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HOW TO PREPARE FOR EMPLOYMENT  
IN A POST COVID-19 WORLD

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### SAYING IT AS IT IS

CREATING A MORE ETHICAL,  
RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE  
WAY OF DOING BUSINESS

### "WE GOT FUNDED!"

THE STORIES BEHIND  
THE RECENT FUNDRAISING  
SUCCESSSES OF **ZIINA,**  
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# A WHOLE NEW WORLD

CHANGING MINDSETS  
ARE OPENING GAPS  
IN THE MARKET (AGAIN)





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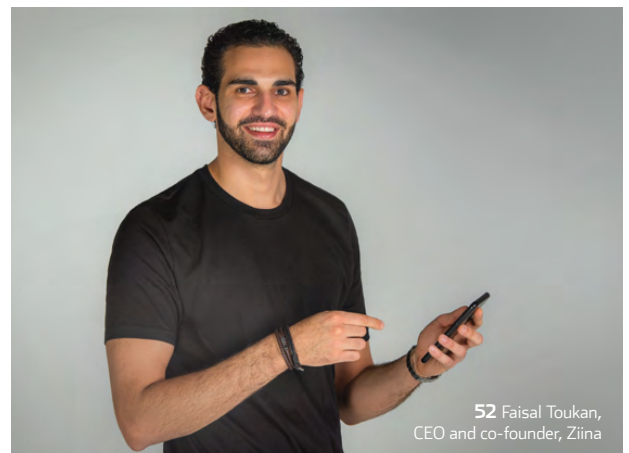
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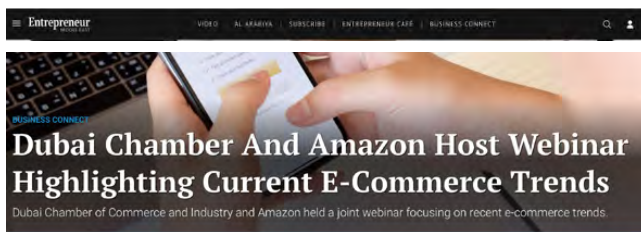
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**New Childhood Development And Cognitive Skills App - Maharat - Launched By Alwaleed Philanthropies and Saudi Ministry of Communications and Information Technology**

Maharat app to detect early-childhood needs and problems of more than 10 million children across the Arab world.  
 Entrepreneur Middle East Staff 2 min read

**BUSINESS CONNECT**  
**Dubai Chamber Processed Over 152,000 E-Transactions In March-May 2020**

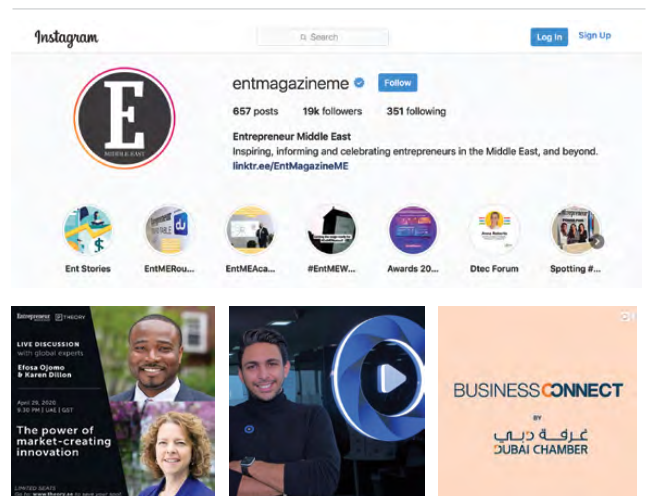
Dubai Chamber has processed a total of 152,059 electronic transaction between March and May of this year, at a rate of 50,000 transactions per month.

**SMES**  
**Silver Linings: What SMEs In Dubai (Potentially) Stand To Gain From The COVID-19 Crisis**

Looking beyond the summer, I'm hoping that we are going to see drastic changes to how we work, how we get paid, and a reduction in bureaucracy that will benefit everyone.

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

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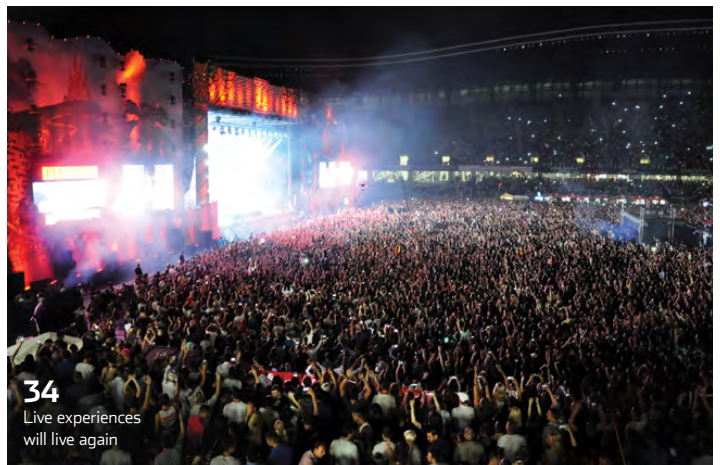
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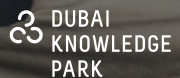
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# AMPLIFYING GOODWILL

Your acts of kindness can go a long way in these times



It was in November of last year, at the third edition of the Sharjah Entrepreneurship Festival (SEF) organized by the Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center (Sheraa), when, while making my way around the event, I accidentally ran into H.E. Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi, a trailblazing member of the Sharjah ruling family, who, among her many roles, is currently the Vice President of the International Publishers Association. Now, I've had the pleasure of interacting with Al Qasimi a few times over the years- one of those instances is what led to her being featured on the cover of *Entrepreneur Middle East* in 2017 for her role in establishing Sheraa, but there have,

of course, been other occasions where our paths crossed and it didn't lead to anything as substantial. However, on this particular afternoon at SEF 2019, Al Qasimi surprised me by saying that she needed to apologize for something that happened the last time we met.

I was quite taken aback when Al Qasimi said this, because I couldn't remember anything at all untoward that happened the last time we had met, which, I recalled, was at SEF's first instalment in 2017. But then Al Qasimi recapped the whole episode for me. I had apparently seen her at the event then, and had asked her for an interview for *Entrepreneur*, but since she was occupied with something else at the time, she declined my request, but told me that she'd come back to chat with me later. However, as it so happened, Al Qasimi wasn't able to do that in the end, and from my point of view, this was completely understandable- I was certain that she had probably just forgotten about my request, and/or gotten busy with other matters given the gathering we were at, and so I wasn't really bothered about it, and I had let it go at that.

But here was Al Qasimi, two years after the above incident, apologizing to me for this apparent slight (which, I reiterate, was definitely not how I perceived it), and I couldn't help but be struck by the consideration and goodwill she was showing me by doing so. As I said in a tweet at the time, this was "a small but remarkably thoughtful



Aby Sam Thomas   
@thisisaby

Still reflecting on a small but remarkably thoughtful act of kindness from @Bodour toward me at @sharjah before today. Thank you! 🙏 #SEF19

2:02 PM · Nov 26, 2019 · [Twitter for Android](#)



01 the idea bank

Let your payment of the day be to charity.

#LoveOverFear #UbuntuLoveChallenge

02 the idea bank

Help a friend who needs it.

#LoveOverFear #UbuntuLoveChallenge

03 the idea bank

Volunteer some of your time at a non-profit organization of your choice.

#LoveOverFear #UbuntuLoveChallenge

04 the idea bank

Save electricity by unplugging your devices when not in use.

#LoveOverFear #UbuntuLoveChallenge

05 the idea bank

Buy a gift for the women in your immediate family.

#LoveOverFear #UbuntuLoveChallenge

06 the idea bank

Allow a driver into your lane.

#LoveOverFear #UbuntuLoveChallenge

10 the idea bank

Think of a skill you are really good at and offer it to a person or community.

#LoveOverFear #UbuntuLoveChallenge

11 the idea bank

Offer to teach an elderly person about technology.

#LoveOverFear #UbuntuLoveChallenge

act of kindness” from Al Qasimi toward me, and I recall thinking that the world would be so much better if more of us would follow her lead when it comes to our interactions with the people around us. For instance, just imagine the effects such small but significant acts of magnanimity by each of us could have on our society and ecosystem as a whole.

I’m bringing all of this up now, because this particular occurrence (and the thoughts it left me with) was the first thing that came to my mind when I found that Al Qasimi has, together with Africa 2.0 Foundation founder Mamadou Kwidjim Touré, in response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, launched a global initiative called the #UbuntuLoveChallenge. Based on the African philosophy of *ubuntu*, which means “I am because we are,” the #UbuntuLoveChallenge is an effort at bringing together people to combat the hardships we face right now, and thus address these problems in a collective

manner, so as to realize a better future for us all. While we may be participating in it as individuals, the #UbuntuLoveChallenge aims to amplify each of our endeavors and thus broaden its reach, be it as inspiration for someone else to do the same, or simply initiate an impactful undertaking of their own.

For me, the best part about the #UbuntuLoveChallenge is how it is quite open in terms of the kind of things one can attempt to do under its banner: it can be something as far-reaching as kickstarting a fund to support entrepreneurs amid the COVID-19 crisis (as done by Sheraa’s Najla Al Midfa), to something as simple as checking in on someone you haven’t heard from in a while (as done by Bahrain Development Bank’s Areije Al Shakar)—sure, their scales may be different, but there’s value to be gleaned from both of these endeavors, and boosting them can only result in good.

At the end of it all, each of our acts of compassion in these times can lead

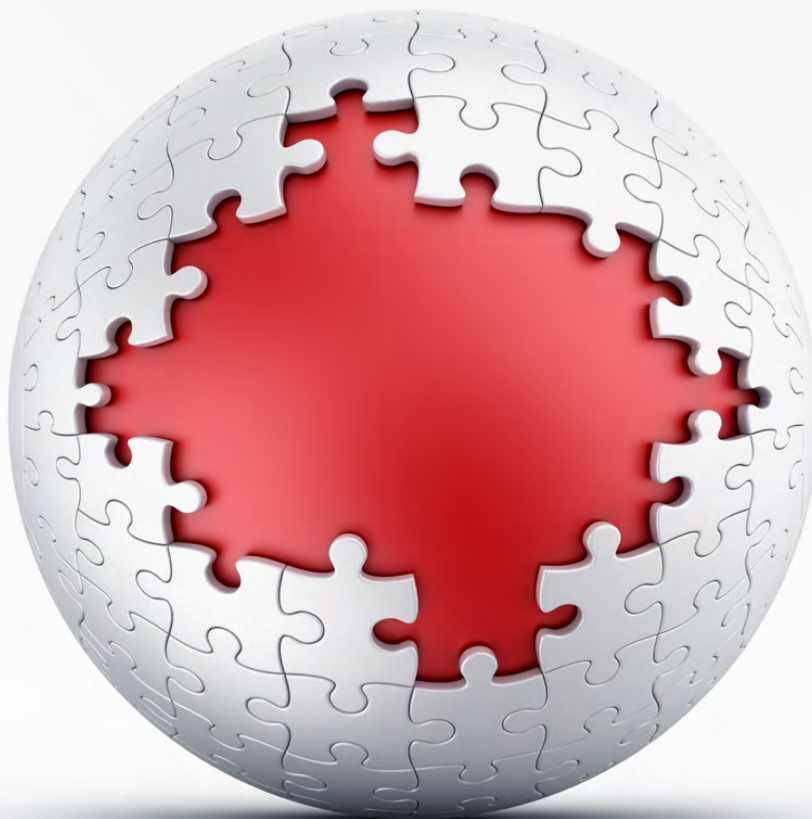
to tremendous goodwill being shared around— I remember only too well how Al Qasimi made me feel with her act of kindness last year, and I sure would love for everyone to feel the same way now through an extensive effort like the #UbuntuLoveChallenge. I’d like to invite you all to share with me how you plan to participate in the #UbuntuLoveChallenge—use the hashtag, and tag me @thisisaby on Instagram and Twitter. Looking forward to seeing what you come up with—let’s put *ubuntu* into action!

Aby Sam Thomas  
Editor in Chief

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aby@bncpublishing.net

# **A WHOLE NEW WORLD**

Reflections on what the post COVID-19 world  
will look like for business





# A blank canvas

Changing mindsets are opening gaps in the market (again) **by HANNA VANKUIKEN**

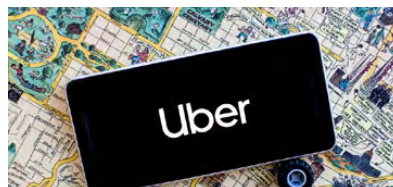
**T**he world has been changing rapidly, thrown into tumult by the novel coronavirus outbreak. As this virus has swept the globe, taking lives, disrupting healthcare, and the global economy, the pressures that people and businesses are facing are constant, and are constantly changing.

These massive pressures and challenges that people are feeling mean that their mindsets are changing too. What we were concerned about in January is no longer a priority—our focus, ideals, and needs have shifted. What were commonly held notions before will transform. The status quo will be disrupted in many ways, and our expectations will change under the pressure of our current context. As the world changes, so will our mindsets.

As our mindsets and ideals change, this will open gaps. These gaps are areas of new needs, new desires, and changing dynamics. The gaps are opportunity, space, and relevancy for products, services, brands, and industries, which will change in response.

## How changing mindsets open gaps in the market

For example, in the years of The Great Recession (2008-2009), people everywhere were under great economic pressure. Many people struggled to make car payments, and others were looking for second jobs for supplementary income. The pressure and the need resulted in a gap as people opened their minds to new possibilities in order to find new solutions. So, when Uber launched, offering a new way to get



around without owning a car, as well as a new way to earn money on the side, this cross-industry innovation was warmly welcomed. Going back further into history, in the US, during the Second World War,



American World War II wartime poster produced by J. Howard Miller in 1943 for Westinghouse Electric as an inspirational image to boost female worker morale

**FOLLOWING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE MEN RETURNED HOME, AND RESUMED THEIR JOBS IN THE FACTORIES. HOWEVER, A SHIFT HAD HAPPENED—WOMEN NO LONGER WHOLEHEARTEDLY BELIEVED THAT THEY BELONGED ONLY AT HOME, AS HAD BEEN THE PRE-WAR NOTION.**

when the men were called to the front lines to fight, this led to a shortage in people to work in the factories back home, causing pressure on the manufacturing and industry sectors at the time. This resulted in the creation of a new mindset, signified by Rosie the Riveter—suddenly, women were needed in the workforce, and they responded. Following the war, the men returned home, and resumed their jobs in the factories. However, a shift had happened—women no longer wholeheartedly believed that they belonged only at home, as had been the pre-war notion.

Whether the brand recognized it at the time, or not, the Tupperware brand responded to this new mindset for many women, who desired to be in the workforce. By introducing an at-home selling model (Tupperware Parties), Tupperware changed their employee model, and in many ways, they introduced the modern-day gig economy, thereby enabling women to work in the post-war era. Now, this move by >>>



Tupperware may seem like a small step. Comparatively, it wasn't a fast change like Uber. However, today, we have made great progress in, while still striving for, gender parity across workplace hierarchies and industries. This is in part due to a boost and a change in mindset brought on by Rosie, and then stimulated by Tupperware, as a movement began.

So, what does this mean for today? Well, for starters, we are finding ourselves in a gap market again.

## A look at the gap market of today

We are in an unpredictable and constantly changing world. Our world has slowed down, taken vast precautions, gone inside, and in some instances, even shut down. Our world has changed drastically- creating a host of new pressures and challenges.

The scale and severity of change that we see in the market today is creating gaps of new mindsets, new needs, new ideals at an equally representative scale. We are in a gap market- a time in which change and disruption of the

norm is, in some areas, more common than continuation of the norm.

Today's gaps, these new opportunities, are not standard- they are the result of unpredictable challenges, causing new needs and shifting mindsets. We can begin to identify these gaps by observing headlines, habits, and changes, and then asking ourselves questions, to open our own minds to what perceptions may change.

For instance: will consumers shift their perception of healthcare? As more people, cooped up in their homes and scared of the pandemic, are finding new ways to proactively boost their immune systems and improve their well-being, will they be open to new ways of taking care of their health?

Will consumers shift their perception of sharing personal data? As governments and organizations begin to plan for or roll out contact tracing to manage the outbreak, using consumer data towards a concrete and specific benefit, will consumers become more comfortable and perhaps even appreciate sharing their data?

Will consumers shift their perception of live events? As people, businesses, performers, museums, and others have found ways to engage and deliver experiences through online streaming or video conferencing apps, we have engaged using digital channels in prevalent and unprecedented ways. We've also found new ways to enable accessibility, despite being in our own homes. Will consumers be open to this notion, that if a live meeting or event isn't possible, then digital is a viable option?

Will consumers shift their perception of humanity and connection? While digital experiences have been our only connection to the rest of the world throughout this crisis, we have also realized what is more important than our screens or our latest apps. As consumers have come out to applaud

and thank our healthcare workers each evening, will consumers continue to take time to celebrate the thing that also makes us so vulnerable- our humanity?

We are living through a gap market, and as such, opportunity is rampant as the pressures of this epidemic are changing mindsets. As peoples' notions, mindsets and assumptions change, this creates the opportunity for brands to respond, to innovate, to reframe, and to deliver in new ways that will lead us into the post-coronavirus era. ■

**THE SCALE AND SEVERITY OF CHANGE THAT WE SEE IN THE MARKET TODAY IS CREATING GAPS OF NEW MINDSETS, NEW NEEDS, NEW IDEALS AT AN EQUALLY REPRESENTATIVE SCALE.**



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## READY FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

How GCC family businesses can prepare for growth after the pandemic

by **MARC-ALBERT HAMALIAN, RAMY SFEIR, and BILAL MIKATI**

**T**he dual shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and low oil prices are severely stressing GCC economies. This especially applies to many family businesses, which entered the crisis on shaky footing with high leverage, limited liquidity, and depressed profits. It is vital that these businesses weather the current storm and prepare themselves for the future, given that these organizations constitute 60% of the region's non-oil GDP and employ 80% of the workforce, according to PwC's *Middle East Family Business Survey*.

Fortunately, most family businesses have taken sound measures for the immediate crisis. Many are supporting staff and retaining the talent necessary for their long-term success. Some are contacting key clients and suppliers to

coordinate actions and ensure business continuity. They are drawing down credit lines and pooling cash among their businesses while getting the most from their working capital. However, beyond the crisis response, family businesses must adapt themselves to a changed post-crisis landscape. We believe that family businesses should adopt four strategies to better position themselves for long-term success:

### 1. Diversify through a new lens

Economic cycles have shortened, and financial crises have become sharper, more frequent, and global in nature. Consequently, the traditional risk management focus on sectors and geographies is failing to shield portfolios adequately. Moving forward, family businesses need to take a more encompassing view of

risk when constructing and managing their portfolios. They should incorporate an assessment of other factors (e.g. cybersecurity threats, disruptions to supply chain, geopolitical events) on cash flows and valuation drivers (e.g. demand, price) to understand risks in aggregate across the portfolio. They should also conduct portfolio stress testing against these potential shocks. Family businesses need to improve portfolio liquidity and geographical diversification. This means rebalancing and, where necessary, overhauling their portfolios to reduce concentration on core businesses. Taking some of their assets public can boost liquidity, and also allow them to benefit more directly and faster from government stimulus packages during times of crisis. Geographical diversification can also reduce potential market risks.

### 2. Digitize their core operating businesses and invest in "stay-at-home"

Before the pandemic, online shopping and working from home was on the rise. Now, it is likely to become a structural "way-of-doing-business" for consumers and businesses alike. Thus, family businesses, particularly those in retail or financial services, will need to adapt their operating companies' business models to the new "stay-at-home" economy. They will need to open digital channels and offer services remotely. For that, they will need to invest in digital infrastructure and cybersecurity and develop the appropriate digital capabilities for their core operating businesses. In considering new investment opportunities that will benefit from the "stay-at-home" economy, family businesses should look at digital business enablers such as cybersecurity, distance learning tools, remote work platforms, digital banking, and delivery services. >>>



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**3. Take advantage of localization opportunities**

The closing of national borders to protect populations from the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the examination of critical supply chains and how to increase localization efforts. For family businesses, investing in local production capabilities and supply chains can reduce reliance on imports and protect against potential supply chain disruptions. Opportunities in manufacturing could be particularly attractive given the manufacturing sector's stable performance through oil cycles in Saudi Arabia. They can also consider domestic tourism and entertainment opportunities given the expected drop in international travel.

**4. Pursue private sector participation (PSP) opportunities**

Government deficits in the region are increasing, a result of lower oil revenues and higher spending to support economies. For example, the Saudi Arabia government announced stimulus packages totaling SAR120 billion (US\$32 billion) as of April 9, 2020. Governments will therefore need family businesses to fuel the economic engine more than ever. Family businesses should respond by taking on significant PSP projects such as infrastructure opportunities by, potentially, creating partnerships between multiple family corporations to combine capabilities and share risk.

To adapt to these changes and enhance the performance of their businesses and investments, family businesses must strengthen their corporate holdings by attracting the right talent, improving portfolio construction and value-creation capabilities, and investing in digitization initiatives. In this manner, they can be ready for growth after the pandemic. ■

**OPPORTUNITIES IN MANUFACTURING COULD BE PARTICULARLY ATTRACTIVE GIVEN THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR'S STABLE PERFORMANCE THROUGH OIL CYCLES IN SAUDI ARABIA. THEY CAN ALSO CONSIDER DOMESTIC TOURISM AND ENTERTAINMENT OPPORTUNITIES GIVEN THE EXPECTED DROP IN INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL.**



# Necessity is the mother of innovation

LESSONS FROM HISTORY SHOW WHY THE COVID-19 CRISIS COULD LEAD TO THE UNCOVERING OF THE MENA REGION'S NEXT UNICORN **by AREIJE AL SHAKAR**

**A**s the global COVID-19 pandemic enters its sixth month, the outlook for startups may, at first glance at least, seem bleak. After a record-breaking year for the MENA region's startups in 2019 (with exits and investments at an all-time high), the first half of 2020 has been markedly different. Indeed, according to recent research by *Wamda*, the crisis has negatively impacted 71% of startups in the region, with half of the respondents having a cash runway of less than six months. Yet, amid the doom and gloom, the crisis has borne incredible stories of resilience and innovation from startup founders across the MENA and beyond— and if history reveals anything, it is that diamonds are often created under the greatest of pressures.

When the 1973 oil crisis struck, the US experienced its worst drop in gross domestic product (GDP) in two decades, and saw unemployment nearly double. But two tiny IT companies emerged from the rubble of that 16-month recession— Microsoft and Apple. Today, they are trillion-dollar household names, two of the most valuable companies in the world. But these two tech giants were far from the only companies to be created in such dire economic conditions. Auto giant General Motors, today worth





some US\$32 billion, was founded during the Panic of 1907 that lasted three years. Computing leader Hewlett Packard was founded in the immediate aftermath of the 1930s Great Depression. And while the 2008 financial crisis led to a global recession that endured for most of the late 2000s, it also saw the emergence of a number of unicorn startups like Uber and Airbnb.

In many of these cases, coveted unicorn status was rapidly attained as agile, innovative businesses reacted to new opportunities driven by necessity, such as a sudden shift in consumer behavior. In this way, the COVID-19 pandemic could serve as a global market leveller that will see even cutting-edge business models refined, as VCs are forced to choose more carefully, strategically, and sparingly where they deploy their capital. To put a modern spin on an old saying, necessity is the mother of innovation.

Here in the Middle East, we could see significant growth in the performance

of VC-backed firms that focus on tech and innovation. For one thing, the region isn't saddled with the kind of legacy systems that can hamper growth, and through agility, can leapfrog other more established markets as governments race to build thriving tech and startup ecosystems. Simply put, the Middle East offers genuine unsaturated white space for the enterprising VCs that are flowing in in ever greater numbers.

To date, the region has only birthed two unicorns, but the conditions are ripe for the next one. An unprecedented boom in the consumer uptake of fintech and other technologies is happening, catalysed by the pandemic. The Kingdom of Bahrain's national e-wallet, BenefitPay, for example, saw a 1257% surge in transactions in March alone, as Bahrainis wary of infection turned away from physical offerings. There are 67 global VC-backed fintech unicorns in the world today, but none in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the region's governments are investing considerable sums in building increasingly dynamic and sophisticated fintech ecosystems. Bahrain is home to the region's first fintech regulatory sandbox, with graduates including the region's first Sharia-compliant cryptocurrency platform, and the region's first open banking infrastructure pro-



Areije Al Shakar, Director and Fund Manager, Al Waha Venture Capital Fund of Funds

**TO DATE, THE REGION HAS ONLY BIRTHED TWO UNICORNS, BUT THE CONDITIONS ARE RIPE FOR THE NEXT ONE. AN UNPRECEDENTED BOOM IN THE CONSUMER UPTAKE OF FINTECH AND OTHER TECHNOLOGIES IS HAPPENING, CATALYSED BY THE PANDEMIC.**

vider. From the UAE to Saudi Arabia, other countries in the region are following suit.

In every major recession, new companies emerge and others reinvent themselves. Apple, born in the wake of the oil crisis, did so twice to get where it is today— first during the dot-com crash of the early 2000s, and then again in the wake of 9/11. Across the region, agile innovative startups are turning to where they're most in demand, using their technol-

ogy to support their communities while seeking out new opportunity. In Bahrain, wearable healthtech venture HayaTech is helping its community boost immunity and exercise safely, while queue management system Skiplino is providing its services for free to government agencies, medical centres, and hospitals. Meanwhile in the UAE, ride-hailing app Careem, the region's first unicorn, has introduced a delivery service enabling customers to order meals and groceries while adhering to the city's lockdown protocols.

With examples like these and more, cautious VCs are paying close attention. There is a wealth of talent in the Middle East. And while VCs are investing less frequently, they are investing more accurately. The third MENA unicorn is just waiting to be found. ■

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She has worked in reputable organizations including Investcorp, Citibank, BNP Paribas, and Lehman Brothers on the treasury, investment management, and advisory side. She holds a Master's of Science in Public Policy and Management from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and a Bachelor of Commerce in Finance from the John Molson School of Business, Concordia University. She is also a Kauffman Fellow Class 24, and a certified business coach and mentor from the UK's Chartered Management Institute. [alwahafund.com](http://alwahafund.com)

# RIDING THE WAVE

**Building a resilient culture of innovation**  
for corporations in a post COVID-19 world

by YOUNESS YAGHCHA

GOVERNMENT ENTITIES AND OTHER LARGE ORGANIZATIONS COULD GREATLY BENEFIT FROM ADOPTING MORE DISRUPTIVE THINKING. THE BEST THING ABOUT THE MODEL THAT I'M ABOUT TO PROPOSE IS THAT ANY ORGANIZATION CAN START EXPERIMENTING WITH IT- ALL THEY HAVE TO HAVE IS AN INTERNET CONNECTION, AND SOME KIND OF COMMUNICATION PLATFORM.





For decades, governments and business communities globally have analyzed the disruptive forces that could impact global economies and debated what should be done about them. While the disruptive trends of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (including the internet of things, artificial intelligence, blockchain, so on and so forth) have inevitably changed the way that we live our day-to-day lives, these changes have happened “slow enough” to allow those who benefit from the status quo to resist the changes needed to establish the innovative, sustainable, ethical, and inclusive economies of the future.

However, in the past several months, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced our global communities to face many realities, the truths that we have been too scared to deal with, because they would require us to exchange the comfortable status quo that we have known for so long with a completely different way of living, learning, and doing business. Although implementing these changes has felt seemingly impossible, the response of governments, businesses, and populations to the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide has only served to prove that we’re capable of anything if we put our minds to it.

The power of technology and the ingenuity of the human spirit have really been driven home for me by my experience as a program manager with the Anjal Z program facilitated by Seedstars. This initiative, led by the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority, offers an equity-free, eight-week, high-impact growth program, for global scale-ups that focus on improving early childhood development (children between zero and eight years of age) in the fields of health and nutrition, early care and education, child protection and family support. Initially, we began delivering the training in person in Abu Dhabi; however, as the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic began becoming increasingly evident and governments around the world began imposing travel restrictions and other safety measures, I decided to return home to Switzerland to be with my family. But like many businesses and teams all

around the world, we at Seedstars and the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority worked together to successfully turn the training for the Anjal Z program into a virtual one.

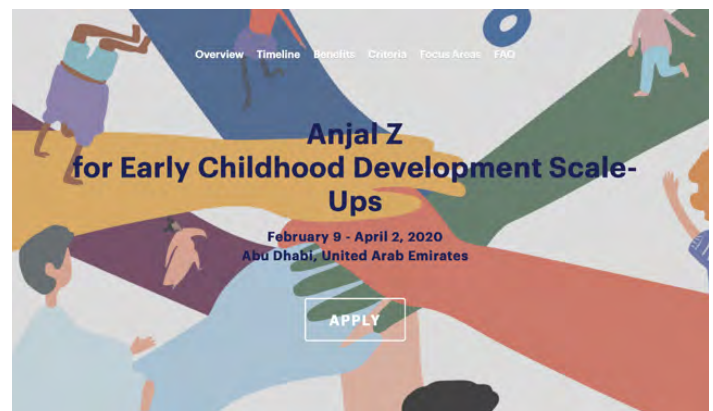
Delivering this program virtually in the unprecedented context of the COVID-19 pandemic has given me a new perspective on entrepreneurship, agility, and innovation. Now, more than ever, I’m concerned about the fate of our global business ecosystems, because I have worked in financial services and management consulting (with a special focus on innovation and business strategy) in Europe and the MENAT region, and I know how resistant corporations can be to change. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly heralded a new age in our global business ecosystems and corporations can no longer afford to resist change.

While startups are used to fast decision-making, boot-

strapping, adapting business models, and having difficult conversations about burn rates and runway, large corporations aren’t. However, the current pandemic will change life as we know it for months, maybe even years to come. So, if corporations are unwilling or unable to learn, grow, and adapt, they might never recover. I know that developing a robust culture of innovation may seem daunting for many corporations, but it’s necessary if they wish to survive the COVID-19

pandemic and continue to thrive in a post COVID-19 world. With this predicament in mind, I believe it’s time that corporations worldwide consider internalizing the spirit of the popular corporate innovation outpost trend.

For several years now, many corporations have set up innovation outposts in some of the world’s most vibrant innovative communities to be “close to the action.” Yet, according to Alessandro Di Fiore, founder and CEO of the European Centre >>>





## IMPACTING PEOPLE'S LIVES IN EMERGING MARKETS THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

for Strategic Innovation, most innovation outposts fail to achieve their goal of promoting innovation and forward-thinking strategies in organizations, because they don't develop the standard operating procedures needed to extract value from the contacts, companies, and innovations that can be found in abundance at these outposts. While the innovation outpost model is an interesting concept for attracting new talent and ideas, I believe that it's crucial now for corporations to prioritize promoting the innovative potential that already exists in their own organization.

Now, you might say that most large corporations already have R&D departments, but I believe that this view of corporate innovation is too narrow in this day and age. Large organizations can no longer afford the tunnel vision associated with the traditional R&D department model. Although it's vital for corporations to constantly develop the products and services they offer to their customer base, it's also important for them to improve the way that every department in their organization operates because, ultimately, every department contributes to the success of a company- not just the R&D department. After all, they do call it an innovation pipeline, not

an innovation pipe. So, how can corporations develop the innovative DNA of each department within their organization?

Personally, I believe that the secret lies in unleashing the problem-solving potential (or solution-finding potential, to frame it more positively) of corporate employees. At the end of the day, who understands the inner workings, assets, and shortcomings of an organization better than its own employees? It seems impractical to me for corporations to go looking for innovation elsewhere, when they haven't spent enough time and/or resources developing and implementing effective innovation pipelines that operate within and across their organizations. Below, I share a tentative model for how a corporation could begin establishing such a company-wide innovation pipeline. But while this particular piece focuses on innovation in the context of corporations, I believe that government entities and other large organizations could greatly benefit from adopting more disruptive thinking like this. The best thing about the model that I'm about to propose is that any organization can start experimenting with it- all they have to have is an internet connection, and some kind of communication platform.

### 1/ Establish "incubation centers"

Corporates could establish a space or time of day in each department to allow their employees to gather and debate about the issues that negatively impact productivity, or brainstorm new and creative ways to promote excellence and high performance. When employees with similar ideas or passions find each other, they can form a team, and begin preparing a pitch to present a solution or "hack" to senior-level management and fellow employees at an intra-department pitch competition.

### 2/ Host intra-department pitch competitions

Several teams from each department could pitch their solution or "hack" to a panel of senior management and fellow employees. The competition's categories could be organized by department pain points, types of innovation, or any other categorization that would make sense to the department in question. One winner or multiple winners could be selected by the judging panel. After the competition, the winning teams could receive more guidance and feedback from senior management (or a group of external mentors) about how they could improve and execute their projects.

### 3/ Host company-wide presentation events

The winners from each intra-department competition could gather to present their ideas to the leadership of the company and its employees, and explain the added value of their projects and how their solution or "hack" would impact the organization's overall standard operating procedures and how they might impact the day-to-day operations of each department, if at all.

### 4/ Partner with relevant startups

At this juncture, I would encourage the leadership of each department to explore their innovation outpost network (or any network at their disposal) to see if there are new or established startups that are working on similar ideas as the winning teams. The corporation could then choose to partner or acquire these startups to help roll out the proposed initiatives. Many top public and private organizations already practice open innovation -a process for sharing knowledge and ideas with other organizations- and it's about time that this became a standard practice.

Once the above model has been realized, then it's just a matter of rinse, lather, and repeat. Ultimately, every corporation is different in terms of size, resources, and level of innovative thinking. The model that I shared above could be repeated on a quarterly basis or a bi-annual basis, depending on the needs of the organization. A corporation could even choose to establish a completely different style of promoting innovative thinking within its organization. Regardless of how a corporation chooses to promote innovation, I think it's crucial that more companies establish some sort of culture of innova-



tion that promotes the following key behaviors:

**1/ Promotes disruptive thinking**

As I mentioned before, having obsolete products and/or services is not the only thing that can render a company obsolete. Having antiquated standard operating procedures or mentalities can be just as detrimental to a corporation's long-term success. Consequently, it's important that every department in a corporation focuses on how it can improve its performance or efficacy- no matter what they do.

**2/ Encourage employee engagement**

The happier your workforce is, the likelier they are to work for you and bring their A-game. Promoting cultures of innovation and well-being is important in this day and age as millennials, unlike their predecessors, are less likely to stay in a job where they don't feel that they're growing or

contributing to society. According to Deloitte's *Global Millennial Survey 2019* report, 49% of millennials surveyed would, if they had a choice, quit their current jobs in the next two years, up from 38% in 2017. Some of the reasons they cited included "dissatisfaction with pay and lack of advancement and professional development opportunities." While the model I propose might not be able to address all the issues that corporations face in terms of employee retention, I do believe that it could tackle many of them.

**3/ Promote inter and intra-departmental collaboration**

One of the biggest pitfalls of most large corporations is that their teams or departments often work in silos. Therefore, they don't know what's happening in other teams or departments, which often leads to fractured organizational identity, breakdowns in communication, and "leaks" in cor-

porations' innovation pipelines. By making value-sharing an important tenet of innovation pipelines, corporations can avoid "identity crises," and promote more collaboration among their employees.

**4/ Encourage collaboration or delegation when necessary**

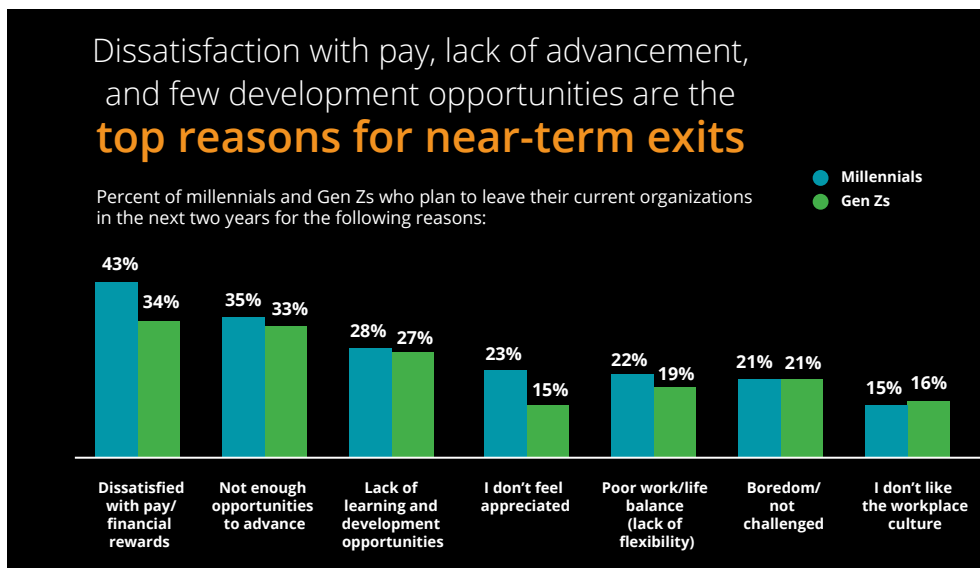
True leaders, whether they hold titles or not, know when to ask for help, or even when to "pass the baton," if there's someone who's more capable of executing a task. Not only could encouraging corporate innovation teams to collaborate with startups help the corporations' employees acquire valuable insight and skillsets, it could also

help them learn the importance and value of delegating in the innovation process. Either way, it's a win-win situation.

While many businesses may be overwhelmed by the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on their operations, I believe that it was only a matter of time until something like this pandemic came and sent shock waves through our global business ecosystems. I know that it might not be easy to hear, but it must be said. Many stakeholders in our global business ecosystems have been operating in an unsustainable fashion for decades. The status quo had lulled us all into a false sense of security and complacency. However, the abrupt and indiscriminate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a sobering reminder that we can no longer resist change. Either our global business stakeholders and community evolve, or we go under.

ACCORDING TO DELOITTE'S GLOBAL MILLENNIAL SURVEY 2019 REPORT, 49% OF MILLENNIALS SURVEYED WOULD, IF THEY HAD A CHOICE, QUIT THEIR CURRENT JOBS IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS, UP FROM 38% IN 2017.

As the late chairman and CEO of General Electrics, Jack Welch, once said: "If the rate of change on the outside exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is near." To me, these words don't only refer to the innovative potential of corporations and the business ecosystems in which they exist; it also refers to the values that we believe and the values we choose to practice. Corporate innovation means nothing if it's not informed and guided by fundamental values such as inclusivity and sustainability. If these difficult times have taught us anything, it's that we're stronger when we work *with* each other, and for each other. ■



DELOITTE'S GLOBAL MILLENNIAL SURVEY 2019 REPORT



Youness Yaghcha is Partnerships Manager at Seedstars. Youness is a serial entrepreneur and an expert in growth and innovation, with a solid consulting and private banking background exceeding a decade. He has held various advisory, management, and technical roles at prestigious European private banks in Switzerland and boutique investor relations firm. He is an expert at communicating and managing relationships with private investors, institutionals, and Ultra-high- and high-net-worth individuals according to their professional and cultural requirements, and has made several investments of his own. His motto: disrupt the status quo, and rethink everything. [seedstars.com](http://seedstars.com)



# RECESSION-PROOF MARKETING

Five tips for your business to ride the tsunami caused by the COVID-19 crisis **by NELIO LEONE**

“**W**e’re safe. It won’t happen to us.” When I first heard about the coronavirus, I was pretty sure it would stay confined to some remote areas. I was sure it would never impact me or anyone I know directly.

But then the wave rose, which led to people starting to ransack supermarkets for toilet paper. Life started to feel like an episode of *Black Mirror* gone terribly, terribly wrong.

This crisis is a monster wave. No one could ever see it coming. And it will cost the world economy approximately three trillion dollars.

Businesses are bracing for impact: some will get wiped out, some will have the surf of their lifetime. Like riding a wave, it all comes down to how you catch it— or in this case, how it catches you.

**WINNERS AND LOSERS: A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH**  
Many companies like Airbnb, Uber, and Whatsapp started during an economic downturn. As such, everyone is wondering who will come out strong out of this one?

The intuitive answer is “e-commerce.” Or “All you need to do is to go online.” However, it’s not that obvious, unfortunately.

According to ProfitWell, business-to-consumer (B2C) and direct-to-consumer (DTC) enterprises are being massively hit. After all, being online doesn’t necessarily solve an underlying problem: people are clinging to cash, as no one really knows how long it will last.

Let’s take a look at business-to-business (Figure 1). In the last 24 months, espe-

cially software-as-a-service (SaaS) businesses, exploded. Today, that exponential growth has flattened out.

In Figure 2, Uber gives us an interesting perspective per industry (conversions = sales).

The stats in Figure 3 make it clear that being in e-commerce doesn’t guarantee success. During a crisis, people tend to stick to basic needs like food, health, pharma, and media (entertainment and news).

But stay with me, things get more interesting when we look at traffic growth. Traffic growth gives us a clear sense of where eyeballs are going. In modern marketing, attention (a.k.a eyeballs) is the real currency. And the eyeballs all go to websites in financial advice, entertainment, and news.

In short, this is what the two graphs in Figure 4 tell us: people are in “browsing mode,” not in “buying mode.”

**#STAYHOME: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR BRANDS AND MARKETERS?**  
Social Fulcrum’s data on social media advertising for B2C gives another piece of the puzzle. Customer

Figure 1

PW SUBSCRIPTION INDEX

## B2C Subscription PW Index

Here we’re looking at an aggregate of all B2C Subscription companies on PW (not E-commerce or media) with their MRR tracked since January 1, 2020. Data has been cleaned and outliers removed.

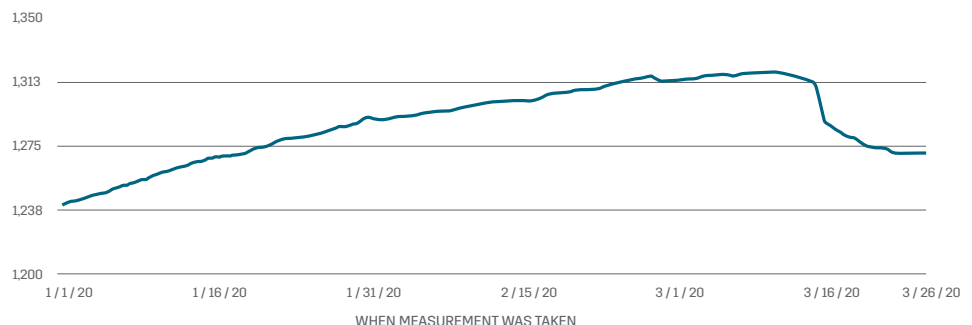


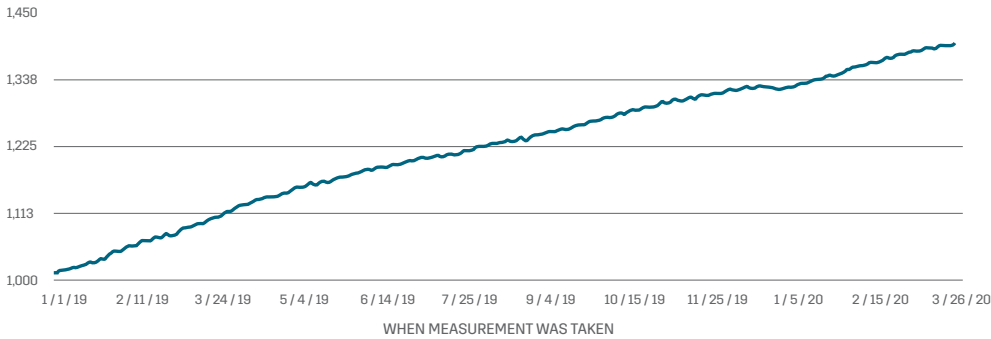


Figure 2

PW SUBSCRIPTION INDEX

**B2B SaaS PW Index**

Here we're looking at an aggregate of all B2B Subscription companies on PW with their MRR tracked since January 1, 2019. Note that this mixes in companies of all sizes, types, etc. although outliers are removed.



acquisition cost (CAC) is up by 45%, while cost per mille (CPMs) are down by 29%.

What does that mean? The increase in CAC means that acquiring paying customers will now cost +45% more than pre COVID-19. And venture capitalists (the guys paying for this tech startup) are not willing to “burn” cash anymore.

So, that leaves you with less access to capital, and more cost to acquire. But there is also some very, very good news. The decrease of CPMs means that advertising platforms (e.g. Instagram) are charging 29% less to show ads.

So, now we have a clear picture. People spend a lot more time on social media. They are not willing to buy (except food and meds), they want to be entertained for free, and in the middle of all that, ad platforms are charging you less to show up on people’s feeds.

This is a fertile ground for the golden grail of marketing: underpriced attention. But things get even more intriguing. According to Statista, because

of COVID-19, social media consumption increased by +40%, yet the increase in content created and uploaded has only increased by +14%.

That means there are increasingly way more people listening than people talking (Figure 5). So, if your brand has anything, but really anything to say, then, say it *today!*

But, remember: *you are not allowed to sell.*

**FIVE GROWTH HACKING TIPS FOR ANY BRAND OUT THERE**

Okay, enough geeking out on data. Now, let’s see how we can leverage these insights.

**Tip #1  
Make sure your brand is browsable**

Companies who will win big out of this crisis are those focusing all their efforts on building a “browsable” brand- not brands that want to sell, but ones that want attention.

**Tip #2  
Get your users to build a habit**

There is a common principle that states it takes between 21 and 66 days to develop a habit. After 21, 35, or 66 days, users will feel they are missing something when they don’t interact with it.

Habits are a marketer’s wet dream:

- They override rational and conscious decision-making
- They build retention and life-time value
- They are hard to break

If you are a marketer or founder your most important question today is: how can I induce my target audience to get into a habit around my brand or product?

**Tip #3  
Build audiences**

Marketing produces only one type of asset: targeted audiences. What does that mean? First, you build an audience. Then, you start selling.

In other words, building an audience today, during this whole COVID-19 pandemic when people are bored at home, is much easier than it was before. Provide free >>>

Figure 3

**Conversion Growth or Decline Due to Covid-19**

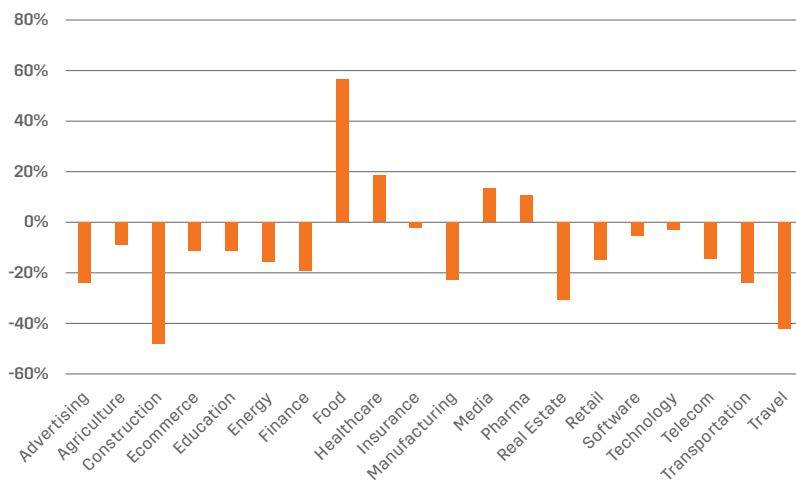
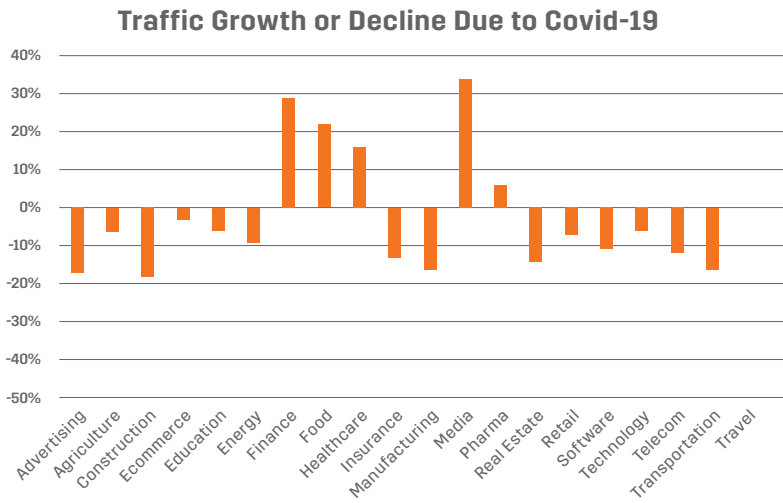


Figure 4



value to those people out there, and get them to subscribe to your email list in exchange- then, then, in three to six months, you go for the ask.

The outcome? It is very practical: an excel sheet with people's first name, last name, phone number, and email. The more you grow that list now, the bigger the potential buying audience will be in the future.

**Tip #4**  
**Obsess about churn**

Okay, by now, you probably got the drill. But some might ask: "I've got three months of runway. If I don't get cash in, my business will shut its doors 90 days from now. Why are we even talking about content?"

I agree. Retention is the new acquisition. But high churn rates will bleed out your business.

Managing churn means getting super close to your customers. *Call them.* Make a list of VIP customers, call 10-50 customers a day, and ask them how this crisis is impacting them.

If you're the founder or head of growth, trust me, they'll appreciate you taking the time to call them and show you care. Try to understand how you can support them through these trying times.

This increases the attachment to the brand on the customer side, and it boosts your customer-centricity. You'll get super valuable insights from these calls that will help you to:

- > Build super relevant content for similar audiences
- > Get a pulse of how the market is shifting
- > Increase top-of-mind awareness

Follow up with automated messages- then, make an offer. Spend hours, even days if needed, on the phone with customers.

**Tip #5**

**Time to partner up**

Entrepreneurs tend to be insular- it's now time to break the silo! Get out there.

This crisis is unprecedented, so instead of a tweet saying "smashing it even during COVID-19" just to fake-it-until-you-make-it, reach out to other founders.

We are all in the same boat. So, now, it's time to partner up to find common solutions.

If you had a dream partner that was inaccessible in the past, now that same partnership might not be a forbidden dream anymore.

Based on the "churn calls" you made to your customers, by now, you should have a clear understanding of their pains. If you are unable to alleviate or address that pain, other companies can. Help them solve your customers' problems, while you solve theirs.

You might not have another chance to get a key partnership for so cheap in the future- the time is now!

In Mandarin, the word for crisis is a synonym for opportunity. Whether it's capitalizing on underpriced attention, building massive audiences, getting closer to your customers, or building key partnerships, the crisis is indeed offering massive marketing opportunities. Surf or get wiped out- either way, the wave is coming. Game on! Time to ride the tsunami. ■

Figure 5

	Worldwide	Italy	Spain	France	Germany	China	United States
Spending longer on social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)	44%	52%	49%	27%	21%	50%	32%
Creating/uploading videos (e.g. on Tik Tok, Youtube, etc.)	14%	10%	15%	7%	5%	17%	6%

Details: Worldwide, March 16 to 20, 2020, 16-64 years, Online survey

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Nelio Leone is the founder and chief executive officer of Urban Monks, a growth marketing agency headquartered in Dubai dedicated to building awesome brands. Nelio has been a growth marketer for nearly a decade, and he has a passion for building edgy brands with digital flair. He discovered this passion during his time at Careem, where he was the Director of Brand and Organic Growth, and one of the company's first 30 employees. Nelio has also held roles at Washmen, L'Oreal, and Chanel. He speaks six languages, and even learned Mandarin by hacking through it in the back seats of cabs. [urbanmonks.io](http://urbanmonks.io)





## FINDING JOBS AND BUILDING CAREERS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19 AND BEYOND

by ANNAS ABEDIN

Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has had unprecedented health and economic impacts on people and countries across the world. While health professionals are working tirelessly to keep us safe and treat those of us who get infected, government and business leaders are also working tirelessly to mitigate the economic fall-out. Never-before seen stimulus packages to protect and support large enterprises, SMEs, as well as ordinary citizens, are either in the works, or have already been implemented in various countries, which is providing important relief.

Unfortunately however, no matter how sizeable or generous any government or private sector relief initiatives are, supply and demand in many industries will shift (some temporarily while the economy recovers, others permanently), and as a consequence, there will be many millions of jobs that will significantly change, or be lost for good on a global scale. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the lockdown measures to date (full or partial) "are

now affecting almost 2.7 billion workers, representing 81% of the world's workforce." Indeed, the ILO "estimates that 1.25 billion workers, representing almost 38% of the global workforce, are employed in sectors that are now facing a severe decline in output a high risk of workforce displacement."

As such, an important component of efforts to tackle the long-term impact of this crisis therefore needs to be a structured approach to help everyone in the workforce navigate these new realities of the labor market. Given the magnitude of the coronavirus pandemic, all members of the workforce need market intelligence on how their industries, and consequently, jobs will be impacted, as well as guidance and coaching on actions they need to take to ensure a promising and successful professional future in a post COVID-19 world. We at Makeen Advisors believe there are four categories of questions that everyone in the workforce needs to address for themselves in order to be able to chart a clear path forward, and be ready for the new realities created by the COVID-19 pandemic:

**1. How is my industry and my job affected by COVID-19?** What are the short-term and long-term implications of the virus for my industry, both locally and internationally? How soon are jobs in my space going to come back? Will my industry grow or shrink? What jobs in my industry will be higher in demand, versus lower in demand? What skills are important to have and develop to succeed in the expected new state of my industry? Will there be a shift in how work will be done going forward (e.g. will there be an increase in flexible and project-based work, compared to full-time employment), and am I prepared to succeed in such a changed environment?

**2. How can I address skill gaps I have to meet the realities and requirements of a post COVID-19 job market?** While learning new skills is always important and helpful, it is beneficial to be aware of and prioritize the skills and tools that will be in demand the most, both during and after the pandemic. Do I know what those skills are, or how can I figure that out? What is the best way to build those skills, and what are the best resources to use? Since there is a plethora of training providers and courses, how do I evaluate which learning options are the most relevant and conducive to help me advance- e.g. which ones are recognized in the industry, which have clearly defined and relevant learning objectives, etc. ?

**3. How do I find and successfully acquire emerging job opportunities?** How are jobs in my current (or target) industry filled? Are there specific job platforms or recruiting firms I need to register with? What do I need to do in terms of preparing my profile or in terms of outreach, in order to increase the probability of success? Do I have the right profile for the opportunities I am going after? Are there other industries or functions in which my skills can be relevant, and how can I figure out whether that is the case? There are >>>



Annas Abedin is the co-founder of Makeen Advisors, the largest network of independent management consultants in the Middle East. With over 15 years of experience in his specialist field, Abedin previously held the role of Engagement Manager at McKinsey & Company, MENA, and prior to this, he held the title of Managing Director at both Namshi (now part of Emaar Malls) and Jumia Egypt (now part of Jumia Group, stock-listed at NYSE). [makeenadvisors.com](http://makeenadvisors.com)

many peculiarities by industry, and following a standard approach of creating a CV and sending applications in all likelihood will not be sufficient to stand out.

**4. How do I stay focused and energized during this period?** We are going through exceptional times and which are mentally challenging on various fronts, including health, family, and other personal relationships, financial challenges, and many others. It is important that we are cognizant of the challenges we are facing, and have a plan to deal with them, and not let them linger in the background demotivating us. Important

questions include: how do I keep myself physically fit and healthy- e.g., sleeping patterns, nutrition, exercise? How do I achieve clarity on my financial situation, and am I doing all I can to manage my cash effectively? Finding new jobs or switching industries might take a long time- do I have a roadmap for what I need to do, and am I mentally prepared for the failures or challenges I might encounter on the way? Which communities and professional groups can I join to help me during the transition?

It is evident that we are going through a period of profound change and significant challenges, and no one has

all the answers on the above questions, and what the future will bring. But to limit the damage and enhance our preparedness, it is critical that we know *what* the key questions are, and to make it a priority to formulate a view and to continuously refine it based on new information and evidence. Fortunately, to facilitate this process, new analyses are becoming available by the day, and thought leaders across the spectrum of industries are in many cases making their insights available for free, be it on news channels, social media, or their own corporate websites. It's thus up to us to take advantage of these insights. ■



## Ready for the workforce

HOW TO PREPARE FOR EMPLOYMENT IN A POST COVID-19 WORLD

by MAY EL KHOURY

**T**he latest wave of fresh-faced and eager graduates will soon embark on their journey of entering the workforce, but with an unstable global economy, and many looking for employment at the same time, how can graduates prepare to enter the workforce after the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic? Given my role as the Career Services and Internship Coordinator at Canadian University Dubai, here are some of my top tips on how graduates can use the time they are spending at home to refine their skills in preparation for securing that all-important first job:



**1. Use this time to get to know yourself better**

Many students often seek advice on what career they should pursue from their families, who usually offer emotional and traditionally-driven advice due to social conforms and expectations. Middle Eastern families are known for encouraging their children to seek a profession in medicine, engineering, and law, but there is a plethora of other professions out there to explore that are more in demand.

If you work in something that you like, you'll naturally be successful, but when you're doing something you don't like, it can have a negative impact, and you could end up being unproductive. Now is a great time to get to know yourself better, work out what you enjoy, and think about what career you can see yourself taking forward after graduating.

Investing in a behavioral assessment is an excellent idea as it analyzes your characteristics and personality, and it can guide you to the field to which you're most suited. The assessments are a great way of understanding what your values are, what you like, and what you don't like. When looking for a job, a behavioral assessment should match at least 70% of these values.

Using the help of mentors and career coaches is another great way to explore career options, and it can also help break bad habits. They will be able to guide you towards an ideal career matched to your personality type, as they will help

you learn to identify your strengths and weaknesses.

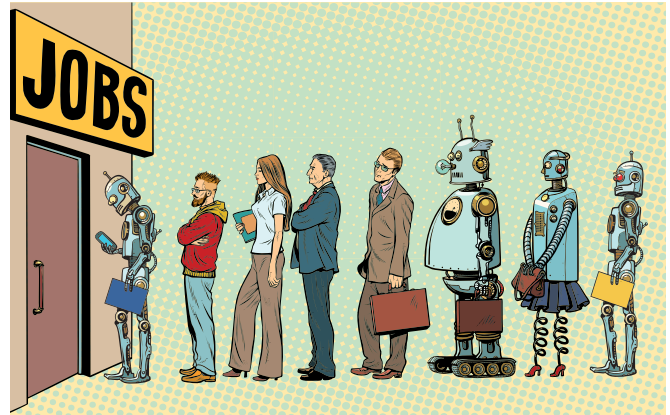
**2. Understand the market**

Once you're clear on the career direction that you want to pursue, research what jobs are available and what the demands are. Read the job descriptions carefully to find out what skillsets are required for that specific job. Then look into ways that you can develop and hone these skills, so you can speak about them confidently in interviews.

Gather as much experience as possible. Accept internships and volunteer. Getting a feel of the industry that you want to work in will help with confidence and knowledge, and give you better insight into the professional market.

Prepare a CV, and tailor it based on the job description for which you are applying. Be sure to connect with recruiters in the field you are looking to enter, as they can help you understand what skills you need for certain roles, discover companies that are hiring, and get you in front of hiring employers.

Even though we are currently housebound, it is still important to network.



LinkedIn allows you to remotely connect with employers and leaders in the market, as does Ojo. Ojo has been created for fresh graduates, linking you to employers, life coaches, career coaches, and job opportunities.

**3. Hone your workplace skills**

The top three skills that recruiters are looking for at the moment are adaptability, communication skills, and demonstrated team players.

With most workplaces experiencing an uncertain future and not knowing when normal office operations will resume, communication skills have never been more critical. Communication skills cover verbal and writing skills, but they also include behavior. How a person addresses members of their team, and how they set tasks is incredibly important to employers, especially as teams are getting to grips with working remotely.

Positivity, empathy, patience, and understanding will go a long way. If you need to be critical, think about how you can offer con-

structive criticism, so that people can build on their skills. Look to be supportive, collaborative, and helpful.

With the majority of workforces working remotely, we need to carefully consider the words and the channels we use when talking to colleagues. Having regular video meetings is a great way for the team to connect, as well as through apps like WhatsApp. It is essential to think carefully about the tone of voice of the messages that you are sending, and to consider the time you're sending messages and emails. Although everyone is working to their schedules, sending non-urgent messages to colleagues out of work hours isn't advised.

The key for anyone looking for employment opportunities during these challenging times is to be positive, eager to learn, and to be adaptable to different environments and situations. With situations changing daily and companies having to navigate business through unprecedented times, aware and supportive colleagues are celebrated. ■



May El Khoury serves as the Career Services and Internship Coordinator at Canadian University Dubai. She holds a BA in Industrial Sociology and is an Accredited Consultant of Harrison Assessments, and brings with her 15 years of experience in the HR field with a focus on talent acquisition and development in diverse industries. Prior to working with Canadian University Dubai, she worked as a Managing Partner at Taozeeff (Talent Management Services) and as a Workforce Acquisition and Development Manager at Juma Al Majid Group. In her current role, she guides and prepares students at Canadian University Dubai to be employable in the job market. [cud.ac.ae](http://cud.ac.ae)



# ADAPTING TO CHANGE

## WHY REMOTE WORK MAKES TEAMS (AND LEADERS) BETTER

by LINDRED L. GREER

**A**s countless companies of all sizes find themselves shifting to remote work due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, the challenge also creates opportunities. I believe that now is a great time for organizations to change their thinking in ways that will improve the people side of their operations, long after the current crisis has passed.

For starters, let's consider this question: how does work from home affect the HR or the "people" aspects of business? When shifting to remote work, companies will likely experience substantial people challenges in terms of communication, conflict management, and motivation. Remote work is like a magnifying glass for underlying people issues in companies—people problems that can be glossed over or shoved under the rug in face-to-face teams tend to explode, and quickly, when companies go remote.

This is because remote work, when not carefully done, lacks the social context of face-to-face work. The small social cues that can help smooth social interactions go

away, and this means underlying conflicts become more manifest, coordination issues become roadblocks more quickly, and so on.

The silver lining of this is that these difficulties in going remote will force companies to take a more intentional approach to people dynamics than they did when operating in person, and this intentionality around people issues will only make companies that much more effective when in-person operations resume again.

Indeed, when you talk to the CEOs of companies on the top 10 remote companies list (such as 10up or Automattic, the company behind WordPress), they strongly believe remote work has made them better at the people issues in their organizations than companies run in person, because it has forced them to be so intentional on the people side of business. This includes providing infrastructure to coordinate workers, virtual coffee rooms to promote social bonding, employee recognition programs for motivation, virtual town halls to reduce power distance, and clear norms and etiquette around meetings and internal communications.

Smart companies should be quick to realize the challenge of remote work and build in solutions to "scaffold" the people-side of work. Again, this intentionality will serve them well not only during remote work periods like this, but also back in the office in person.

As examples of this, our team in the Sanger Leadership Center has a subcommittee working on reclarifying our cultural values and practices, including thinking about how to bring them into the virtual environment. How can we preserve our culture in this new way of working, as well as get super intentional and clear about what our culture is more generally? We also are working on writing down our rules for running meetings online, such as ensuring speaking time for each person and keeping discussions to fewer than five people.

These are all good people practices and backed by lots of research in management and psychology. Remote work is forcing us to get better at them now.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVELY WORKING FROM HOME

Broadly stated, to be effective at working at home, we all need to get super intentional about the people side of work. For employees, this means being aware of your own motivation and energy and finding ways to structure your work-home life to support yourself right now. Additionally, research suggests having a routine, knowing your needs (social contact, physical movement, structure), and building (and holding to) a daily routine that is intentionally designed to meet those needs is critical.

For leaders running effective remote teams, it's important to take the time now to make a plan about how to be intentional about the people side of your teams. When being intentional about teams, I always start first with Situational Awareness, and then look at four key criteria that every team (and leader!) needs—specifically, can my team COPE? This includes assessing Culture (value-based, meaningful, and inclusive rituals, artifacts, and norms), Objectives (clear, fair, and motivating performance targets), Processes and norms (playbooks for how to communicate and work together), and Experimentation (support for flexibility and adaptation).

Here are a few specific actions you can take to address each of these critical team:

## 1. SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

### KNOW HOW YOUR TEAM IS FEELING AND WHAT THEY NEED, AND WORK TO MEET TEAM NEEDS.

Take the time to do one-on-ones with direct reports to understand their needs right now. What are their emotions and their energy? What do they need to be productive? What resources do they need? Interestingly, successful remote companies agree that having a large budget to set up a comfortable home office is critical. Has your organization updated policies and secured funding to help support employees to comfortably work at home?

Relatedly, set up an energy/culture check within your teams. Have a meeting at the end of the week to see how the team is doing; you might need to adapt for next week. Or send out an anonymous culture pulse survey at the end of every week to do an energy check. Gratitude checks or asking for positives of the week can also be helpful practices in helping people reappraise the situation.

**RESEARCH SUGGESTS HAVING A ROUTINE, KNOWING YOUR NEEDS (SOCIAL CONTACT, PHYSICAL MOVEMENT, STRUCTURE), AND BUILDING A DAILY ROUTINE THAT IS INTENTIONALLY DESIGNED TO MEET THOSE NEEDS IS CRITICAL.**

## 2. CULTURE

### FORM A CULTURE SUBCOMMITTEE AND FIND WAYS TO REALLY EMPHASIZE YOUR MISSION AND VALUES RIGHT NOW.

Empower this committee to find and set into action three to five cultural practices that can bring your company's values and missions alive in a remote work environment. How can cultural traditions have continuity in the new way of work? How can traditional offsites be run online? How can rituals celebrating successes be brought into the online environment?

In addition to ensuring that your culture

translates to remote work, reminding people of your core mission and values is also a great way to provide stability and motivation during turbulent times (and ensure alignment and motivation during times of smooth sailing as well).

## 3. OBJECTIVES

### ENSURE THAT INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM PERFORMANCE GOALS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ARE CLEAR (AND VISIBLE IN A DAILY WAY).

Setting long-term company goals and then being clear how that translates to team and individual objectives each week (and is visible in daily life for employees, including in new online environments) is always important. If you are not already using project management software such as Asana, now is the time. Minimally, even a shared Google sheet that clarifies who owns what and when it's expected to be done can be helpful, especially if it's something engaging that people will want to log in to and look at every morning. Providing people with goals and ensuring mechanisms for accountability will keep your remote team going and make the team even better when it goes back to face-to-face.

Don't forget to build in a little extra time in the next few weeks, though, as people adjust to the new normal—again, show compassion, know individual needs and bandwidths right now, and adjust goals accordingly. But do set, communicate, and make visual realistic goals as a way of increasing energy and preserving team alignment and direction.

## 4. PROCESSES AND NORMS

### MAKE A PLAYBOOK FOR COMMUNICATION AND MEETING NORMS IN THE REMOTE-WORK ENVIRONMENT.

Where are quick-response questions communicated that used to be done face-to-face? (Over Google Chat, Asana, Slack?) What is the structure for an ideal meeting?



What types of meetings are there? How are the rules to run decision-making meetings different from town halls or larger standup meetings? (Three to five people in the virtual room is ideal for decision-making/problem-solving meetings. For larger town halls or standups, you can have more people, but people should be on mute unless speaking and chat functions should be used to gather questions and ideas.) What are the norms about video on/off? (Research suggests video always on, unless there are extreme circumstances, is the best!)

## 5. EXPERIMENTATION

### MAKE SURE YOUR TEAM IS ACTIVELY EXPERIMENTING, ADAPTING, AND BEING FLEXIBLE BY BEING MINDFUL OF YOUR OWN MINDSET, SELF-COMPASSION, AND FLEXIBILITY AS A LEADER, AND THEN FINDING WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR TEAM ON THESE TOPICS AS WELL.

Coping with change requires flexibility. To be flexible and adaptive, you have to start with both compassion and a growth mindset for yourself as leader. For example, Sue Ashford and colleagues found that leaders can only help others if they have compassion for themselves. So make sure you are taking care of you, getting your head in the right space, and setting the right image for your team.

Then make sure you are doing everything you can do to show compassion for the different needs in your team. Use this compassion for yourself and your team to help promote a growth orientation for members to learn how to flexibly adapt to a new way of work. ■



Lindred (Lindy) Greer is an Associate Professor of Management & Organizations at Michigan Ross as well as the Faculty Director of the Sanger Leadership Center. Her research focuses on how to lead effective organizational teams, with specific interests in leadership skills in conflict management, diversity and inclusion, vision crafting, and the communication of emotions.

Lindy is currently an Associate Editor at the Academy of Management Journal, on the boards of six of the top management and psychology journals, and has served on the boards of professional associations such as the International Association of Conflict Management and the Conflict Management Division of the Academy of Management.



A large audience is seated in a dark arena, looking towards a stage. The stage features a large screen displaying a person's face and a smaller screen showing a globe. The ceiling is high with a complex grid of lights and rigging. The overall atmosphere is professional and high-tech.

# Live experiences will live again

“We are not meant for a digital world, and whilst events can take place within this realm, they cannot replace the live experience.”

by DAN BOLTON

Remember the day well. It was the start of the first week in March, and we were navigating what would essentially become a perfect storm of challenges that would be problematic to any business.

Rewind a few months, and the last quarter of 2019 and the beginnings of 2020 had not been as busy as we would have usually anticipated in the events industry. Clients were taking longer to pay. Tensions with Iran meant clients were nervous to host events in the Middle East region where we are based, and then there were issues brewing in China with a little-known virus that had started to take hold. Hearing that it had already shut down

parts of their economy, it became clear that people would have to spend some time apart, which is a difficult proposition when your entire business model and industry is built upon bringing people together.

As the first emails and calls to cancel events started filling our inbox and voicemails in that first week of March, it became very clear that the world was arguably having a defining historical event, which would stand alongside those memorable “where were you” moments, such as 9/11, the first man on the moon, and the financial crisis of 2008. This time, it would be: “Where were you when the coronavirus pandemic hit?”

**EVERYTHING THAT WE ARE GOING THROUGH RIGHT NOW GOES AGAINST THE NATURAL DNA OF WHO WE ARE. WE ARE SOCIAL BEINGS. WE ARE NOT MEANT FOR A DIGITAL WORLD, AND WHILST EVENTS CAN TAKE PLACE WITHIN THIS REALM, THEY CANNOT REPLACE THE LIVE EXPERIENCE.**

On that fateful day in March, we went from a successful business with a pipeline of more than six months of interesting and exciting projects, to literally absolutely nothing in the space of 12 hours. To say that this is something we were completely underprepared for would be an understatement; we simply never thought that we would be in a position to experience this. To watch helplessly as the world around you begins to crumble, and to have a complete overwhelming feeling of helplessness is something that, like many business owners, I was completely unfamiliar with.

Throughout the years I have been in the industry that I love, no matter what the challenge, I always believed that there was something to be learned from the experience that you were going through. I believed opportunities can be created to adapt and deal with the challenge at hand, and that with this, a solution can be found. This time, however, the solutions were not ours to find. This was a problem much bigger than anything we could manage. This event was global and life-changing. The world we lived in had literally changed in the blink of an eye, and there is absolutely nothing that we can do about it.

As the domino effect of the pandemic took hold across the globe, one by one, the shutters came down, and we were forced indoors. When we could go out, we were told to keep at least two meters apart, to not embrace those we love, and social distancing quickly became the new buzz word. Eventually, the dust began to settle, and collectively, we realized the ramifications of this new norm we collectively found ourselves in. The emphasis began to

switch to finding solutions to help evolve an industry that relies on people not socially distancing. "Pivot" became the new tag line, as businesses that depend upon the now socially unacceptable gatherings of people explored alternatives to help them survive in a new, unknown world.

This "pivot" towards global digital gatherings has accelerated in recent years. There is certainly something to be said about the ability to connect with industry peers, delegates, fans and a wider audience across the world through online and digital mediums. As brands, businesses, and event attendees look to evaluate and minimize overheads where possible, the wider population has also started to ask legitimate questions about what they can personally do to stem the challenges that climate change and unsustainable travel and business practices pose the planet.

In the weeks following the complete overnight collapse of the live events industry in which we do business, the scramble began to examine ways that we too could evolve into a fully digital and online service provider. Exacerbated by the relentless news feeds and reports that the live industry will be in shut down for a significant amount of time, that concerts festivals and other large public gatherings might be out of action until at least the end of the year, and that mega projects such as the Olympics and Expo 2020 will in fact take place in 2021, this evolution continued at pace.

Was digital the savior to our stalled business that has been forced into a hiatus with the global shutdown? This question has been lingering since that

fateful day back at the beginning in when our world imploded, and it has continued to keep myself and many others awake at night as we endure a period of self-isolation and lack of interaction with fellow human beings. And therein lies the answer to that very question that has paralyzed us with bouts of anxiety induced insomnia. It is the essence of humanity: our yearning and ability for social interaction.

To be able to feel the bass of your favorite band as it travels within your body, to laugh and joke with your socially close companions at a gig from your favorite comedian, to personally engage with your audience, to be wowed by acrobatic feats of human brilliance, to touch, to taste, to smell, to love, to laugh, to cry, to experience- to live. Everything that we are going through right now goes against the natural DNA of who we are. We are social beings. We are not meant for a digital world, and whilst events can take place within this realm, they cannot replace the live experience. Live will reign again.

Once the world heals, we shall mourn our collective losses, and then emerge from within a period of imposed self-isolation having had the time to reflect upon the world in which we wish to live in. Live event experiences will be back, more relevant, and stronger than ever- just different from what we might be used to. ■



Dan Bolton is the owner and Director of Dan Bolton Creative Management Agency. A member of the British Business Group Dubai and Northern Emirates, Dan is an artist director and creative producer with over 21 years of experience and an extensive global network in the live events, entertainment and performance industry. Bolton's credits include the Jakarta Palambang Asian Games 2018 opening and closing ceremonies where he was

the associate choreographer and chartist, artist director for the inauguration of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2017, part of the flash team for the 2017 Edinburgh Hogmanay celebrations, creative producer for the AFC champions league final pre-match opening ceremony in 2016, along with a host of other leading international shows that include the London and Athens Olympic Games opening and closing ceremonies, as well as the Manchester and Glasgow Commonwealth Games opening and closing ceremonies. [danbolton.me](http://danbolton.me)



# #TAMTALKSTECH

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

**CAPTURE THIS**  
**SONY HANDYCAM FDR-AX43**

Sony has unveiled the new 4K Handycam with a built-in gimbal mechanism and the Balanced Optical SteadyShot technology for capturing smooth, high quality video. Developed especially for content creators and vloggers, the device combines essential hardware and software in a compact bundle featuring a ZEISS Vario-Sonnar T zoom lens with 20x optical zoom

and 30x Clear Image Zoom for 4K video. This iteration of the Handycam also has three mic capsules to capture clear sound and reduce noise. Plus, it has a tilting LCD screen with touch display to make selfie shooting on-the-go easier than ever before. With a battery enabling up to 235 minutes of continuous shooting, Handycam is a vlogger's best friend.



**37** Sony  
4K Handycam



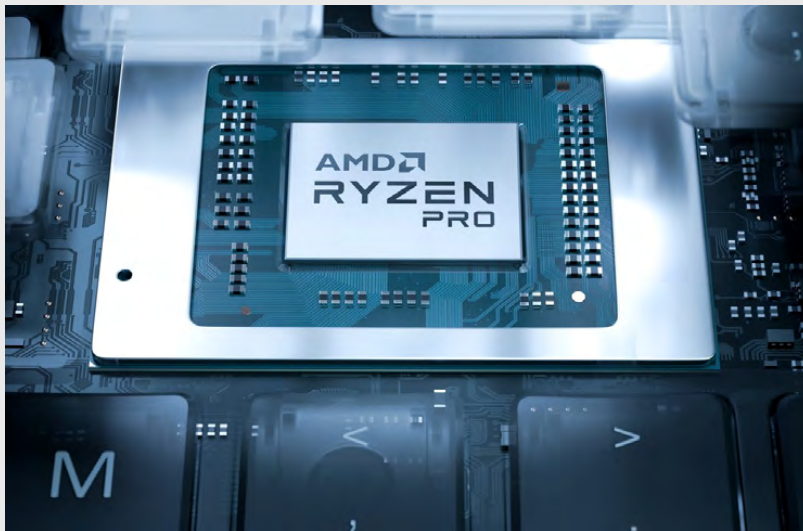


**TUNE IN**  
**HONOR MAGIC EARBUDS**

HONOR Magic Earbuds filter out unwanted ambient noise thanks to its dual microphone setup: Feedforward and Feedbackward—these work together with the inner microphones to cancel out background noise. The small, in-ear devices also come with touch control, which lets you control music and calls quickly. You can even toggle the noise cancellation feature on and off when you need it. Aside from its “magical” handling features, the earbuds render crystal clear vocals and deep bass thanks to its 10mm driver unit. The earbuds offer up to 3.5 hours of streaming, up to 2.5 hours of call time, and around 12 days of standby time to keep you tuned in wherever you go.



HONOR  
Magic Earbuds



**EFFICIENT (AND EFFECTIVE)**  
**LENOVO THINKPAD**

Lenovo is offering two new smart solutions for computing with the E14 and E15 laptops. With improved screen to body ratio of 85%, this E series of devices offer greater durability and security. The integrated touch fingerprint reader, which is embedded in the power button, offers one touch power and log-on, while the optional IR camera with Glance by

Miramatrix software can respond to your presence and automatically unlock the laptop. ThinkPad E series devices are powered by AMD Ryzen 4000 series processors and feature Harmon speakers with Dolby Audio, a dual array far field microphone, and Microsoft Teams and Skype for business hot keys to help you work efficiently.



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

# 'TREP TRIMMINGS

# THE EXECUTIVE SELECTION

From better goods to better wardrobe bests, every issue we choose a few items that make the approved executive selection list. In this issue, we present our picks from the Paul Smith SS20 collection, a refined timepiece that could be your next splurge, and more.

## THAT '70S SHOW

PAUL SMITH SS20

There is a touch of nostalgia in Paul Smith's Spring/Summer 2020 collection. The line is inspired by the personal wardrobes of creative people that Smith came to know in his trips to New York's up and coming art community in the SoHo district in the 1970s. At the time, galleries that were opening up like OK Harris, Pace, and Leo Castelli influenced the city's young artistic community, and that was a period when an artist's tailored suit could double as overalls, and individual style was expressed with

everyday items like an oversized jacket or customized cotton shirt. As such, this collection centers on function and utility as key, with suits that are soft and wearable. These suits are worn oversized with jackets longer, lapels wider, and trousers higher on the rise—it's certainly a wardrobe for those with an artistic, daring flair. With colors slightly mismatched, it's a nod to the pop art palette, which includes pastels of soft pink and caramel, to electric hues of strong yellow and blue.

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



Paul Smith SS20



Paul Smith SS20



Paul Smith SS20

IMAGE CREDIT PAUL SMITH | BREITLING | DOLCE & GABBANA | SHISEIDO



## IN WITH THE OLD

### BREITLING

Having debuted in 1984, the Chronomat continues to be centerpiece in the Breitling watch collection, and nearly 40 years later, the horology brand does not disappoint with its newest redesign of the timepiece. Throughout its evolution, every Chronomat has had features that makes it instantly stand out. First is the use of the signature rotating bezel, the interchangeable rider tabs at 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock that the wearer can adjust for either a count up or count down timer function, and the signature integrated Rouleaux bracelet with a butterfly clasp. Powered by the Breitling Manufacture Caliber 01, an in-house mechanical movement, it also comes with lume on the dial, with a 200-meter water resistance, making it a great dive watch as well. The collection consists of four steel on steel models, with silver, copper, blue, or black dials, as well as the Bentley model with a green dial, and the Freccie Tricolori limited model with a blue dial. Plus, there's also a steel version with gold rider tabs, a silver dial, and a street bracelet, another with a steel and goal case, and finally a model with a golden case that comes with a black rubber strap. With the range of different metal and dial options, whether you wear it to your beach or your board meetings, you'll be sure to find one that's the right fit for you. [breitling.com](http://breitling.com)

## FUSION OF OPPOSITES

### DOLCE & GABBANA

The One for Men Eau de Parfum Intense by Dolce & Gabbana is a seamless fusion of opposites. Concocted by perfumer Jean-Christophe Herault, it is a scent of extremes, opening up with accents of golden neroli essence, fused with cypress and cardamom, as well as musky cashmere, tinged with calming clary sage and benzoin at its heart. Along with notes of deep black leather, patchouli, and labdanum, this is an intense, warm, and spicy scent that simply deserves a spot in your collection.

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



## EDITOR'S PICK

### SHISEIDO

Based off the company's holistic research in skin science, Shiseido's new Vital Perfection line is definitely worth your time. Its Uplifting and Firming Cream has a silky and luxurious texture that promises to fight wrinkles, dark spots, and the loss of elasticity. With its use of key ingredients that deliver on antioxidant, skin brightening and soothing functions, the high-glycerin moisturizer is ideal for treating dry, mature skin. Suitable for both your morning and evening skincare routine, after cleansing and toning, take two pearl-sized amounts with a spatula or your finger. With a light tap, dot evenly onto your cheeks, forehead, nose, and chin, and spread it out smoothly. Your skin will thank you! [shiseido.com](http://shiseido.com)





# REFLECTIONS WHILE #STAYINGHOME



## 10 LESSONS I LEARNED THROUGH THE COVID-19 CRISIS

by JUMANA AL DARWISH

**T**he world has been presented with its greatest fear: an ever-changing pandemic forcing global business communities at large to pause in confusion, in panic, and in distress. Leaders from an array of disciplines have been pushed out of their comfort zones to reassess their modus operandi and adapt to new market dynamics.

Like many owners of self-funded businesses, I have nurtured the growth of my social concepts, The Happy Box, The Happy Studio, and Happy Hearts Global over the years organically and regionally, and yet, I was not prepared for a market play overnight.

However, there is beauty in chaos, because amidst it all, a silver lining shines. This pandemic has forced us to remove our blind shades and see clearly, probably for the first time in a very long

time. With hundreds of how-to guides pouring in from “experts,” is there really a survival handbook for all this? With so many lessons doing the rounds, here are a few of mine.

### LESSON 1 BACK TO BASICS IS KEY

How many times has entrepreneurship been dubbed as the never-ending hamster wheel? I have been on it for six years, and I am exhausted. My business was always chasing the next big thing. I had this urge to diversify my product and service base, because it would increase our financial rewards, which it did— but so did our expenses. The COVID-19 disruption has enabled me to take a step back and refocus. By understanding what my business’ 10x factor is, I am able to capitalize on it, and ensure further systematic growth and sustainability. Despite the pandemic, our sales

have increased, because our product offering has remained consistent over the years, with a strong consumer sense of brand loyalty.

### LESSON 2 EMBRACE AGILITY

My late father used to always tell me, “You are a lion, Jumana,” and his words ring in my ears more so lately. This ethos bears a similarity with my leadership style. I have always thought of my business as agile, in the sense of its ability to move fast and be responsive, whilst maintaining a strong foundation. With market fluctuations over the years, there was no choice but to continuously innovate. Six years later, our concept remains. Businesses must never remain stagnant, and they must continuously evolve and adapt to new market trends. Nothing is ever set in stone— including existence.

**LESSON 3****THERE'S STRENGTH IN PARTNERSHIPS**

What competitors fail to understand is that it takes years to build a brand, and a lot of trial and error. Brands are never built overnight, and what may work for one business may not necessarily work for another. Clients buy a product or service because of their allegiance to that brand, the consistency in its offering, quality, and service. As such, duplicating another business' offering will not ensure success. There is power in partnerships. I've witnessed an increase in competition, even from the closest of our partners, but I have also seen impactful collaborations come our way in the form of co-creating with like-minded businesses and government entities for the greater good.

**LESSON 4****SHOWCASE SOLIDARITY**

Small businesses are important to the growth of any economy, yet they are fragile at this time, and need the greatest of support from governments and semi-government entities. Government fees alone compromise approximately 7% of our business' yearly expenses. A solidarity fund supporting small businesses could help our future and the future of many others. The key to staying financially afloat is by lowering administrative costs, which could lessen the burden on small businesses like ours. What is needed is a backbone to rely upon, and there is no better one than having the support of our enablers, who basically helped nourish the sheer existence of our entrepreneurial spirit.

**LESSON 5****CASH IS KING**

In the words of Ken Morse: "Cash is more important than your mother." Well, not *mine*, but you get the gist of what I am trying to say. Cash is everything. It is of great importance to maintain your business' financial health, and more so when you are self-funded. This gets difficult at times

when expenses are high and receivables are delayed from partners, thus creating a prolonged cycle of payment delays, which hurts small businesses the most. I would love to see an expenditure scoring system put in place for all stakeholders, as this could really change the course of how we do business in the future.

**LESSON 6****REALIGNING TEAMS**

If anything, the COVID-19 crisis has made us all more human, more resilient, and more understanding, and yet even with that, there is a fine line. I have always said that personnel are at the core of a business' success. With the right people on board and the art of delegating, your business is set. This pandemic has enabled me to determine the keepers, the ones who share my business' core values, and those who don't— and that is ok. It is always hard to let team members that you invested in go, but a crisis calls for thick skin and tough decisions to be made.

**LESSON 7****THE FUTURE IS TECH**

Technology has kept us uniquely connected and informed, and now is the time to upgrade and integrate technology processes in our business functions. In my business, I am not only deploying technology for communications, but also looking into more effective technological channels and platforms to innovate our products and services, and serve our core essence. Tech is the future, and an investment that all small businesses should consider.

**LESSON 8****WEIGH SOCIAL VS. ECONOMIC VALUE**

We've seen throughout this crisis that social values supersede economic values. In my humble experience, social enterprise should be a core component of one's business, be it in the realm of education, nutrition, healthcare, environment, female empowerment, or

**A SOLIDARITY FUND SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES COULD HELP OUR FUTURE AND THE FUTURE OF MANY OTHERS. THE KEY TO STAYING FINANCIALLY AFLOAT IS BY LOWERING ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS, WHICH COULD LESSEN THE BURDEN ON SMALL BUSINESSES LIKE OURS.**

microfinance. The point is, initiatives that aim to create social value will add purpose to one's business, and offer greater meaning to its existence and now more so, especially with the ongoing issues concerning global welfare.

**LESSON 9****REMAIN ETHICAL**

Ethics are the backbone of all human interaction, and when faced with risk, they tend to surface. I found this to be an incredible moment of truth that has helped me filter my stakeholders, from personnel, clients, and business partnerships. It has been my greatest learning, which will certainly serve as a basis for future business undertakings, and which will enable me to establish the boundaries I need for my business to thrive.

**LESSON 10****DON'T FORGET "YOU"**

Don't forget to care for yourself. As you adapt to the new normal, you are truly not alone in the process. No matter how hard we try to manage, there are things that remain outside of our control. Reach out to your trusted networks and engage. I have always said that entrepreneurship can be a lonely experience, let alone leading during a time of crisis. We all need each other, and what an amazing journey it is to share this experience with others. The beauty of this process is that you will be equipped for anything, *literally anything*, after this. ■



Jumana Al Darwish is an award-winning social entrepreneur and philanthropist. She is the co-founder of the international franchise, The Happy Box, and the founder of global brands, The Happy Studio, and Happy Hearts Global. Jumana holds a Bachelor's degree in Community and Ethnic Studies from Concordia University in Canada, a Master's of Science in Evidence-Based Social Intervention from Oxford University in the United Kingdom, and a Strategy Execution Program Certificate from INSEAD in France.



## SAYING IT AS IT IS

**Deborah Webster, founder and CEO of Amani Circle,** on creating a more ethical, responsible and sustainable way of doing business **by TAMARA PUPIC**

**I**'m disappointed, at least in terms of results from the region," says Deborah Webster, founder and CEO of Amani Circle (Amani means "harmony" in Swahili), a Dubai-based consultancy on sustainable business practices, when asked how satisfied she is on the impact of her venture in the GCC market over the last few years. "However, I keep reminding myself that change happens by a few taking the lead, and until I find those few, I need to keep chipping away."

Born and raised in the GCC region, Webster launched Amani Circle in 2017 with an aim to unlock the region's potential when it comes to achieving harmony between business practices and the environment, society, and communities. However, she now finds a greater appetite for her work in the UK and Europe. "There are healthier ecosystems to drive innovation," she explains. "They also have more robust approaches to issues such as sustainability, data privacy, and ethical consideration around technology. The message and approach in the UK and Europe are vastly different from the 'move fast and break things' doctrine touted in

**"IT UPSETS ME TO SEE PEOPLE TAKEN IN BY FANCY PITCHES AND NOT PEELING BACK THE LAYERS, SO [THE MAIN CHALLENGE IS] THE LACK OF PROPER DUE DILIGENCE, AND THE LACK OF RESPONSIBILITY AND THOUGHT AROUND TECHNOLOGY, DATA, AND SIMPLE ETHICS."**

Silicon Valley, which I frequently hear repeated in the ecosystem here."

Since it's fairly rare to talk with a startup founder and/or advisor who is not unnecessarily bombastic, and does not shy away from giving constructive feedback in order to make things better, I ask Webster to share with me her thoughts on the UAE's entrepreneurial ecosystem in particular. "It pains me to say this, but I think that there's a lot of talk about innovation, and there are some brilliant people here, but it upsets me to see people taken in by fancy pitches and not peeling back the layers, so [the main challenge is] the lack of proper due diligence, and the lack of responsibility and thought around technology, data, and simple ethics," Webster responds. "We seem to be backing 'me-toos' in a way that is akin to fattening up a cow to sell on the market. This, for me, is not innovation. It's replication. And while we do this, the true innovators are being overlooked."

Webster is not just talking about the need to prevent such mistakes in the ecosystem—Amani Circle is a testament of her intention to do something about it. To start with, Amani Circle is focused on helping companies become both profitable and purposeful. "The two matter, because if a company doesn't make a profit, it is unsustainable, it can't hire the best people, and/or won't be a secure place for those people to invest their time and talent," she says. "When we say purpose, we look for those whose practices are a true and honest reflection of that purpose, i.e. purpose in action. One of the secrets in the sauce, so to speak, is finding out people's aspirations and whether they can fulfill them through their work. We like to say, you pay people to turn up, but they *choose* to donate their heart and their mind."



The next pillar is responsible leadership. “Firstly, we create a distinction between leaders and people in positions of power, since just because people have a title doesn't mean that they are leaders,” she says. “Responsibility and accountability are key in drawing that distinction. Competence is one thing, but responsible leadership is about moral courage. It's about character (not personality). Is this person a person of their word? Can they be trusted? Character and responsible leadership are tested in tough times, like now.” According to Webster, another way to look at all this is as personal governance. “People talk about family governance and corporate governance, but, in reality, we're only as good as our weakest link, the decisions and actions of individuals,” she explains. “So, being able to understand and strengthen the human factor is very important.”

Through Amani Circle, Webster also explores sustainable business practices, especially when it comes to the situations which she describes as 'good' people doing 'bad' things. “This is justified in the name of profit, or under the other popular banner of 'that is standard practice,’” she says. “For me, it begs the question of why we are creating and allowing corporate practices to corrupt people. Why do we

think it's ok to act in a way that disregards consequences?” Amani Circle also analyzes the ethical use of data and technology, Webster notes.

“This is a big one, and where all of the above play a critical role, because just because we can, doesn't mean we should,” Webster notes. “I'm of the view that to unleash powerful technologies, when we do not seem to have the character maturity to deal with them responsibly, is dangerous. With the current lack of global standards and regulation, some are behaving abysmally, because 'legally,' they can get away with it. In the process, they feel it's ok to collect and analyze copious amounts of data, which is, in effect, hacking people's inner worlds, and thus, the ultimate invasion of privacy. I believe when Socrates said, ‘Know thyself,’ he meant for humans to know themselves and their inner world, not for Alexa, Siri, or Google to tell us who we are or what we want.”

Webster started her career in the marketing field, which is what got her convinced in the power of relationships. Towards the end of 1990s, she moved to the US and worked for a startup that aimed to digitize the yellow pages in those early days of the internet. In the midst of Webster talking about her love of build-

ing things in new domains, I notice that this part of her story carries a lesson for how to go about making decisions in difficult situations- so, dear reader, pay attention! “That was also where I faced a tough moral dilemma, because, through the books, I saw that funds came in from investors one day, and the next, large payments would be made to the directors as loans to officers. No one else in the company was aware of that. In the meantime, they were not meeting payroll. I remember the CEO calling a town hall meeting to explain the situation to people, and that they were trying to figure it out. He added that, if anyone had any bright ideas, they were willing to listen. I remember speaking out to say I did, but advised it would be better if we discussed it in his office.”

At this point, it's important to note the power dynamics at play: Webster was then “a little 25-year-old girl,” and she was having to state her case to a burly ex-Chapter 11 attorney from California. “I told him that I saw some loans to officers so maybe the officers should pay them back,” Webster remembers. “I cheekily pointed out a loan is, by definition, a payment due, but, in his mind, the loans were instead of them taking out salaries. I challenged him on that point, highlighting that that meant all the risk was sitting >>>



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## THE PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF GOOD BUSINESS

People – their thinking, principles and moral compass, impact what acceptable business practice is. AMANICIRCLE is a curated community of business leaders, investors and entrepreneurs committed to building, growing and investing in better companies. Our unique approach aligns visions, values and value creation.

EXPLORE



**“IF WE WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD, WE WON'T DO IT THROUGH CHARITY, BUT BY CHANGING THE WAY BUSINESS OPERATES. SOLUTIONS EXIST, BUT A KEY OBSTACLE IS HUMAN APATHY; THEREFORE, ALIGNED INTERESTS AND APPETITES ARE ESSENTIAL IF WE WANT TO BUILD TRACTION AND SEE RESULTS.”**

with the employees.” To emphasize the point, Webster paints the picture by telling me about one of the employees— a manager from the office in New York, a single mother, with no other source of income. “So, if I stayed, I would be lulling people into a false sense of security that everything was fine, but in effect, putting them more and more into a financial hole. If I left, it would likely be taken as a signal of trouble, which could lead to some people, if not all, leaving, which meant that we would not finish the product, and hence, no revenues.” But Webster wasn’t satisfied with the two routes she had in front of her— so she went on and created a third option. She contacted recruiters and got new roles for the team.

This personal initiative and commitment to help others served as Webster’s first foray into the recruiting industry. “It was about really understanding the client, the vibe of the company, and other little things to get the ‘fit’ right,” she says. “I also got really good at profiling candidates, because by understanding both the candidate and the company, I could zero in on targeting the right candidate for the right role/right company, saving time, and improving outcomes. Some of the jobs were just filling in for someone for the day, but the fit was so right that by noon on that day, the client would call asking if they could take them on board full-time.” Working in recruitment, Webster says, taught her the power of a paycheck, “and how a job, even for a day, can make a marked difference in the lives of people who live hand to mouth.”

This period of her career holds one

more interesting story which happened during the 2008/2009 financial crisis. “I remember getting a call from a past candidate, who was with Lehman Brothers, asking if I could help him and his team. So, I started meeting them and profiling them, not really knowing what I could do given what was happening around us. So I called a client who was also a mentor, and after I explained the composition of the team, and that I hadn’t met the heads yet, he said, ‘I’ve always known you do things differently, but today you’ve gone up in my estimations even more.’ It turned out that every recruiter in town had contacted him trying to sell him the team, but no one had sat down to figure out the engine, so to speak.”

Before you finish reading this feature, I will share with you a few other valuable lessons from Webster’s fruitful career. Some years ago in Malta, Webster took part in a Nokia challenge for innovative solutions using low tech phones to solve a problem for people living on less than US\$2 per day. The solution did not win, but the projects was successful nevertheless. “If we want to change the world, we won’t do it through charity, but by changing the way business operates,” Webster concludes. “Solutions exist, but a key obstacle is human apathy; therefore, aligned interests and appetites are essential if we want to build traction and see results. And, lastly, we need to reverse engineer the keys that bring mutual success to companies and people. They are the ones that, in reality, set me the challenge to plough all my experiences, research, patterns into a model that we call Amani.” ■

**‘TREP TALK**

**FOUR NOTES** **DEBORAH WEBSTER**  
**HAS MADE ON BUSINESSES**  
**NAVIGATING THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

**1.** “Some companies that have a more command and control style of leadership struggled to deal with the working-from-home environment. Some were tempted to compensate for the lack of ‘visibility’ by deploying authoritarian-like technology to monitor people’s inputs. Companies need to think through what matters more— input or outputs. They also need to consider what employees’ expectations will be post-crisis, and ensure they have the environment and circumstances that enable bright people to operate.”

**2.** “In some cases, there was poor handling of treatment of people. For instance, to cut costs, some companies decided to let go of people, which impacted not only their paychecks, but other factors like health cover and visas. The UAE government was very good in changing some of these regulations, but the reality is then when lockdown is lifted, the 30-day window is likely to be back in place, and these people will have to leave the country. Others chose to relegate the responsibility of announcing layoffs to HR where, in reality, this is the leadership’s responsibility. The other factor was the trickling of decisions of this nature, creating further angst in a situation that is already rife with uncertainty and fear. This is a sign of weak leadership, and needs to be addressed.”

**3.** “Some companies, especially startups, need to consider that what they were working on, and/or their approach may have been relevant before the crisis. But they must not underestimate how the crisis will impact the relevance of their business and/or approach. They must factor this in deciding what to do going forward.”

**4.** “There may be a temptation to use the crisis to implement technologies that are more akin to surveillance tech. There may not be any legislation currently to stop these practices. But as founders, investors, and decision-makers, we have a moral obligation not to deploy tech that has the risk of taking away people’s privacy and freedom— regardless of the spin and hyperbole media and project promoters may be using.”



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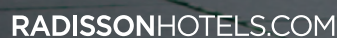
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# “WE GOT FUNDED!”

The stories behind the recent fundraising successes of MENA startups Ziina, Ogram, and Baims **by PAMELLA DE LEON**



Faisal Toukan, CEO and co-founder, Ziina

## ZIINA ziina.com

Ziina, a UAE-based licensed social peer-to-peer (P2P) payment solution, has successfully raised a pre-seed round of US\$850,000, led by San Francisco-based Class 5 Global, with partici-

pation from Samih Toukan’s Jabbar Internet Group and other prominent angel investors.

Promised to be as easy as sending a text message, the social P2P payment solution is available on the iOS App Store and Google Play Store for download, which allows

UAE bank account holders to send and receive money with just a phone number—no IBAN or SWIFT code required. According to its release, the app offers bank-grade security and end-to-end encryption, providing a seamless way for users to split cost of the bill.

### ‘TREP TALK

ZIINA CEO FAISAL TOUKAN SHARES TIPS FOR ENTREPRENEURS LOOKING TO RAISE FUNDS FROM INVESTORS AMID THE COVID-19 CRISIS

#### 1. Have a short-term vs long-term plan

“Investors want to hear from a founder that can navigate both favorable and tough circumstances. Given the current climate, they want to understand how your startup is positioning itself in the short-term without sacrificing its long-term vision. Show them how you’re navigating current circumstances to get to that light at the end of the tunnel.”

#### 2. Demonstrate what you’re building

“This is the time for you and your team to focus on building. Show VCs that you’re using this time effectively by demonstrating how you’ve iterated your product. How is your core product going to come out of this current situation better?”

#### 3. Be optimistic

“It is natural for every entrepreneur to be optimistic; this isn’t the time to lose that optimism. Investors can feel it. While current circumstances aren’t favorable, bad times don’t last. Uber, Airbnb, WhatsApp, Groupon were all founded in the last recession. To quote Y Combinator’s Paul Graham: “Any startup that gets started during the next few months is disproportionately likely to succeed. Success depends most of all on determination, and imagine how determined you have to be to start a startup in a global pandemic.”



Sarah Toukan, Chief Product Officer and co-founder, Ziina

Co-founded by Faisal Toukan, CEO, Sarah Toukan, Chief Product Officer, and Andrew Gold, VP of Engineering, the startup is on a mission to simplify payments for everyone. By leveraging the MENA re-

gion's adoption of fintech, Ziina aims to encourage the use of mobile payment solutions to fast track the UAE's transition towards a cashless society. Fresh from launching their operations out of in5 Dubai's startup incubator, with a license issued by TECOM, the founding team seems to have a good support system too- their advisory board includes serial entrepreneur Samih Toukan, as well as Emre Tok, former VP of Growth at Careem, who led a team of 80 people.

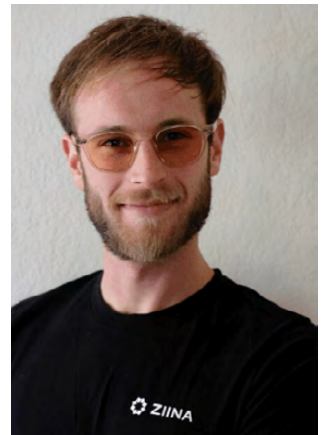
Using research on its core target demographic, the startup plans to introduce value-added services such as QR code integration, prepaid cards, and utility payments, among others. The team is keen to democratize access to financial services by be-

**THE SOCIAL P2P PAYMENT SOLUTION ALLOWS UAE BANK ACCOUNT HOLDERS TO SEND AND RECEIVE MONEY WITH JUST A PHONE NUMBER- NO IBAN OR SWIFT CODE REQUIRED.**

ing the go-to platform, with plans of making it easy for anyone who wishes to invest by integrating third party robo-advisors to Ziina's platforms. In terms of plans for the future, the startup plans to launch operations in Saudi Arabia in 2023, and the team also plans to integrate different revenue streams in their platform. For point-of-sale solutions and prepaid cards, Ziina will take a small percentage fee on all transactions from vendors.

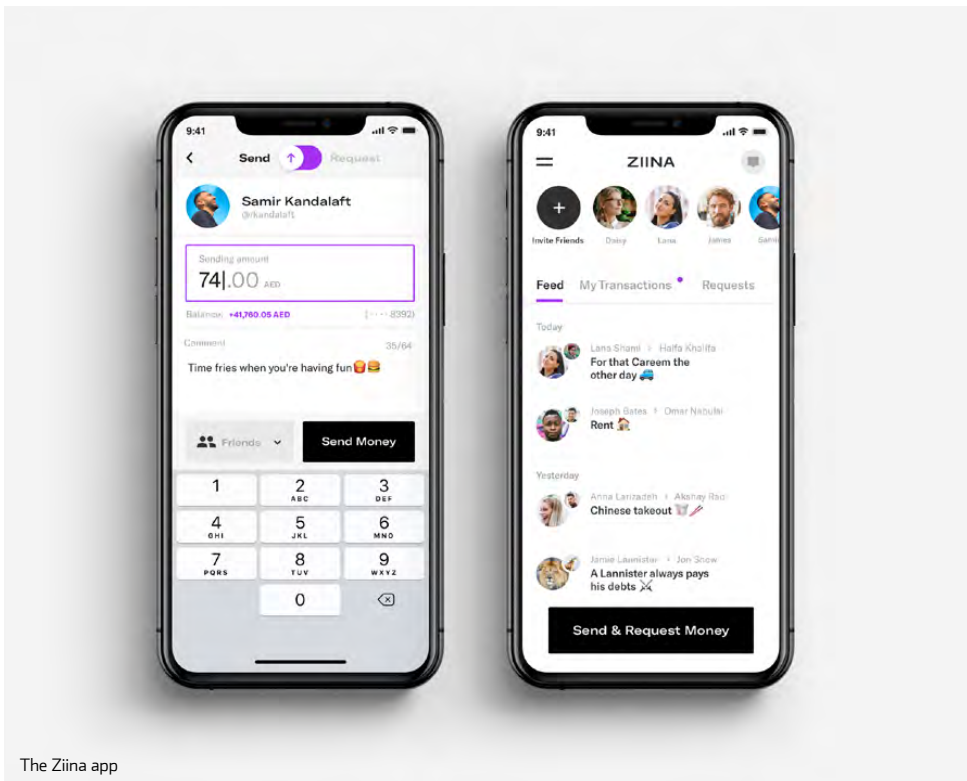
Toukan also points out that with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, they expect an uptake in use for their platform

as one, people have fewer opportunities to meet in person, so they will resort to sending remote payments when they need to pay someone pack, and two, people are wary to handle physical cash to avoid possible germ contamination. "Muslims in the UAE can use the Ziina app to send cash gifts to each other to preserve cultural and religious traditions," he also notes.



Andrew Gold, VP Engineering and co-founder, Ziina

As a region with one of the highest rates of smartphone penetration in the world and a young population, Joel Ayala, co-founder and Managing Partner of Class 5 Global VC, noted his company's eagerness to join Ziina's funding round, saying, "The economy is still cash-based. It's tough for people to do simple things like paying their friends. Ziina is taking a Silicon Valley mindset to the region, and solving this problem with technology."



The Ziina app



Ogram co-founders Shafiq Khartabil, Karim Kouatly and Karim Beyhum

**OGRAM**

*ogram.ae*

In an indication of how the MENA region is embracing the future of work, UAE-based platform Ogram has announced the completion of a US\$870,000 in a pre-Series A equity round by Global Ventures.

Launched in 2016, the online platform connects on-demand vetted gig workers with temporary job opportunities in different sectors, mostly in F&B, hospitality, e-commerce and logistics. The startup solves staffing challenges such as limited access to reliable staff, lengthy and costly onboarding processes for temp workers, and a lack of availability of staff at a short notice. Co-founders Shafiq Khartabil and Karim Kouatly, who were former restaurant operators, experienced similar staffing issues and wanted to address the staffing issues they faced in the F&B sector. In 2019, they were joined by former banker Karim Beyhum.

According to a statement, the startup has, so far,

served over 450 businesses and individual clients in the UAE, with over 1,050 active service providers placing 2,000 jobs per month. The Ogram app and website allows customers to book a job opportunity, as well as access to automated clock-in/clock-out timesheets, and direct staff payment through individual online wallets. The platform features pre-screened part-timers such as baristas, bartenders, waiters, drivers, entertainers, retail staff and cleaners. UAE residents who apply for temporary work permits to accept part-time work can apply for roles in the platform. Clients have included Al Tayer Group, Anantara Group, Bentley, and Chez Charles.

With the new capital infusion, Ogram plans to scale its business in the UAE. As the current pandemic stir current employment structures, Noor Sweid, General Partner at Global Ventures is bullish on her company's partnership with Ogram, with the firm also joining Ogram's board following the round of funding.

"We believe that embracing flexible work and upskilling the workforce to adopt multiple jobs will be the future of work in the region," she says.

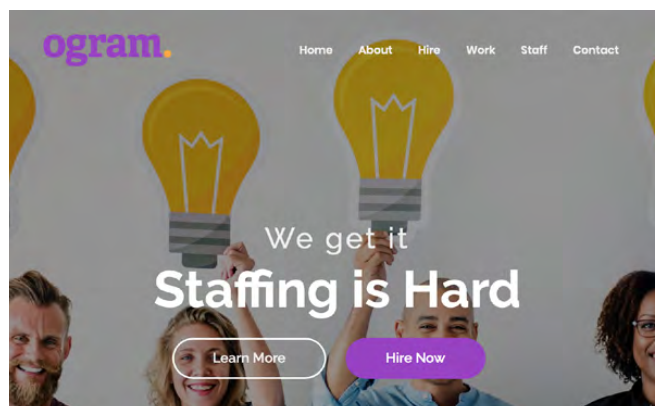
Khartabil notes that the current situation with the COVID-19 crisis has been a wake-up call to the global workforce, pushing individuals to garner multiple income channels and for companies to look into flexible solutions to reduced fixed costs amid the market uncertainty. "Going forward, we believe that flexible workers will allow businesses the agility to recover in line with the economy," he says. "The gig economy is

**'TREP TALK**

**OGRAM CO-FOUNDER AND CEO SHAFIQ KHARTABIL SHARES TIPS FOR ENTREPRENEURS LOOKING TO RAISE FUNDS FROM INVESTORS AMID THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

1. "Embrace the crisis and find creativity in building value to your existing user base or a new user base.
2. Don't bargain with the idea that things will go back to status quo. Accept the change, and adapt quickly.
3. Engage your investor base, and continue investor discussions on how your business model has adapted during COVID-19, and what that looks like post COVID-19 (emphasizing on product sustainability).
3. Reinforce your mission/vision with your investor discussions with strong conviction galvanizing them to believe your mission/vision as well."

the future of work and multiple jobs will be the norm future generations. It is a great time for investors and industry to take part, and fuel this growth."



IMAGES COURTESY OGRAM



**BAIMS**

baims.com

Kuwait edtech startup Baims had successfully raised an undisclosed amount in a seed funding round led by Al-Wazzan Education, a service provider of K-12 American, British and Arabic education in Kuwait, along with VC firm Seed Partners, and several angel investors.

Launched in 2017, Baims is an e-learning platform for Kuwait students that digitizes the offline tutoring experience and makes content accessible online. Started by Yousef AlHusaini and Bader Alrshaid while pursuing their engineering degrees in Kuwait University, it was originally focused on engineering subjects, and has since grown to tailor fit high-quality tutoring courses based on the university curriculum.

With a 70% discount on the price tag of a normal tutoring hour, AlHusaini notes that the startup was able to break even in just 24 hours after its launch. AlHusaini commends the help of the startup's early supporters, including engineer Khalid Al-bash who taught physics and lent his office to shoot Baims' first courses. They also credit Hemma Tech Accelerator's Jassem AlMutawa, who, even while the duo were still university students, provided them with guidance on leadership, negotiation, and the significance of having a scalable plan, as well as offered his office and studio spaces for their use as well.

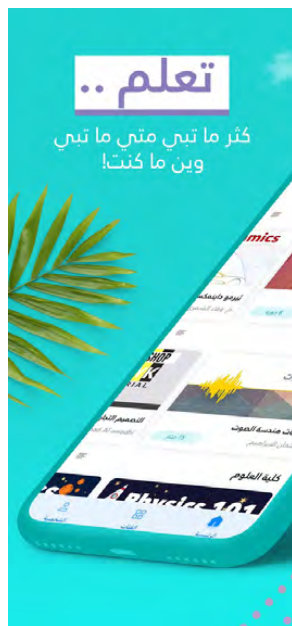
With a portfolio of top tier professors and tutors, the startup has expanded its scope to include colleges and universities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia today, and it



Yousef AlHusaini and Bader Alrshaid, co-founders, Baims

has also added courses suited for high school students. The platform is run on a revenue-sharing model with its instructors, who provide content tailored for each subject. Available on web, iOS, and Android devices, it has more than 1,000 recorded courses and over 30,000 lectures, with more than 450,000 course enrollments.

Baims app



With the impact of the coronavirus pandemic crisis manifesting in all industries, Alhusaini and his team offered all of the startup's high school courses for free, which helped it amass over 130,000 new course subscriptions and also introduce a large section of the high school population to online learning. "Before COVID-19, [people] thought that edtech startup solutions are a secondary option, but today, it's a need and a must!" he notes, adding that now is the best time for investors to leverage the opportunity in the huge digital transformation in the education sector, given how Baims experienced exponential growth in a matter of days.

This is a sentiment that is shared by one of their investors too—Fawaz AlObaid, Managing Partner of Seed Partners, comments, "We are thrilled to be joining Baims, a startup who we feel serves a much-needed purpose in our modern society. Baims is a unique and well-guided startup, focusing on empowering the youth and offering other models of education. Edtech has always

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been an intriguing field for Seeds Partners, and we are extremely honored to be associated with Baims and its founders in helping pave the way for future generations."

As for advice for fellow 'treps in these times, he shares: "Keep your burn rate low, and hire based on your needs, be flexible with adapting the new change, and restructure your plan overall for 2020, and focus on user acquisition, market share, and giving back to the community." Looking forward, the co-founders are now keen to grow their startup within the region. "Our ultimate goal is to be a part of the student's life," says Alhusaini. "Baims stand for Big Aims, and our aim is to build a strong youth community for a better educational ecosystem in the GCC and MENA region, and improve educational content." ■



Ramesh Jagannathan, Vice Provost for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Managing Director of startAD

**“OUR PHILOSOPHY IS TO NOT JUST TEACH THE COMMUNITY HOW TO CODE, BUT GIVE THEM THE ENTIRE DIGITAL OPEN SOURCE TOOL KIT TO BUILD ANY SMART SYSTEM THEY COULD IMAGINE.”**

innovation for the GCC region by NYUAD and Tamkeen, an Abu Dhabi-based government company that bills itself as one “that delivers projects enriching the UAE’s social, cultural, and educational landscape.” Despite the then ongoing global oil crisis, Jagannathan remembers startAD finding favor with the ecosystem at large owing to the way it worked. “The model enables major regional corporations to innovate with global startups through an immersive program that is based on a disciplined, repeatable, and scalable process to efficiently de-risk the path to product/market fit,” he explains.

Indeed, in a short period of three years, startAD has created a successful ecosystem platform of programs aimed at regional capacity building, youth entrepreneurship, research commercialization, and business acceleration for SME, corporate, and government innovation. It has graduated 118 global startups that have raised US\$50 million, secured over 50 pilots with corporations, generated \$15 million in revenue annually, and created over 250 jobs. Over 6,000 people have participated in startAD programs in these three years. “We strongly believe that startAD’s holistic approach, the processes and programs are directly applicable to scale and build MENA and other emerging ecosystems,” Jagannathan declares. “It is an unprecedented opportunity for the UAE to be the regional leader in the 21st century entrepreneurial economic transformation.”

However, this process has not been smooth sailing at all times. Robyn Brazzil, Director at startAD, says that working in an emerging ecosystem often included overcoming the lack of cultural acceptance of entrepreneurship and adoption of new technologies. “This was universal across

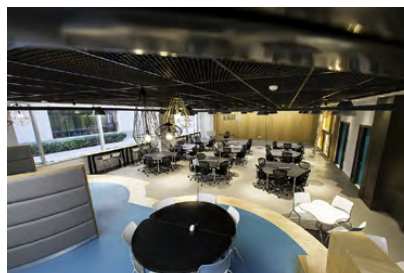
# A launchpad for success

As it celebrates its third anniversary in the UAE, a look at how **startAD** has bolstered Abu Dhabi’s entrepreneurial ecosystem **by TAMARA PUPIC and ABY SAM THOMAS**

**W**hen New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) opened its campus in 2010, it was a key step in the UAE’s strategy to move the country into a knowledge-based economy, remembers Ramesh Jagannathan, NYUAD Vice Provost for Entrepreneurship. At the time, Jagannathan was among the small group of founding faculty members on the ground, having joined NYUAD after a three-decade-long career at Eastman Kodak Company, and “having witnessed firsthand its rise and fall as a giant in corporate innovation.” As the Associate Dean of NYUAD Engineering, he helped build the university, and was then invited by the Abu Dhabi government to be one of the five experts to certify its 2030 vision. “I was struck by the immense potential for the Abu Dhabi startup ecosystem to lead the UAE and

the MENA region,” Jagannathan says. “We bootstrapped a pilot entrepreneurship program at NYUAD in 2015, and offered free weekly educational and training programs for the UAE community on lean startup, customer discovery, digital marketing, startup financing and legal, angel investment, and fundraising.”

In 2016, Jagannathan and his team managed to successfully raise significant funds for startAD, which was built as a model for entrepreneurial education and



the stakeholders we engaged with, from corporates, government entities, and even within the university," Brazzil says. "The only remedy for this was time, and demonstrating the viability of entrepreneurship as a legitimate career path through regional successes like Careem and Souq." Other challenges included finding people with the right mix of expertise and the right mindset to join the program as mentors, trainers and coaches. Today, she adds, their team of experts is their biggest strength, who are constantly developing new program offerings that do not currently exist in the market, which include a community based prototyping lab, a hardware-based accelerator, a UAE-wide youth incubation program, and most recently, a deep tech focused incubator targeting UAE research and faculty.

Jagannathan adds that startAD's strategy to build the regional ecosystem is based on the philosophy of demystifying and democratizing the entrepreneurial innovation process, especially in the digital smart space. To provide an example, Jagannathan explains that its Al Warsha program is based on a gender, education, and age neutral philosophy, where a grandparent in their seventies, or a construction worker, or an architect who is interested in transforming their career, or even an artist would learn how to build their own smart systems in a matter of hours. They would learn using open source platforms how to build prototypes, such as autonomous cars, smart vacuum cleaners, a smart watch, or a smart speaker, and interact with them using voice, gesture or facial recognition. Furthermore, the Al Warsha program helps startups and potential entrepreneurs to productize their innovations in Shenzhen, China, by connecting them to startAD's network partners. Most importantly, these programs are offered to people at no cost. "Our philosophy is to not just teach the community how to code, but give them the entire digital open source tool kit to build any smart system they could imagine," Jagannathan says, explaining that the Al Warsha program is conceptualized as the foundation to catalyze and build the innovation infrastructure across the entire regional community, and as such, it has so far trained over 1,000 people and supported over 20 prototypes.

"I am also proud of the community that we have built and the 'give back' mentality of our entrepreneurs," Jagannathan adds. >>>

## THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

startAD's corporate partners sound off on the program's growth and development over the years

**Samah Al Hajeri / Chief Innovation Officer,  
UAE Ministry Of Economy**



"I believe that startups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will lead the economic growth in the UAE and the GCC over the next few years. The UAE government has been aware of the importance of startups and SMEs in supporting the national economy and its crucial contribution to GDP; hence, there are many initiatives and projects to support and encourage both locals and residents to start up their businesses in UAE. The importance of having a program like startAD in UAE lies in its main role in stimulating the growth potential of the UAE in the region, being a hub to accelerate and support startups and innovation, as well as in developing the startup ecosystem in Abu Dhabi and the UAE.

The startAD program actually contributes highly by removing the barriers to entry, providing tangible resources and providing the environment and ecosystem, so that the very best ideas and entrepreneurs are allowed to flourish. We have decided to associate with startAD due to their

impact in the entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem as in just three years, startAD has welcomed over 6,000 participants and accelerated over 100 startups— 68 of which are based in the UAE.

Moreover, startAD has it all in one; their experienced staff and the local expertise with international exposure and knowledge, the facility and space provided to startups from labs, spaces and prototyping facility, the quality and the content of the training courses as well as the programs and mentorship that are delivered. Furthermore, their strong international network being integrated with NYU is an important factor to support startups.

Dealing with startAD's professional and experienced staff made my experience with startAD very pleasant. Our employees have learned a lot, and enjoyed the experience, which has resulted in some of the employees have decided to incubate their personal projects and ideas in startAD."



## THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

startAD's corporate partners sound off on the program's growth and development over the years

### **Maan Al Awlaqi / Executive Director – Strategy & Transformation, Aldar Properties**

"Innovation, technology, and supporting startups has always been at the forefront of the UAE's agenda as the country transitions to a knowledge-based economy. As such, a program like startAD is perfectly aligned with national objectives and developing a supportive ecosystem for startups.

The Manassah entrepreneurship competition, which was designed to support the UAE's most ambitious retail and F&B entrepreneurs, is Aldar's first retail startup program in partnership with startAD. Joining forces with this global accelerator is a fantastic way for us to build a community of entrepreneurs and harness their talent to energize our communities. Choosing them as our partner also came as a natural decision since they have already made great strides in that domain, directly contributing to the UAE's economy by providing startups with the necessary tools to launch, develop, and scale their ventures.

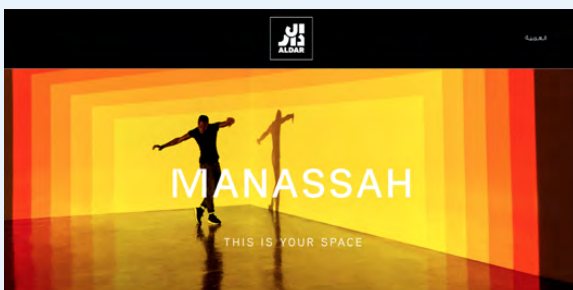
So far, this competition has given us the pleasure to meet with a number of creative and talented people developing innovative concepts, and we look forward to working closely with them. It is really exciting to see homegrown concepts become part of our thriving retail portfolio. Another reason why we are



so keen to work with more startups is the mutual benefit. They benefit from working with a company such as ours that can offer scale and large company expertise, and we can learn from them.

Specifically, we can learn how to be more dynamic, innovative, and agile—three of our core values at Aldar and areas we are constantly seeking to build upon. Innovation is something that is embedded in our corporate mission statement, and to increase our maturity in this area, we plan to inject more startup solutions into our business. We advise any interested startups to reach out

to us in order to explore collaboration opportunities. We are very keen to support them take their plans to the next level, and identify the best ways for them to grow."



"For example, one of our youth program participants had an idea for a hardware-based startup and was running into challenges on how to scale his product to be production ready. He was able to access our lab facilities with the help of our team and prototype several versions of the product, and then we were able to connect him with other more experienced entrepreneurs we have worked with, both within the UAE and abroad, to answer questions about how to manufacture and grow a hardware-based business. At other times, we see a successful startup that takes on talent from another startup from the same cohort that was unable to continue. There are many such examples where an entrepreneur can truly start with an idea, and get the resources they need every step of the way through our network and community. These opportunities make me proud of the community that we have built."

**"THE BIGGEST VALUE WE GIVE STARTUPS, BESIDES CUSTOMERS AND FUNDING, IS SAVING THEM TIME. OUR PROGRAM IS DESIGNED TO CONDENSE WHAT CAN BE A PAINFUL 12-18 MONTH SALES CYCLE INTO A MATTER OF WEEKS AND MONTHS."**

Lenka Basweidan, founder and COO at Arabee, a multi-format online Arabic language program, confirms that taking part in startAD proved beneficial to them due to forging valuable connections with other startups and industry experts.

"You get out what you put in, and this quote encapsulates our participation in the startAD program," she says. "The startAD team has been key in ensuring we got the most out of the program. If we needed help in a way that was not part of the incubator, they went out of their way to help us in any way they could, but attendance and participation are key. You are given the opportunities to connect with fellow entrepreneurs, learn new skills, refine existing ones, acquiring knowledge you didn't even realize you needed to know. The one-to-one

mentorship part was particularly helpful as it is tailored to your startup. So, the more effort you put in, the more benefit you will get out.” This sentiment is echoed by Nadim Habr, CEO of DesignHubz. “Being part of startAD enabled DesignHubz to accomplish in 10 days what would have taken us three months,” Habr says. “I would recommend any fellow entrepreneur to join startAD. The program is an intensive two-week sprint that gives startups access to customers, investors, and mentors. These are the top three priorities for any startup.”

Prateep Basu, founder of SatSure, a spatial data intelligence startup, moved from India to attend the startAD program in order to learn about the MENA region’s construction market. “We learnt quite a lot about the cultural way of doing business in the UAE, and through our interaction with local firms, such as IMKAN, CCC, ADM, and ProTenders. The networking sessions with representatives of these companies, the mentors of the program, and the other entrepreneurs who were part of the cohort along with us gave us deep insights into technology trends in this sector, key market gaps which people are excited about solving, and potential partnerships that we could have in the region. Because of this wholesome experience and the fact that SatSure won the Imkan Innovation Award of \$10,000 along with a paid pilot project, we have been actively seeking business in the region, and we have also identified a local partner, Abu Dhabi-based Digital Trinity, to establish a joint venture with in order to bring our automated satellite image analytics products to the region to help executives in the construction and oil and gas sectors address some of their key project management challenges.” The main benefit of the program, Basu says, is that it is very goal-driven. “To make the best out of this program, I would suggest coming prepared for 10 days of high energy, a good mix of academic and practical coaching on business modeling, lots of coffee, and very little sleep!”

One of startAD’s key advantages lies in its collaborative model that involves many stakeholders across corporates, government, investors, and academia, both locally and globally, and across the entire startup life cycle, Jagannathan explains. “This means that we can support ventures from the ideation stage all the way through launch and exploring new markets,” he adds. >>>

## THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

startAD’s corporate partners sound off on the program’s growth and development over the years

**Walid El Hindi / CEO, Imkan Properties**



“WE BELIEVE THE STARTAD PROGRAM TRULY UNLOCKS THE COUNTRY’S POTENTIAL BY EQUIPPING STUDENTS, STARTUPS, AND CORPORATES FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE WITH THE NECESSARY TOOLS NEEDED FOR HOMEGROWN INNOVATION.”

“We believe that the UAE is an environment where innovative and entrepreneurial spirit thrives with its excellent infrastructure and business-friendly economy. At the very core of IMKAN is an ethos to ‘do this differently,’ as we aim to redefine and foster new standards of modern community living and national development through innovation and forward-thinking.

As a major push towards supporting Abu Dhabi as the creative and entrepreneurial capital of the UAE, we decided to partner up with NYU’s startAD program. We fully support and share their vision in advancing local industries through introducing global technology. Furthermore, we believe the startAD program truly unlocks the country’s potential by equipping students, startups, and corporates from across the globe with the necessary tools needed for

homegrown innovation that serve a global need, while contributing to UAE’s economy through new business development and job creation.

Last year, we embarked on a corporate innovation partnership with startAD, where we awarded the startup SatSure with the US\$10,000 IMKAN Innovation Award. The geospatial data analytics company leverages advances in satellites, machine learning, and big data analytics, and supports local corporations in developing decision-making insights for planning and monitoring assets. This year, we officially launched the pilot program with SatSure as part of our agreement as Venture Launchpad sponsors. We are at the initial stage of the program, whereby the team is developing the software and installing the hardware onsite, and we are very pleased with our progress so far.”

startAD's accelerator model is also a low-risk way to explore the market, since it takes zero equity while startups gain the tools necessary to develop a robust sales process, and understand pilots and partnerships while applying them directly with its corporate partners. "We work with our corporate partners closely for months ahead of the accelerator cycle to align on desired outcomes, refine their problem statements, and match them with the startups," Jagannathan explains. "The biggest value we give startups, besides customers and funding, is saving them time. Our program is designed to condense what can be a painful 12-18 month sales cycle into a matter of weeks and months. This is huge for a startup at the early stages where time wasted on big corporates that will go nowhere or who ask for endless customizations can kill a startup's growth trajectory."

Going forward, Jagannathan and his team do not intend to slow down. Some of the key milestones ahead of them, he says, include setting up the infrastructure and catalyzing the necessary stakeholders to support research commercialization. "While NYUAD is our home, we work side by side with world leading researchers and labs that are creating amazing innovations in deep tech that can be grown from the UAE," he says. "This is a long-term process that we hope to see materialize in faculty spinoffs in the next five years from not just NYUAD but other UAE universities. We are also looking forward to supporting more students through our youth programs, which will focus more on future skills building and creating conscientious leaders that will create products that have a deeper impact on society. Lastly, we are proud to be a part of the vibrant Abu Dhabi ecosystem where month over month, new initiatives are being launched. I think given all of the recent activity in the past 12-18 months, we will start seeing results in the next few years, which, to me, would translate to more companies establishing in Abu Dhabi, and more Abu Dhabi companies securing post Series A rounds of funding." ■

## THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

startAD's corporate partners sound off on the program's growth and development over the years

### Mouza Al Nasri / Acting CEO, Khalifa Fund For Enterprise Development



"Abu Dhabi has been and will continue to show economic gains by supporting efforts in value creation, knowledge transfer and diversification. Part of that effort is nurturing and growing the local entrepreneurial talent. Anchored at NYU Abu Dhabi and powered by Tamkeen, an Abu Dhabi government owned company, startAD is a key player and a positive contributor within Abu Dhabi's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

startAD is an Abu Dhabi-based global accelerator steering technology startups to launch, develop, and scale their ventures. Accordingly, Khalifa Fund, an enabler and orchestrator of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, has chosen to work with startAD due to synergies and vision to foster the local entrepreneurial talent by bringing global perspective into local context.

startAD are passionate and serious about their mission. They do not take shortcuts, are committed to success, and they deliver. startAD was able to adapt quickly

**"KHALIFA FUND, AN ENABLER AND ORCHESTRATOR OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM, HAS CHOSEN TO WORK WITH STARTAD DUE TO SYNERGIES AND VISION TO FOSTER THE LOCAL ENTREPRENEURIAL TALENT BY BRINGING GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE INTO LOCAL CONTEXT."**

to changes and needs, embrace collaboration, and have a proactive attitude to achieve the desired goals.

Entities, private, public or semi-public, could easily benefit by working with startAD to foster both the entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial talent for a more vibrant economy. We strongly recommend working with startAD, and we plan co-create and deliver high-impact programs in the future. startAD are passionate and serious about their mission. They do not take shortcuts, are committed to success, and they deliver."



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The Concept team at Sheraa

"THE MORE YOU'RE COMFORTABLE WITH GOING BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD TO WORK ON CHANGES, THE MORE REFINED THE FINAL PRODUCT WILL BE. IT'S DEFINITELY A LEARNING CURVE AND IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE AN OPEN PERSPECTIVE ONCE IT COMES TO THE ACTUAL PROCESS OF DESIGN, RATHER THAN JUST FOCUSING ON THE FINAL OUTCOME."

# Soaring high

UAE startup **The Concept** wants to help you travel using sustainable products

by PAMELLA DE LEON

**W**hile the airline industry may still be figuring out its bearings given the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Dubai-based startup The Concept is making its presence felt in this landscape thanks to its innovations that help boost the sector's efforts in the sustainability domain. Founded by Yadhusan Mahendran, Maria Sobh, and Muhammad Rijal Hikmatullah, The Concept was formed in 2017 with the mission to create "disruptive hardware and software solutions that embodies sustainability, technology, and innovation." With the initial aim to remove non-sustainable hardware from the aviation industry, its first core prototype distorts a centuries-old product: a passenger's inflight food tray. The redesigned lightweight in-flight economy food tray called NEOS Fly combines functionality, sustainability, technology and conveni-

ences, and would make a positive impact on the environment, while also allowing airlines to save money in the long run as well.

The trio, who have diverse backgrounds in business, design, and engineering, started out on this enterprise while they were university students, and got their venture off the ground by joining the Dubai-based aviation and travel incubator, Intelak. Having to balance their final year as university students, while setting up their own startup was a challenging but rewarding experience, Mahendran remembers. "We've not only grown as co-founders, but also grown individually as entrepreneurs in way where we've learnt how to balance our company." He commended the program's mentors as essential in helping them realize the capacity to build a startup, while also helping boost their relationship and skills, which soon grew to complement

each other's. "This [experience] not only let us validate our business potential by working with some of the world's leading airlines and flight catering centers, but it also helped us to fulfill and understand the fact that there is a need for sustainable hardware in this market." Being selected as one of the top winners in the program then enabled them to get direct access to key stakeholders in the aviation market, and they soon noticed the lack of sustainable hardware for the aviation sector. "This further strengthened our drive towards achieving our vision. Our aim through our company is to balance innovation, sustainability, and price points for our clients, whilst maintaining the highest possible quality."

By honing into this gap in the MENA region's aviation market, the co-founders settled in on The Concept's core value of sustainability, and essentially, disrupting the supply chain of waste management. The Concept partnered with manufacturers and recyclers based in Europe, wherein they have the capability to design, manufacture, and recycle in-house. Though they're currently engaging with UAE government sectors to help setup production facilities locally, finding a local company with whom they could partner up with was a major hurdle initially, as most of them didn't want to work with smaller companies like The Concept. However, the co-founders call this one of their "best" hurdles, as it forced them to look for out-of-the-box solutions, which included designing products designed in UAE and having material and production partners in Europe. By creating such partnerships, they hope to reduce production and final product costs, while also achieving a sustainable product life cycle. Mahendran describes their process as one that goes into "identifying the gaps of lack of practicality, and where



sustainability as a solution hasn't been introduced." He elaborates, "It's become natural for us to begin by diving deep into the design, material, and business model of a product. The first questions we ask ourselves are: 'How is it being made?' and 'What happens to the product at the end of its lifecycle?'"

This is exactly how Mahendran and his team went about building The Concept's products. They found that in 2018, the aviation industry generated an average of 1.43kg of cabin waste per flight, which is potentially 6.1 million tons of waste annually—equivalent to 17,000 empty A380 aircraft. According to a 2020 report from United Nations Environment Program, only 9% of plastic waste is being recycled, while 12% is being incinerated, and 79% is discarded to landfills. This thus creates an opportunity for The Concept to not only rise as changemakers, but as rectifiers in the lifecycle of products in the aviation industry. Besides sustainability as a main core in their manifesto, Mahendran says they're also about building products that is superior in quality and competitive in pricing. For creating their first product NEOS Fly, Mahendran says they started with the involved stakeholders, considering the user journey, with reiterations as a natural occurrence. "We believe the more you're comfortable with going back to the drawing board to work on changes, the more refined the final product will be. It's definitely a learning curve and it's important to have an open perspective once it comes to the actual process of design, rather than just focusing on the final outcome."

Working closely with material and manufacturing partners

to help validate and test the product, it took The Concept 13 prototypes, multiple focus groups with over 100 cabin crew, and even a live piloted flight to come up with the current version of the NEOS Fly. "Using recycled materials, we were able to meet the goal of creating a closed-loop sustainable product that can be mechanically recycled at the end of its lifecycle, and contributes to being made into new products whilst still holding its mechanical properties," explains Mahendran. While they offer a variation of materials for clients, rPET, which stands for recycled polyethylene terephthalate or recycled PET, has been one of their most sought after material. "We offer our clients (aircrafts) the service to use their used PET water bottles that were consumed onboard the aircraft by their passengers to be recycled and made into brand new, NEOS Fly trays," says Mahendran. "These trays can be then recycled again into new trays and other products at the end of its lifecycle. Not only does this motivate our clients in regard



to being sustainable, but we offer them rebates per ton in regard to the waste materials collected that are re-used to create new NEOS Fly trays."

Another key characteristic that Mahendran points out is how the product combines design and engineering: the team designed the NEOS Fly to be up to 30% lighter than existing trays in the market, allowing an airline to save up to \$1,500,000 in fuel savings (according to their estimation), just from using their lightweight food trays. But it's worth noting here that it has taken the team two years to reach production and launch stage, which also included a fair share of challenges and

R&D. "Plenty of people might think, 'It's just a tray, how much is there to innovate?'" Mahendran says. "However, we've learnt through the process, the level of detail in innovating a product to the best of its capability in terms of practicality and sustainability." With a B2B business model, the co-founders kept in mind while building the product that airlines would not be willing to pay more for sustainable materials and technology, making R&D all the more significant, as they wanted to offer a much superior product to existing trays at a similar or even lower cost. With their business model, the co-founders foresee working >>>



The Concept team at Intelak Incubator





**"WITHIN THE NEXT 3-5 YEARS, WE AIM TO PROVIDE OUR HARDWARE AT ALMOST NO/ZERO COST, BASING OUR BUSINESS MODEL AROUND THE DATA COLLECTED FROM THE PASSENGER CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR BEING SOLD BACK TO AIRLINES AND FLIGHT CATERING CENTERS."**

directly with airlines and flight catering centers, and also through distribution partners based in the UK (who has opened the opportunity for NEOS Fly to be used in over 20+ airlines worldwide), who will take care of 70% of their sales.

While the product has been in development, The Concept has also been working closely with multiple airlines and stakeholders in the market, thanks to their pre-product marketing that they've executed. Not only has the strategy helped create traction and attention, but helped the startup secure a pilot with "one of the leading airlines in the world" and open access to multiple flight catering kitchens around the world. To date,

The Concept has raised \$150,000 in a pre-seed round from a UAE-based angel investor, along with grants from commercial and government entities, and they're now looking to raise \$1,200,000 for a seed round that will go towards production and scaling. They're also looking to embed RFID tech in their trays to enable airlines to collect and understand passenger consumption behavior. This is part of a long-term plan to include the data as a value-added service through a subscription model: "Within the next 3-5 years, we aim to provide our hardware at almost no/zero cost, basing our business model around the data collected from the passenger consumption behavior being sold back to airlines and flight catering centers."

Amidst the ongoing crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, Mahendran notes that they've been lucky to have been selected by the Abu Dhabi-based tech hub Hub71 as part of its Mubadala-backed incentive program, which will help them in opening a second office in the UAE capital. "Not only has Hub71, through their partners (such as Microsoft), constantly offering us solutions on how to go about our business, but they have also been backing our business in these tough times," says Mahendran. In a similar manner, as an alumni of Sheraa's Pre-Seed Launch program, the Sharjah-based entity has been connecting The Concept with the right stakeholders to ensure business continuity. In-house, they've been preparing for a short-term impact for their business as they predominantly

fall within the travel industry, but they're using this time to accelerate into other verticals such as events and hospitality by working on supplying with sustainable catering hardware. "As a company, we see a great opportunity to seize at this current situation. We believe airlines are changing their strategy to look for alternatives even with current contracts or tenders; [this is] where we could come in and propose our solutions." ■

**'TREP TALK**

**Q&A WITH YADHUSHAN MAHENDRAN, CO-FOUNDER AND CEO, THE CONCEPT**



**What's a key lesson you've encountered in your journey as an entrepreneur?**

"We've faced a lot of challenges and failure such as finding the right distribution partner, raising investments, and getting major airlines on-board. The one thing we learned as entrepreneurs is that don't be too optimistic based on the words of the people in a meeting, always proceed forward with an open mind, but don't expect it to be rainbows and butterflies after. Asking people a 'yes or no' question for us has become so pivotal as a startup, so that we are able to judge our next steps. We've had a handful of opportunities that didn't end up maturing, which caused false hopes. In the end, it's helped us to be more strategic and purpose-driven when we have key meetings, ensuring that we are able to get direct answers from those present."







# FOR THE MOST DARING LEADERS



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Hassan Hallas,  
co-founder and CEO,  
One Click Delivery Services



"WE ARE WORKING AS HARD AS WE CAN TO BE **AS HYGIENIC, FAST, AND EFFICIENT AS POSSIBLE** TO KEEP OUR AND EVERYONE ELSE'S BUSINESS GOING."

One Click Delivery Services, one of the fastest growing regional technology companies specializing in last-mile, is currently experiencing a sharp spike in demand for fleet and fleet software management, in order to respond to their clients' high demand of food and groceries orders. "With restaurants and retail stores changing their business model to deliveries, we are facing a surge in delivery demand, which has led us to increase our fleet capacity by 14% in under one month," says Hassan Hallas, co-founder and CEO of One Click Delivery Services. "The verticals operating more than others are the delivering necessities, such as grocery stores and pharmacies. Restaurants are also operating well, as customers still want to enjoy their favorite meals, even when the dine-in option isn't available (with the exception of a few restaurants)."

With health and safety being a concern to all customers, all delivery services have introduced measures to deliver goods safely. In the case of One Click, Hallas explains how his enterprise has taken extra measures to ensure that their last mile delivery goes smoothly. "We have a great responsibility of protecting

## Driven by demand

Dubai-based logistics tech startup **One Click Delivery Services** sees surge in growth amid the COVID-19 crisis

by KASUN ILANKOON

The spread of the coronavirus and sweeping policy measures taken by various governments have led many industries into uncharted territories. We've seen tourism, airlines, electronics, and many other industries hit by the COVID-19 crisis, but there's been an unprecedented growth spike in the online food and delivery industry. As consumers globally have been either mandated to stay home or have chosen to do so, they have resorted to ordering food, groceries, shopping, and other essential needs online.

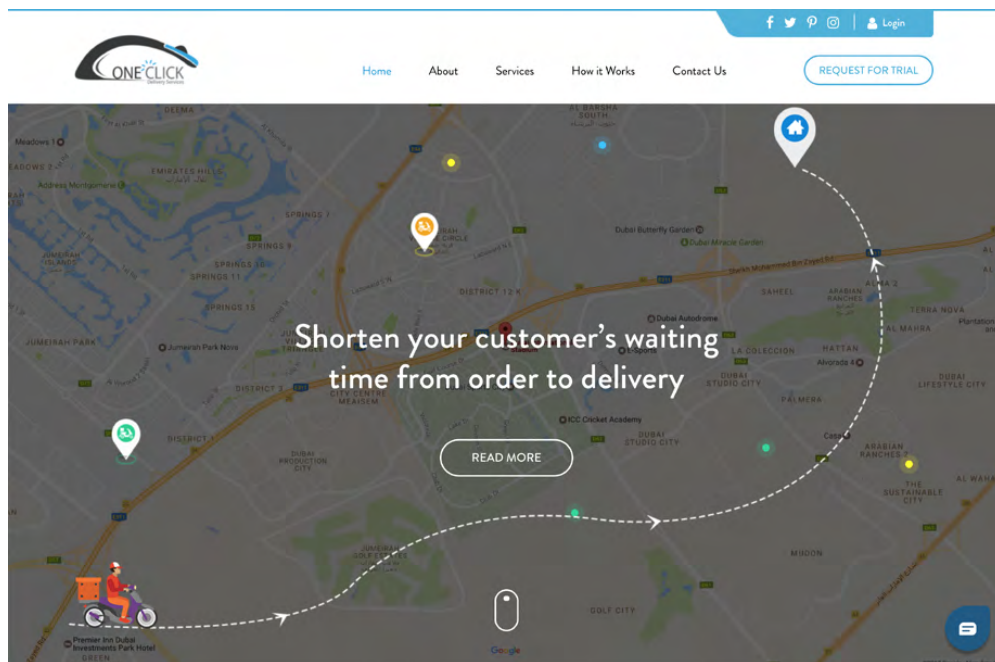
Due to the surge of online shopping, many delivery services and solutions companies are thriving during this pandemic. KPMG Lower Gulf's latest report, *Navigating The Pandemic*, has revealed that among the strong performing sectors, online retail, particularly of groceries, has witnessed significant growth. Grocery retailers witnessed a 20% to 40% increase in sales during the first half of March, compared to the same period last year. Online marketplaces also saw surging demand, particularly for laptops/tablets, and gym equipment.



all customers and riders, so we have implemented strict hygiene protocols that all riders must abide by," he notes. "It starts at the warehouse, where all the disinfection begins. This, of course, is additional time and work from our side— but this is the way things must be done. Riders then must have their vehicles deep cleaned, and also continuously sanitize their hands and change their masks and gloves multiple times. We are working as hard as we can to be as hygienic, fast, and efficient as possible to keep our and everyone else's business going."

One Click Delivery Services aims to develop solutions that cover the entire last-mile delivery phase, with its end goal being to become a one-stop shop for all last-mile delivery phases, ultimately changing the last-mile delivery landscape through digitization. "To keep our clients satisfied, we are keeping their customers happy by executing deliveries rapidly and safely," Hallas says. "Our strong technology is enabling them to manage fleets easily and efficiently, especially in such times of high delivery. Every one of our solutions facilitates a specific element of the last-mile delivery, from fleet management and data collection, to client acquisition and more. We aim at becoming a one-stop shop for all last-mile delivery phases, ultimately changing the last-mile delivery landscape through the digitization of every angle."

One Click's efforts in this arena can perhaps best be seen in its software-as-a-service (SaaS) solution,



**“OUR FLEXIBILITY IS OUR ‘SECONDARY USP.’ THE BLEND BETWEEN OUR TECHNOLOGY, AND THE BRAINS BEHIND THE TECHNOLOGY. WE ARE PROUD OF OUR MANAGEMENT’S AGILE APPROACH TO CHALLENGES.”**

nGage, a game changer for the logistics industry, which makes the company especially stand out from the rest of the competition in this market. “nGage last-mile delivery is a SaaS that our clients are provided with to manage their fleet and track package deliveries in real time, optimize routes, get all the necessary information about fleet activity, and much more,” says Zeid Abu Ennab, Senior Director – Brandware and SaaS, One Click. “It gathers all last-mile delivery elements information into one comprehensive and user-friendly software. Clients no longer need to take orders and

assign drivers for deliveries manually. Orders come through the software and riders/drivers are immediately assigned to pick them up, and are given the best route to take with the help of the GPS.”

Apart from nGage, One Click is also planning to introduce a new groundbreaking technology called Brandware, which can dynamically and digitally update the look and feel of your fleet and delivery specialists. The patented technology includes uniforms with digital panels, as well as delivery boxes and backpacks with digital panels. “Our goal was never to simply create a software, sell to our clients,

and stopping there,” Hallas explains. “It was creating an entire last-mile delivery ecosystem. Our software provides us with particular data, which is later utilized for the creation of another solution, useful at a later stage— in a domino-like effect.”

With the COVID-19 pandemic changing how every industry operates, One Click's flexibility allows them to adapt and evolve to provide the right solutions for their clients. “Our flexibility is our ‘secondary USP.’ The blend between our technology, and the brains behind the technology. We are proud of our management's agile approach to challenges. Our team does not turn away any client, no matter what the size of their business is. We custom make solutions for all clients, create new services, and find ways to solve their challenges,” Hallas concludes. ■



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## SILVER LININGS

What SMEs in Dubai (potentially) stand to gain from the COVID-19 crisis

by ALEX MALOUF

First of all, forgive the headline— I’m not looking to trivialize what’s going on right now. I do understand what you all, as entrepreneurs, are going through: I’ve been a founder myself, and I’ve poured two years of sweat and tears into an idea. I remember going without a salary on many occasions, and still believing that my business would work out.

This is what I remember when I see many of my friends who are SME owners and founders in the UAE enduring the worst possible hardships right now. They’re doing everything they can do to stay afloat, including cutting costs as much as they feel they can do, and chasing payments.

Short of a bailout, similar to what we’ve seen in Europe where governments have stepped in with a raft of policies, stimulus packages, and employee payment schemes (I remain hopeful that govern-

ments in the region will step up and do more, rather than let businesses fail), SME owners must look to themselves right now to survive this crisis.

Looking beyond the summer, I’m hoping that we are going to see drastic changes to how we work, how we get paid, and a reduction in bureaucracy that will benefit everyone. Here’s what I mean:

### 1/ The remote working revolution

Let’s start with the most obvious one. This pandemic has made us all realize that we don’t need offices to work out of. All we need is a computer and an internet connection. That’s it. This could result not just in employees being able to live wherever they want (and move to cheaper locations), but also companies resizing and reducing their office space. Rent is one of the top two costs when running a business, and this trend toward remote working could result in SMEs

being able to drastically reduce their overheads. The challenge here could be how the number of work visas a company is entitled to is often tied to the size of office space rented— free zones and governments will need to rework this policy.

### 2/ A future with less red tape

You can show me all the “Ease of Doing Business” reports that you want till you’re blue in the face, and I will tell you that there’s still too much bureaucracy here. Well, that red tape needs to go. We don’t need company stamps or a company card. Given everything is supposedly digitized, should we need to make so many calls to government offices and pay for processing both physical and digital forms? Governments must transition away from their old habits, embrace digital-only services, and reduce costs for us all.

### 3/ Improved cash flow

I remember how much time I used to spend chasing on money owed to me, and how little recourse I had besides the constant follow-ups. There’s little any of us can do, besides spend days following up via email and phone calls. Governments in the region have promised to take action on late payments from their own entities. But they’ve got to go a step further, and set up mechanisms that make it easy—and cheap— to follow up on pending payments. Improving cash flows will benefit everyone in the economy, most of all SMEs and their employees.

### 4/ Fairer taxation

Muttering the word tax in the UAE often feels like a taboo. And yet every company pays for a whole range of fees and

services. Would a corporate tax be fairer, especially if it meant that companies paid proportionately? There’s been increasing chatter about the idea of a corporate tax being introduced, and it may be the right way to go if the fees go, and if the tax provides for transparency and fairness based on a company’s size and operations.

### 5/ A (real) sense of community

This is my last hope, and it’s up to SMEs to make this happen. SMEs are the life-blood of the economy. Let’s focus on just Dubai, as an example. I’m going to quote a couple of statistics from a 2019 report issued by Dubai SME: SMEs represent 99.2% of the number of establishments in Dubai, they account for 51% of the workforce, and they contribute around 46% of Dubai’s GDP. You run this city and this Emirate. Your voice has to be heard loud and clear. You’ve got to come out of this as one community. Set up associations, organizations, or whatever you want to call them. But come together as one. When you join forces, we all have to listen to you, and help change the economy and the laws so they support your growth.

These are my five cents for today. My hope is that the pain will ease, as we return slowly back to work. And we have to build something better for the economy and for the SMEs that power it. Do let me know your thoughts, and whether you agree, disagree, or see things differently. Let’s start a conversation on how business should be for SMEs, once all of this is over.



Alex Malouf is a marketing communications executive who has spent the last 17 years in the Middle East. Alex has lived across the region, in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and the United Arab Emirates. He is the Corporate Communications Director for the Middle East and Africa at Schneider Electric.



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