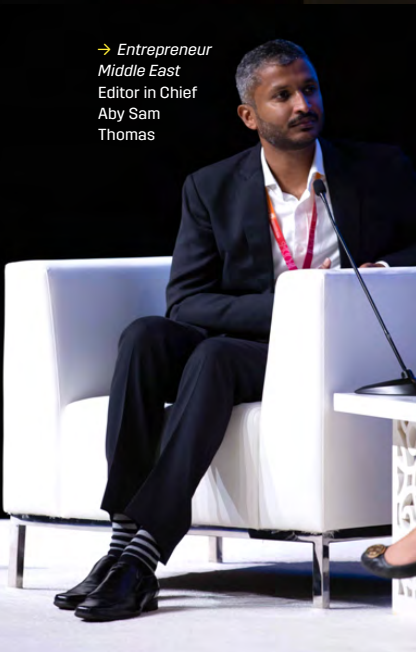
↓ Dubai Chambers Vice Chairman H.E. Faisal Bin Juma Khalfan Belhouli congratulating the first winner of the Smartpreneur Competition 6.0, EduPlayment co-founder and CEO Mazen Omair.



↓ DIFC FinTech Hive Executive Vice President Raja Al Mazrouei, and other members of the Smartpreneur Competition 6.0 jury



→ Entrepreneur Middle East Editor in Chief Aby Sam Thomas



MAKE WATER, NATURALLY!



Engage with us to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



↑ Dr. Saeed Alhassan Alkhazraji, founder and CEO of Manhat, pitching to the Smartpreneur 6.0 jury

EXPO 2020 DUBAI UAE OFFICIAL BUSINESS INTEGRATION PARTNER

غرفة دبي DUBAI CHAMBER

دبي للمشروع الناشئة DUBAI STARTUP HUB

DUBAI SMART COMPETITION

# ENTERPRISE AGILITY FORUM 2022

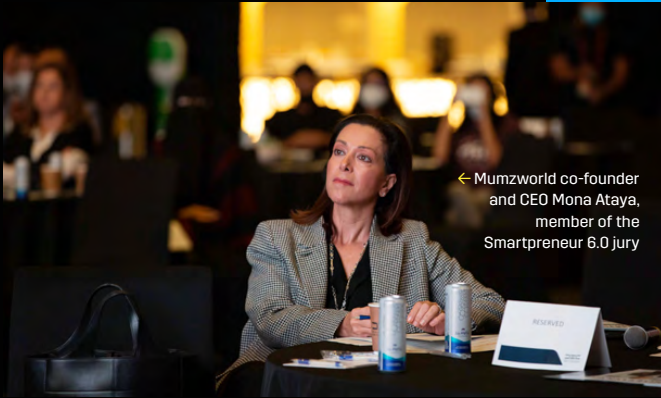
THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CONTINUUM IN PERSPECTIVE

An Entrepreneur Industry Intel event

**FAISAL BIN JUMA KHALFAN**  
Vice Chairman, DUBAI CHAMBER  
Founder and Chairman, ITHMAR CAPITAL

↑ Dubai Chambers Vice Chairman H.E. Faisal Bin Juma Khalfan Belhouli giving his keynote address

→ Digital Energy founder and CEO Morgan Eldred is the one of the 10 finalists of Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur Competition 6.0



← Mumzworld co-founder and CEO Mona Ataya, member of the Smartpreneur 6.0 jury

→ Gaurav Oberoi, co-founder of direct-to-consumer digital discovery platform Hamples, during his pitch



↑ Members of the Dubai Chamber listening to the pitches of the 10 finalists of the Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur 6.0 Competition



↑ Panel discussion: FROM THE UAE, TO THE WORLD

The

TOP

Meet the startups who beat out more than 280 of their peers to become the 10 Finalists of

**DUBAI  
SMARTPRENEUR  
COMPETITION 6.0**

غرفة دبي  
DUBAI CHAMBER

دبي للمشاريع الناشئة  
DUBAI STARTUP HUB  
AN INITIATIVE OF DUBAI CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

**1<sup>ST</sup> WINNER**

# EduPloyment [eduployment.com/](http://eduployment.com/)

↓ **EMPLOYMENT TRANSFORMS THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS**, leveraging technology to educate blue-collar workers in order for them to find better livelihoods.

**F**or Mazen Omair, co-founder and CEO of tech startup EduPloyment, the concept of using technology to create a profitable business that also adheres to a social cause was something he came upon quite by chance. "The idea for EduPloyment was inspired at an entrepreneurship conference that my co-founder Rana A. Batterjee and I were attending, where one of the speakers introduced the concept of a purpose-driven business, as one which solves a world problem while generating a profit," says Omair. "This was a novel concept to us, which challenged the traditional model of building a business, and then using its proceeds for a charitable or corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity."

▶ **THAT REALIZATION LED TO THE CREATION OF EDUPLYMENT**, a social enterprise that leverages technology to educate blue-collar workers in order for them to find better livelihoods. "As a global online recruitment platform focused on the blue-collar segment, we upskill blue-collar workers with critical English language skills and provide them access to better jobs both abroad and domestically to uplift them and their families out of poverty," Omair says. "EduPloyment leverages the increasing use of smartphones among our target population to engage with job candidates using their native language, to improve accessibility. Candidates can use the application to create their resumes, and can also benchmark their English proficiency. After that, they begin learning and improving their English, while also simultaneously being matched with jobs for which they qualify."

But EduPloyment doesn't solely help the blue-collar workers seeking jobs alone - it also aims to solve the hurdles employers often face in hiring them. "Employers utilizing the EduPloyment platform reduce their hiring costs by over 80% versus traditional mechanisms, gain faster access to better qualified candidates, and eliminate travel through our built-in video interviews," Omair explains. "We also pass on 100% of the employers' placement fees to the hired candidate as EduPloyment subscriptions,



which they can share to help uplift their community members." And it is this combination of technology and CSR that Omair believes sets his startup apart from other traditional recruitment platforms. "We are providing employers with a tangible social impact, with no change to their business practices," he adds. "To help uplift the next generation, eligible hired candidates can also apply for an EduPloyment Scholarship to pay for one of their children's college tuition."

▶ **WITH AN APPROACH THAT THUS CATERS** to both employers and employees, while also opening doors for better career futures, Omair believes EduPloyment addresses one major sub-theme of the ongoing Expo 2020 Dubai: opportunity. "We do this by providing blue-collar job seekers with a one-click access to jobs with employers committed to fair work, from the comfort of their homes, at a negligible cost compared to traditional mechanisms," he explains. "It also eliminates any intermediaries. Therefore, these job seekers have a great opportunity to uplift themselves and their families, while avoiding

the typical pitfalls associated with traditional recruitment pathways." This would also explain how EduPloyment got to be a part of Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur Competition 6.0, with Omair saying the experience has been a fruitful one for him and his startup. "With the coaching feedback we received, we are now working on how to succinctly communicate EduPloyment's value proposition and potential," Omair says. "Now, it's all about 'practice, practice, practice!'"

▶ **AS FOR THE ROAD AHEAD** for EduPloyment, Omair is dreaming big. "In 2022, we plan on expanding our employers' community in additional GCC countries, and further expanding candidate recruitment to additional countries," he says, while adding that the UAE is the right place to catapult all these goals into fruition. "Across the spectrum of services and resources that a new business requires, the UAE provides world-class offerings, and I believe the advanced business ecosystem in the country makes it ideal for us to keep growing," concludes Omair.

# The TOP 10

DUBAI  
SMARTPRENEUR  
COMPETITION 6.0

2<sup>ND</sup> WINNER

## Diwama [diwama.com/](https://diwama.com/)

Christopher Arida and Aya Hariri, founders of Diwama, an image recognition software making use of artificial intelligence (AI) to automate waste analysis, spent years learning how the waste management industry works in Lebanon, and at first, their commitment to this domain resulted in a startup called Reseco in 2020. "We invested in and operated a small waste sorting facility in three municipalities in Lebanon, recycling over 18,000 plastic bottles every month," Arida recalls. "In parallel, we operated a door-to-door collection service of recyclables for a monthly fee for over 50 households."

▶ **ALTHOUGH BOTH BUSINESS MODELS** proved to be unsustainable due to the challenging economic conditions in Lebanon, Arida and his team did manage to get an in-depth insight into the challenges faced by different stakeholders along the waste value chain, such as waste sorting facilities, or ordinary people struggling to sort their waste at home. "So, we came up with an idea of a smart waste container, which was a 40-foot shipment container that could be placed at any street or corner," he says. "People would just drop off their waste bags, and the container would automatically sort the waste, compact, and prepare it for recycling."

In the founders' initial designs, the containers were to be optimized using an AI-based software that would efficiently detect and sort waste through the use of robots; however, that required a large amount of capital for research and development. Instead of building this product from scratch, Arida's market study across the MENA region pointed out to a need for the same AI software for sorting waste, which could be integrated into the existing infrastructure of large waste sorting facilities. "This is when we rebranded ourselves as Diwama, standing for Digital Waste Management, with a mission of introducing affordable AI technologies aimed at increasing recycling rates and revenues for waste management companies," Arida says.

And that led to Arida and Hariri founding Diwama in 2021. "Our product is an AI-based image recognition software called Vitron, which automatically analyzes the composition of waste streams," Arida explains. "Through a camera and a deep learning algorithm, the

2<sup>ND</sup> WINNER | DIWAMA  
CASH PRIZE AED50,000



▶ **DIWAMA TRACKS MATERIAL COMPOSITION AND CONTAMINATION LEVELS IN REAL-TIME** through its AI-based image recognition innovations that enable the detection and auditing of waste streams.

different waste types, colors, and brands are automatically detected and tracked. We then collect valuable data to be used by different stakeholders across the waste value chain to improve the circularity of resources. The hardware component of Vitron is sold at a one-time fixed fee, while the software component, which consists of a dashboard displaying the data analytics, is sold as a software as a service."

▶ **IN SOLVING PROBLEMS** within the waste management industry, Diwama is helping accelerate the transition to a circular economy model, which has been supported in the UAE by its Circular Economy Policy 2021-2031 reflecting the country's commitment to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and enhancing the quality of life for residents. "However, there is a critical gap in the current waste management value chain, which is source segregation," Arida notes. "The GCC countries do not follow adequate source segregation, but have efficient collection and transportation systems. Therefore, there is a need for optimizing the segregation process, both at source and material recovery facilities, which is encouraging the adoption of more technology in the waste management sector."

▶ **THIS THUS PRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY** that the Diwama team wants to tap into. "In providing waste analytics and automation, Diwama is closing the recycling loop and ensuring a fully connected waste value chain by enabling data-driven decisions to increase recovery and purity of recyclables and operational efficiency of waste-related activities," Arida explains. Following its experiences as one of the finalists of Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur Competition 6.0, Diwama is now gearing up to raise a seed round that will be invested in research and development, business development, and sales. "We are aiming to increase the accuracy of our AI model, and acquire more pilot studies across the UAE," Arida says. "In the next three years, we aim to become the go-to company for waste image recognition technologies and data analytics in the MENA region."

**3<sup>RD</sup> WINNER**

# Soul Artists [soulartists.net/](http://soulartists.net/)

**S**uhail Khoury is a performing artist and entrepreneur who is perhaps best known today for being the co-founder and CEO of Soul Artists, a UAE-based talent management company. However, that's not how he started out his career trajectory. "I have had a love for performing arts since I was a child, and for over 10 years, I dedicated much of my free time exploring dance, magic shows, and fire arts," Khoury says. "However, when I came to Dubai, I started working in a bank, selling credit cards to make a living, then I moved to real estate, and then to corporate events, until I realized that I was neither happy nor able to make ends meet."

▶ **"WHAT WOULD I DO IF MONEY WAS NO OBJECT?"** That's the question many creatives stuck in the corporate world often ask themselves, and that's also what led Khoury to think of performing arts as an alternative career. "I instantly picked myself up and created the best resume and promo videos that I could at the time, in order to share it with all the event managers and companies in the country," he says. "However, I received no response from any of those companies." This experience made Khoury aware of a market gap- a lack of online platforms that housed performing artists looking for gigs, while also offering event creators a roster of talent to choose from. "I realized that I was meant to create it," Khoury says. "I reached out to my brother Zaid Khoury, and we scrapped all the money we had around to build our first prototype."

Before long, the two brothers raised a seed investment, and today, according to Khoury, Soul Artists hosts the largest roster of MENA-based performing artists, allowing anyone to discover and book an entertainer for their event. "The platform also acts as a dedicated space for performing artists and musicians to manage their bookings and tap into a new pool of growing clients, using a unique business model that takes zero commission from the artists, and simply charges clients an industry low agency fee when making a booking," Khoury explains. But Khoury's

work on this startup was not without obstacles, the most challenging one being educating the industry as a whole that the Soul Artists model was how entertainment booking would be made for generations to come. "This was mitigated a couple of years later, when we were able to prove that our platform and technology work, and that the people behind it cared and offered excellent support and service throughout the booking process," Khoury says.

According to Khoury, Soul Artists, at its core, is about offering opportunities to all artists and creatives out there. "Our solution not only documents professional artists from this region for the first time in history in one dedicated space, but it also gives any event creator or entertainment seeker a true insight into the artistic landscape within their country in seconds," he explains. And once Khoury realized that Soul Artists was a sustainable entrepreneurial venture, he started taking part in startup competitions, one of which was Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur

Competition 6.0. "We were in several startup competitions in the past, but we have never seen this level of care put into each entrepreneur," Khoury says. "We have had multiple private one-on-one sessions that have been very valuable to us."

▶ **LOOKING BACK** on his entrepreneurial journey, Khoury believes that Dubai can serve as a fertile ground for all kinds of startups- his own story is an example for that. "I honestly don't think we would have been successful if we had started up anywhere else," he adds. "Dubai is perfect for startups as the infrastructure is built from the ground up to support innovation and technology, and the vision of UAE's leaders of always looking to the future trickles down into the economy, markets, and each individual, and we are eternally grateful for this." As for the road ahead, expanding Soul Artists across the region is on Khoury's agenda for 2022 and beyond. "We want to provide all performing artists and event creators in the Arab world with the same benefits and pleasures enjoyed by the UAE from our solution," he concludes.

↓ **SOUL ARTISTS IS A UAE-BASED WORLDWIDE TALENT MARKETPLACE** for booking performing artists, musicians, and entertainers.



IMAGES COURTESY DUBAI STARTUP HUB

# The TOP 10

DUBAI  
SMARTPRENEUR  
COMPETITION 6.0

↓ **HYDRO WIND ENERGY IS ON A MISSION** to create the world's leading energy company that will provide a substantial contribution to the welfare of humanity.

Hydro Wind Energy's work in advancing the field of sustainability with disruptive systems that address the challenges of low-cost electricity, grid-scale energy storage, and seawater desalination has led it to be shortlisted as one of the finalists for Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur Competition 6.0. "Our efforts align with the UAE's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," Vasilyan adds. "QuenchSea, as the world's first low-cost hand-held seawater desalination device, both empowers an individual to produce their own freshwater from seawater, and it also reduces the use of plastic bottles during disaster relief missions."

▶ **FROM ITS OFFICES IN DUBAI, SAN FRANCISCO, AND LONDON,** Hydro Wind Energy targets humanitarian, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and governmental development agencies that can provide the QuenchSea device to people who lack access to safe water. According to a UN report (just one among many reports on the topic that present similar data), 2.2 billion people around the world still lack safely managed drinking water, while 785 million of those are even without basic drinking water. "We are currently finalizing the first production batch of QuenchSea due for delivery in the first quarter of 2022," says Addepalli. "Our plan is to scale to 100 million units by 2027, and impact over one billion people."

Taking part in Smartpreneur Competition 6.0 has allowed the Hydro Wind Energy team to connect with people behind other solutions that can radically change the world, says Hassani. The UAE and its thriving innovation ecosystem has also recognized the talented Hydro Wind Energy team by offering them golden visas—this, according to Addepalli, indicates an important piece of advice for fellow entrepreneurs. "Entrepreneurs in this ecosystem are always willing and happy to advise you on the basis of their experiences, so don't be afraid to tap into your network," he says. "Lastly, enjoy the journey, because no entrepreneurial endeavor comes without its fair share of challenges and hardships, it is important to stay positive and focused on your mission."

## Hydro Wind Energy [/hw.energy/](http://hw.energy/)

It often takes a team of talented individuals gathered from all corners of the world to develop a first-of-its-kind device, and that's certainly the case for tech startup Hydro Wind Energy, which has built QuenchSea, a low-cost seawater desalination device that produces fresh water from seawater using only manual power. Led by Hayk Vasilyan, Maryam Ahmed Hassani, and Pranay Addepalli, co-founders of Hydro Wind Energy, the startup has been built on the premise that innovation has the ability to change people's lives for the better. "Over 2.2 billion people worldwide lack partial or complete access to clean fresh water, and we wanted to make an impact on the world's water crisis," says Hassani. "For that reason, QuenchSea was primarily developed to cater for the humanitarian and disaster relief sectors."



# Hamples

/hamples.com/

**“**As parents, we bought 10 different kinds of tooth-paste for our two-year-old to try out before we found the best one for her.” This is the example that Gaurav Oberoi, who co-founded direct-to-consumer digital discovery platform Hamples with his wife Aditi Oberoi, uses to explain the crux of the issue his startup is trying to solve. “Although there are many online and offline channels for us to buy from, there are no options for us to try products before we purchase them,” says Oberoi. “This gap in the pre-purchase user journey triggered an urge to launch a platform for everyone to discover new launches and try new products, reduce wastage, and hereby put an end to buyers’ regrets.”

► **LAUNCHED IN MAY 2021**, the startup’s name was coined together by the husband-and-wife co-founding duo. “Hamples is derived from ‘Happy Samples,’ which basically means happiness comes in small packages- or samples,” Oberoi says, explaining that consumers who’ve registered on Hamples get to try free samples and mini-trial packs, with products ranging from skincare to home care and fragrances as well. Every time users make an order on the e-commerce platform, they also get the opportunity to avail AED20 coupons that can be further used on Hamples. By enabling consumers to try out multiple samples before finalizing on using a particular product, the startup thus aims to help them make more

informed decisions while purchasing.

Oberoi also notes that Hamples is also an enticing option for brand owners to sell their products via “tryvertising”—a trial-based advertising method. “Hamples is a launchpad for brands to shorten the go-to-market journey and get ready access to an in-market audience,” he explains. “Brands can also target future consumers as per region, demographics, lifestyle, personal interests, and other attributes. The platform is designed to make at-home sampling accessible, affordable, and measurable for brands, while simultaneously helping them collect first-party data, generate consumer ratings, social mentions and shares, and also unlock qualitative and quantitative consumer insights.”

► **TODAY, HAMPLES HAS ALREADY LAUNCHED 500,000 SAMPLE UNITS** across the UAE.

More notably, it has also launched digital sampling campaigns for over 150 brands including Unilever, Procter & Gamble, Britannia, Henkel, IFFCO, PepsiCo, Swiss Image, and Alyssa Ashley, among others. But this entrepreneurial journey didn’t have the easiest of beginnings, Oberoi admits. “Like any other early-stage marketplace, our first and biggest challenge was to convince brands to commit to using the platform before the other, when there was neither supply nor demand on the platform,” he recalls. “We are thankful for the first few brands who trusted us during our initial days, and gave us their samples to showcase on Hamples. Today, we can proudly say that we have

→ **HAMPLES WORKS ON A UNIQUE CUSTOMER MATCH TECHNOLOGY**, which enables brands to precisely target the right audience for their sampling activities.



retained 100% of our brand partners, and generated high returns for them.”

Such successes are a good indication of how Hamples got to be selected as one of the ten finalists for Dubai Startup Hub’s Smartpreneur Competition 6.0, with Oberoi saying that that he and his team have gained a lot by being a part of the program. “More than a competition, Smartpreneur is a well thought-out platform for startups to learn, reflect, and present their business to the world,” he says. “Apart from the direct prize benefits, one should consider this competition as an opportunity to get trained to draft a pitch deck, receive one-on-one attention from experts, and showcase your

business to influencing personalities in the region and beyond.”

► **HAVING RECENTLY RAISED** an undisclosed amount in a pre-seed funding round by Nama Ventures, Oberoi is now optimistic about his plans to grow Hamples in the UAE and also expand within the region. “We expect 2022 to be a strategic growth year for many of us,” he says. “With support from our stakeholders, we plan to increase our portfolio of brands, add more categories, and simultaneously increase our audience base. Our vision is to become a destination for users to discover and try new, unique, innovative products and services.”

# The TOP 10

DUBAI  
SMARTPRENEUR  
COMPETITION 6.0

→ **PALLETPAL'S MISSION** is to make shipping as quick and easy as booking a flight.

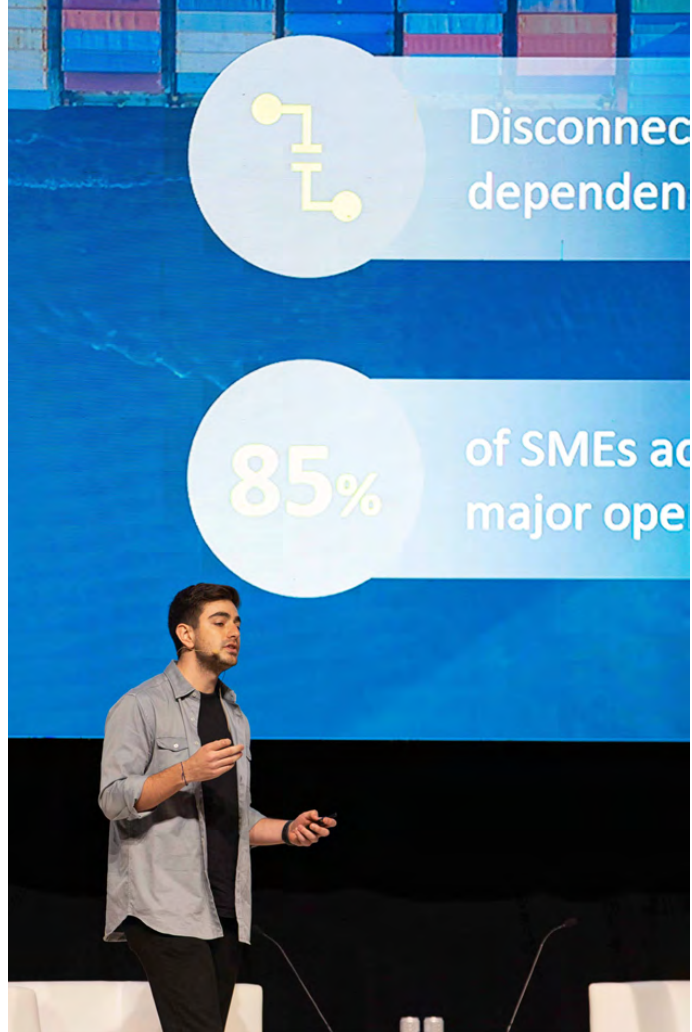
## PalletPal [/palletpal.me/](https://palletpal.me/)

For Adel Hamwi, Kareem Ghanam, Antonio Chidiac, and Ali Nawaz, co-founders of digital freight forwarder PalletPal, it was the observation of many lacking elements within the supply chain ecosystem that drove them towards creating their startup. "This kickstarted a period of regular brainstorming sessions between us co-founders, numerous field visits, endless discussions and feedback loops with prospective customers who are most impacted by the lack of progressive services in the space, and multiple iterations of the business we aspired to build," says Hamwi. "We eventually landed on the current concept of PalletPal, as a next-gen digital solution for freight shipping."

However, Hamwi admits that the co-founders' long-term goal for PalletPal to eventually become an end-to-end digital logistics solution initially created some doubt about which aspect of the industry they needed to start working with. "The deeper we dug into the huge number of problems in logistics, the more we realized how severely the industry is lagging," says Hamwi. "To overcome this, we set ourselves a vision and objectives and simply started at the

beginning of the supply chain: freight." The startup's offerings thus aim to optimize freight shipments and streamline supply chain management. By enabling the processing of multiple quotes, the platform enables vendors to request, compare, and select optimal offers with their preferred credit terms.

► **PALLETPAL ALSO HELPS** business owners connect more easily with suppliers, as well as communicate with partners across each stage of shipment to ensure a more centralized supply chain. Furthermore, it also provides data insights, tracking features, and stored documentation to enable more informed and quick supply chain decisions. "The future of the supply chain industry is one rooted in total transparency, high speed, and maximum efficiency," explains Hamwi. "PalletPal aims to realize this vision, attain new operational efficiency standards, and set the next ones throughout our journey into the future. Down the line, we aspire to become the go-to platform for companies to manage their end-to-end supply chain operations- be that by automating shipping decisions, recalibrating sourcing decisions, or optimizing trade routes."



► **LAUNCHED IN EARLY 2021**, PalletPal has already raised US\$200,000 in a pre-seed round from US-based Draper Associates, and according to Hamwi, being located in the UAE has been a big part of the impetus for the startup's growth. "Having grown up in the UAE and been a part of the startup ecosystem for many years now as a founder and previously a coach at the Mohammed Bin Rashid Innovation Fund Innovation Accelerator, I've seen the tremendous strides being taken to make the UAE an even more attractive place to start a business," Hamwi says. "Your network is your best friend when it comes to doing business in the UAE. There is also a lot of opportunity for growth across industries, and there is always a lot of support through the many government-backed events, accelerators, and funds."

With his startup having made it to the finals of Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur Competition 6.0, Hamwi recommends other entrepreneurs to not shy away from participating in such contests. "Just remember this: there is no better way to practice pitching, affirm your problem statement, and validate your solution than by taking the stage and telling your story," he says. "Win or lose, the experience will only make you stronger!" Looking to the future, 2022 is set to be PalletPal's first fully operational year, and Hamwi remains confident of what his startup could potentially achieve in the months to come. "We plan to continue to build on trying to solve the various problems in the industry through technology and operational excellence, onboard more customers, bring on additional team members, meet objectives and make freight shipping as quick and as easy as booking a flight!" he concludes.

# Manhat

manhatuae.com

**D**r. Saeed Alhassan Alkhazraji, founder and CEO of Manhat, a deep technology startup that provides sustainable water production solutions without desalination, found the idea that he'd turn into a business in nature itself. "Our inspiration is the natural water cycle in geographical locations where water availability never requires human interference," Dr. Alkhazraji says. "Our solution contributes to the overall knowledge in the field by providing key insights into how we should produce water directly, without electricity and any additional products, on open water surfaces, which basically cover 70% of the earth surface."

► **USING HIS EXPERTISE** as an Associate Professor in the Department of Chemical Engineering and Senior Director at the Petroleum Institute at Khalifa University, Dr. Alkhazraji -who was also the first recipient of the inaugural Sheikh Mohamed Bin Rashid Award for Scientific Excellence in 2017- was keen to contribute to solving the water scarcity challenge. "We have developed a technology to produce water directly from open water surfaces, and our business model is designed around providing water in coastline communities with irrigation being its main application," he explains. "The challenge for us is the fact that we are working on a novel, physical science-based concept that requires optimization and research and development."

Communicating his startup's vision to an audience was one of the things Dr. Alkhazraji had to learn to do in his time being a part of Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur Competition 6.0. "I think that most of us understand the water scarcity issue to a certain extent, but explaining the nuances of this challenge will hopefully allow us to be

effective in communicating and presenting our startup and its solution," he says. "Being judged is always challenging, but startup founders develop thicker skins after each presentation, and that is exactly what they should focus on- learning how to adapt to feedback at each corner. Finally, knowing the room and appreciating the audience is immensely important."

With this experience behind him, Dr. Alkhazraji, along with his team at Manhat, are now getting ready to embark on a new stage of the business. "We are currently preparing to launch a pilot scale test for our technology, which will allow us enough time and space to optimize it for specific applications," he says. "In parallel, we are planning to conduct specific projects for clients in order to provide an alternative solution to their water needs in advantageous locations like islands." In his opinion, the UAE has already demonstrated to be a fertile and lucrative location to set up shop for entrepreneurs, and in support of this claim, he shares three insights about the local market. "Here, we have the flexibility of regulations, access to capital, and finally large open labs for experimenting and testing futuristic ideas."

► **GIVEN HIS EXPERIENCE** developing a physical science-based startup that uses research and development (R&D) as its key differentiator, Dr. Alkhazraji's advice for entrepreneurs is for them to be aware of their intellectual property rights, and how to protect them in the UAE. "This is crucial for any business, but it is even more important for R&D based startups that need to understand how to protect their assets," he explains. "Also, I'd advise them to choose their manufacturing strategy wisely. If you are building a physical device, you have to know how to protect your business, and so it is important to know what to manufacture where, and to manage this supply chain in an effective manner. Lastly, make sure to use the UAE government's programs for supporting entrepreneurs, because these can be helpful in advancing your business."



# The TOP 10

DUBAI  
SMARTPRENEUR  
COMPETITION 6.0



## Aiotize [aiotize.com/](http://aiotize.com/)

↑ **AIOTIZE DEVELOPS BESPOKE BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE & AUTOMATION SOLUTIONS** for businesses and governments worldwide making the work & production environments efficient, reliable and versatile.

**S**hivansh Sethi founded Aiotize in Chandigarh, India, in 2018 with a mission to create a one-stop-shop for all artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning-enabled requirements of governments and organizations. "Aiotize is a deep tech startup that provides automation and business intelligence to stakeholders for better situational awareness and aerial intelligence, by using state-of-the-art technologies," Sethi explains. "We create an autonomous system to deliver rapid situational awareness and aerial intelligence to the stakeholders of the enterprises and their production areas. We focus on the sectors of health, safety, environmental security and inspection by making their work and production environments efficient, reliable, safe, and versatile."

▶ **HIS VISIT TO DUBAI IN SEPTEMBER 2019 PROVED A GAME CHANGER** for the fledgling startup. "I was working on the internet of things (IoT) technology stack for Aiotize, and I was in Dubai to conduct a market research and feasibility

study for it," Sethi recalls. "But then I met Gustavo Carriconde during a meetup at Dubai Future Foundation's Area 2071. Gustavo was a pilot at Emirates Airline back then, and he was helping entrepreneurs enrolled in F6's startup accelerator StartupSpace.io. Being an aviation expert myself, I also took his suggestions and feedback regarding the unmanned aerial systems." Sethi was thus inspired to focus on the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) sector, and following extensive research, he and his team developed Aiotize's UAV system. "We are now working on empowering the UAV industry with our research in the latest technology and materials, which disrupts the conventional ecosystem of drones, UAVs, and remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS)," Sethi says. "The major development is amalgamation of drones and robotics with artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms, which are used to automate industrial workflows. At present, we are working in the B2B space, mainly with corporate clients, like DP World, a Dubai-based multinational logistics company,

and Adani Ports and SEZ, an Indian integrated ports and logistics company, in order to automate and disrupt the conventional operations in the health, safety, and environmental sectors."

▶ **TALKING ABOUT THE PROCESS** of building his business, Sethi says that one of the most challenging aspects of his entrepreneurial journey has been in establishing trustful and effective partnerships with large corporations. "In corporates, the operations are designed in such a way that everything depends on the return on investment, whereas our startup culture is all about experimentation, and corporates are not much interested in that," Sethi says. "Startups working in deep technology, such as ours, don't have proven technologies, especially in a nascent stage, but we somehow managed to prove that our technology is disruptive, and that it has a lot of potential." Being a part of Dubai Startup Hub's Smartpreneur Competition 6.0 has helped too, with Sethi pointing out that Dubai provides plenty of reasons for entrepreneurs to

develop their businesses in the Emirate. "I feel that the best thing about Dubai is its acceptance of expatriates," Sethi says. "We are a small Indian startup, and we are among the top 10 finalists for this competition, which in itself shows that the city welcomes foreign entrepreneurs with open arms."

Sethi goes on to note that Dubai is a market where disruptive startups can test their technologies on a wide and diverse customer base. "We plan to do proof-of-concept presentations for our potential industrial clientele here in order to give them an idea of the look and feel of how aerial intelligence can work within their production processes and on inspecting their own infrastructures." In addition, with the UAE Ministry of Economy introducing the Entrepreneurial Nation initiative to attract and support 20 startups valued at more than US\$1 billion by 2031, Sethi concludes by saying that "in the UAE, no one can stop you from becoming a unicorn." He adds, "We have seen the best startups from around the world expanding to the Middle East for help, and the rest will be history."

# One Moto

[one-moto.com/](https://one-moto.com/)

**B**ack in 2016, Dubai-based serial entrepreneur Adam Ridgway recognized the potential of a global market boom in the last-mile delivery sector, and then set out to design and build the world's best electric vehicles that could play a vital role in this particular landscape. Today, he is the founder and CEO of One Moto, the MENA region's first approved, data-driven and multi-award-winning electric vehicles manufacturer with a focus on the last-mile sector, and a mission to make all delivery vehicles in the UAE electric by 2024.

## ► NOW, WITH COMPANIES' COMMITMENTS

to sustainable business practices grabbing headlines these days, it would be reasonable to expect that Ridgway faces few challenges in building his business. However, he explains that demonstrating how the last-mile operators can be both profitable and sustainable is a hurdle he is yet to overcome. "There is still a discussion between a 'want' and a 'need' when it comes to sustainability," he explains. "Although we are supporting the UAE's governmental agenda of electric vehicles adoption and sustainable mobility, at the moment, there aren't any real incentives to make the switch. It will happen, but in the meantime, the private sector is a focus for us."

This answer provides more background about why the support of an entity like Dubai Startup Hub, the entrepreneurship arm of Dubai Chamber, is so crucial for visionary entrepreneurs like Ridgway. "We've had a tremendous relationship with the team at Dubai Startup Hub for the past couple of years- I feel they are all on this journey with us," Ridgway says. "We won the Dubai Chamber Market Access program [an initiative that pairs leading companies and government entities in the UAE with startups that offer innovative solutions to address their key challenges] last year, which provided us with so many opportunities, and allowed us to expand into 21 territories this year alone."

As such, when Dubai Startup Hub opened the Smartpreneur Competition 6.0 to technology startups with solutions centered on the themes of opportunity, sustainability, and trade, Ridgway did not

hesitate to apply, because his startup contributes to advancing all three areas. "Let me give you an example," Ridgway says. "From one side, we know that air pollution is the greatest killer of humanity, because the 15,000 delivery motorcycles on the roads in Dubai produce enough carbon dioxide to kill 21,000 acres of forest each year. From the other side, I understand that fleet operators, delivery aggregators, and logistics companies aren't always profitable, and that is why our One Moto fleet reduces operational expenditure by 74%, and guarantees a return on investment in five to seven months."

## ► WITH THE THEME OF OPPORTUNITY

often being explained as helping individuals and communities to unleash their potential, Ridgway presents a well thought out proposition on how One Moto improves the wellbeing of delivery riders in order to help them create a better tomorrow for themselves. "If we know that they cover their own fuel costs, which are around AED650 per month, and which reduce their salaries with each fuel price increase, and that their work pressure is enhanced due to a volume based bonus system and high working hours, it is clear how One Moto can help them," Ridgway says. "Our data-driven vehicles can optimize routes, reduce work pressure, maintain delivery volumes, save money, and reduce accidents. Quite a substantial claim that we've proven many times."

Ridgway adds here that One Moto is also currently building the UAE's first electric vehicle manufacturing facility. "It is a



→ **ONE MOTO** is an electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer offering a fleet of vehicles such as electric motorcycles, bikes, scooters, delivery and grocery vans, catering to the last-mile industry, as well as urban commuters.

pioneering change that places the UAE on the world electric vehicles stage," he says. "In 2021, our team has achieved 10x on sales and expanded 5x more than forecast, with an international sales pipeline, so our growth through dealerships is just one route that we'll be harnessing. We have a global vision of all 17 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals being achieved by 2028, and we support it with our presence in 100 cities, one million vehicles sold, and one billion tons of carbon dioxide eliminated, so this will be our longer term focus."

# The TOP 10

DUBAI  
SMARTPRENEUR  
COMPETITION 6.0

## → THE STARTUP ENABLES ENERGY INTENSIVE COMPANIES

to track, trace and optimize emissions, water, waste, materials and employee safety.



# Digital Energy

[digitalenergy.ai](https://digitalenergy.ai)

Solving inefficiencies for energy intensive companies requires a wealth of industry experience and a commitment to in-depth research—two qualities that Morgan Eldred certainly did not lack before founding Digital Energy. Having worked as an energy research director, and in strategy development, as well as transformational program delivery for Gartner, Maersk Oil, and Shell respectively, Eldred decided that his startup venture, at its core, should be focused on “environomics,” which he defines as the unification of economic strategies and sustainability practices delivered through advanced artificial intelligence (AI) solutions. “We have developed cutting edge AI solutions that are proven to significantly reduce the use of resources and the costs with precision and transparency,” Eldred explains. “These algorithms are accessible from our collaborative digital platform that enables companies and their supply chains to connect and collaborate on tracking, tracing, and then optimizing their emission intensive processes.”

## ▶ SUCH INNOVATIONS POINT TO HOW DIGITAL ENERGY GOT

**SELECTED** as one of the finalists of Dubai Startup Hub’s Smartpreneur Competition 6.0, with Eldred saying that the time he spent being a part of this contest has been extremely fruitful. “I would definitely recommend it to all entrepreneurs, because the structure, format, and mentoring offered by the Dubai Startup Hub is excellent, and all entrepreneurs will acquire critical skills needed to grow a business,” he says. Eldred gives us a preview of his pitch for Smartpreneur 6.0 by reiterating that his startup works in the digital energy space, which consists of large-scale emission intensive companies, such as those in the energy, logistics, manufacturing,

and construction industries, and which account for over 30% of the world’s emissions.

“Many of these companies have ambitious sustainability targets and digital plans, but they are focused on pocket solutions and are struggling to unlock real transformation,” Eldred explains. “This is where we really excel, because, by leveraging our environomics approach and subsequent AI solutions, we have already reduced millions of gallons of fuel, which is enough to sail around the world, reduced thousands of tons of material, which are equivalent of three Eiffel Towers, increased energy production equivalent of 127,500KWh per day, which is enough to charge 1,275 Teslas, and saved hundreds of potential incidents—more than a year of loss-time injuries.”

▶ **AS A LONG-TERM DUBAI RESIDENT**, Eldred has witnessed firsthand how the UAE has built its startup ecosystem, and therefore considers the country to be a vibrant and dynamic working environment to start up a business. “Three insights that I could provide about the UAE is that it is a great place for recruiting talent,” he says. “You don’t need to import talent, but you can attract and grow talented individuals that are already in the country. The digital infrastructure of the UAE government is unparalleled, and this really helps fuel a vibrant startup ecosystem. Lastly, as a society, the UAE is made up of many nationalities from all over the world which offers the potential to get insights that will help companies scale on a global level.” And that’s the plan Eldred has in mind for Digital Energy as well. “We are planning to expand to other geographies along with releasing new product and service offerings that are coming out of our research and development,” Eldred reveals. **E**

#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)



# LOGISTICS FORUM 2022

March 29 | Dubai

#### FOR SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

CLAYTON RODRIGUES  
+971 50 929 3982  
clayton@bncpublishing.net

JOAQUIM D'COSTA  
+971 50 440 2706  
jo@bncpublishing.net

#### FOR SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES

JOCHEBED MENON  
+971 55 969 8037  
jochebed@bncpublishing.net

KASUN ILLANKOON  
+971 56 135 4769  
kasun@bncpublishing.net

## Topics

1

### INNOVATION IN TECHNOLOGY

How blockchain, artificial intelligence and IoT is revolutionising the logistics and supply chain industries

2

### WAREHOUSING

How automation is reinventing the warehousing business and disruptive technologies are allowing warehouses to accommodate the F&B, retail and pharma sectors' growing requirements.

3

### SUPPLY CHAIN WOES

The shipping network upended by the pandemic shows no respite – supply chains continue to find itself in a logistics knot, ports face a never-seen-before congestion and shipping rates are yet to fall. What is the solution?

4

### SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

Green fuels, sustainable infrastructure and sustainable modes of transport

# #TamTalksTech

Gadgets and doodads that you might've missed out on, sourced by a tech aficionado. **by TAMARA CLARKE**



## On the go ↑ /Acer Swift X

Acer's ultra-portable Swift X laptop, weighing in at just 3.09 lbs (1.4 kg), packs a 12th Gen Intel Core processor with up to 12 cores and an NVIDIA GeForce RTX 3050 Ti laptop GPU. But despite all the power inside, its 0.7-inch aluminum chassis gives it a thin profile. Meanwhile, a fan, an air inlet keyboard, and dual heat pipes help to keep the device cool during peak performance. The 14-inch model runs on Windows 11 and features narrow bezels, thereby allowing for up to a

92.22% screen-to-body ratio. Get things done with two USB 3.2 Gen 1 Type-A ports for fast data transfers, as well as a fingerprint reader for easy login with Windows Hello. Plus, Swift X gives you up to 16 GB of memory and 2 TB of SSD storage that will allow you to access your work even when you're on the go.



## Clickbait ↑ /Logitech Signature M650 Wireless Mouse

The Logitech Signature M650 Wireless Mouse is designed to upgrade any workstation and improve the overall work experience with features such as SmartWheel scrolling, nearly silent clicks, and a contoured, comfortable design for your hands. Whether working on a document or browsing through a website, the Signature M650's SmartWheel helps to deliver precision and speed. The Signature M650 and the larger Signature M650 L also feature SilentTouch technology, reducing click noise by 90%, compared to the Logitech M185 Mouse. With two sizes (and a left-handed option), a soft thumb area, and a rubber side grip, the Signature M650's inclusive design allows you to work comfortably for extended hours, and also gives you the ability to customize the side buttons to your favorite shortcuts with Logitech Options+. The Signature M650, available in off-white, graphite, and rose, connects in an instant via Bluetooth, and it also gives you peace of mind with a battery that lasts up to two years.



## ← Listen up /Bose SoundLink Flex

The Bose SoundLink Flex delivers impressive audio in an all-new size with an ultra-rugged design. For the first time in a Bluetooth speaker, the Bose SoundLink Flex dynamically detects its orientation, and automatically adjusts itself to deliver uncompromised audio using Bose PositionIQ technology. Whether the Flex is upright on the kitchen counter, hanging from a backpack, or lying flat next to the pool, you don't need to do a thing to ensure optimal sound quality. The SoundLink Flex's setup is straightforward with simple voice prompts for Bluetooth pairing. It remembers up to eight connections for seamless switching from one device to the next. Using the Bose Connect app, you can control the Flex, personalize settings, and receive the latest software updates. And on-speaker buttons allow you to power on/off, turn volume up/down, connect to Bluetooth, as well as play, pause, or skip tracks. You can also access your phone's voice assistant, or take and make calls with exceptional clarity through a built-in microphone. The speaker has an IP67 rating making it dust and waterproof. With up to 12 hours of battery life, you are set to stream your playlist anywhere, anytime.



**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. Talk to her on Twitter [@TAMARACLARKE](https://twitter.com/TAMARACLARKE). [theglobalgazette.com](http://theglobalgazette.com)

# 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, our picks include the COS AW21 collection, French watchmaker Reservoir's new Kanister, and more.

## EDITOR'S PICK

### ← Soleil

Whether you're heading out for a Sunday brunch, or for a weekend getaway, Soleil has the bag for you. As a sustainable accessories brand, Soleil uses the highest quality and locally sourced fabrics to create personalized handbags, travel bags, and other travel accessories. The Spanish brand's newest Autumn/Winter range features luxurious tweed fabrics for the winter season, with versatile styles for various occasions. And of course, each bag is really your own, as all handbags and travel bags are personalized with the client's monogram and choice of color. Plus, as Soleil's footprint further grows in the Middle East market, the new collection also offers monogram customization in Arabic. Currently showcased in concept stores in Dubai, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, head to your nearest store (or the Soleil website) to grab your own piece and support the slow fashion movement. [shop-soleil.com](http://shop-soleil.com)

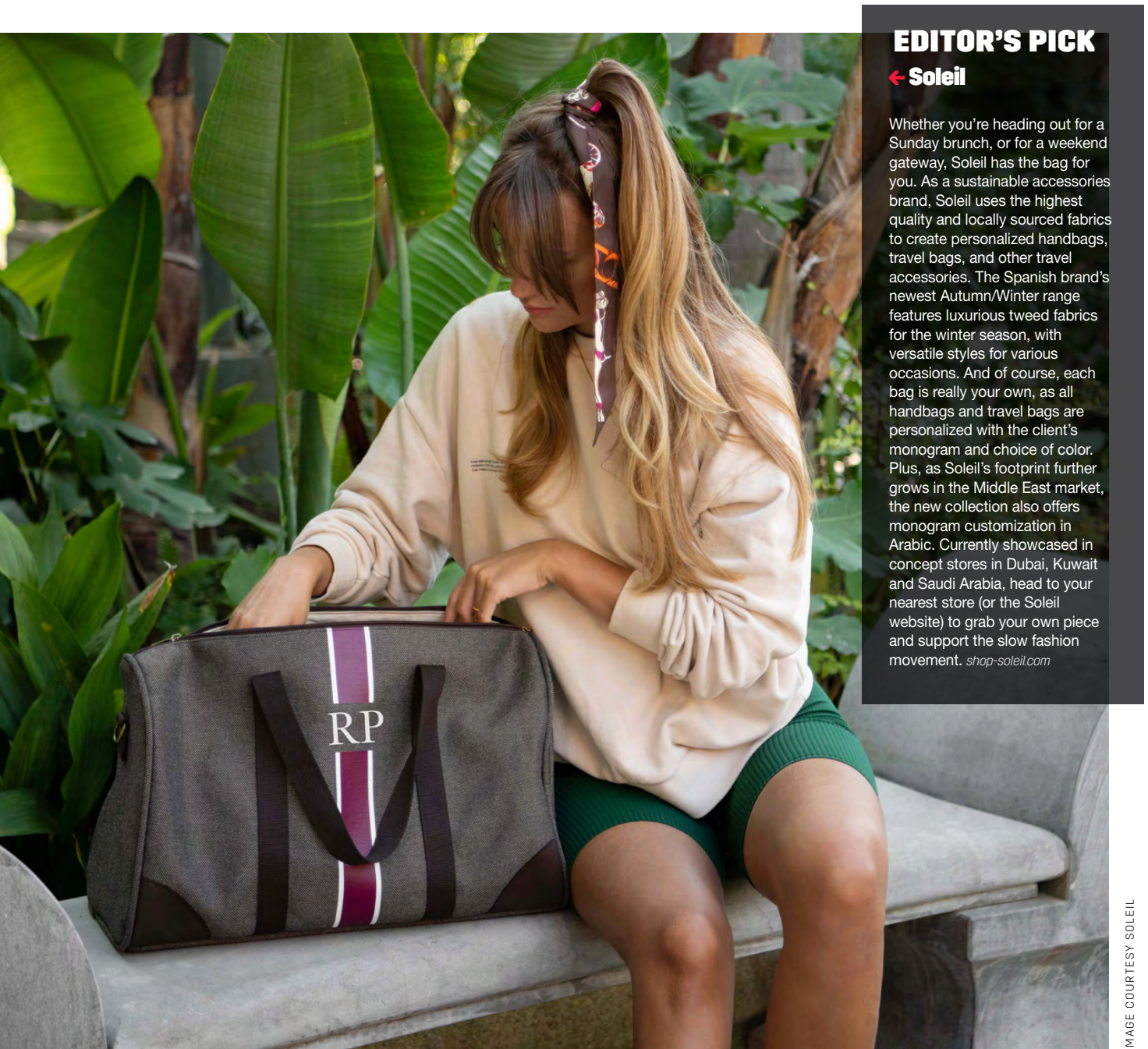


IMAGE COURTESY SOLEIL



**READY, SET, GO** ↑  
Reservoir

Renowned for its retrograde dial configurations, French watchmaker Reservoir's newest release is the Kanister, a collection inspired by the legendary 356 Speedster made by Porsche in the 1950s. Similar to Speedster's speedometer, the black dial, complete with pastel green minute indexes and white hands, is encased with a grade 5 titanium case, and displayed through sapphire crystal glass. Presented on a leather strap, the hues include black with green stitching alongside santa red and havana leather. The timepiece is powered by a self-winding mechanical movement, offering a power reserve of 37 hours. If you're a fan of vintage automobiles, this timepiece will certainly catch your eye. [reservoir-watch.com](http://reservoir-watch.com)



IMAGES COURTESY RESERVOIR | COS | BURBERRY



Autumn/Winter21 collection by COS

**NEW YEAR, NEW LOOK** ↑  
COS

With an aim to look at "contemporary culture through a fashion lens," the Autumn/Winter21 collection by COS boasts of dandy, staple pieces to add to your wardrobe. You'll probably recognize the classics, which have been enhanced by the fluidity of movement through draped, layered styles, and oversized fits. Inspired by jacquard fabric and earthy tones, along with its signature minimalist aesthetic, pieces are paired with essentials for an understated, relaxed ensemble. Made from repurposed and organic materials, this selection of garments is made for an intentional wardrobe. [cosstores.com](http://cosstores.com)

**THE EYES HAVE IT** →  
Burberry

Evoking powerful, modern energy, the Burberry Autumn/Winter eyewear collection plays homage to nature, while still venturing into the unknown. Made in Italy, the range features frames and lenses created using biomaterials that have been obtained from renewable sources- and yes, they are biodegradable too. [burberry.com](http://burberry.com)



Burberry FW eyewear collection

**DUBAI  
SILICON OASIS**

**RED**  
*Radisson*

# **FUN COMES GUARANTEED**

**YOU DECIDE WHEN THE PARTY  
STOPS WITH 24HR FOOD & DRINK.  
NOW OPEN AT DUBAI DIGITAL PARK.**

**RADISSONHOTELS.COM/RED**

# 'Treponomics /

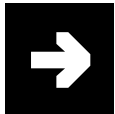


## From Conversations to Conversions

How e-commerce is revolutionizing sales  
by RAMY ASSAF

Online sales in the MENA is expected to exceed US\$50 billion by the end of this year, making this region one of the most exciting emerging markets. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital transformation initiatives by brands, and improvements in logistics and last-mile delivery have vastly contributed to double-digit growth. Saudi Arabia is leading the way in terms of regional e-commerce growth with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 39%, just ahead of UAE (38% CAGR). However, a less talked about phenomenon driving this seismic shift is the rapidly changing consumer behavior and attitude towards retail in an omnichannel world. This is where social media comes in.

The MENA is home to some of the most prolific users of social media and messaging apps in the world with an average of 3.5 hours spent on social media per day. The UAE has the highest number of accounts per person globally, at an average of 10.5 accounts per user. Not only are users in the region creating and consuming content, they are increasingly using these platforms to discover and engage with brands as well. As of 2021, globally there were more than 200 million business accounts on Instagram. Messaging apps like WhatsApp, one of the most used platforms in the world with over two billion active users, has over 18 million business accounts, where users send approximately 175 million messages every day. ▶



**WITH CONNECTED COMMERCE, IT IS POSSIBLE TO REACH POTENTIAL AND EXISTING CUSTOMERS DIRECTLY** TO BUILD TRUSTED AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH CONVERSATIONS THAT OFTEN LEAD TO NEW INTERACTIONS, EFFECTIVE PERSONALIZED RECOMMENDATIONS, AND INCREASED SPEND.

Savvy brands and online retailers are taking notice of how their customers are discovering, interacting, and shopping with them; however, traditional e-commerce is proving to be challenging in meeting customers on the channels that matter most to them. Online retailers are finding it harder to get discovered (increasing digital media costs), witnessing high abandoned cart rates, and struggling with decreasing customer lifetime value.

These are just a few of the reasons why there is increasing pressure on brands to meet their bottom lines, and look for an advantage amongst their competitors. In addition, the low to almost zero barriers to entry for digitally native challenger brands and small to medium businesses have further compounded these pressures, and they are changing the rules of the game. This widening gap between where and how customers meet, interact, and shop with brands is paving the way for the next generation of commerce.

#### **SAY HELLO TO C-COMMERCE**

Connected commerce, or c-commerce, enables businesses and their customers to interact and close sales through social media and messaging apps. Research has shown that almost 87% of people feel more connected to brands that communicate through social and messaging apps. Facebook's research found that 53% of respondents said they were more likely to buy from a company and take their advice through messaging apps like WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. A message sent by a brand to

its customer is opened 98% of the time on a messaging app, versus an average 10% open rate for an email or branded newsletter.

With connected commerce, it is possible to reach potential and existing customers directly to build trusted and personal relationships through conversations that often lead to new interactions, effective personalized recommendations, and increased spend. This behavior has quickly become a worldwide trend, allowing for brands to interact with shoppers in new ways. Brands that are pioneering c-commerce have found that when compared to traditional online carts, the average c-commerce cart is 2.7 times bigger, and is 20 times more likely to convert into a sale.

**BRANDS CAN NOW USE MESSAGING APPS** to chat with their customers allowing them to discover products, make purchases, avail offers, get personalized recommendations, as well as benefit from customer support. Imagine experiencing the warmth of a knowledgeable salesperson anywhere, anytime on any device. As a result, c-commerce is poised to change the way customers shop and communicate with brands.

Steve Jobs once said "Get closer to your customers. So close, in fact, that you tell them what they need before they realize it themselves." This could not be truer in today's world of big data. C-commerce platforms (like my company, Zbooni, and the tools it offers) help brands build a comprehensive picture of their customer by tracking over three million data points. Past order

history, product preferences, customer profile, frequently asked questions, and sales data can help retailers create bespoke offers and product recommendations.

C-commerce acts as a complementary sales channel for brands seeking to engage with their customers who are increasingly wanting a more personalized digital experience. Retailers can use the power of chat over habitual digital channels like WhatsApp to share new product releases, sales and offers or brand content and reviews to turn conversations into conversions. For larger retailers with brick-and-mortar outlets, c-commerce can also prove to be a useful tool to increase sales and bridge the gap from offline to online or vice versa.

Sales representatives can provide concierge-like services over messaging apps to their loyal customer database and notify them of exclusive sales, new products, and support with customer queries. This helps brick and mortar retail maximize their sales staff's time by increasing productivity and selling more. Indeed, businesses that use Zbooni have witnessed a phenomenal 81% conversion rate due to this personalized approach in selling.

Why? Because Zbooni is human to human. E-commerce brands with sales support or retailers with sales associates leverage this aspect to have direct engagement on messaging apps, and assist customers to check out, while increasing both basket size and conversion rates. As brands seek to enhance omnichannel strategies and reconfigure brick and mortar operations largely affected by the pandemic and shifting in-store experience expectations, c-commerce offers an innovative advantage. ■



*Ramy Assaf is the co-founder and CEO of Zbooni. His vision and strategic direction for the business has catapulted it through business and product development, the acquisition of thousands of merchant businesses, its expansion across multi-territories including UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, hiring of a diverse and talented cross-jurisdictional team, and the scaling to a multimillion-dollar revenue organization.*

*His experience as part of Middle East Venture Partners in selecting appropriate companies for investor funding, has helped Zbooni become one of the best capitalized startups in the region. Its latest funding came in September 2021 with the closing of a US\$9.5 million Series A round. Prior to founding Zbooni, Ramy held a variety of business development, marketing, and venture capital roles. Before embarking on his career, he studied Business Administration and Political Science, graduating from the University of California Riverside.*

*Outside of developing and growing one of the most exciting tech platforms, Ramy spends time with his wife and children, learns about religion and the spiritual sciences, and watches documentaries as well as the NBA. zbooni.com*

# Building a Foundation for Success

How company culture can positively impact business goals **by MURTAZA HASHWANI**



**T**here was an interesting report recently published by human resources (HR) software provider Breathe that revealed that the cost of poor company culture in the UK stands at a whopping GBP20.2 billion (US\$27.1 billion) per year- a truly staggering figure.

It's strange that as workplaces across all sectors strive to become leaner, greener, and more resource-conscious, there is still an underestimation in some quarters of the terrible impact a depressing work environment can have. As the saying goes: "there're no bad companies, just bad managers." A solid cultural foundation not only fosters growth of departments, individuals, or the company in general, but it also creates a legacy of an organization's values. It helps employees know how the top management wants them to respond to situation, and what behaviors will be rewarded. ▶



IF YOUR PLACE OF BUSINESS IS WITNESSING EXCESSIVE STAFF TURNOVER AND SICK DAYS, HR COMPLAINTS, AND THERE IS NEVER-ENDING GOSSIP AND DRAMA, **THEN SOMETHING IS VERY WRONG.**

According to Aditya Jain, an associate professor in human resource management at Nottingham University Business School, a toxic work culture is “one where workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards. They may have little or no organizational support, poor interpersonal relationships, high workloads, lack of autonomy, poor rewards, and a lack of job security.”

From bullying and harassment, to more subtle issues such as race/gender discrimination and intense micro-managing, once the poison has started to spread, it is extremely hard to stop it— and an organization’s reputation can go into a death spiral. This is certainly a global problem, which, too often, managers, company leaders, and CEOs ignore.

How can companies and CEOs drive innovation, dedication, and enthusiasm from the bottom-up to not only create a growth-centric culture in the workplace, but also one that supports inclusivity, equal opportunities, and a clear value

system that is followed by one and all? This will thereby create a culture that creates positive impact for the business, as well as for its individuals.

If you’re in a leadership position, then it’s worth considering the expression: “the fish rots from the head.” If your place of business is witnessing excessive staff turnover and sick days, HR complaints, and there is never-ending gossip and drama, then something is very wrong. You must address the situation for the sake of your organization, and the wellbeing of your staff.

Being seen as having a progressive and fair work environment really isn’t an option anymore, because these days new recruits don’t just care about good salaries or job perks— they also care about a company’s culture, philosophy, and quality of training. If the vibe or reputation about a company is bad, they’ll likely walk away— no matter how good the bonuses are. Employee development doesn’t mean breaking the

bank or adding huge monetary incentives every time a team member throws their toys out of the pram. Implementing consistent training and development opportunities serves as a motivational tool, and it also benefits the company in the long-term. For example, using skills of other employees for internal training and development is also one aspect to invest in, if the company can’t offer external training resources.

It’s not hard to offer a great place to work and reap the benefits of having cheerful employees. You just need to relate on a human level, and think a little outside the box. Awareness among leadership teams, across the board, is imperative to identify the common factors that are causing a lack of motivation among team members. Define the company values, and use the culture to tell the narrative of the company vision.

Most importantly, company culture can be changed and molded over time. Use the past as an indicator of setting yours and your team’s future priorities. Consider all the changes before implementing them, and get your team’s feedback and focus on the new narrative. For example, Iceland’s trial of a four-day work week back in 2015 seemed shocking to some, but the experiment was an overwhelming success. Productivity remained the same or improved in most workplaces, while happiness levels rocketed— leading many fellow European countries to follow suit.

As such, it was fantastic to see the UAE government —as ever at the forefront of positive change— announce that public sector employees will enjoy a two-and-a-half-day weekend starting in 2022. The transition to longer weekends is intended to boost productivity and improve work-life balance, officials said, and there are further work-related policy changes expected in the months ahead. What a great example to set as we move into a new era of business. ■



*Murtaza Hashwani is the Deputy Chairman of Hashoo Group. [hashoogroup.com](http://hashoogroup.com)*

# Not Just a Passing Fad

Here's why you (and your business) need to take the metaverse seriously **by BRIAR PRESTIDGE**

---

I don't know if it's a failure to understand the technology or a very basic resistance to change, but the same skepticism surrounding the advent of the internet in the 1990s seems to have enveloped the launch of the metaverse in the world we live in today. A young David Letterman in conversation with an even younger Bill Gates trying to understand why the world needs to be digitally connected is a startling reminder of how recently the internet came into being.

And yet, in just 30 years, look how far we've come. Today, the internet is the bedrock of our daily lives. It's not only driving our gadgets and devices, but it's also navigating, creating, and mapping our digital lives through a range of social (media) platforms and apps. And here's the hard truth— not a single one of us is willing to give up our online lives and narratives. The immersion will only get deeper. So, it does beg the question: where do we go from here?

**A SIGN OF THE TIMES** The confusion (and reluctance) that's currently surrounding the metaverse is understandable. After all, it follows hard and hot on the heels of cryptocurrencies and non-fungible tokens (and we're barely getting our heads around those), with Web3 (or, MV3, as it is more colloquially called) is undeniably and irrevocably the next stage of digital evolution. As millions of people continue investing and migrating onto the metaverse, it's time to get onboard, or be forgotten. And if we are being honest with ourselves, we did see this coming.

With roughly 2.89 billion monthly active users on Facebook and a billion-plus on Instagram alone (not even counting all the other platforms and usership out there), increased digital preoccupations and immersions is the only way forward. Add to that a whole new generation of tech-savvy preteens and teenagers already playing (350 million users on Fortnite, and growing!), operating, and living a more wholesome version of their lives on the web, and you know that this train has already left the station. The way I see it, the best-case scenario is that you catch the next ride out, and try and keep up.

**LIFE MOVES ONLINE** As these tech-savvy users move from an online "renting" model to online "ownership," brands and labels are already making the transition to Web3 to offer their real-life products to digital identities. For instance, Spanish fashion house Zara has recently taken the leap with South Korean label Ader Error to launch its first collaborative project where users can purchase digital clothes and makeups for their avatars.



Similarly, Nikeland and Adidas Originals have issued statements to boldly venture into the "bleeding edge" of the "frontier of creativity" to see every one of the metaverse's inhabitants thrive. How, you ask? By helping the makers of original digital content own (and sell) their products in the digitalverse— because *now*, there is a demand for it. Backed by blockchain, the metaverse's identities, personas, and narratives are going to be as distinct in digital DNA as you are to me.

As the MV3 landscape evolves, job openings for digital fashion designers, tour guides, event directors, world builders, and even metaverse safety managers become more relatable. Similarly, haptic gloves, bodysuits, virtual reality, and augmented reality tech are slated to become the next purchase progression to our AirPods, charging pads, and wearable tech. The way I see it, there's a whole new creative economy just waiting to be unlocked on Web3.

**BLURRING THE LINE** And that, in a way, is the crux of it. Brands with physical assets and value right now realize that if they're to last for all times and ages, they need to have a Web3 presence, in addition to what they've got going on in the real world. It means not only getting on this learning curve, but through collaborations and partnerships, create a digital identity that can go forward.

While a future fitted out in digital gloves, VR/AR glasses, and sensory bodysuits sounds dystopian at worst and life-imitating-art (remember *Ready Player One*?) at best, you can no longer deny that it seems to be heading straight at us. Today, if you look back at those late 80s and early 90s videos of people talking about the internet, their naivete (or, dare I say, willful ignorance?) seems laughable. Much like we all had to jump aboard the digital marketing, branding, and brand building bandwagon a decade ago, it looks like we're all at another juncture where we need to up level our game again.

So, what are you going to do about it? That's the question I'll leave you with. ■



*Briar Prestidge is a serial entrepreneur who is currently the CEO of Prestidge Group, a personal branding, public relations, and media production agency managing high profile personal brands for high net worth individuals, C-level executives, technology experts, celebrities, and investors in Dubai, Riyadh, London, and New York. She is also the CEO of BRIAR PRESTIDGE - The Label, a corporate collection of premium power suits. [prestidgroup.com](http://prestidgroup.com)*



## AS MORE AND MORE OF US WORK REMOTELY, BIG TECH COMPANIES WARN TO STAY VIGILANT WHEN IT COMES TO CYBERSECURITY

*With hundreds of thousands of new variants of malware being created every day, our worry extends beyond the evolution of COVID-19 to the world of cybersecurity, topping boardroom agendas as we are moving into 2022*

**W**ith the enduring COVID-19 pandemic, and the latest omicron variant seemingly wreaking havoc across the globe, employers find themselves yet again at a crossroad, contemplating whether to move their workforce 100% remotely. Opinions about the benefits and effectiveness of working from home differ vastly, but whatever your views may be, what really complicates matters is that hybrid ways of working inevitably mean more endpoints, more remote connections, and more potential for mayhem.

As a result, some of the world's largest tech companies, including HP Inc., have voiced their concerns over cybersecurity provisions made— particularly those by small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). And findings show their concerns are well-founded. A Tripwire survey highlights that a whopping 94% of surveyed cybersecurity pros say they're more concerned about security now than before COVID-19, and 64% say that security visibility is more difficult with employees working remotely. In fact, security risks specifically related to remote work top their lists of concerns.

### **Beyond COVID-19: the evolution of malware variants**

Add to those already staggering numbers that every day 350,000 new versions of malware are being created, and you can see why experts would feel the way they do. In fact, the Independent IT Security Institute in Germany estimates that from September 2019 to August 2020 alone six to 18 million new malware variants have been released into the vast internet universe. What is more, the impacts of malware can be devastatingly expensive for companies of any size, with malware related downtime costs averaging US\$10,000 per hour.

But how does malware protection actually work? Traditional virus protection operates by checking code against a list of known malware, stopping anything it recognizes. But with hundreds of thousands of new malware variations being created every day—and many of them use artificial intelligence (AI) to disguise themselves through continuous mutation—detection has become increasingly complicated. If cyberattackers can take down the root of your protections, control of your PCs is wide open, potentially compromising all your data—including sensitive customer data, which could cause additional reputational damage to your company.

Where is the increase coming from? Hacking used to require some expertise. Now, with malware-as-a-service, it's as easy as shopping online. Attackers can just pay ridiculously low fees to buy, host, and distribute targeted, custom malware in online markets- no coding required. And that means it's easier than ever for your organization to become a target.

### Extortionware: the new ransomware?

If that wasn't troubling enough, there is more bad news for SMEs. As the COVID-19 variants are evolving, so are cyber threats. For example, the market has experienced a shift from ransomware attacks to extortionware attacks. While traditionally ransomware gangs would just lock up your sensitive data, holding it hostage until you paid to get it back. Now they're threatening to release it to the world. And lately, this instant destroyer of organizational trust and reputation has been going through the roof, with payments up by 60% from Q1 2021.

### Phishing has become more sophisticated

And phishing practices, which have amounted to 22% of all security breaches in 2019, are evolving too. People were getting wise to the standard, old phishing tactics. So those tactics evolved into what's known as "spear-phishing." Gone are the times of far-fetched stories and chronic misspellings that gave clues as to the true nature of a phishing email. Today's sophisticated phishing scams plagiarize language directly from hacked inboxes of friends and colleagues. Fooling a target has never been easier.

You might think simple house-keeping exercises such as regular password changes are enough, but experts believe that password protection isn't enough for business PCs as most hacking-related breaches stem from compromised credentials. From spear-phishing attacks that trick users for login information to bad hygiene practices like weak, shared, and reused passwords.



### Protecting yourself

So, what can you do? Experts at HP Inc. maintain that hardware-based security is your best defence, helping you protect, detect, and recover from attacks.

Offering unparalleled levels of security, HP's Endpoint Security Controller is the foundation of the security architecture that protects the HP ProBook 600 series. This physically isolated, cryptographically protected chip houses hardware-enforced, self-healing security features like HP Sure Start, HP Sure Run, and HP Sure Recover. The HP ProBook 600 series is protected by HP Sure Sense, which uses deep-learning neural networks to recognize and defeat never-before seen malware. If malware does slip through, HP Sure Click isolates it in a micro-VM container so that it can't escape- and then destroys it.

By using HP's ProBook 600 series, you protect your PCs -and your network- from unauthorized access with multifactor authentication. The HP ProBook 600

series allows you to configure your PC to require up to three verifications for login, including an optional fingerprint reader and IR camera for facial recognition. These policies are locked in at the hardware level. Take remote control of your PC endpoints with a platform that lets you administer security settings from anywhere. HP Sure Admin gives IT admins a secure digital signature for managing BIOS settings remotely over the network.

End visual hackers' game of "I Spy" with these built-in privacy tools:

- HP Privacy Camera, a physical shutter that protects users from surveillance
- HP Sure View, a one-touch privacy shield that makes the screen unreadable to those nearby

*Learn more about how HP ProBook 640 G8 Notebook PCs (3S8T3EA) powered by Intel® Core™ i7 processor can protect your business against endpoint attacks here: [www.hp.com/wolfsecurityforbusiness](http://www.hp.com/wolfsecurityforbusiness)*





**CHALLENGES POSED BY REMOTE WORK /**

Remote work is highly beneficial in saving time on transportation, staying close to family, and increasing productivity. However, it still poses plenty of challenges to companies as a whole. For instance:

- ▶ **The glaring disconnect** between diversely located company employees leads to a decline in team spirit and morale.
- ▶ **The absence of physical social** interaction can hinder employee productivity. Employees with a more extroverted nature tend to thrive with the presence of physical human interaction.
- ▶ **The nonchalant attitude** while working from home often generates a plethora of unfit habits, such as procrastination.

▶ **According to Findstack's** ultimate list of remote work statistics for 2022, 16% of employees working from home feel less involved by their employers in the goal-setting process.

Despite being an efficient alternative during the pandemic, remote work has been a temporary solution to a large-scale dilemma. Now, we need to usher in the era of hybrid offices.

**HYBRID OFFICES BRIDGING THE GAP**

The hybrid work model is witnessing a surge in adoption by fast-growing companies, at an estimated 63%. According to recent studies, more than 83% of employees have favored the hybrid office approach.

Countries like the UAE, which possess an abundance of workspaces, top-notch infrastructure, and high-speed Wi-Fi, are tailor-made for the hybrid work model. Hybrid offices are a big hit right now, as they offer employees the flexibility of choosing between working from their homes, offices, or even a blend of both.

Furthermore, the hybrid work model offers an array of benefits, such as:

- ▶ **Hybrid offices** strike the perfect balance between managing work-life harmony, and sustaining healthy social interactions with fellow company teammates. This combines the family-strengthening element of remote work with the morale-boosting workspace social interactions. Additionally, this ushered in the return of water-cooler time, a well-known office term for fellow employees who would socialize and discuss their weekends and sports results over their

# THE TIMES, THEY ARE A-CHANGING

**Hybrid offices** represent the prospects of a permanent shift in the workspace **by JAREER OWEIMRIN**

**F**ollowing a grueling two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the workspace as we know it has changed forever. For the better part of those two years, remote work has been the standard protocol in response to lockdowns and safety guidelines. However, the recent rise in herd immunity has led to the gradual reopening of the physical workspace. The threat is yet to be extinguished, especially with the surge caused by the latest Omicron variant of COVID-19. Consequently, there lies an air of ambiguity when deciding between working from home or an office space, and that thus paves the way for hybrid offices and the prospects of a permanent shift in the workspace.

designated water breaks. Subsequently, this boosts the team spirit and collaborative synergy within the company as a whole.

► **It also bundles employee** comfort with employer cost-effectiveness through flexibly leased hybrid offices, such as serviced offices, co-working spaces, and meeting rooms. These workspaces are a match made in heaven for both employers and employees. For instance, they offer flexible rental options ranging from short-term to long-term. Moreover, these workspaces provide employees with a variety of amenities and services, a comfortable work environment, and networking opportunities with a diverse community of people.

Indeed, hybrid offices are a force to be reckoned with as the latest surge in the model's adoption exemplifies solid proof of that. For instance, industry giants including Apple, Spotify, Twitter, LinkedIn, and plenty more have solidified their leadership prowess and astute foresight by becoming early adopters of the hybrid work model.

## HYBRID OFFICES A FUTURISTIC VISION

Hybrid offices are on the rise, and the possibilities are endless. In an ever-evolving era of technological advancements, there lies ample room for improvement to an already thriving hybrid work model. For example:

► **For effective smart offices**, companies can utilize the usage of smart office sensors. For instance, Verizon's latest articles tackle how digital technology aids in data collection that could help boost workplace effectiveness, efficiency, and safety.

► **To further enhance** hybrid offices, companies can prioritize embedding video conference technology within their new hybrid models. Hence, this could bridge the gap between a diversely located working staff and ensure efficient and effective collaborative teamwork.

► **Experts envision** a shift towards cloud computing and virtual reality (VR) as the



## DON'T PRESUME THAT THE LEADERSHIP TEAM KNOWS WHAT IT TAKES TO EXECUTE A STRATEGY. LONG TERM-COMMITMENT AND DISCIPLINE IS VITAL.

future of technological optimization in the workspace. These booming technologies could set the bar high in terms of enhanced technological advancements. Furthermore, this combination, aka cloud VR, is expected to augment product design, project reviews, and collaborative synergy.

Aside from the technological aspect, workspaces require a revamp of their set-ups- this includes:

► **Eliminating the outdated** open floor plan, and switching to a less crowded arrangement aids in amplifying employee productivity. Consequently, this provides a comforting distraction-free environment, and diminishes the risk of spreading diseases among staff.

► **Deploying a diversified** furniture layout throughout the office creates an environment that bolsters inspiration, ingenuity, and synergy among company employees. Companies should invest in an ergonomic office setup to ensure a smoother transition to hybrid offices. For example, an ergonomic chair is a mainstay among the hybrid office layouts, as it helps induce high levels of functionality, productivity, and employee well-being.



Additionally, the surge in adoption of the hybrid work model has left businesses with excess office space that put a strain on their commercial real estate costs. This paves the way for a couch surfing approach, or office surfing, where businesses would rent out their excess office spaces in a manner that ensures both cost effectiveness and environment diversity.

A permanent shift in the workspace is on the horizon, and my company, fluidmeet, has been a catalyst of change in the transition towards hybrid offices across Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and all of UAE. As a peer-to-peer marketplace, fluidmeet offers a diverse assortment of serviced offices, coworking spaces, and meeting rooms tailor-made for the elevation of your businesses. Indeed, the hybrid work model is inevitable, and business leaders who capitalize early on will benefit the most. ■



*Jareer Oweimrin is the founder and Executive Director of fluidmeet. Jareer has worked in entrepreneurial settings for most of his*

*professional career. He's enthusiastic about technology and its application on real estate and the hospitality industry. Previously, he led the new market business development for a large transnational pharmaceutical company. He has established entrepreneurial ventures in the UAE and USA.*

*Jareer has also served as a management advisor for an entrepreneurial consulting firm that had engagements with government organizations, government-related entities, and private companies. He has led multiple large-scale consulting engagements and managed large teams. When he's not running fluidmeet, he enjoys the company of his family and books. . fluidmeet.com*



**It's Worth** Transferring  
your salary

**Much More Offers**



Pay flexibly with your Al-Tayseer cards, with usage limits of up to KD 5,000 and many other benefits.



---

# Startup / Spotlight

---



← **ANGANA MAHESHWARI**, founder and CEO of Veganologie, wants to make a more positive impact on the world around her and is proud to be part of the generation that is the driving force behind ethical consumerism.

---

## Driven by Purpose

In conversation with **Angana Maheshwari**, the entrepreneur behind Dubai-based **Veganologie**, an enterprise that creates bags from recycled plastic bottles **by PAMELLA DE LEON**

---

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had several negative repercussions, it cannot be denied that the crisis did provide many of us with the much-needed time we needed for reflection, rethinking priorities, and pursuing passions. In the case of 27-year-old Angana Maheshwari, the crisis provided her with the time she needed to follow through on her entrepreneurial ambitions, ignited by her curiosity on sustainable practices in the fashion industry. In particular, she saw a lack of sustainable handbags in the market, and she decided to fill this gap by setting up her own venture. “Nothing [that was available] really resonated with me, and I was unable to find anything that was sustainable yet fashionable, well-made, and well-priced,” says Maheshwari. “It seemed to me that there was a gap in the market that I could fill, and that would appeal to others, who also wanted to make decisions that didn’t harm the planet.”

► **It is with this vision for purpose-led fashion** that Maheshwari set out to launch Veganologie, along with Sara Basar, the brand’s 28-year-old Executive Director and Designer. Prior to Veganologie, she had co-founded

nonprofit organization U2Adoption.com, (which features stories of adoptees from around the world), while Basar has previously worked at design houses in Italy, Turkey, and the UAE. Using 100% vegan, recycled

materials to craft Veganologie’s products, the duo started selling them through the brand’s direct-to-consumer website in November 2021. Veganologie has since gone on to receive certifications from the Global Recycled Stan-

dards (GRS) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), affirming its vision to becoming completely cruelty-free as well as an authentic sustainable brand.

► **Designed for fashionable conscious consumers,**

Veganologie’s first collection consisted of crossbody bags, wallets, and card holders, made using vegan and sustainable materials. The bags are fabricated from fully recycled material, be it the vegan leather, or the faux suede linings. In fact, the company points out that its crossbody bags are made from 11 plastic bottles, wallets are made from four plastic bottles, while cardholders are made from two plastic bottles. Even its dust bags are sustainable, with each made from 10 recycled plastic bottles. Plus, the brand’s entire packaging is 100% recycled, and it’s also fully recyclable. Starting a business during the pandemic was no easy feat, Maheshwari says. “Funnily, the collection wound up being even more sustainable, because it was impossible to fly to our production facilities and

## “ THE COLLECTION WOUND UP BEING EVEN MORE SUSTAINABLE,

BECAUSE IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO FLY TO OUR PRODUCTION FACILITIES AND SUPPLIERS TO HAVE ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS WITH THEM, WHICH REDUCED OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANTLY.



→ Made using vegan and sustainable materials, Veganologie's collection is designed for fashionable conscious consumers.



suppliers to have one-on-one meetings with them, which reduced our carbon footprint even more significantly," she notes. But Maheshwari counts herself lucky to having Basar on board, as the latter developed the sketches, designs, and products that the former had in mind. "Together, we faced the struggles and challenges, especially when it came to communicating with our suppliers- all done via Zoom," she says. "The main challenge was that we were unable to travel and meet them, but, even so, we managed to create fantastic, high-quality products, despite never having visited them once."

► **However, given the number of sustainable eco-friendly brands in the MENA region, how does Maheshwari ensure that the brand stands out in this domain?** To this, the young entrepreneur replies, "While there are many eco-friendly brands in the MENA region, there are not many brands

that focus on handbags and accessories," she says. "Sustainability is a complex issue. One of the most important aspects of sustainability is transparency, something which is hard to achieve for a small business/startup. At Veganologie, we made this our priority! While we never compromised on the designs and quality, we made sure that we are transparent with the materials we used, and the factories we worked with. Every aspect of our products, from packaging, all the way down to the hardware, has either been recycled or are recyclable. That's why we have achieved GRS certifications in our materials, and we are also PETA certified. Our factories are audited by the Business Social Compliance Initiative, thereby ensuring that we are following ethical production of our bags. These certifications validate our authenticity, which allows us to stand out compared to other brands."



But while navigating the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenge, launching the business in Dubai has its perks, notes Maheshwari. "As Dubai was one of the most vaccinated cities in the world, we were lucky to have movement, which helped us propel the business forward," she says. "One aspect that has been really helpful is the openness to discussing sustainability, and even showcasing the issue so positively at Expo 2020 Dubai." Going forward, though Maheshwari is grateful for the support and backing of her family in kickstarting the brand, she is now looking for new allies to join her journey and boost the brand. "I am hoping that we can start fundraising soon and get investors and partners on board for Veganologie to grow and reach where it needs to be," she concludes. ■

## ► 'TREP TALK

Q&A with Angana Maheshwari, founder and CEO, Veganologie

**What's your advice for entrepreneurs who may be hesitant to follow through on their entrepreneurial dreams, given the current circumstances of the world?**

"It's during times like these when the most successful ideas and businesses are born! We have seen businesses like Uber and Airbnb be born during the 2007-2009 financial crisis. If the opportunity to start a business presents itself, you should take the plunge. After all, one of the key characteristics of an entrepreneur is to take risks and overcome obstacles. Some of the learnings that I have picked up along the way is first and foremost, remember 'why' you began your business. I once heard, 'if your why doesn't make you cry, your brand will not survive,' and that's something I take with me to work every day. Furthermore, always believe in yourself and your idea. If you don't believe in your idea, no one else will. Finally, make every decision with confidence knowing that you will be okay regardless of the outcome. Never stop dreaming."



→ **EIN MORGAN**, England and Delhi Bulls cricketer, **AMIT SINGH**, co-founder, **BOOMER11**, and **DWAYNE BRAVO**, West Indies and Delhi Bulls Cricketer

# Playing to Win

Dubai-based startup **Boomer11** offers a gamified fan experience for sports fans in the Middle East **by AALIA MEHREEN AHMED**

For 21-year-old Dubai-based Amit Singh, who describes himself as an “avid gamer, sports enthusiast, technophile, and fitness fanatic,” the realization that there was a lack of apps that catered specifically to sports enthusiasts in the Middle East came as a bit of a surprise. “It was a revelation to me that in a country like the UAE, which has a cricket-loving expat population of over 55% hailing from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, local cricket fantasy apps were practically non-existent,” Singh says. “Add to that the fact that there are more than 88.6 million football enthusiasts in the region, making it by far the most popular sport in the UAE, across all nationalities.”

It was this observation that led to the creation of fan engagement app Boomer11 in March 2021. This journey began with Singh and two of his close friends, Parth Vinod and Umang Asher, who are also in the 20-something age group, starting market research in order to test their business idea. One of the findings was an obvious interest for sports like football, cricket, and basketball in the Middle East, particularly during major sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Indian Premier League (IPL). But there was also a keen interest among the region’s diverse communities in locally played tournaments such as the Abu Dhabi T10 League, which has seen the participation of internationally

renowned cricket players, such as England limited-overs captain Eoin Morgan and West Indies all-rounder Dwayne Bravo.

The three co-founders then decided to bring together a small team of sports and technology enthusiasts from the UAE and India to help with creating app content and technology-related operations. "Unlike many international sports apps which either focus on sports news or sports betting or only one sport, we wanted to provide a highly interactive and gamified experience for multiple sports, all in one app, catered to fans in the Middle East," explains Singh. The result has been a mobile-first freemium app, which offers features such as daily fantasy sports, quizzes, and an engagement wall that offers exclusive content such as match highlights, as well as live match updates and

**“** **DAILY FANTASY SPORTS ARE, AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE, A SOCIAL GAME.**

scorecards. The app, which currently focuses only on the sports of football and cricket, is already available on Google Play Store, with the startup gearing up to launch the iOS version very soon.

Notably, the app is available in Arabic as well, to cater across the cross-section of nationalities in the Middle East. And like many other fantasy sports games, the daily fantasy facet of Boomer11 allows users to create fantasy teams during major tournaments, such as the IPL and the many football league games that take place during a given season. But here's where Singh has an interesting take, from a purely business perspective- he plans on keeping this feature of the app free. "Daily fantasy sports are, and will continue to be, a social game," he says. "We understand that even in markets like India where there are 130 million users playing daily fantasy sports, around 80% of the users play fantasy sports apps without using money. So, we plan to keep the core feature of the app free to play and would like to concentrate on other models for generating revenue."

And Singh already has quite a few ideas up his sleeve to achieve that goal. "We plan to create content and game formats that resonate with the audiences in the GCC, which will give us a lot of organic users as well as barter deals with large brands and sport franchises that can enhance our reach within the region," he says. Currently bootstrapped with initial funds raised from friends and family, Singh says his team is now fully focused on strengthening its operations and increasing user reach across the region. He also mentions that foraying into providing features related to basketball matches as well as esports is the next obvious plan of action. "Playing video games is a rewarding career option nowadays, and we would love it if we could enable people's esports careers through Boomer11," says Singh.

The app has already gained 15,000 users since its launch, with an average user spending close to 30 minutes a day on the platform- and all this has been achieved with no major

marketing activity so far. "While 80% of our users are from the UAE, we intend to take the new app to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Egypt, Oman, and Kuwait," Singh adds. This goal could potentially be fulfilled through Boomer11's biggest partnership yet- a collaboration with the Abu Dhabi T10 League's Delhi Bulls team.

"So far, we did not need to spend money on marketing, but to grow at a rapid pace we recently collaborated with the Delhi Bulls Abu Dhabi T10 team to shoot a 'Boomer11 - pick play and win daily' ad campaign so that we can get the word out to the sports fan in the region," he adds. "We hope more people download the app now, and support us in our journey!" **E**

## 'TREP TALK

AMIT SINGH / CO-FOUNDER, BOOMER11

**What is your plan to incentivize more people to not just download, but also use, the Boomer11 app regularly?**

"Boomer11 is designed to provide an immersive and engaging experience along with instant gratification to its users who want to follow their favorite sport. The winning combination of Boomer 11 is that we have variety, versatility, and innovation. Our goal is to offer original products going beyond standard market formats and this is what makes us stand apart. Our daily fantasy sports feature lets users create a fantasy team based on real-life matches, like the IPL and football leagues, to score maximum points and win exciting prizes or Boomer coins. Boomer coins can be redeemed for prizes or branded merchandise on the App. We gave out prizes such as gold coins, TVs, and e-commerce vouchers during the recently concluded IPL and T20 world cup. Even without any prizes, we have seen users spend more than 30 minutes on the platform to follow the game. We also have a referral program that allows users to win Boomer coins for inviting their friends.

**How does the company maintain privacy and confidentiality of the users?**

"We have implemented policies and procedures which are in line with leading global practices related to security and privacy. We take the security and confidentiality of our users very seriously, and ensure data is securely processed, accessed, and stored within and outside the organization."

**What is your vision for 2022, and how are you planning to align it with that of the UAE government?**

"We want to be the platform of choice for the sports fan in the region, build interesting content for users, and make sure they enjoy the engagement the app offers. We want to be the primary app for users to follow their favourite sport! And with many popular sporting events expected in 2022, our first milestone would be to reach 500,000 users in the coming year. The way we are growing right now, and the amount of time spent by users and the frequency of usage we are seeing, the opportunity is massive. With encouraging support from the UAE government for startups, we aspire to be one of the 20 unicorns UAE aims to have by 2031!"

# IN FOCUS

A roundup of the up-and-coming startups in the **Mohammed Bin Rashid Innovation Fund (MBRIF)** accelerator program that you *should* be keeping an eye on **by AALIA MEHREEN AHMED**

## Dal Global [dal-connect.com/](https://dal-connect.com/)

**G**iven the number of companies around the world that are looking to align their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this has led them to seek out collaborations with credible social enterprises that can help them achieve such targets. Serving as a bridge in this aspect is Dal Global, a Dubai-based digital platform that connects corporations with non-profit organizations (NGOs). “The Dal platform aims at enabling corporations to embark into a journey towards investing in their SDG endeavors,” explains Hasnaa Kebouri, founder and Managing Director of the startup. “The platform features targeted impact investment opportunities from NGOs to corporations, along with value-added impact services such as monitoring and evaluation (M&E), measurement, reporting, and others.”



↑ **HASNAA KEBOURI** is a management consultant and life coach with more than 23 years of experience in multinationals and public administration. She is a strategy, business planning and project management expert and was part of the founding team that started Dubai Internet and Media City.

IMAGES COURTESY DAL GLOBAL

► **Initially launched in the United Kingdom** in 2020, Dal Global shifted its headquarters to the UAE in 2021. As a startup that is largely focused on social impact, its core line of work involves registering and connecting NGOs to corporations, while also helping the latter manage their contributions seamlessly. As such, Dal Global's primary source of revenue comes from the subscription fees it charges both parties, as well as commission fees, which vary based on the nature of the projects. For Kebouri, creating Dal Global has been the result of her own convictions about philanthropy and impact. "Digitizing philanthropy and providing impactful and sustainable help has been one of my personal key objectives in life," she says. Having closed the startup's first two impact projects in Morocco and the Republic of The Gambia, Kebouri believes that the platform can prove to be advantageous to not just the corporations it supports, but the NGOs involved as well. "For one, most NGOs do not have organized and sustainable funding channels and struggle to fund impact projects, but we open doors for accessing such funds through our portal," explains Kebouri. "We can also help them in negating the challenges involved in finding the right partners to implement initiatives and campaigns, as well as gain exposure through global marketing."

► **From a corporation's perspective,** Kebouri believes that it is the quick access to impact investment opportunities as well as alignment with CSR strategies that makes Dal Global's offerings enticing. "It can be challenging to choose the most compelling impact investments to align with the most relevant SDGs, especially when organized and reliable information is extremely challenging to find," she explains. "On the other hand, most inhouse-built CSR actions fail either due to lack of CSR projects expertise, misalignment of company CSR



MOST NGOS DO NOT HAVE ORGANIZED AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING CHANNELS AND STRUGGLE TO FUND IMPACT PROJECTS, BUT **WE OPEN DOORS FOR ACCESSING SUCH FUNDS THROUGH OUR PORTAL.**

stakeholders, or a lack of appreciation of social actions." By enabling connections with reliable NGOs, Dal Global is thus hoping to put an end to this inefficient way of creating meaningful networks. Through this, not only does the startup ensure that a corporation's CSR agendas and activities are organized, it also aims to be a source for reliable data regarding the social impact investment sector. "It is difficult to trace the quality of a given project's implementation and its impact, making accountability a difficult task for sustainable impact, which is why we also offer accountability services from the NGOs," Kebouri adds.

Today, with a team of two employees, three board members, as well as four coordinators allocated to ongoing projects, Dal Global is focused on laying all the important groundwork for the months to come. "The first six months will be focused on establishing the essential network, processes, and approvals necessary for operations," explains Kebouri. "The size of the company is expected to grow with the number of projects facilitated, and the geographical areas covered." Through the startup's journey in the UAE so far, Kebouri admits that issues such as a lack of awareness regarding legal set-up, and the high costs of marketing and technological solutions have been a pain point. But thanks to the startup's participation in the MBRIF accelerator program, a lot of those troubles were eased quite quickly, says the founder. "MBRIF helped tremendously in refining my value proposition and meeting with key stakeholders," Kebouri adds. "It has truly accelerated our operations and helped me decide to settle in the Middle East."



► **DAL GLOBAL PROVIDES A DIGITAL PLATFORM** that registers and connects NGOs and corporations to donate and receive contributions. Dal platform aims at enabling corporations to embark into a journey towards investing in their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) endeavors.

Now, as Kebouri and her team gear up to start their operations in the UAE in full swing, she remains mindful of why she does this in the first place. "Our clients are real people in corporations who care about solving humanity's poverty issues and act as responsible and dedicated organizations to the good of society," she remarks. "The Dal Global platform is digital for sure, but our projects are tangible and genuine, and impact real people's futures. It is here for connecting the good!"



**1.7 BILLION PEOPLE** in the world lack access to clean toilets, as per the 2021 Joint Monitoring Program Report developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The same study goes on to note that a total of 3.6 billion people do not have safely managed sanitation facilities. While these statistics are both jarring and concerning, they also put into perspective the privileged lives most of us live.



↑ **IMAD AGI**, founder and CEO, ECOLOO

It's this reality that was brought to Imad Agi's attention by watching a television documentary that inspired him to launch ECOLOO, a sustainable toilet solution. Launched in Sweden in 2008, ECOLOO was created on the principles of simplicity, scalability, environmental responsibility, and economic viability. "ECOLOO is a fully enclosed sanitation system that requires no energy and no water for flushing, which prevents sewage generation and water contamination, as well as pollution and environmental contamination," explains Agi. "But ECOLOO is not just about sustainable toilets. It is a technology that can save money, water, energy and create a healthier and greener environment."

► **Agi's claims here allude to ECOLOO** going beyond simply solving the issue of accessing clean toilets, but also addressing a wide array of environmental and societal problems. For starters, ECOLOO has come up with a special formulated bacterial culture that can easily get rid of solid human waste, while also transforming it into an organic liquid fertilizer that can be used for farming. And this is the facet of the ECOLOO solution that can cause positive ripple effects on a socio-economic scale, believes Agi. "The poor can benefit from free organic fertilizer from ECOLOO and improve their lives,"

66

BY ADOPTING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS IN CITIES AND COMMUNITIES, **WE CAN TURN ANY COMPLEX OR BUILDING INTO AN ECO-FRIENDLY AND SEWAGE-FREE AREA**, LEADING TO SUSTAINABLE LIVING.

he says. "No more expensive chemical fertilizer will be needed. No need for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) either. Organic agriculture also brings higher value to the farmers and supports them financially."

Of course, the fact that ECOLOO uses no water in its solution is also a key showcase of its eco-friendly approach. "We have to protect our water resources, by preventing water from being flushed or mixed with waste," he says. "The flush toilet system is the worst invention of all time, according to UNICEF's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) experts, when it comes to creating diseases that kill people. Also, by treating our waste on site, instead of dumping the untreated sewage and toxics into oceans and rivers, we ensure the lives below the water are not contaminated!" While a large part of ECOLOO's focus is on underprivileged societies, Agi remains upbeat about the prospect of it proving to be successful in urban areas too. "By adopting sustainable solutions in cities and communities, we can turn any complex or building into an eco-friendly and sewage-free area, leading to sustainable living," he notes.

From a purely business standpoint, ECOLOO's business model is fairly simple to comprehend. "Operating as a social impact business, ECOLOO Group sells, rents, and maintains its innovative ECOLOO toilet solution," explains Agi. "Our business model is developed to integrate underserved populations into the supply chain by creating business and job opportunities for the local community from production to distribution, installation, training, maintenance, collection and reuse of fertilizer from the toilet, which may lead to organic farming." At this point, Agi doesn't shy away from also pointing out that the end goals of his startup also cater to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the core line of its work adhering to the objective centered on "clean water and sanitation." As an example, he points out how ECOLOO can provide a solution to the problem of cultural stigmas and socio-economic issues in certain countries that prevent women from gaining access to, and being educated on, sanitation facilities. "ECOLOO offers hygienic toilets that lead to healthier people, especially for women and children, by eliminating risks such as safety and security too," Agi says.

► **It is this people-oriented vision** that perhaps also influences how the ECOLOO team gauges the scale of its achievements. “The huge impact on the whole supply chain is our way to measure our success,” says Agi. “For example, we measure it through the number of units we install, the number of people using our toilets, the amount of water and energy we save, the decrement of infant, child, and maternal mortality, the number of farmers using our organic fertilizer, the business and job opportunities created through our social business model, and the decrement of pollution and carbon footprint.” As of today, ECOLOO’s toilet solution has already been sold in more than 20 countries, and its work has also been acknowledged by media outlets and global social enterprises alike, including the United Nations Foundation, CNN, Swedish Energy Agency, as well as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. With the startup now gearing up to introduce its solution to the UAE, it has received help in navigating the local business landscape through its participation in the MBRIF accelerator program. “We joined the MBRIF program because we wanted to establish ourselves in the region and specifically in the UAE, and being a part of the accelerator program was the best thing that happened to our startup, because we received the support we needed to restructure our business, and to be on the right track again,” says Agi. “It was all thanks to the mentors and organizers that provided us with one-on-one meetings to discuss the issues we faced and the knowledge we lacked, and made us an investment-ready company. We are very grateful and humbled by all the support and efforts that were put into the program to help us achieve our milestone.”

↓ **ECOLOO’S AWARD-WINNING SOLUTIONS** are based on the principles of simplicity, scalability, environmental responsibility and economic viability.



## **Opteam** /opteam.ca/

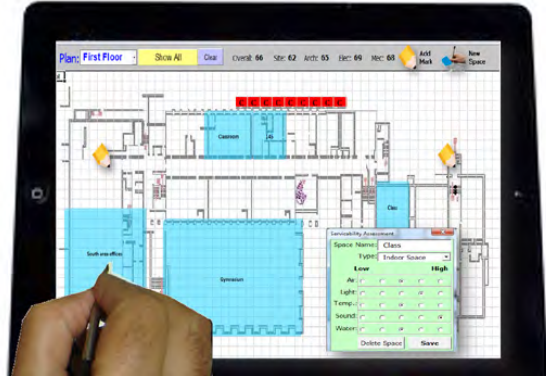


◀ **DR. TAREK HEGAZY**, co-founder and Chief Information Officer (CIO) of Opteam, participated in a wide spectrum of new rehabilitation projects and is internationally renowned for his research on Computational Construction Management and Asset Management.

“Half of every dollar spent on infrastructure maintenance often goes to waste.” That is the claim made by Tarek Hagezy, co-founder and Chief Information Officer (CIO) of Opteam, a Canada-based company that offers consultation, training, and software development for project management and infrastructure asset management. Hagezy first made this observation many years ago, when he started teaching and research work at the University of Waterloo. “There is a critical problem in the construction business that is happening on a global scale: companies and cities just do not have enough budgets to cater to all the repair needs of their infrastructure and assets,” Hagezy explains. “So, collectively around the world, our infrastructure keeps worsening. To address this issue, my research team has spent the last 25 years specializing in artificial intelligence (AI) for asset and project management. I believe that AI could be the key to both improving the overall condition of infrastructure while actually reducing repair cost.”

↓ **VISUAL INSPECTION** plays a crucial role in knowing the present condition of assets to facilitate investment decisions related to capital renewal and replacement.

This vision came to fruition in 2020, when Hagezy co-founded Opteam along with his son Ahmed Hagezy, who is also the CEO of the firm. “We build software that helps companies and cities make their buildings healthy, sustainable and last longer at lower costs,” explains Hagezy. “The solution is a subscription-based cloud software, and Opteam offers specialized services and customization based on the needs of the customer.” Currently in its pre-revenue stage, Opteam has already secured pre-seed funding, and pilot versions of its services have also been launched in both Canada and the UAE. “The pilots found strong results, seeing an average of 20-30% improvement over traditional methods,” adds Hagezy.



“

THE HUMAN BRAIN IS LACKING IN THE COMPUTATIONAL ABILITY THAT IS NEEDED TO SOLVE MULTI-VARIABLE PROBLEMS FOR TENS OF THOUSANDS OF ASSETS SIMULTANEOUSLY. THEREIN LIES THE VALUE OF OUR INNOVATION, COMBINING AI WITH HUMAN INTUITION, TO MAXIMIZE DEVELOPING THE ASSET STRATEGY.

While there are already quite a few digital inspection solutions available in the global market, Hagezy believes that it is Opteam’s ability to not only customize services, but also handle the decision-making following a given inspection, that gives it a competitive edge. “Today, existing software companies are focusing only on using analytics to help the user visualize the data and make decisions,” he explains. “But imagine having to manage tens of thousands of different assets -the new, old, and very old- and then having to decide how much of the limited yearly budget needs to be spent on repairs or upgrades, and when in the next 5-10 years you should execute each action.”

According to Hagezy, it is this manual decision-making that creates a lot of organizational inefficiencies, which eventually leads to poor asset performances, as well as increasing repair costs. And it is this underlying issue that Opteam aims to fully get rid of by adopting AI technology- a feature that Hagezy insists offers his startup a first-mover advantage. “We believe we are the first to use AI as the primary decision- layer to manage assets,” says Hagezy. “The AI engine we use is taught to evaluate decisions for each asset in a way that is specific to the customer’s business goals. The outcome is a fully optimized plan, maximizing the outcome of every dollar in the budget. Our methodologies are patented, published and have also won global awards.”

But while Opteam’s offerings are mainly AI-driven, Hagezy believes his startup cannot function efficiently without giving equal importance to the human element of its operations too. “As we are developing AI, the technology is not yet able to match our ability to fully interact with the real world’s

complexity and changing variables,” he notes. “At the same time, the human brain is lacking in the computational ability that is needed to solve multi-variable problems for tens of thousands of assets simultaneously. Therein lies the value of our innovation, combining AI with human intuition, to maximize developing the asset strategy.”

And the UAE is the right place to test out the feasibility of Opteam’s offerings, Hagezy says. “In determining where we should be based, the UAE quickly became the top choice due to its forward-thinking leadership, visionary goals, and the high amount of investments towards the startup ecosystem,” he says. “We also felt the UAE would be a strong place to grow due to the aggressive infrastructure expansion and sustainability emphasis in the country.” However, setting up shop in a new location has come with its fair share of obstacles. “So far, our biggest challenge has been to actually get in front of the right people at the companies [we are targeting], as we are reaching out to and building relationships from scratch,” says Hagezy.

Opteam’s participation in the MBRIF accelerator program provided some relief on that front. “The MBRIF has been fantastic in its ability to provide a platform to interact with the local network,” says Hagezy. “This has been extremely valuable in developing our go-to-market strategy as well as shaping the solution to fit the Middle East’s landscape. The MBRIF also provides many personalized sessions and resources that help guide first-time founders with knowledge and guidance to navigate a startup company’s journey towards growth.” ■

# On the Move

## Digital billboards startup Override

paves the way for delivering hyper-targeted advertisements on the roads of Saudi Arabia (and beyond) **by PAMELLA DE LEON**

**W**hile out-of-home (OOH) advertisements are a common sight on billboards and public transportation, it appears that there's also an opportunity to monetize portable digital ads displayed on the top of cars itself, where the content can be viewed by drivers, passengers, and pedestrians alike. Taking the plunge into tapping this opportunity is Override, a KSA-based digital billboards startup that is offering an even more valuable

feature: data and hyper-targeted geofenced advertisements. Using online targeting techniques, the company's algorithm can tailor a brand's message for the people that will most likely respond to it, whether they're on the road or stuck in traffic. For example, if a vehicle enters a business district, an airline's ad would promote business class tickets, but as soon as the screen moves to an area with a heavy student population, the airline's ad would switch to showcase economy class tickets with student-specific discounts. ▶

### ↓ OVERRIDE CO-FOUNDERS

Oliver Schmid and Ibrahim Ibrahim



IMAGES COURTESY OVERRIDE

**FOUNDED IN 2020, LEADING OVERRIDE ARE IBRAHIM IBRAHIM AND OLIVER SCHMID**, whose backgrounds are in technology and digital media, and they also have entrepreneurial experiences to boot. The concept for Override started from the duo's fascination with the shared economy, and how anyone can generate passive income from goods they own that others would want to utilize. While driving in the US, Schmid came across an ad on navigation app Waze, directing him towards the nearest exit with a McDonald's that's running a breakfast promotion. He thought it

was clever to utilize geofenced advertising -which involves using GPS technology to create a virtual geographic boundary software to enable a response when a mobile device enters or leaves a particular area- for people on the go. "It was a time when Schmid and I were becoming increasingly more aware of how advertisements had paved their way into many dimensions of people's lives," Ibrahim recalls. "But the advertising business model remained focused entirely on corporations managing the media and reaping its benefits."

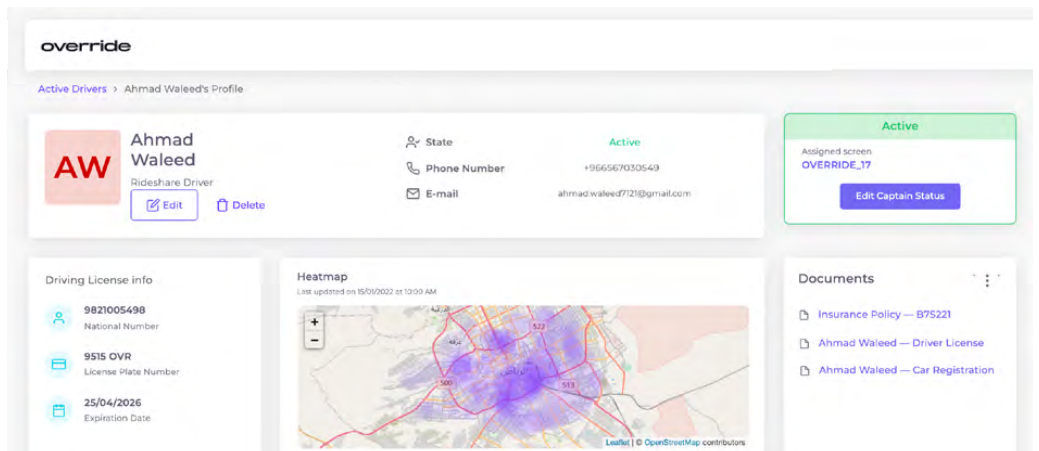
**“ MOST OTHER PLAYERS IN OOH EMPLOY THIS METHODOLOGY TO PRICE THEIR MEDIA, BUT PEOPLE DO NOT BEHAVE THAT WAY... WE'RE ALSO WORKING WITH A PIONEERING TRANSIT MEDIA MEASUREMENT PROVIDER TO GIVE BRANDS RICH INSIGHT ON THE IMPRESSIONS THEIR ADS GARNERED THROUGHOUT THEIR CAMPAIGNS.**

**DECIDING TO LAUNCH THE VENTURE TOGETHER**, the duo conducted further research and talked with advertising heads Eldredat leading brands in Europe, Middle East and North Africa (EMENA). They noticed that advertisers were in dire need for relevant OOH advertising, as traditional OOH lacks hyper audience targeting and measurable results. And that's how they settled on what would become Override's current USP. "We combine location-intelligence with audience data to understand the mobility behaviors of people," Schmid explains. "We know, for instance, that people who frequent a particular area are more interested in luxury goods or expensive retail than others." Unlike its regional competitors that base their campaign reports on historical traffic data, Override's advertisers will be equipped with a single-point platform to plan, publish, optimize, and track their campaigns' performance in real-time. "Brands will no longer have to settle for outdated analytics based on predictions of traffic patterns, but rather, receive measurement studies that evolve with the world around us," Ibrahim points out. "Most other players in OOH employ this methodology to price their

media, but people do not behave that way... We're also working with a pioneering transit media measurement provider to give brands rich insight on the impressions their ads garnered throughout their campaigns."

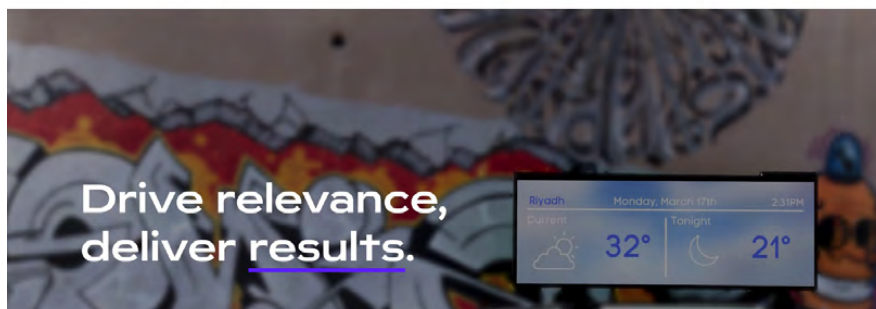
Besides filling a gap for advertisers in OOH, Override's co-founders are also keen on providing another source of income for ride-sharing drivers on roads today. The co-founders' research had come to the following conclusion: ride-share drivers spent an average of more than eight hours on the road every day, yet they were always in need of more income, and digital ads could be a passive source of the additional revenue they need. Along with enabling advertisers to reduce costs, Override aims to help increase the monthly income of rideshare drivers with a passive revenue stream. At the moment, the compensation is on a flat-rate monthly fee, but Ibrahim states that they are working on implementing a more sophisticated model that accounts for total miles driven and time-of-day, as well as surges that will incentivize drivers to increase their pay. Moreover, it's worth noting that Override's screens are also outfitted with humidity, noise, and

**→ OVERRIDE DELIVERS RELEVANT MESSAGES WITH IMPACT.** By knowing where your audience spends time, it can show your ads only to those who will most likely respond & interact with them— increasing the overall return on ad budget spent for your campaign.



override

Advertisers Drivers Journey [Contact us](#)



## TREP TALK

TIPS FOR ENTREPRENEURS FROM THE CO-FOUNDERS OF OVERRIDE

### / IBRAHIM IBRAHIM /

► **Seek discomfort** “I experienced immense growth when I sought discomfort by pursuing crazy ideas, and witnessing what existed on the other side of fear. Create a company culture that avoids making fear-based decisions, and hold one another accountable for it.”

► **Don't waste time** “Time is the most valuable thing, it's the only non-renewable resource.” Brene Brown said this first, and I couldn't agree more. The success of anything you build rests on what you do with your time. Be your time's best guardian, the rest will follow.”

### / OLIVER SCHMID /

► **Develop your network** “Building a network is a daily pursuit: we're social beings by design, so it makes a lot of sense for progress to be facilitated through a network. But this isn't a thing that has a beginning and an end, it's a daily act. You should take a step everyday towards building your network.”

► **Experiment and learn** “Find the balance between discipline and surrender. It's easier said than done, but that's the key to unlocking great creative potential. I've found that our best ideas came about when we were able to arrive at a balance between strategic planning and playful experimentation.”

pollution sensors, allowing the team to gather valuable insights, which they plan to offer to government entities for better smart city planning. “We hope for Override to leave a footprint in the world of urban living, and one of the most tangible ways we feel we can do this is by helping governments learn more about their cities,” says Ibrahim.

Having KSA as its launch market was a result of the team's extensive geographical feasibility study, says Schmid. Looking at over 20 cities, the team weighed metrics based on their vitality to Override's success, and Riyadh ended up becoming their pick. A prime reason is Override's alignment with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, as well as The Line, a proposed smart city in Saudi Arabia. Schmid states, “Override's position as a pioneer in the transit advertising space leads the way in these programs as it aims to increase the monthly income of 500 Saudi male and female drivers within the first year, provide municipalities with intelligent data to build smarter cities, and overall, grow the Saudi market by giving brands more real estate to develop personable connections with their consumers.” Though they faced hurdles initially with respect to the legality of advertising on vehicles, Schmid states that Override is now ready to take over Saudi's streets.

From software engineers to product managers and UI/UX designers, Override is currently running with a team of seven members as a bootstrapped startup. “The technology that Override employs is intricate and multi-layered- our business model relies on more complexity than just placing a digital display on top of a vehicle,” Schmid notes. Taking into various factors such as the durability and aerodynamics of the displays, ability to

geofence properly, and data fetching and analysis, the team extensively tested its technology to identify potential hurdles. In doing so, they hit quite a few milestones, according to Schmid- including iterating display designs, targeting ads down to the street level, and streamlining the installation process, to name a few. They also managed to establish relationships with several leading media buying units across MENA and joined the World Out of Home Organization as its first Saudi member, alongside leading global players in OOH.

As for what's next, Schmid reveals that the company is currently raising for its first round of financing from institutional investors, and perhaps more importantly, it is also working towards creating a regulatory shift in the Kingdom. “This means upgrading the existing laws to incorporate our medium of advertising and eventually launching on rideshares and taxis in Riyadh,” he says. The team plans to grow operations in Riyadh and start expanding to other markets in KSA, followed by other EMENA countries such as Egypt and the United Kingdom. And the end goal? Override wants to work with governmental bodies to fully pursue its vision of making transportation free. The duo accepts that this is a huge ambition, but Schmid says, “Our vision was created in line with our mission: to make transit media an engine for human betterment. We stand by our belief that advertising can help make transportation more affordable, and one day, free.” He continues, “This is evident from the power of advertising today- if you think about it, advertising is the reason many of the things we use every day are free. TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Google are all examples of how advertising can benefit

our lives. We believe through transit advertising; we can lift off the fare for people's trips. Imagine this: you order a taxi, just to pleasantly discover that it's US\$3 cheaper than you expected. All of a sudden, the world becomes smaller, allowing people to reach and access newfronts- literally and figuratively. In an age of more connectivity, the potential for evolution and novelty through accessible mobility are endless.” ■

# “WE GOT FUNDED!”

The stories behind the recent fundraising successes of Saudi Arabia-based Lucidya and UAE-based Fit On Click **by PAMELLA DE LEON**

→ **LUCIDYA** founder and CEO **ABDULLAH ASIRI**, Rua Growth Fund Managing Partner **TURKI ALJOAIB**, iMena Group founder and Managing Director **KHALDOON TABAZA** and Lucidya CTO **ZUHAIR KHAYYAT**



**LUCIDYA**  
lucidya.com

**Saudi Arabia-based tech startup Lucidya has raised US\$6 million** in its latest funding round led by Saudi venture capital firm Rua Growth Fund, with participation from KSA-based investors MAL Ventures and AlRashed Group, and other international VC firms. Existing investors also participated in the round, which included early-stage investment firm VentureSouq.

Founded in 2016 by Abdullah Asiri, Lucidya is a social media analytics and monitoring tool geared towards Arabic brands, powered by artificial intelligence and natural language processing technologies. The platform offers in-depth monitoring across

websites, blogs, and forums, as well as evaluates interactions in English and all Arabic dialects, and generates insights for brands by analyzing customer data across all social media platforms. As a B2B software-as-a-service platform, Lucidya's solution aims to help brands in making data-driven decisions.

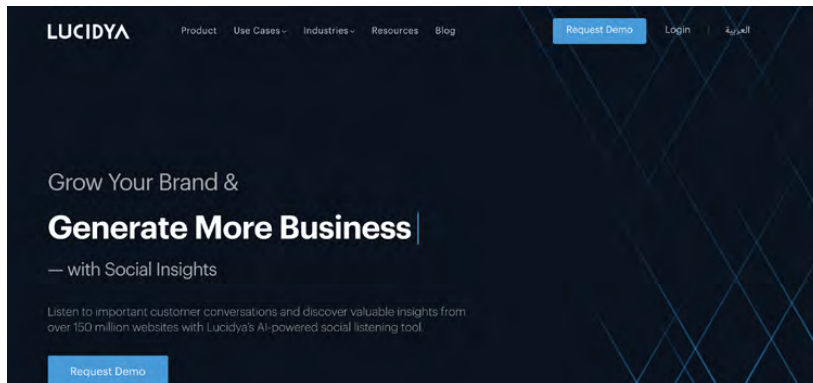
According to research by Martech Alliance, the global market for marketing technology solutions is worth around \$344.8 billion last year, which serves as an indication of the growth seen in the industry. It's an opportunity that Lucidya is leveraging by its distinct focus on analyzing customer interactions in Arabic.

Serving more than 100 enterprise customers in the UAE, Kuwait, US, UK, Iraq, Bahrain, and Jordan, the startup's reported annual recurring revenue (ARR) has grown five times annually. The latest influx of funds is part of the startup's long-term goals, notes Asiri, founder and CEO at Lucidya. "This investment is part of our company's master plan which was set a few years ago with the goal of reaching \$100 million ARR in 2025," he explains. "Our master plan has a couple of pit stops for refueling to continue our exponential growth. This round was the second pit stop for us, which came after we reached the perfect product-market fit milestone."

IMAGES COURTESY LUCIDYA

“

**WE AT RUA GROWTH FUND BELIEVE** THAT BOTH, THE SAUDI MARKET AND THE MENA REGION, HAVE BEEN UNDERSERVED WITH TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS AND SERVICES TAILORED TO THE LOCAL MARKET.



Following the new capital, Asiri explains that the funding will be used to primarily expand the company's product offering to provide a wide range of features to its customers. The startup also aims to provide its products to businesses in other Arab countries who face the same challenges that customers in Saudi Arabia face, which is the ability to analyze Arabic content in online channels. Rua Growth Fund (RGF) joined as the lead investor owing to a number of factors, which included the firm's domain knowledge and investment philosophy, as well as the alignment of its values and vision with the Lucidya team. Asiri points out, "Unlike many other VCs in the region, the RGF team goes all-in when they invest in a company in terms of support and providing value add. They focus more on quality of investment than quantity in order to help the startups as much as possible."

Commenting on his firm's decision to invest in Lucidya, Turki Aljoaib, Managing Partner at Rua Growth Fund, says, "We at Rua Growth Fund believe that both, the Saudi market and the MENA region, have been underserved with technology solutions and services tailored to the local market. This has left significant

gaps and opportunities for digitization that can only be successfully filled by local players who understand the needs of the market, and know how to deliver value to their customers." According to Aljoaib, Lucidya's solution is an example of this. "Having developed their technology in-house by and for Arabic speakers, they serve the needs of the global market while also demonstrating the Kingdom's potential of innovative tech entrepreneurs, which promises to be a key part of accelerating the Kingdom's growing leadership in MENA's tech revolution," he explains.

#### So, what's the road ahead for

**Lucidya?** "Honestly, we are enjoying the journey at Lucidya and we hope it lasts forever," says Asiri. The mission to revolutionize customer experience in the MENA region hasn't changed, he says. "One main goal is that every B2C business in the MENA region (regardless of the industry or size) uses at least one product of our customer experience suite to help them satisfy and retain their customers. Businesses who are using Lucidya today are enjoying an improvement of 200% in customer satisfaction- we want to enable more businesses to reap similar benefits."

## TREP TALK

### Q&A with Abdullah Asiri, Founder and CEO, Lucidya

#### What, according to you, is the message that Lucidya's newest investment sends to the MENA startup ecosystem at large?

"The Saudi market and the MENA region have been underserved with enterprise-grade technology solutions and services tailored to the local market. The reliance on international technologies is not only risky, but it also doesn't solve all customers' problems due to the lack of localization. Thus, I strongly believe this investment will have a great impact on the MENA tech ecosystem because it puts the spotlight on a successful example of Saudi startups solving enterprise-level problems using state-of-the-art technology which was developed in-house by and for Arabic speakers. I am confident that we will start to see many more solutions in this domain in the next few years."

#### What's your advice for entrepreneurs seeking investments for their enterprises?

► **Concentrate on your business first** "Focus on creating a great business, not seeking investments. Accomplishing the former will make the latter much easier (and you might not need it anyways)."

► **Choose your partners wisely** "Be selective on who you allow in your company as investors. Do proper reverse due diligence by asking portfolio company's founders."

► **It's not only about the numbers** "Don't fall into the trap of seeking higher valuations at the expense of other terms (economical or control related)."

► **Start early- the earlier, the better** "Start fundraising early. Plan for 6-12 months to close the round, and remember that seeking funds when you don't need it is much better than seeking it when you are on the edge."

► **Be clear on the legalities** "Invest in a good lawyer to represent you in the round- someone who has experience in carrying out similar deals."

→ **BEN AND NEHA SAMUEL,**  
co-founders, Fit On Click



# FIT ON CLICK

fitonclick.com

**Fit On Click, a UAE-based online marketplace** that aggregates fitness and wellness providers, has raised US\$1.5 million in a pre-Series A funding round led by Dubai-based investment advisory firm Arrow Capital. Led by husband-and-wife duo Ben and Neha Samuel, Fit On Click helps corporate employees and residents in the UAE maintain an active lifestyle by incorporating sports and physical activity in their day-to-day lives.

Founded in 2015, the startup launched with an offline B2B vertical that aimed to help corporates in boosting employee engagement. “We witnessed interest very early on from various corporates in the country who wanted to encourage employee wellness -both physically and mentally- and would utilize Fit On Click employee engagement programs in order to do so,” says Ben, co-founder and CEO, adding

that the company has worked with over 200 corporates to date. A few years into the business, the startup introduced its B2C online vertical in 2020. This materialized in the form of an app called Fitze, which allows users to swap their steps for various rewards. Though it debuted during the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the duo claims the app has still managed to fare well. “The COVID-19 lockdown was a blessing in disguise for us,” Ben says. “We used our existing

sustain themselves through product launches and user growth, the latter of which rose at an annual rate of 15%, according to Ben. “When we started to view the traction [of the app], engagement, and the number of corporates on board, we knew it was the right time for us to open up this opportunity for investors,” Ben says. The startup’s lead investor, as well as its financial and strategic advisor, Arrow Capital, organized roadshows with investors for Fit On Click’s

“

WE USED OUR EXISTING EXPERIENCE TO VALIDATE THE PRODUCT, AND WITH MINIMAL MARKETING, **WE GAINED OVER 20,000 USERS ON OUR APP.**

experience to validate the product, and with minimal marketing, we gained over 20,000 users on our app.” With the app, the startup has partnered with over 100 brands to provide a multitude of reward options to its users, and it has also partnered with 30 corporates to host virtual challenges for their employees. According to Ben, Fitze, in partnership with key reward partners, have given away rewards and prizes worth AED1 million so far.

While Fit On Click was initially bootstrapped, the funds it has raised now mark the first institutional funding that the startup has received. Prior to this, the startup had managed to successfully

co-founders. “This was how we met Modus Capital and were accepted into its Ventures Lab program,” notes Ben. Ventures Lab, developed by Dubai-based venture capital firm Modus Capital in collaboration with Abu Dhabi-based business incubator Hub71, is a venture builder program for early-stage startups, designed to offer hands-on support from the ground up, such as marketing, logistics, technology, talent and more. Being a part of the program was certainly helpful for the startup, says Samuel. Within the program, Samuel explains that Modus is working operationally with the team to develop

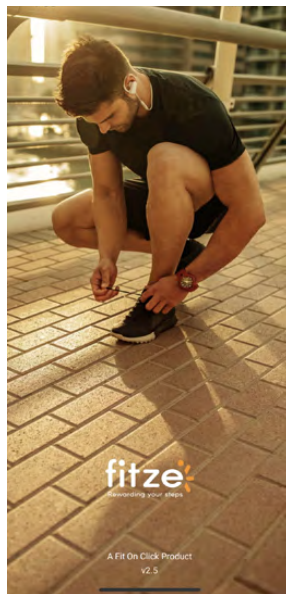
“

**FITZE HIGHLIGHTS BEN AND NEHA'S ABILITY TO SHIFT WITH MARKET NEEDS AND CREATE INNOVATIVE WAYS TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN USERS AND CONSUMER BRANDS, AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO JOINING THEM ON THEIR JOURNEY OF INEVITABLE GROWTH.**

business strategies, refine product offerings, strengthen the platform's tech, and build out marketing capabilities, among other factors. The company has also been able to gain access to Hub71's community, which has further boosted its efforts to commercialize the product.

On the fundraising process, Samuel states that it took six months to close the round. "From founder interviews, team interviews, and due diligence, to financial and product audits, we went through it all," he recalls. "Once everything was approved, we signed the term sheet with both Arrow Capital and Modus Capital. We wanted not just investors, but strategic advisors onboard, and with investment from Arrow Capital, and being a part of Ventures Lab, all of us are now aligned with the same vision and goal."

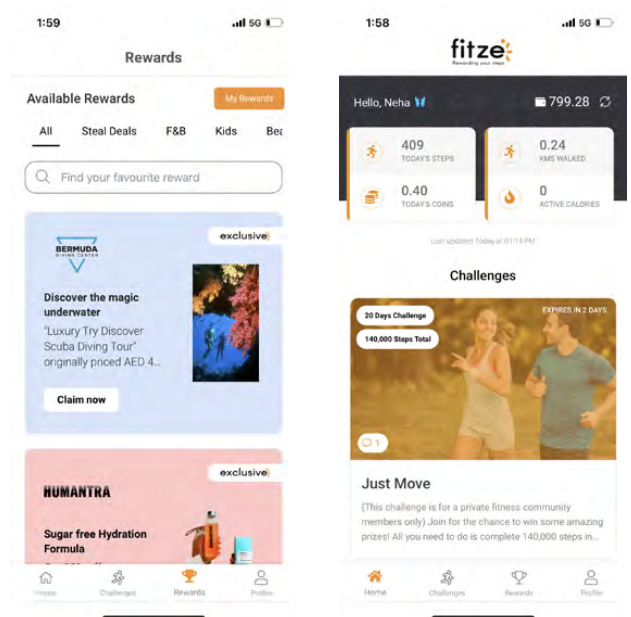
Commenting on the firm's decision to infuse capital in the startup, Sumit Mehta, Managing Director of Arrow Capital, says, "We are thrilled to be investing in Fit On Click, a self-sustaining sports and fitness services business which has recently pivoted and launched a digital app." He continues, "Fitze highlights Ben and Neha's ability to shift with market needs and create innovative ways to increase engagement between users and consumer brands, and we look forward to joining them on their journey of inevitable growth."



**↑ THE FIT ON CLICK APP CONNECTS THE UAE THROUGH FITNESS AND SPORTS.**

The online marketplace was launched with an aim to incorporate healthy lifestyle into the day-to-day life of Dubai residents.

With the new funds, the two entrepreneurs plan to enhance the Fitze app, along with improving the startup's technology, research, and marketing. "Fit On Click is a self-sustainable business, and it will continue to grow and operate in the UAE," says Ben. "With Fitze, our short-term goal is to become the top app in the UAE that motivates its users to stay active and be on top of their wellness. Our long-term goal is to expand regionally and help users build and sustain an active lifestyle in the region." ■



**'TREP TALK**

**Tips for entrepreneurs from Ben Samuel, co-founder and CEO, Fit On Click**

- ▶ **Be clear on why/what you're building** "If you have an idea, the first step is to validate it."
- ▶ **Get the right people around you** "Get a team on board who are aligned with your vision, with respect to product, marketing, research, operations and sales."
- ▶ **Stay focused on your vision** "Create short-term goals and milestones, and stay focused to achieve them."
- ▶ **Have a proof of concept before fundraising** "Once you create a product that is the right market-fit, then look to raise investment."
- ▶ **Never stop the hustle** "After raising, you need to work 50x faster to reach your next milestone."

# EMULATE AND REFLECT

MUSINGS ON  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

WORDS & IMAGERY by **IHSAN EID SALHIA**



**T**here's nothing wrong with looking up to someone you admire. We've all had heroes growing up and whether they be sports heroes or real-life heroes, they've brought pleasure or excitement to our hearts at one point or

another. Many of us build our careers by trying to emulate the success of our heroes. But we often forget to sit and think or reflect on what we really want out in terms of our success and our achievements. Your shadow is a reflection of you that's dark but appears only in the light, and similar to how the world views you, it is always seen differently from your perspective. So, while it's good to aspire to reach the heights of your heroes, it's also very important to take a moment for yourself and reflect on what success really means to you—understanding that is certain to make a whale of a difference in your life. **E**



**IHSAN EID SALHIA** (perhaps better known as The Guy, aka TG) is the founder and CEO of TG Media Productions LLC. Follow him on Instagram @ **TGFROMDUBAI**. [tgproductions.com](http://tgproductions.com)

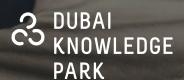
# Find the right freelancer, faster.

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





# SOBHA HARTLAND

MBR CITY, DUBAI



## WATERFRONT DISTRICT

Explore Waterfront Living with endless moments of experiences in the centre of Dubai.  
1, 2 & 3 bedroom apartments starting from AED 981,000\*



Waterfront promenade



Amazing views



Resort-style amenities

Call **800 999 999** and schedule your visit to Sobha Hartland, MBR City

\*T&C apply

 @sobharealty | sobharealty.com