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QATAR'S NEWEST MALL
OPENS ITS
DOORS IN APRIL

HUMANIZATION BY **AUTOMATION**

QATAR-BASED
STARTUP FEED
WANTS TO REINVENT
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BETWEEN FOOD LOVERS
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74
Loyyal CEO and co-founder Gregory Simon at the Dubai Future Accelerators

22
INNOVATOR:
HEDGING BETS

With an aggressive international expansion plan, BMB Group is well on its way to take its Middle Eastern confectionary brands global.

28
INNOVATOR:
A NEW FRONTIER FOR RETAIL

As Doha Festival City gets set to open its doors in April, CEO Kareem Shamma on what the new mall will bring to Qatar.

32
CULTURE:
LIFE

Family-like teams build extraordinary businesses
This year's list of *Top Companies to Work For in the UAE* shows that 24 of the country's enterprises have managed to strike a balance between implementing often aggressive growth strategies and nurturing human resources.

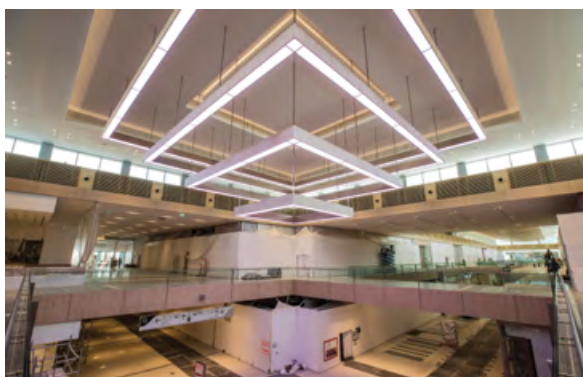
18
EDITOR'S NOTE
By Aby Sam Thomas

52
'TREPONOMICS:
SKILLSET

Are you your enterprise's chief salesman?
Marketing Masters Consulting founder Matthew Chaban believes that entrepreneurs must celebrate selling- not delegate.

74
START IT UP:
Q&A

Keep 'em coming back to you
UAE startup Loyyal uses blockchain technology to keep customers, well, loyal.



28 The new DFC mall

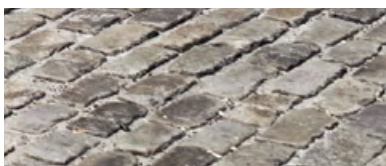


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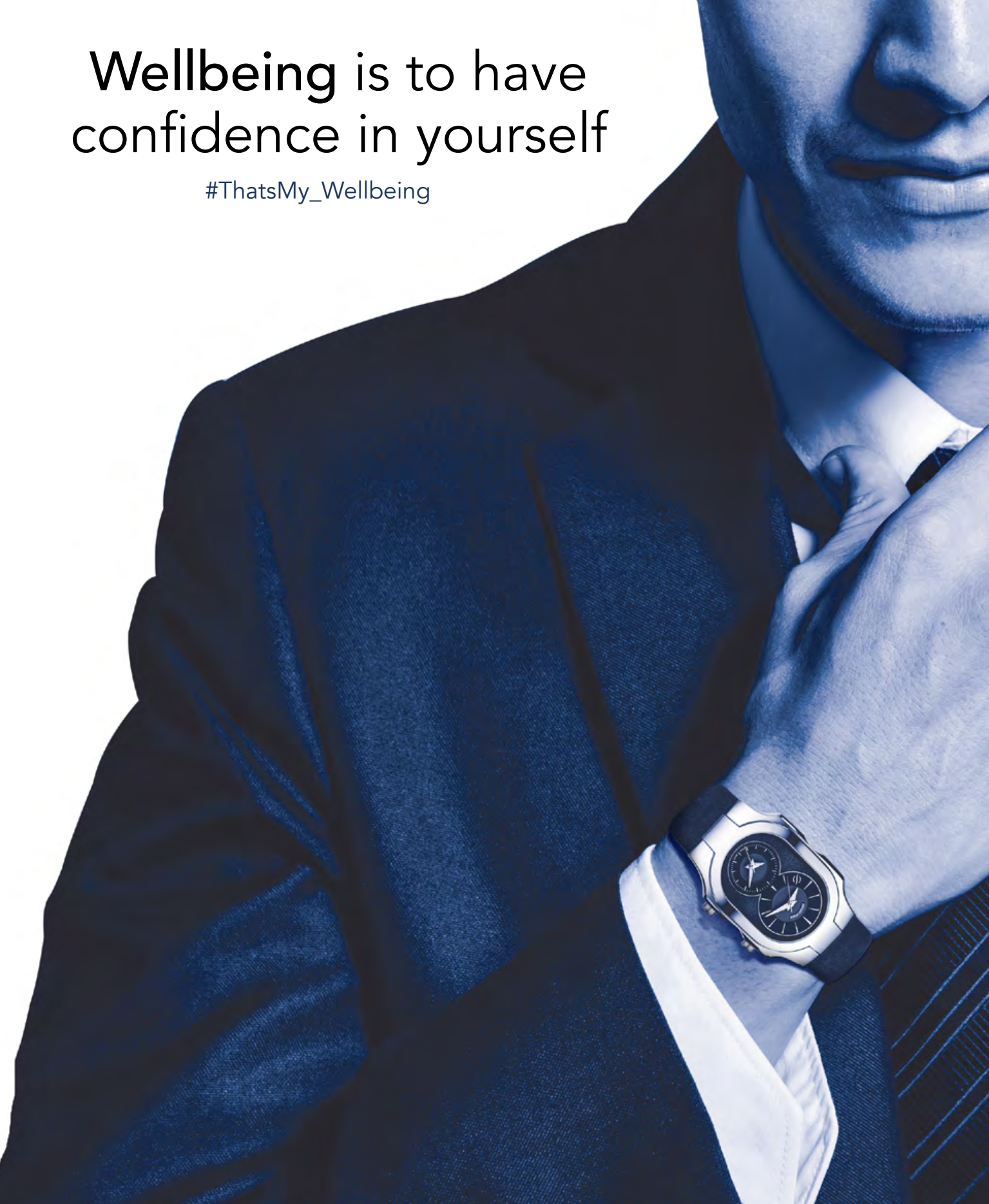
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Viceroy, Burj Al Arab, Watches Corner.



56 Five things to look for in a franchise partner, as explained by Classic Burger Joint's Franchise Development Manager, Angela Sawan.

46
CULTURE:
TRAPPINGS
'Trep gear

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

58
'TREPONOMICS:
PRO
"You're fired!"
Asma Bajawa, founder and MD, PeopleFirst HR Consultancy, lists steps to manage a termination in a fair (and legal) way.

38
'TREPONOMICS:
PRO
Hiring the right people
Bayt.com's Suhail Al-Masri explains how your company can screen talent strategically and effectively for your enterprise.

68
TECH:
ONLINE 'TREP
Engaging e-commerce
Experts at global advertising media planning agency MEC explain how MENA businesses can achieve a successful customer-centric digital transformation.

64
MONEY:
YOUR MONEY
Seal the deal
Here's a primer for entrepreneurs looking to close a venture capital investment.

50
CULTURE:
LIFE
Remember what you read
James Clear offers reading comprehension strategies to help you retain more of everything you read.

78
START IT UP:
Q&A
Humanization by automation
Qatar-based startup Feed wants to reinvent communication between food lovers and their favorite restaurants

56
FRANCHISE:
Partnering for profit
Five things to look for in a franchise partner, as explained by Classic Burger Joint's Franchise Development Manager, Angela Sawan.



33

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founder,
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78 Feed co-founders Abi Elamin, Nour Moussalli and Moe Shibib

48
'TREPONOMICS:
ESQUIRE GUY
Fake it 'til you make it
The *Esquire* Guy on how to convincingly fake confidence, happiness and other necessary feelings in the workplace.

82
'TREPONOMICS:
SKILLSET
Sustainable ventures
Nahel Selo, Creative Director of Sedar Global, on ways to create long-lasting success in family-run businesses.

62
MONEY:
ASK THE MONEY GUY
Forecasting opportunities
Shailesh Dash, founder, CEO and Board Member of AI Masah Capital shares five key takeaways from AI Masah Capital's sixth Annual Investor Forum at Dubai.

70
START IT UP:
STARTUP FINANCE
"We got funded!"
UAE-based startups Enerwhere and CarSwitch reveal the story behind their fundraising wins.

54
CULTURE:
BUSINESS UNUSUAL
Made for the Middle East
Halla Walla offers emojis that are characteristic of Arab culture.

44
TECH:
SHINY
#TamTalksTech
Gadgets and doodads that you might've missed out on, sourced by a tech aficionado. Yes, it's okay to want them all... and no, it's not our fault.

44 The new Nokia 6



62

Shailesh Dash, founder, CEO and Board Member of AI Masah Capital



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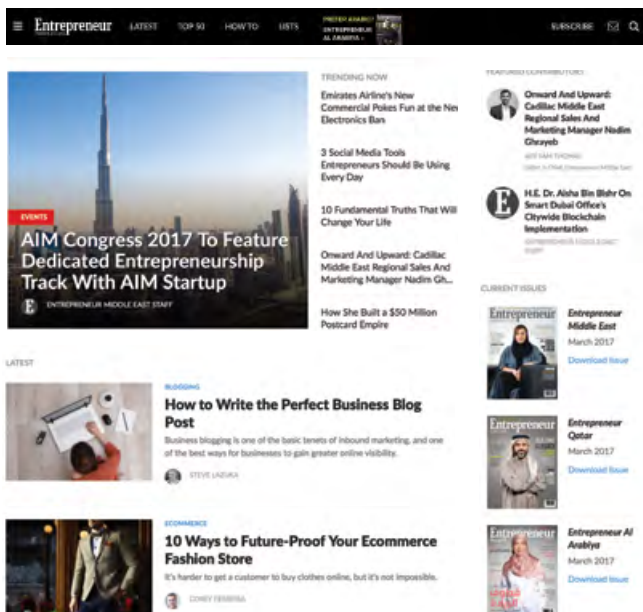


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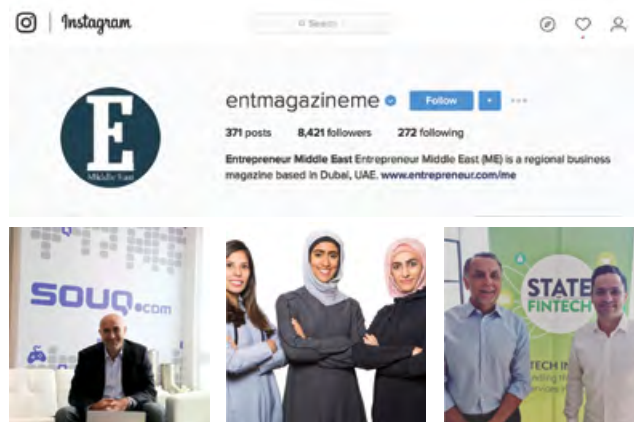
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Souq's suitors

A win-win scenario, either way it goes

The last few days of March have been rather eventful for those of us following the MENA entrepreneurial ecosystem- it's been exciting, to say the least. We had only barely begun to cheer reports of Amazon's acquisition of Souq.com for more than US\$650 million, when a plot twist came around in the form of Emaar Malls lodging an \$800 million bid for the e-commerce website. At the time of writing this piece, Emaar Malls had confirmed that it had indeed made such an offer, while Amazon and Souq are yet to release a statement on any of these reports. As a result, it's hard to predict how this will play out- we just have to wait and watch for the next development in this story. I've previously stated that the region would *probably* have been better served if Souq's ownership remained in the Arab world, but then again, one shouldn't discount the importance its sale, even if it is to Amazon, would be for the MENA entrepreneurial ecosystem at large. As Dash Ventures Managing Director Omar J. Sati told me: "An exit is an exit. Whether Amazon or Emaar, both [are] equally significant, and both [are] vital to the ecosystem's development and sustainability."

Sati's right, of course- after all, the region has been waiting with bated breath for an exit for quite a while now; the last one that hit headlines here was Rocket Internet's \$170 million buy-out of the Kuwait-based Talabat in 2015. The MENA investment community's cheer was perhaps best showcased in BECO

Capital CEO Dany Farha's tweet (@danyfarha is his handle) when news of the Amazon-Souq deal first came out: "Amazon's acquisition of Souq is a great day for MENA tech stakeholders. To those who ask, 'Where are the exits?' Here you go." When I reached out to Farha for his thoughts on the current scenario, he replied: "If a traditional operator like Emaar Malls were to purchase Souq, and give it complete autonomy over strategy through to operations, allowing the true tech DNA of the executive team in place to shine and flourish, and only act as a helping hand to increase supply of product, strengthen supply chain, reinforce the branding and marketing offline in stores across the region, and build out an omni-channel strategy for retailers across the region, whilst supporting it with funding and increasing its capital efficiency, then this would be a fantastic outcome. Amazon has many of these attributes, which also makes it an optimal buyer."

With that being the case, if there are indeed two options in front of Souq now, then Sati believes the choice should essentially be made based off what makes better sense for the venture's founders and investors. "Clearly, the higher bid from Emaar is better for them at first glance," he explains. "But the Amazon deal is still unclear. Will they keep management? Will there be sweeteners such as earn-outs? Don't forget, the biggest advantage Amazon has is the ability to offer share swaps and share incentives in Amazon. In summary, I think



an Emaar deal would be a short-term win for the Souq team, but an Amazon deal would be a more valuable win in the long-term. In either case, it's a win."

Sati has, in his characteristic succinct way (I recommend following him on Twitter at @ojsati for more of his pithy insights), hit the nail on the head- no matter which way the deal goes, the Souq sale remains a win to be celebrated. It's a testament to the excellent work done by founder Ronaldo Mouchawar and his team, and the exit will definitely be something to inspire more entrepreneurs to build amazing companies in the MENA region. And that, by itself, is worthy of applause. Congratulations, Souq!

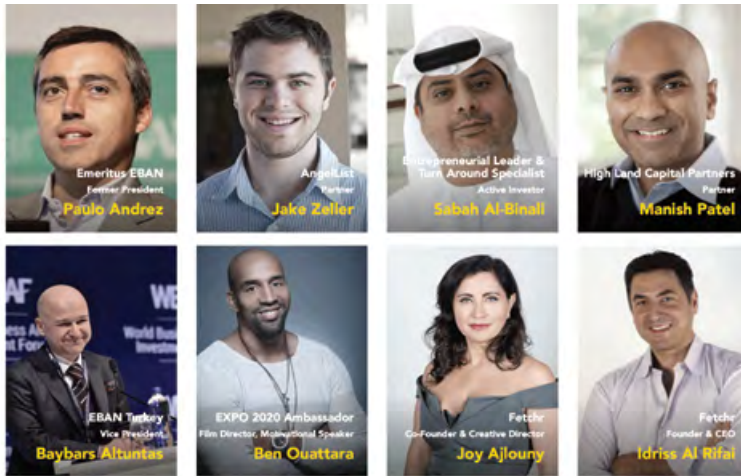
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Some of the speakers at AIM Startup 2017

Entrepreneurship takes center stage

AIM CONGRESS 2017 TO FEATURE DEDICATED ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRACK WITH AIM STARTUP

Entrepreneurs, here's your chance to learn from peers across the world, and showcase your business in the presence of global business leaders, investors, and government officials at one of the region's largest investment gatherings. This year's Annual Investment Meeting (AIM) 2017 features a separate entrepreneurship track -AIM Startup 2017- to be held on April 2-4, 2017 at Dubai World Trade Centre (alongside AIM 2017). Themed "International Investment, Path to Competitiveness & Development," the seventh edition of AIM, like its previous editions, gathers international investment community, corporate leaders, policy makers, and others to discuss strategies on attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in emerging markets.

At the same time, AIM Startup 2017 will host an innovation showcase and pitch competition, giving pre-selected startups across sectors space to showcase their products to attendees, and pitch their businesses to investors, with cash prizes totaling US\$30,000 up for grabs. The entrepreneurship track also features training sessions for

selected startups on best ways to pitch their ventures, and will hold keynotes and panel discussions on topics including government-startup collaborations, technology investments, collaborative economy, and others.

The larger AIM Congress event expects to host over 15,000 businesspeople from over 140 nations, and is gearing up to feature over 500 exhibitors. Besides workshops aimed at providing investment professionals with detailed understanding of FDI, the event agenda also features other key notes and panel discussions on global economic conditions, role of policy makers, innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem, among others.

Some of the speakers slated to be a part of AIM and AIM Startup include H.E. Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansoori, UAE Minister of Economy, Sabah Al-Binali, Chief Investment Officer, SHUAA Capital, and former Chairman, Zawya, Kamal Hassan, general partner, Turn8, Jake Zeller, Partner, AngelList, Elissa Freiha, co-founder, WOMENA, and others. Abu Dhabi Global Market, Aramex, Dubai FDI, Invest in Sharjah and others are a few sponsors for the large-scale business event. aimstartup.com

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FLAT6LABS BEIRUT LAUNCHES WITH US\$20 MILLION SEED FUND

Heads up Lebanon 'treps, here's something you'd be interested in. As part of a partnership between Flat6Labs and ArabNet, Flat6Labs Beirut has announced the launch of Lebanon Seed Fund (LSF), which consists of a US\$20 million early-stage fund with the aim of supporting 100 startups in the next five years. The LSF, approved by Banque du Liban's Circular 331, is set to be utilized as part of Flat6Labs Beirut's mission in pushing forward Lebanese entrepreneurs and startups to markets in the region and internationally. Regional ecosystem veterans would know this- but if you don't, this isn't Flat6Labs' first foray into this field- in fact, with its accelerator programs in Cairo, Jeddah and Abu Dhabi, Beirut will be its fourth regional accelerator. Other notable players in the initiative are FlatLabs Beirut's partnership with BLOM Invest Bank for the fund placement, and Kobessie & Frangie as its legal counsel.



Flat6Labs Beirut Launch

And entrepreneurs joining Flat6Labs can expect impressive offerings: startups in the seed program would receive \$30,000-\$50,000 in funding, in return for 10%-13% equity, 16 weeks of mentorship, legal support, office space, training sessions on essential business skills, opportunities to pitch in front of investors and network with like-minded startups and potential partners regionally and globally. Meanwhile, for its early-stage funding program, startups -either in early-stage or growth phase- with exhibiting traction, a solid team, and a growth plan can receive between \$150,000-\$500,000, as well as strategy, budget and legal consultancy, introduction to key potential partners, and strategic support in various business aspects to further scale the startup. With much support set for the region, we can't wait to see promising ideas and solutions from the region. Budding entrepreneurs, get moving- applications for the accelerator's first cycle in both the startup seed program and early-stage fund are now open. www.flat6labsbeirut.com



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BMB GROUP CO-FOUNDERS BILAL BALLOUT AND MOHAMAD KHACHAB

With an aggressive international expansion plan underway, BMB Group is well on its way to take it's Middle Eastern confectionary brands global

By Tamara Pupic

"WHEN OUR FIRST CONTAINER ARRIVED IN JANUARY 2007, WE WENT TO THE MARKET WITH A BRIEFCASE AND A BLOCK OF CHOCOLATE, AND STARTED KNOCKING ON PEOPLE'S DOORS."

Interviewing two entrepreneurial cousins at the helm of BMB Group, one of the largest private label Mediterranean confectionery and chocolate manufacturers in the GCC region, would have been a draining experience, but for a few truffles of De Rafael, their first chocolate brand, served at all the right moments. Energetic and affable Bilal Ballout and Mohamad Khachab, the company's CEO and Managing Partner respectively, began by taking me on a quick tour of their vast office, designed to encourage both collaborative work ethics as well as impromptu meet-

ings—especially in a centrally located sweet shop replica. I got a first-hand view of how a host of Mediterranean sweets and chocolate treats are made in the production facility, located on the first floor of the BMB Group building in Dubai Investment Park, alongside an hour-long conversation with the two entrepreneurs, which proved hardly enough for all the passion, thoughts, and plans of the two cousins for developing a global chocolate brand originating from the MENA region.

BMB Group trades bakery and chocolate ingredients, manufactures private labels, produces its own brands of Mediterranean sweets—Petit

Gourmet, Asateer, Mely's, and Simply BKLVA, and more recently De Rafael, a luxurious caramel chocolate. The group now employs 1,100 staff in Dubai, Doha and Riyadh, and has recently set up shop in Russia, Europe, and the US. Its two state-of-the-art facilities in Dubai Investment Park operate with the capacity to produce 35 tons of baklava and Mediterranean sweets, 50 tons of chocolates, 2 tons of ingredients, 15,000 packaging units, and 1,000 gift trays, all per day, and their products get exported to 32 countries.

In 2006, when the story began, the picture was quite different. The then 21-year-old Ballout stumbled into the chocolate and confectionary business while helping in his uncle's sweet store. While he had earned a Master's Degree in Finance from the University of Durham, he didn't shy away from spending most of his time in the kitchen, learning how to roast nuts and make sweets. However, a failed attempt to improve the small firm's purchasing options led to today's BMB Group. "I went to our suppliers who were very arrogant," he says. "It was a very tough discussion. I was trying to improve credit terms, to improve the way they deliver, and so on, and they ended the meeting by saying that from then on, it would be me going and picking it up from them and paying only in cash. So, instead of improving it, things went backwards. There wasn't an alternative. Then I decided to open a business that would sell ingredients for chocolate." The business then snowballed after a Singaporean chocolate producer, which Ballout flew to visit after finding it on Google, decided to take him on as an agent for the GCC region, and sign a US\$400,000 contract for 100 tons of chocolate, although wary



BMB Group
co-founders
Bilal Ballout and
Mohamad Khachab

of his young age. “I didn’t have a dollar, but I agreed,” Ballout says. Back in Dubai, a bank manager had no option but to believe in the business idea, and approve of a bank loan enabling Ballout to rent a warehouse in the industrial area of Sharjah and hire one additional person. “When our first container arrived in January 2007, we went to the market with a briefcase and a block of chocolate, and started knocking on people’s doors.” And the result: the first 100 tons was sold out in two weeks.

Finding his place in the new industry did not take too much time, only due to Ballout spending 16 hours a day working and learning, eventually becoming a master chocolatier. “Once I gained the technical know-how, I

“WE HAVE BOTH AGREED THAT AS THE WAY YOU WALK INTO ANY SUPERMARKET IN THE WORLD AND FIND A FERRERO, IN THE SAME WAY YOU SHOULD FIND OUR BRAND OF BAKLAVA, FOR EXAMPLE. THEN WE WILL KNOW THAT WE HAVE MADE IT.”

started expanding the range,” Ballout says. “In January 2008, I went to China and opened an office there. Also, I went to a wine bottle cap manufacturer and convinced him to start making chocolate paper, which had only been made in Italy up until then. There was no other alternative to wrap chocolates, which is big in our culture. So, I convinced him to move from wine bottle caps to chocolate paper. It took a year in development to get it

right- it is not as easy as it sounds. But in the end, we were the first ones to bring that paper here, and we were selling it at 50% of the market price.” While expanding its trading confectionery raw materials business, the team also slowly steered towards manufacturing private labels, especially after Ballout’s younger brother Mohamad joined BMB Group -standing for Bilal and Mohamad Ballout at the time- to run its day-to-day operations. The

decision to set up a chocolate factory in 2009 in Dubai was, however, not based only on the promising market growth figures, but due to the escalating civil war in Lebanon, proving to be a sort of silver lining for the fledgling business.

The confectionery and chocolate market in the UAE has been enjoying steady growth due to a local culture of giving chocolates as a gift on festivals and other occasions, rising per capita expenditure, growing youth population, and escalating seasonal demand. The latest industry report by TechSci Research states that the market is set to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 8% between 2016 and 2021. However, it has traditionally been flooded >>>

"YOU HAVE TO ELIMINATE EGO BECAUSE IT IS THE KILLER OF MOST PARTNERSHIPS. NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU LOVE EACH OTHER, IF YOU DON'T ELIMINATE YOUR EGO, YOU WILL EVENTUALLY START QUESTIONING SOMETHING."

with international brands, leaving local chocolate producers to compete by offering a more authentic taste of Arabic ingredients, such as dates, spices, nuts and milk. Regionally, Lebanese and Syrian confectioners, famed for their culinary skills, have traditionally ruled in the niche catering specifically for Arabic tastes.

Yet, a decade into the millennium, vicious civil wars ranging in the two countries changed the landscape of the industry, dramatically. "In 2007, a war in Lebanon started, during which the airport closed down, meaning that the factories in Lebanon could not export anymore," Bilal explains. "The chocolate shops here got hit because they were all buying from Lebanon. At the same time, there were only five local manufacturers

in Dubai. They were all small, not industrial manufacturers. Also, we realized that in this domain, everyone had an old-school mentality; nobody was innovative. There were some who were looking at new ideas, but the sector was always five years behind [the more advanced markets]."

From the outset, the BMB chocolate factory has become known for sourcing the finest ingredients, pioneering recipes and innovative presentation, while the co-founders' willingness to offer alternatives to their prospective clients has slowly started transforming the industry across the region. "The usual approach to selling these products was a push strategy," Ballout explains. "We implemented a consultancy strategy, explaining to our customers whether something would

work or not, or whether something was saturated. We started tailor-making recipes for clients. That is why we are now known as a consultancy. It is interesting, because we are manufacturers. Even today, whenever we decide to venture into something new in terms of manufacturing, or if our Chief Innovation Officer is coming up with a new product range, we never come up with a product range that is too broad."

How did the company set up in Qatar, the first foreign market they entered back in 2010? Credit there belongs to Mohamad Khachab, Ballout's third cousin and the company's Managing Partner. When Khachab started talking, it became clear that the two cousins shared more than just a family resemblance. "We believed that if we worked



BMB Group Factory

together, we could make it big,” Khachab says. “I sat with Bilal for exactly 30 days and got all the know-how. We used to stay 15 hours a day together. After that one month, we planned to open the Qatari market because it was small compared to other GCC countries and there was a lot of potential, no one produced there. I moved to Doha and started making connections. We managed to open a company there after another 30 days. In 2011, Qatar was booming because the market was raw, we started directly going to customers and we made it in one year.” Ballout here makes a special note of Khachab’s skills in getting this done. “The trick here is that there are people who are good at sales and people who are entrepreneurs,” he explains. “Considering his age at the time, going to Qatar, where he didn’t know anyone, and establishing a business from scratch, it is clear that it is an entrepreneurial mindset. It is not a sales mindset. We were very skeptical, but not only did he open the market, but he became number one in Qatar in such a short time.”

In mid-2012, Khachab says, it was time to enter the big market of Saudi Arabia. He started spending two weeks in Riyadh and two weeks in Doha each month, in addition to regular visits to Dubai for a monthly board meeting with Ballout to ensure that the rapid growth did not get out of hand. “Things came fast in Saudi,” Khachab says. “At the beginning, the mindset was ‘No, we want to buy from Lebanon and Syria,’ but when the war in Syria started in 2011, they had no choice. Syrians were so strong in Saudi Arabia because they share the border. Also, everything coming from Lebanon was hit because of

that war, since shipping by land is much cheaper than shipping by air. We ended up getting some key accounts in Saudi Arabia very quickly, not only because we were so passionate, but because we really had good intentions for the customers. How people dealt in business here in the region was not based on a lot of trust. This is what we found. The good thing is that we really understood, then and now, what our customers want. All our competitors would just show their catalog, take it or leave it. For us, no. To build trust with these big clients, we built strong relationships, we made it more trustworthy, we made it more into a win-win situation, we became a part of their team. This is how we really connected with the big clients. I targeted the key accounts, and it took us three months to get them all.” Ballout adds: “Mohammad landed a deal, which was an inflection point for the business. How it happened was because we tailor-made products that ended up being the talk of the town in the whole country. They did so well, and we did so well on the back of that. From the start up to today, we have never sold something to someone we don’t believe would work.”

The business of trading bakery and chocolate ingredients and private label manufacturing in all three markets was booming, but joining Endeavor UAE, the local chapter of a global network of high-impact entrepreneurs, in 2015 led them to a conclusion that the future of their company should be in owning the brand equity. It also brought about one more important change, causing the BMB acronym to now stand for “Baklava Made Better” after



BMB Group at the Sweets & Snacks Exhibition in Dubai

“TO BUILD TRUST WITH THESE BIG CLIENTS, WE BUILT STRONG RELATIONSHIPS, WE MADE IT MORE TRUSTWORTHY, WE MADE IT MORE INTO A WIN-WIN SITUATION, WE BECAME A PART OF THEIR TEAM. THIS IS HOW WE REALLY CONNECTED WITH THE BIG CLIENTS.”

Mohamed Ballout decided to exit the business. “Private equity started coming to us because we went through Endeavor,” Ballout says. “Just out of interest to see how much our valuation was, we started engaging with them and they got to one of us. They got to my brother. He had always seen it from a perspective of an investor, whereas the two of us were wearing both an investment and a passionate entrepreneur hat. So, he came to us saying: ‘Guys, I’m planning to sell.’ We agreed on the basis that we would choose a private equity firm. Eventually, I found one that I trust and which I know can open up a lot of doors. We finished the deal in October last year. They are now good partners to have in our dream of geographical expansion. What I’d like to highlight after going through an exercise, such as [the selection process for] Endeavour UAE, is why it is important to find the right partner. I see a lot of entrepreneurs who get excited, such as being the best friends from university

and so on, but then the problems happen down the line, if things don’t go well and if things go too well, and so on. With us, let’s say that we have been lucky. We made all the mistakes that any other person would make, we went in with just our hearts. But, luckily enough, the way our bonding has been since childhood, we have never had to question that.”

So what can Ballout’s peers in the entrepreneurial ecosystem learn from his experience? “The lesson from this is that, first, you have to define who does what,” he explains. “Second and foremost, you have to eliminate ego because it is the killer of most partnerships. No matter how much you love each other, if you don’t eliminate your ego, you will eventually start questioning something. Lastly, it is about whether you want the same thing. You might want it now, but you might not want it in 10 years. You can change your mind every year and discuss it, as long as you are transparent. If your interests don’t align anymore, it is >>>



BMB Group
showroom

"WE HAVE OPENED AN OPERATION OFFICE IN MICHIGAN, IN MOSCOW, AND IN APRIL WE ARE MEETING WITH POTENTIAL PARTNERS IN LONDON TO EXPLORE OUR GROWTH IN EUROPE. WE ARE ALSO DEALING WITH BIG FACTORIES IN EUROPE THAT HAVE SHUT DOWN THEIR PRODUCTION AND ARE NOW OUTSOURCING EVERYTHING FROM US BECAUSE OF THE SCALE THAT WE HAVE. THAT IS HOW MUCH WE ARE ABLE TO COMPETE."

okay to say that it is time for you to move on, as my brother did. As long as you have that word of honor, nothing can stop you." As for the future of the company, Ballout says they will be choosing one of two options: either a stock market flotation, or selling it to a strategic buyer. A third option, and a route most commonly taken by other chocolate producers in the region—passing the business to the next generation in the family—is not on the table, he says. "It is interesting psychologically to see why these businesses never grew that big. It is because they are mainly family businesses," he says. "The reason for failure for a lot of brands was that they had too many partners. In our field you can see a lot of brands that families start splitting among their members, with a lot of them becoming kings of only their cities and their countries, but no one had the drive or passion to take the product worldwide."

A firm believer in corporate governance, Ballout signed The Pearl Initiative, a project of Badr Jafar of Crescent Enterprises, developed in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Partnerships, to promote a corporate culture of transparency and accountability across the large number of regional family-run businesses. "It is about

"WE HAVE BUILT SCALABILITY BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE HAS THE MACHINERY THAT WE DO. [...] WE BELIEVE THAT OUR PRODUCT WILL BE SUPER HARD TO BEAT IN TERMS OF QUALITY, PRICE, AND SCALE."

investing in it to grow globally but sustainably," he adds.

"At the same time, none of our competitors here has invested in the know-how. For Arabic sweets, you need to know very clearly the technicalities of the flavor, the ingredients, how it is done, and so on. That is what we have invested 10 years in, the know-how. We have also realized that we have built scalability because no one else has the machinery that we do. Plus, you can't buy it outside, we have invented it. We believe that our product will be super hard to beat in terms of quality, price, and scale." Khachoub adds: "We are now expanding into Russia, Europe, and the US, all in parallel. We have opened an operation office in Michigan and Moscow, and in April we are meeting with potential partners in London to explore our growth in Europe. We are also dealing with big factories in Europe that have shut down their production and are now outsourcing everything from us because of the scale that we have. That is how much we are able to compete."

In order to remain competitive in a fast-changing global market place, Ballout maintains a close eye on market trends, which is his final piece of advice for fellow entrepreneurs. "No one is invincible," he says. "Sometimes companies are doing so well and say they will forever be number one, and so on. You need to wake up every day and ask yourself: 'How is the landscape changing?'

or 'How are my consumers changing?' You read all these examples of business, which everyone thought were prime businesses in their areas, collapse sometimes over a month, not even a year. So, we keep on asking ourselves how people are changing in the way they give sweets as gifts. Our parents used to visit each other a lot and take a lot of sweets, but today our generation does not do that anymore. We meet each other outside of our homes and our gifts have shrunk, the way we give gifts is different. So, no matter which business you are in, you have to keep track of everything."

The global chocolate market is set to grow at a rate close to 5% through 2020, according to various estimates. Among the most dominant players are companies from the US and Switzerland. It was in the 19th century that Swiss chocolate was recognized as a world standard in the field of chocolate manufacturing, not because the country had natural resources of cacao beans and other ingredients, but due to its continuous research and experimentation. Why then, Ballout asks, isn't there a global brand of chocolate from this region? And that's his vision for De Rafael, and indeed, BMB as well.

"While my brother was cashing out, we went through, let's say, a spiritual transformation about deciding where we wanted to steer this ship," he explains. "The fact that we decided to stay made us think what we wanted to do. Thanks to Endeavor entrepreneurs and mentors, we learnt what defines success. We have both agreed that as the way you walk into any supermarket in the world and find a Ferrero, in the same way you should find our brand of baklava, for example. Then we will know that we have made it." ■

by
Kilian



A NEW FRONTIER FOR RETAIL

AS DOHA FESTIVAL CITY GETS SET TO OPEN ITS DOORS IN APRIL, CEO KAREEM SHAMMA ON WHAT THE NEW MALL WILL BRING TO QATAR

By Aparajita Mukherjee

“THE DIVERSITY OF THE PROJECT ALLOWS FOR HEDGING AND DOES NOT OVER-EXPOSE US TO RETAIL OR ANY OTHER SINGLE AVENUE. ALSO, THERE IS A VARIETY OF OTHER OFFERINGS ACROSS INCOME BRACKETS AND ACROSS PRICE POINTS.”

A civil/structural engineer by education, with experience in construction sites and design offices, Kareem Shamma, CEO of Doha Festival City (DFC), moved into project management of large-scale projects and joined DFC in 2012, just before it broke ground. According to Shamma, DFC shouldn't be seen as just a retail project, but instead as a destination that features large-scale entertainment unlike any other in the whole region. As if to prove his point, Shamma draws attention to Juniverse, a project aimed at harnessing the power of dynamic learning to inspire, educate and entertain, as well as Virtoucity, a plan to merge the virtual world with reality and thus deliver an immersive digital experience. “Snow

Dunes will be Qatar's first indoor snow park themed around a fantastical Arabian town set in the distant past,” Shamma adds. “Angry Birds, the global gaming sensation and Hollywood blockbuster movie from Sony Entertainment will also launch its first theme park at the mall. Additionally, VOX Cinemas is also set to revolutionize the cinema experience for audiences in Qatar with 18 digital screens including four new concepts -4DX, Theatre by Rhodes, MAX and VOX Kids- which are exclusive to DFC.” With all this and more headed to Qatar, what DFC will offer is an experience like no other, Shamma reiterates.

According to Shamma, DFC has been envisioned as a family entertainment and leisure destination, with

options aplenty for every age group. The USPs of DFC, in Shamma's opinion are, first, the entertainment zone, and second, the number of firsts that DFC will have introduced in terms of the combination of entertainment





IMAGES COURTESY DFC

and retail. “For instance, the Harvey Nichols store is a first in Qatar, and [it] has signed with us as the one and only sanctioned store in the country,” Shamma notes. “Then, Ace Hardware, which is a very popular brand hail-

ing from the Philippines, again a first in Qatar- [these are] just a few of the firsts.” At the same time, the inclusion of known brands, such as Debenhams, H&M, BHS, Centrepont, and M&S, has been done keeping in mind

that these are the familiar brands that shoppers who come to malls want to see. So, these brands add a certain comfort factor to the shoppers who come here. “They need to be there to give that feeling of familiar-

ity to our shoppers. The hypermarket Monoprix is the largest in the world, 7,000 square meters. Ikea was again a first when it came in in March 2013, in addition to Muji’s and The Fragrance Kitchen,” Shamma adds. >>>

BY THE NUMBERS DOHA FESTIVAL CITY

- Project cost: Over QAR6 billion
- Groundbreaking date: October 19, 2011
 - Completion date: 5 April 2017
- Location: Umm Salal Muhammed, Qatar
 - Land used: 433,847 sq. m.
 - Gross building area: 670,000 sq. m.
 - Gross leasable area: 244,000 sq. m.
- Expected footfall: 1.6 million visitors each month
 - Car parking spaces: 8,000 units
 - Retail units: over 500
 - Entrances: 29
- Floors: Two floors of retail, four floors of car parking

“Thirdly, DFC’s world-class management is on a par with any other global location, an aggregation of global best practices as far as mall management goes.”

Shamma also draws attention to the bespoke *Sculpted Torus*, created by artist and sculptor David Harber in the Mall’s Centre Court. The sculpture, four meters in diameter, is an adaptation of David Harber Ltd.’s iconic *Torus*, and is part of a series

of five variations that will be installed at DFC. It is made from mirror-polished, marine grade stainless steel, and will sit alongside a succession of smaller, two-meter high *Torus*— all of which will be slight variations of the original design. Harber is also producing a four-meter high bronze *Key-stone Ring*, with a Verdigris finish to be located outside one of the main entrances to DFC, and is currently



designing some hanging tree canopies to be placed in the two glass atria of the North Food Court. Adding to all of these features are the smart mall initiatives of DFC, with Shamma explaining that the mall has a digital advertising model that hinges on unique screens made for this purpose. “We have unique vehicle management systems in the car parking and an interactive website. To make it easier for our guests, we

Sculpted Torus by David Harber



also have digital way finders, which will be conveniently located throughout the mall. Spread out over a total site area of 433,000 sq. m., our interactive directory is sure to be of assistance for those seeking guidance on any of our 500 leading retailers and extensive entertainment offerings. Whilst traditional printed Mall Guides will also be available, digital way finding offers a quick and easy alternative and visitors can also search events, offers and find out what entertainment is happening in the mall,” Shamma explains.

With a gross leasable area of 244,000 sq. m. (just to understand the mall’s size, its area covers 94 football pitches), one wonders if the prevailing slump in retail spending will affect DFC’s ability in finding the tenants it needs to achieve the required space efficiency. To that, Shamma replies, “Yes, of course, we have achieved a very good efficiency, having crossed 70%, which is above the global average benchmark for efficiency, in terms of industry standards.” Refuting the logic of a retail slump, Shamma adds, “We are, to an extent, hedged in that sense. We have a limited dependence on pure retail and have varied entertainment offerings. When is it a bad time for people to be entertained? Particularly in times of economic hardships, there are stuff that they will always need and buy, even if it is not luxury. The diversity of the project allows for hedging and does not over-expose us to retail or any other single avenue. Also, there is a variety of other offerings across income brackets and across price points.” Shamma also refutes the suggestion that online



DFC mall exterior

shopping and e-commerce can ever replace physical malls, stating, “Even though e-commerce and online shopping have caught on tremendously, they cannot substitute the experience of actually touching and feeling as one shops, especially in this part of the world. There is something unique about physically shopping that online purchase can never offer. No matter how much one sits in front of one’s screen, one can’t simulate a snow-slope gliding experience or tobogganing, and that is where we will always score over online purchases. DFC is a community meeting place, for Qataris, by Qataris and for everyone who lives in Qatar.” ■

“WE HAVE ACHIEVED A VERY GOOD EFFICIENCY, HAVING CROSSED 70%, WHICH IS ABOVE THE GLOBAL AVERAGE BENCHMARK FOR EFFICIENCY, IN TERMS OF INDUSTRY STANDARDS.”

GOING GREEN

A LOOK AT DFC’S ECO-FRIENDLY INITIATIVES

- Building designed for maximum daylight usage with 10,230 sq. m. glass installed throughout the building
- Energy-efficient cooling plant to minimize electrical load
- LED lighting for reduced power usage longer life
- Reduced water usage through
- Water efficient taps and cisterns in the bathrooms
- Recycling rain water through use of retention tanks which collect the rain water and the blow down water from our chiller plant
- Recycled water is then used for irrigation for the outdoor landscape and recreational areas on the site
- Majority of landscape designed using native or adaptive plant reducing the amount of water consumed



Kareem Shamma, CEO, Doha Festival City

FAMILY-LIKE TEAMS BUILD EXTRAORDINARY BUSINESSES

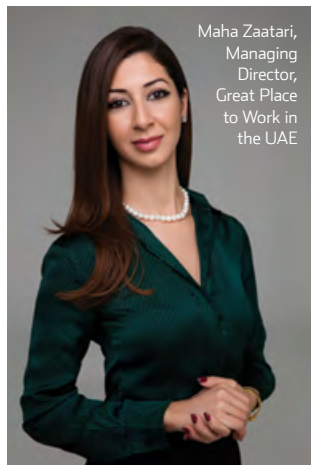
GCC BUSINESS LEADERS REVEAL AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT
FOR GROWING SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES

By Tamara Pupic

For a business, striving to beat growth expectations and building a family-like company culture can seem to be mutually exclusive— in fact, a poll recently conducted by recruitment website Bayt.com, stating that nearly 100% of MENA-based respondents planned to look for a new job in 2017, reveals that maintaining a close-knit, loyalty-based workplace culture is a challenge for employers. However, this year's list of *Top Companies to Work For in the UAE* by global consultancy Great Place to Work shows that 24 of the country's enterprises have managed to strike a balance between implementing often aggressive growth strategies and nurturing human resources. The annual benchmarking study assesses the level of credibility, respect, fairness, pride and camaraderie within an organization, and forms part of the world's largest employee survey. Two-thirds of a company's score is based on the confidential feedback of their employees, while the remaining score is attained from an audit of management and HR practices.

Topping this year's list are two corporate giants DHL, the global logistics company praised for its close monitoring of the implementation of best employment experience policies, and Omnicom Media Group, commended for focusing on the continuous development and well-being of its staff. Among the top five are two homegrown UAE brands, namely Splash Fashion and THE One Total Home Experience—proving that entrepreneurs often find different ways to keep their staff eager to work. “SMEs have less financial means to develop great practices, but sometimes an initiative with zero cost can make the highest impact,” says Maha Zaatari, Managing Director of Great Place to Work in the UAE. “I usually advise my clients that having a fancy office is amazing, but it is just a cherry on top. It is all about the relationships that we develop at work. What they need to do is to make sure to spend time with their staff and to make sure that they are being very honest and transparent in their communication. It is also about starting right, making sure that they hire the right people with the right values. The reason is that all these companies have great values inscribed on their walls and published on their websites, but one of the biggest challenges is that they don't live by the values they promote. So, small companies should make sure that they stand for and foster the values they set at the beginning.”

For Swedish entrepreneur Thomas Lundgren, founder of THE One Total Home Experience, which has grown from its first shop in Abu Dhabi, opened in 1996, into a chain of 31 stores in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Tunisia and



Maha Zaatari,
Managing
Director,
Great Place
to Work in
the UAE

the UAE, it has always been about “building something bigger,” both internally and externally. With no college degrees adorning his walls, Lundgren has built THE One Total Home Experience and its sister brands FUSION by THE One, THE One Jun-

ior, and THE One Basics, to collectively employ over 650 people. His secret is in responding to his employees' desire for meaning. “From day one, we have built a culture of fairness and empathy,” he says. “It's about creating a better life for our people and the community around us. We don't believe the world needs another retailer; we need a better world. I have always said, if we focus on humanity, the bottom line will follow, and the most effective way to change the world is through being in business.” Indeed, Lundgren considers corporate social responsibility as something not related to values— it's a matter of priorities, he says. This thus explains his company's Challenged Employee Initiative, which currently employs 19

“WE LOOK FOR PASSION, EMPATHY AND COMMITMENT, CANDIDATES THAT BELIEVE IN AND WILL LIVE BY OUR CORE VALUES— JOINING THE ONE IS FOR TEAM PLAYERS WHO WANT TO BELONG RATHER THAN JUST DO A JOB.”



Thomas Lundgren,
founder,
THE One Total
Home Experience

A cut above

The top 10 companies to work for in the UAE in 2017, as listed by Great Place To Work in the UAE

1. DHL
2. Omnicom Media Group
3. Splash Fashion
4. THE One
5. Weber Shandwick
6. Estee Lauder Companies
7. HILTI Emirates
8. FedEx
9. Hilton
10. MARS

www.greatplacetowork.ae

special needs individuals across the network, and aims for challenged employees to eventually make up 5% of its staff. In 2008, Lundgren launched THE Onederworld, a sustainable village community program, focusing on neglected regions in the world where their employees come from or their manufacturers are based.

When asked about his company's recruitment process, Lundgren replies, “We value cultural fit above skills and experience at THE One. >>>

“FOR ME, THE CULTURAL FIT IS THE NUMBER ONE CRITICAL THING THAT I WOULD LOOK FOR WITH SOMEBODY COMING TO WORK FOR ME. THAT COMES FROM LEADING BY EXAMPLE. I’M ENERGETIC, CHATTY, A PEOPLE’S PERSON, SO YOU WANT PEOPLE WHO WILL BE LIKE THAT TOO, ESPECIALLY ON THE SALES TEAM. IF YOU DON’T HAVE THE RIGHT CULTURAL FIT, IT IS NOT GOING TO WORK.”

I believe that organizations worth working for, attract people worth employing. We practice a recruitment method, which enables us to pick the best in the market through a chronological in-depth structured interview process which covers a candidate’s history starting from high school days through to their present career status. It brings out behaviors, paints a picture of personality and attitude as well as skill competencies. We look for passion, empathy and commitment, candidates that believe in and will live by our core values— joining THE One is for team players who want to belong [to a team] rather than just do a job.”

Loosely defined as an ability to adapt to the core beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors within an organization, the concept of cultural fit is also a number one recruitment criteria for Donna Benton, founder of The Entertainer, a “buy one get one free” voucher books provider launched in Dubai in 2001. In the span of 16 years, The Entertainer has grown to offer a range of 39 products across 18 destinations in 14 countries. More than 250 employees work in their headquarters in Dubai and 14 global offices, including Singapore, Hong Kong, Cape Town, Kuala Lumpur, London and Doha. This year, the company expects over

12 million of its offers to be redeemed by their customers globally. Yet, the rapid expansion, starting after Riya-da Enterprise Development, an investment platform of Dubai-based investment firm Abraaj Capital, acquired a 50% stake in the company in 2012, brought growing pains potentially affecting company culture. Nevertheless, Benton insisted on her recruitment standards. “For me, the cultural fit is the number one critical thing that I would look for with somebody coming to work for me,” she says. “That comes from leading by example. I’m energetic, chatty, a people’s person, so you want people who will be like that too, especially on the sales team. If you don’t have the right cultural fit, it is not going to work. We have over 35 nationalities, but the nationality does not really matter, what is important is someone’s personality and perception of their role in the company. Above all, I look for someone with a will before the skill. You need somebody who is passionate, who wants to work for you, and who fits in. It is great for them to have a skill, but you can teach them that along the way, which is better of having a skill and no will.”

“ABOVE ALL, I LOOK FOR SOMEONE WITH A WILL BEFORE THE SKILL. YOU NEED SOMEBODY WHO IS PASSIONATE, WHO WANTS TO WORK FOR YOU, AND WHO FITS IN. IT IS GREAT FOR THEM TO HAVE A SKILL, BUT YOU CAN TEACH THEM THAT ALONG THE WAY.”

Benton adds that she is not a fan of argumentative attitudes at the workplace either. “If there is any of that, they are out straight away. So, it is also about attitude. I think I’m really fair, but I’m also firm because it is the human capital that makes or breaks your company. Another key thing that you need to look at is that a good football player is not necessarily a good coach. You really have to keep an eye out for people who are able to manage others and for those who prefer working independently and like

Donna Benton, founder, The Entertainer



IMAGE CREDIT THE ENTERTAINER

to be managed. Also, as an owner or CEO, you have to be able to watch the people who manage upwards and not downwards. I am very aware of people who manage upwards to me, which would mean their coming, sitting in my office and talking about how everything is great, taking all the glory, and so on. At the same time, I see that they don't treat their team well and don't motivate them. Lastly, you need to look for your plan C to see who can come up in the ranks because they may have the will, they may learn the skill, and then you need to be able to know to promote them at the right time."

Raza Beig, founder of Splash, part of Landmark Group and one of the region's largest fast fashion retailers, has always believed that valuable employees can be found in scattered, sometimes unexpected, parts of his now big retail conglomerate. "I started the program *Hello HR* nine years ago when my business was small and I was very connected to the team," Beig explains. "I knew people

by their names and I knew what they were doing. As the company grew, their voices became fewer and my time was more focused on other things. There was a general feeling in me that I was not being able to hear what my people were saying. But, my belief is that all the good changes in business actually come from ground zero. So, when I started our *Hello HR* program, it was to hear my people's grievances, which especially was something I took very seriously, and also their ideas and suggestions. Until this day, I ensure that all grievances are dealt with, even if it leads to the top management of the company. If suggestions and ideas turn into something that the company will use, I send a letter of appreciation and a cash reward to that employee. So, the process started with listening, but it has become a very important tool in our business. Today, our people believe that when you speak to Raza, he will listen. And this is managed by myself and my senior HR manager only, so it is very confidential." >>>

"WE KEEP ON HEARING PEOPLE WANTING TO WORK FROM HOME AND HAVE FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS, BECAUSE WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS A KEY CHALLENGE HERE. THAT IS ALSO WHY THE STRESS LEVELS ARE HIGH IN MANY ORGANIZATIONS AND THEY DO NOT HAVE A GREAT WORKPLACE CULTURE."

Pain points

Maha Zaatari, Managing Director, Great Place to Work in the UAE lists five struggles UAE employers face in their enterprises

1. Employment security

"The UAE is a very unique market, and that is why managers have to be very careful when setting up their businesses here. There are quite a few restrictions here, and many of employees' concerns relate to their employers, such as if they lose their visas tomorrow, they will have one month to leave the country. So, organizations have faced challenges trying to make people feel more secure and make them want to stay. By communicating to talent that no matter what happens, that you will take care of them, that builds that element of trust."

have a very limited maternity leave here, and women feel they might lose their jobs if they go on a maternity leave. That affects their engagement and productivity. However, there are companies here that go above and beyond the law to address those challenges."

4. Work-life balance

"One more challenge goes back to the concept of trust. We keep on hearing people wanting to work from home and have flexible working hours, because work-life balance is a key challenge here. That is also why the stress levels are high in many organizations and they do not have a great workplace culture. When we get a question about how to help employees have work-life balance, we always say to trust them, stop micromanaging them, and so on."

2. Communication challenges

"Another key challenge is the lack of communication between line managers and employees. Line managers have so much to do, and they often underestimate the value of human interaction, spending time with their staff, and think that a good morning greeting will make everyone happy. We have heard from employees that they do not know what is expected from them, where they are heading to, and so on."

5. Lack of career planning

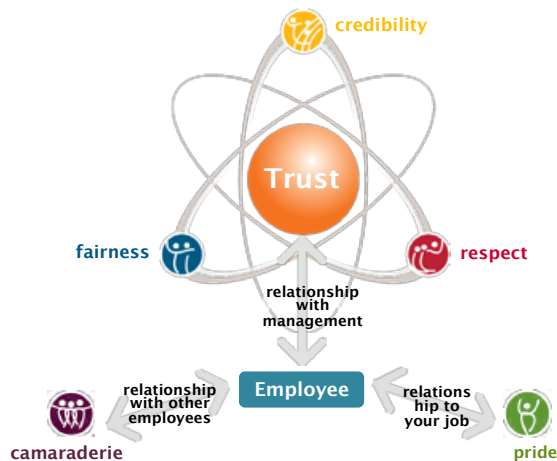
"Organizations send people on many training courses, but we don't see much value out of them without planning. We often hear that people here are in transit only for just a few years, but it is not the case anymore and employees now want to work for an organization that gives them a well-developed career plan. So, organizations should start offering careers rather than just jobs."

3. Women in the workplace

"Also, this market has less female-friendly policies, so we

What is a Great Workplace? Employee Perspective

Any workplace can be measured through five dimensions: **credibility**, **respect** and **fairness** (which are attributes of **trust**), as well as **pride** and **camaraderie**.





Raza Beig,
founder, Splash

"UNTIL THIS DAY, I ENSURE THAT ALL GRIEVANCES ARE DEALT WITH, EVEN IF IT LEADS TO THE TOP MANAGEMENT OF THE COMPANY. IF SUGGESTIONS AND IDEAS TURN INTO SOMETHING THAT THE COMPANY WILL USE, I SEND A LETTER OF APPRECIATION AND A CASH REWARD TO THAT EMPLOYEE. SO, THE PROCESS STARTED WITH LISTENING, BUT IT HAS BECOME A VERY IMPORTANT TOOL IN OUR BUSINESS."

"WHEN I STARTED OUR HELLO HR PROGRAM, IT WAS TO HEAR MY PEOPLE'S GRIEVANCES, WHICH ESPECIALLY WAS SOMETHING I TOOK VERY SERIOUSLY, AND ALSO THEIR IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS."

A note about Beig's background here: after losing his father when he was six years old, Beig started running errands for neighbors to help his family—his mother and five sisters—to make ends meet. Since then, the Indian entrepreneur has never stopped looking for business opportunities, and his repertoire includes establishing a tutorial college, a shirt manufacturing business, a cable TV distribution business, all before founding Splash in 1993 as a single brand store in Sharjah. The company currently operates over 220 stores and 55 brand stores across 14 countries. The credit for its growth, he says, goes to his employees. "My values come from my mother in a lot of ways because she selflessly devoted herself and believed in forgiveness," he explains. "All my employees now know that the DNA of my business is 'be nice'. It is perfectly fine to lose your cool sometimes, but if you

are a good person, you will also have the strength to go and say sorry... I believe that if your team is very happy and motivated, they will perform better. That is the reason why we have managed not only to survive, but to grow in double digits in a very competitive market with almost every brand in the world."

In addition to the *Hello HR* program, Beig has implemented a number of other initiatives, such as *Meet the CEO*, *Retail Employees Day*, *IIM Leadership Development Program*, *Goal 360*, and *Spotlight*, investing a significant amount of time listening to his employees' feedback. "Within our *Meet The CEO* initiative, if any of my employees submits a request to meet with me, wherever they are in the GCC, we would fly them down to Dubai to have lunch with me," he says.

"In general, this has helped a lot, because the management in all my stores now

know very clearly that if they mess up, it will reach Raza and an investigation will follow. In the past, those were the issues that we had, such as different ill treatments, and today there is one simple treatment that everybody needs to follow. It did happen that some people had lost their jobs as a result of our investigation. So, we take this very seriously."

In DHL's case, close monitoring of the application of their HR practices and policies is what has earned it the number one position on the annual benchmarking list for the fourth consecutive year. of the application of their HR practices and policies is what has earned DHL the number one position on the annual benchmarking list for the fourth consecutive year. "The reason why DHL has stayed on the list for so long is because they have made sure that these great policies are being implemented, are being followed up on, and are being checked against the market changes," Zaatari notes. "They have followed up on their practices and made sure to make changes and to customize them to the market changes, but they always put their employees first. At the beginning, organizations here in the UAE would get so excited acquiring the best practices and they would hire the best consultants to help them decide on those. After that, however, those practices are never implemented. That is why they fail to become great workplaces. They never train their line managers on how to cascade down all these practices to the front-liners. In DHL case, the front-liners are the people who deliver you a parcel, and they actually are the people who make the difference. They make DHL a great company." ■

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HIRING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

How to screen talent strategically and effectively for your enterprise

By Suhail Al-Masri

Whenever a company is looking to hire new employees, a major concern is whether or not the candidates they are moving forward with are truly the best of the best. With the help of online hiring solutions and expansive CV databases, accessing talent is becoming easier by the day. But the concern of picking and choosing, comparing and contrasting, and narrowing down the list of potential yes's is an issue worth investigating.

Younger companies and startups often find it a challenge to manage this hiring stage effectively. Without having a well-defined talent screening strategy, hiring decisions will be haphazard and risky. As we analogize in Bayt.com, you can think of talent screening as a series of funnels: with every funnel, you are left with the most qualified and most suitable potential employees.

The types of funnels or filters that guide your screening process are set by you at every hiring stage. When it comes to defining the criteria or attribute that you deem essential for a candidate to pass through a particular screening funnel, you should keep these in line with your overall hiring strategy. After all, you are looking for a specific set of qualifications and you need a candidate who precisely fits

your company culture and who pursues your goals.

Talent screening tools and technologies can be implemented throughout the hiring process. Here is where you can start.

SCREENING CANDIDATES BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

There are many aspects to consider when screening talent based on CVs and initial application material, such as the appearance and the organization of the documents. Although CVs may provide different types of information, the purpose of screening them is saving time and effort and looking for candidates who appear, in writing, to have the needed qualifications and experience. Here is how to do that:

1. FOCUS ON YOUR JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Although you may not have viewed them this way before, your job descriptions are one of the most important screening tools in your arsenal. A detailed list of duties, responsibilities, skills, academic qualifications, and relevant work experience must be specified before announcing the vacancy. Doing so makes it easier for you to screen candidates. For one side of the operation, it signals to unqualified candidates that they

are not the target, and so, you minimize irrelevant applications. For the other side, you will be able to systematically filter out applicants based on the job description specifications. There are many job description templates available on leading job sites, such as Bayt.com, to help you with this step.

THE TYPES OF FUNNELS OR FILTERS THAT GUIDE YOUR SCREENING PROCESS ARE SET BY YOU AT EVERY HIRING STAGE. WHEN IT COMES TO DEFINING THE CRITERIA OR ATTRIBUTE THAT YOU DEEM ESSENTIAL FOR A CANDIDATE TO PASS THROUGH A PARTICULAR SCREENING FUNNEL, YOU SHOULD KEEP THESE IN LINE WITH YOUR OVERALL HIRING STRATEGY.

2. AUTOMATE YOUR SCREENING PROCESS

You can put technology to work for you and streamline your entire screening efforts. Let's say you use an online job postings tool. You have the option of creating a mandatory questionnaire that applicants have to fill out before applying for your jobs. Using screening questionnaires will automatically filter out unqualified candidates, will give you scores to compare and contrast applicants, and will provide you with additional information about the job candidate, which will aid you further in the screening and short-listing process.

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- Last Job Title
- Years of Experience
 - All
 - 2 - 5 Years
 - 5 - 10 Years
 - More than 10 Years
- Last Employer
- Specialities
- Specialty
 - All
 - Marketing
 - Graphic Design
 - Sales
 - Account Management
 - More
- Personal Information
- Residence Location

Actions

Nora

Target Job: [dropdown]
Target Monthly Salary: [dropdown]
Degree: [dropdown]
Experience: [dropdown]

Actions

Adam

If you use a CV search tool for hiring, you can use built-in filtering options and tools. For instance, you can filter out based on CV freshness or based on keywords that are missing from the applicant's CV. But you also have CV comparison tools at your disposal that you can use to juxtapose candidates for comparison, assign ranks and scores, and shortlist with minimum time and effort.

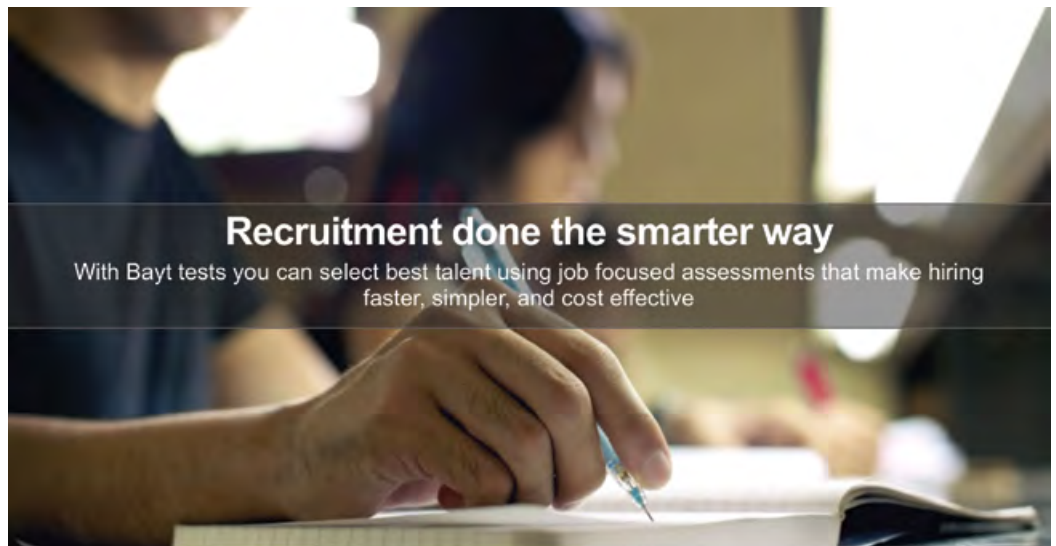
3. AVOID FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Although 83.4% of respondents to the Bayt.com *Influence of Personal Appearance on Hiring Decision* poll claim that there is a link between appearance and success, first impressions, whether positive or negative, can often be misleading. Appearance is not a recommended screening tool.

Even in terms of submitted material, first impressions aren't always accurate. Some people, for instance, are better than others at communicating specific information in writing. You may find a very able candidate behind an imperfectly crafted CV, if you pursue the missing links and information gaps. However, if excellent writing skills is a requirement for the position, then writing style would become part of your selection criteria.

Let's also keep in mind that application documents are limited in how much they can convey. Sometimes, it is necessary to request more information from the applicant. Other times, when the employer is truly ambivalent, it is appropriate to postpone the screening of a particular candidate to the interview round.

USING SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRES WILL AUTOMATICALLY FILTER OUT UNQUALIFIED CANDIDATES, WILL GIVE YOU SCORES TO COMPARE AND CONTRAST APPLICANTS, AND WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE JOB CANDIDATE.



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SCREENING CANDIDATES DURING THE INTERVIEW

Job interviews are the most informative part of the hiring process; during these sessions, the employer has the opportunity to ask many questions about the candidate, understand their experience and career motives, and also showcase the company and the benefits associated with the vacant position. But there are also a few tools that make talent screening during the interview much easier.

1. PRIMARY CRITERIA

As we mentioned earlier, a list of skills, academic qualifications, and work experience must be specified when formulating a job description. However, as

you commence with the job interviews, it is very helpful to boil down the list of qualifications to the most critical ones. Create the primary list of 10-12 items that you will not compromise over. This will make it easier for you to exclude candidates who fail to meet the most essential requirements, and you can move on to the next steps with those who satisfy all of the primary criteria.

2. SCORECARDS

During the interview, comparing candidates against each other qualitatively is rather difficult. For instance, how do you know which candidate has better leadership skills if both of them give similar examples? The answer is to use a

OBSERVING BEHAVIORAL TRAITS FROM THE MOMENT THE CANDIDATE ARRIVES FOR THEIR INTERVIEW UNTIL THEY LEAVE CAN BE VERY TELLING ABOUT THEIR WORK ETHICS AND DEDICATION TO THE JOB.

scorecard. Create a scale (one to 10 for example) to plot the skills and traits you require. Based on the candidate's performance during the interview, as well as their documented qualifications, assign them the appropriate score. The scores of all candidates can then be compared to determine the most qualified ones.

An alternative route is to use online employer tests, which will automate this entire stage. You can receive detailed reports so you can quantitatively, and more confidently, conduct your screening. >>>

APPLICATION DOCUMENTS ARE LIMITED IN HOW MUCH THEY CAN CONVEY. SOMETIMES, IT IS NECESSARY TO REQUEST MORE INFORMATION FROM THE APPLICANT. OTHER TIMES, WHEN THE EMPLOYER IS TRULY AMBIVALENT, IT IS APPROPRIATE TO POSTPONE THE SCREENING OF A PARTICULAR CANDIDATE TO THE INTERVIEW ROUND.

3. BEHAVIORAL CHECKLISTS

In addition to the primary criteria and the score card, evaluating a candidate should include assessing their behavior during the interview, and under general circumstances. Consider, for instance, the candidate's punctuality, body language, communication style, energy level, listening skills, and general interaction with prospective colleagues. Observing such behavioral traits from the moment the candidate arrives for their interview until they leave can

be very telling about their work ethics and dedication to the job. Certainly, how much value is given to each of these traits varies depending on the company goals and culture.

SCREENING CANDIDATES AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Sometimes, the job candidate performs exceptionally well or exceptionally poorly to the extent that the decision is self-evident. But it is not always so easy. In many cases, you will have many candidates who performed at or above the expected level. This means that hiring cannot be made instantly after the interview and a process of assessments, comparisons, and analysis must take place. Whoever makes the hiring decision is expected to provide an explanation of how that decision has been concluded.

1. REFERENCE CHECKS

If you have gathered a reference list or some recommendation letters, which are extremely valuable screening tools and easily obtainable through online job sites such as Bayt.com, then this would be the time to go through them. Make some phone calls and discuss the candidate's qualifications and previous experiences. Gain as many details as you need and compare the answers you receive against what the candidate provided during the job interview.

2. SOCIAL SEARCH

One of the easy, yet highly informative, tools for evaluating the candidate post-interview is conducting a search on any major search engine, leading job sites, and social media platforms. If the candidate has a public profile on Bayt.com,

you can gain even more details about who they are. Social media can also be an honest revelation of the candidate's personality, interests, and passions. Such information will help in deciding whether the candidate truly fits within the hiring team and company culture, or not.

3. SECOND INTERVIEWS

Even if your hiring process typically includes one interview, do not rule out the possibility of having additional opportunities to sit with and talk to the shortlisted candidates. Having more than one interview, with varying styles, can be extremely useful for differentiating candidates who performed at the same level or if you are still missing some details from a candidate. It is also a good opportunity for the job seeker to re-assert their qualifications and be more comfortable in their seat.

HIRING CANNOT BE MADE INSTANTLY AFTER THE INTERVIEW AND A PROCESS OF ASSESSMENTS, COMPARISONS, AND ANALYSIS MUST TAKE PLACE.

4. PANEL DISCUSSION

Whether you were the only interviewer or had a panel interview, you should feel free to seek out input and suggestions from your team. Talk to human resources, prospective peers and supervisors to gain their impression on the candidate. Hiring a new employee impacts many existing employees from different departments and their input can be very helpful.

At the end of the day, as a hiring manager, you should have a systematic talent screening method and make a well-informed and objective hiring decision, based on the goals and interests of the company or organization. ■

The image shows a screenshot of the Bayt.com website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'My Workspace', 'Recruitment Solutions', 'About Us', 'Resources', 'Contact Us', and 'Request a Demo'. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with 'Overview', 'Special Offers', 'Job Postings', 'Job Search', and 'More...'. On the right side of the secondary navigation bar, there are links for 'Log In Register', 'English', and 'For Job Seekers'. The main content area features a large banner with the text 'POST YOUR JOB ONLINE & REACH 24 MILLION PROFESSIONALS' and 'Post Your Job for FREE'. Below this is a form with input fields for 'Full Name', 'Company Name', 'Email', and '+962 Phone Number', followed by a 'Post Your Job Now' button. A link 'Already have an account?' is also visible. Below the form is a section titled 'How Job Postings Work' with the subtext 'Just post your job on Bayt.com and watch the applicants flood in. It's fast and easy.' To the left of this section are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google+. Below the text is a laptop displaying a job listing on the Bayt.com website.



Suhail Al-Masri is the VP of Employer Solutions at Bayt.com. Al-Masri has more than 20 years of experience in sales leadership, consultative sales, account management, marketing management, and operations management. His mission at Bayt.com goes in line with the company's mission to empower people with the tools and knowledge to build their lifestyles of choice.



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THE COMEBACK

THE NEW NOKIA 6 MAKES A STUNNING FIRST IMPRESSION

Nokia is back with a bang—and it has got a new operating system to boot. The Nokia 6 runs Android and also offers Google services like Google Assistant and monthly security updates. In addition, it features a bright 5.5-inch full HD screen, Dolby Atmos sound, and dual speakers. There's a 16 MP phase detection autofocus camera on the back, and an 8 MP camera on the front. Plus the dual-tone flash on the main camera helps you take natural-looking photos, even in low light. It's powered by a Snapdragon processor, and features a Micro SD card slot as well. The unibody of the Nokia 6 is crafted from a single block of 6000 series aluminum, and comes in four sophisticated colors: Matte Black, Silver, Tempered Blue and Copper.



Nokia 6

WATCH OUT

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LG Watch Style

LG Watch Sport

The LG Watch Style and LG Watch Sport are the first watches running Android Wear 2.0, Google's newest wearable operating system. Both watches have Google Assistant built-in, and the LG Watch Sport supports Android Pay with NFC technology. With Android Wear 2.0 you can reply to a message, set a reminder, or ask for directions by holding the power button or saying "OK Google." In addition, these smart accessories provide advanced fitness features through Google Fit like the ability to track your activities, guided strength training and coaching. If helping reach your fitness goals isn't enough, you can download your favorite apps

directly from the Google Play store- onto the watch! Both feature a circular bezel with a rotating side button for easy navigation, and you also get the ability to customize watch faces.



LG Watch Sport

SNAP IT

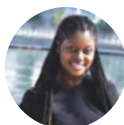
SONY CYBER-SHOT HX350

With a mix of easy-to-use features and DSLR-inspired styling, the new Cyber-shot HX350 makes photography a snap (pun intended). The HX350 packs big camera performance into a compact body and fits comfortably in your hand. The camera is good for a variety of shooting situations with the ZEISS VARIO-Sonnar T lens offering 50x optical zoom range, and Image Zoom that doubles maximum magnification to bring distant targets jaw-droppingly close. Optical SteadyShot cuts handheld wobbles and minimizes camera shake for crisper

still, while Intelligent Active Mode keeps Full HD videos equally sharp and blur-free. HX350 has a high-resolution back-illuminated Exmor R™ CMOS sensor with 20.4 effective megapixels and speedy BIONZ X image processing engine. This camera is loaded with serious shooting options like manual ring for smooth adjustment of zoom/focus, plus an easily accessible mode dial and custom button for quick adjustment of your favorite settings. Whether you're an enthusiast or budding professional, the Sony Cyber-shot HX350 is an ideal choice.



Sony Cyber-shot HX350



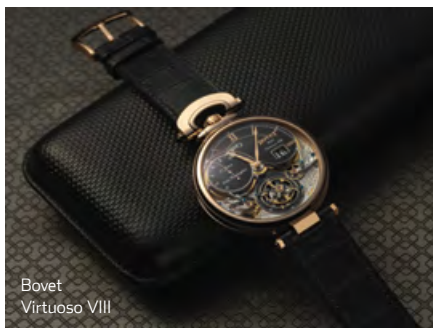
#TAMTALKSTECH Tamara Clarke, a former software development professional, is the tech and lifestyle enthusiast behind *The Global Gazette*, one of the most active blogs in the Middle East. *The Global Gazette* has been welcomed and lauded by some of the most influential tech brands in the region. Clarke's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

'TREP TRIMMINGS THE EXECUTIVE SELECTION

From better goods to better wardrobe bests, every issue we choose a few items that make the approved executive selection list. In this issue, we present the Suitsupply FW16 range, a sleek timepiece for your collection, and a great overnighter for your next work jaunt.



Bovet
Virtuoso VIII



Bovet
Virtuoso VIII

TIME TRAVELER

BOVET

Celebrating its 195th anniversary, the House of Bovet is rolling out the new timepiece Virtuoso VIII, with the tourbillon as its accentuated feature. Available in a variety of fine options -ivory, black lacquer and blue aventurine- interested gents can choose from three cases in 18k red-gold, 18k white-gold, and platinum (with customized sub-dial colors). The high-end timepiece offers an intricate dial and details such as the hand-engraving work, blue screws, and beveling. Virtuoso VIII's design shows off its eye-catching features in its dials, and hints an ode to the House's historic pocket watches. If you have a penchant for form and function, this watch deserves a place in your collection. www.bovet.com



Bovet
Virtuoso VIII



Christian
Louboutin
Bagdamon
Calf Empire
Nubuck
Ebony



Christian
Louboutin
Bagdamon
Canvas
Calf Empire
Version
Black

EDITOR'S PICK CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN

Got a business trip coming up? The Christian Louboutin Bagdamon can help you zoom from the runway to the office. The carry-on features a subtle emblem of the House's logo, designed with sturdy stitching work and shoulder handles for convenience. Tote your work essentials or double it up as an overnight bag. A worthwhile purchase, this versatile piece can even carry you right into your next weekend getaway. www.christianlouboutin.com

SUITS AT THE READY

SUITSUPPLY FW16

Since we're facing uncertain day-to-day temperatures, it's convenient to have pieces you can take off or put on throughout the day. It's time to brush up on layering ensembles- and with the right pieces, you can do this effortlessly. Influenced by Mark Rothko's "No.3/No.13" art piece consisting of rectangular blocks of dark tones, Suitsupply's FW16 range offers tailored slim fit suits to waistcoats, and a change for an otherwise monotone look with layering elements like various patterns and vests. From the boardroom to chilly après work events, there's plenty of choices that aren't just one-off wear pieces. Wardrobe investments? Yes, sir. www.suitsupply.com



Suitsupply FW16



Suitsupply FW16



Fake it 'til you make it

The *Esquire Guy* on how to convincingly fake confidence, happiness and other necessary feelings in the workplace *By Ross McCammon*

We fake it in meetings. We fake it over email. We fake it when we're envious of someone else's success. We fake it in the elevator when we ask Kyle if he has any weekend plans. The professional world's a stage, and we're all actors pretending to care about how Kyle spends his free time.

The question is: how much do the roles in which you cast yourself differ from who you actually are? Because if they differ a lot, you're going to cause more problems for yourself than if you'd just behave authentically. But if they differ just a little -if you can fake it in a way that tempers your real feelings and allows you to present yourself as calm or deliberate or enthusiastic or charged up or any other situational virtuous behavior (SVB, as no one but me refers to it)- then you are giving yourself time to let the negative feelings pass. And they will pass.

A FEW WORDS ON SELF-PRESENTATION

You think that's you going to work? Heading into a meeting with a client? That's not you. That's you, plus your self-presentation tactics.

Self-presentation is the behavior and information we offer to others, almost always so that we can show ourselves in a favorable light. It's how we shake a hand, smile, make eye contact. It's the information we provide- and don't provide. Self-presentation involves "tactics." And those tactics often involve fakery: we smile when we're not happy; we act interested when we're bored; we stay awake when we'd like to crawl up on the table in the conference

room and go to sleep. To be quite honest, we lie.

But there is honor in those lies. Because you're *trying*. You're trying to overcome your annoyance or insecurity or fear for the sake of a larger goal.

But enough about such lofty things. Let's get to the tactics.

SEEMING HAPPY WHEN YOU AREN'T IS A USEFUL TOOL. SOMETIMES YOU'RE BLINDSIDED BY NEWS THAT MIGHT BE GOOD FOR THE COMPANY BUT DISAPPOINTING TO YOU. A COLLEAGUE IS PROMOTED, FOR INSTANCE. SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO SEEM GRACIOUS. THE KEY TO SEEMING HAPPY GOES BEYOND FAKING A SMILE.

1. HOW TO FAKE CONFIDENCE AT A MEETING

Research shows that the key to faking is to do it early, when impressions are being made. To that end, let's have a remedial course in body language.

You might not feel like you should smile, but you should smile. (More on that later.) You might not want to maintain eye contact, but you should lock in. What researchers call the "gaze" is key. You want a lot of gaze. You know the eye contact is working if you feel slightly uncomfortable. (Slight discomfort is underrated in business.) You might not want to sit up straight, but sit up straight. You'll seem assertive, social, in control. Basically, you want to act like a news anchor. National news- not local.

Also: raise your eyebrows every now and then. The eyebrows don't get enough credit when it comes to body language. Draw some circles with a couple of dots for eyes. Draw some lines above the eyes and see how the expression changes.



2. HOW TO SEEM HAPPY FOR SOMEONE WHEN YOU'RE NOT

Seeming happy when you aren't is a useful tool. Sometimes you're blindsided by news that might be good for the company but disappointing to you. A colleague is promoted, for instance. Sometimes you have to seem gracious. The key to seeming happy goes beyond faking a smile.

They key is digging deep. You have a lot of resentment and envy to get through before you get to the good stuff. This requires real acting, says Sean Kavanagh, CEO of The Ariel



Group, an international training and coaching company that puts acting techniques to work. I'll let Sean have the stage. Take it away, Sean.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT THE KEY TO FAKING IS TO DO IT EARLY, WHEN IMPRESSIONS ARE BEING MADE. TO THAT END, LET'S HAVE A REMEDIAL COURSE IN BODY LANGUAGE. YOU MIGHT NOT FEEL LIKE YOU SHOULD SMILE, BUT YOU SHOULD SMILE. YOU MIGHT NOT WANT TO MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT, BUT YOU SHOULD LOCK IN. WHAT RESEARCHERS CALL THE "GAZE" IS KEY. YOU WANT A LOT OF GAZE.

"To be a really good actor, you have to authentically take on the role. So it's more than just pretending." [Polite applause. From me at least.] "Before they go on, actors will do breathing techniques that keep the breath deep into the diaphragm and not up in the shoulders. It makes them focus, it allows them to speak more clearly and it relaxes them." [Even more polite applause.]

"The next thing they do is they focus on their intention. What does this audience need of me? What do my fellow actors need of me? What is my intention as I walk on stage?" [From the wings I shout: "The audience is your associate! The stage is probably your associate's office or something!"]

"The allegory for the meeting is, how can I empathize with them? How can I walk in the shoes of the audience and bring the appropriate part of me to bear? The third thing they consider is: What is the purpose behind this soliloquy I'm about deliver?" [The soliloquy is your words of congratulations!]

"Now you know what your purpose is, and you can deliver news that might feel uncomfortable to you with a level of confidence, warning, inspiration, support or whatever it is you need to convey." [Bravo, Sean. Bravo.]

3. HOW TO "CAN" WHEN YOU "CAN'T EVEN"

There are times when you *can't* (like at a networking event or celebrating somebody's success). And then there are times when you *can't even*. If you *can't even*, and you need to seem like you *can*, here's what you should do. Fix your eyes, which will want to roll involuntarily, upon an object. Any object will do. Just make sure the object is at eye level or below. Raise the corners of your mouth so that instead of exhibiting dumbfound-ness, you seem... founded.

Now it seems like you merely *can't*. If you close your mouth, which opened when your jaw dropped, it might even seem like you *can*. Up to you.

4. HOW TO SMILE WHEN YOU DO NOT FEEL LIKE SMILING

The main thing to remember is: unhappy smiling is worse than not smiling at all. People who smile when they're not actually happy look like county-level pageant contestants. So think of something that makes you happy. Embroidery? Archery? Origami? Whatever. Consider the point of all this, which is to do good work. And doing good requires pushing through the things that make you want to scream so that your authentic reaction doesn't create even more problems- for you and a lot of other people.

Anyway, what are your weekend plans...?!



WHEN FAKING GOES TOO FAR

A Michigan State University professor studied a group of bus drivers, whose jobs require them to be polite to commuters. The research found that bus drivers who faked a good mood with only a smile, or "surface acting," ended up in a worse mood and with diminished productivity. However, those who faked happiness by smiling and thinking positive thoughts, or "deep acting," found themselves in a better mood with increased productivity.

So, if you want to seem happy, get happy. *Real* happy. ■



Remember what you read

Reading comprehension strategies:
how to retain more of everything you read

By James Clear

Finishing a book is easy. Understanding it is harder. In recent years, I have focused on building good reading habits and learned how to read more. But the key is not simply to read more, but to read better. For most people, the ultimate goal of reading a non-fiction book is to actually improve your life by learning a new skill, understanding an important problem, or looking at the world in a new way. It's important to read books, but it is just as important to remember what you read and put it to good use.

AS SOON AS I FINISH A BOOK, I CHALLENGE MYSELF TO SUMMARIZE THE ENTIRE TEXT IN JUST THREE SENTENCES. THIS CONSTRAINT IS JUST A GAME, OF COURSE, BUT I DO FIND IT TO BE A USEFUL EXERCISE BECAUSE IT FORCES ME TO REVIEW MY NOTES AND CONSIDER WHAT WAS REALLY IMPORTANT ABOUT THE BOOK.

With that in mind, I'd like to share three reading comprehension strategies that I use to make my reading more productive.

1. MAKE ALL OF YOUR NOTES SEARCHABLE

Having searchable book notes is essential for returning to ideas easily. It increases the odds that you will apply what you read in real life. An idea is only useful if you can find it when you need it. There is no need to leave the task of reading comprehension solely up to your memory.

I store all of my book notes in Evernote. I strongly prefer Evernote over other options because 1) it is searchable, 2) it is easy to use across multiple devices, and 3) you can create and save notes even when you're not connected to the internet. I get my book notes into Evernote in three ways.

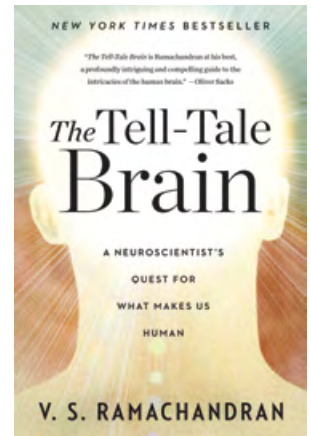
First, if I am listening to an audiobook then I create a new note for that book and type my notes in as I listen. My preference is to listen to audiobooks on 1.25x speed and then press pause whenever I want to write something down. The faster playback speed and slower note taking process tend to balance out and I usually finish each book in the

same time as normal.

Second, if I am reading a print book then I follow the same process with one change. Typing notes while reading a print book can be annoying because you are always putting the book down and picking it back up. I like to place the book on a bookstand, which makes it much easier to type out a long quote or keep my hands free while reading.

Print books and audiobooks are great, but where this system really shines is with e-books. My third (and preferred) approach is to read e-books on my Kindle Paperwhite. I can easily highlight a passage while reading on my Kindle—no typing required. Once I'm finished, I use a software program called Clippings to import all of my Kindle highlights to Evernote.

These three approaches make it fairly easy for me to get my book notes into Evernote where they will be instantly searchable. Even if I can't remember where I read about a particular idea, I can usually search my Evernote folder and find the answer quickly.



2. INTEGRATE THOUGHTS AS YOU READ

When you go to the library, all of the books will be divided into different categories: biographies, history, science, psychology. In the real world, of course, knowledge is not separated into neatly defined boxes. Topics overlap and bleed into one another. All knowledge is interconnected.

The most useful insights are often found at the intersection of ideas. For that reason, I try to consider how the book I'm reading connects with all of the ideas that are already knocking around inside my head. Whenever possible, I try to integrate the lessons I'm learning with previous ideas.

For example:

- While reading *The Tell-Tale Brain* by neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran, I discovered that one of his key points connected to a previous idea I learned from social work researcher Brene Brown.
- In my notes for *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*, I noted how Mark Manson's idea of "killing yourself" overlaps with Paul Graham's essay on keeping your identity small.
- As I read *Mastery* by George Leonard, I realized



James Clear writes at Jamesclear.com, where he uses behavior science to share ideas for mastering your habits, improving your health, and increasing your creativity. To get useful ideas on improving your mental and physical performance, join his free newsletter jamesclear.com/newsletter. To have James speak at your entrepreneurial event contact him jamesclear.com/contact

that while this book was about the process of improvement, it also sheds some light on the connection between genetics and performance.

I added each insight to my notes for that particular book. This process of integration and connection is crucial not only for making new ideas “stick” in your brain, but also for understanding the world as a whole.

Too often, people use one book or one article as the basis for an entire belief system. Forcing yourself to connect ideas helps you realize that there is no single way of looking at the world. The complex connections between ideas are often where the most beautiful bits of knowledge reside.

3. SUMMARIZE THE BOOK IN ONE PARAGRAPH

As soon as I finish a book, I challenge myself to summarize the entire text in just three sentences. This constraint is just a game, of course, but I do find it to be a useful exercise because it forces me to review my notes and consider what was really important about the book.

How would I describe the book to a friend? What are the main ideas? If I was going to implement one idea from the book right now, which one would it be?

In many cases, I find that I can usually get just as much useful information from reading my one-paragraph summary and reviewing my notes as I would if I read the entire book again. (There is a lot of fluff in non-fiction books these days.)

I have published many of my book summaries on my website, which includes my one paragraph summary and my full notes. If you're looking for an idea of what these reading comprehension strategies look like in practice, feel free to browse that page.

Happy reading! ■

| MOBILE TECH |

DIGITAL IMPRINTS

Autography lets visitors leave their mark at Florence's cathedral—without having to resort to graffiti

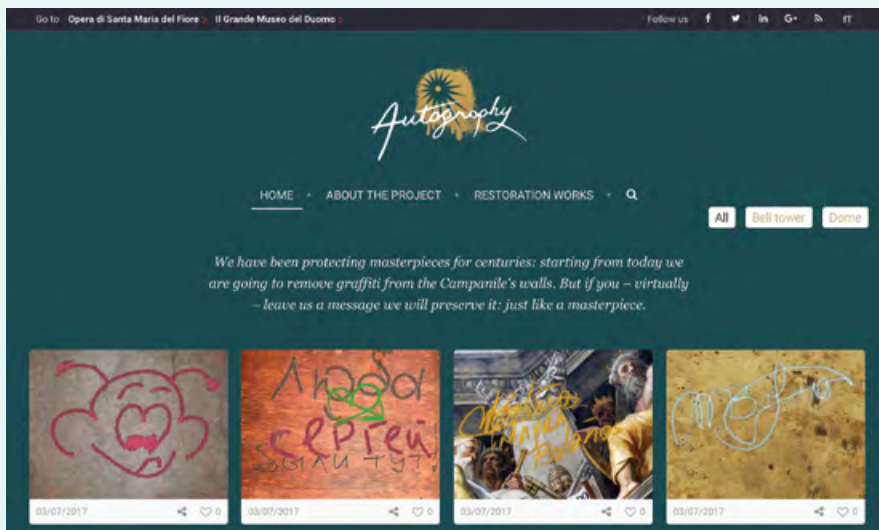
At Florence's historic cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, the authorities have come up with a distinctive way to tackle the rampant problem of vandalism and defacing of heritage structures with graffiti. The Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, the organization in charge of preserving Florence's monuments, is inviting tourists to leave a lasting mark on the cathedral (yes, you read that right), but on a digital surface. “To leave a mark on monuments is an anti-social and childish behavior, while the will of leaving a mark, a keepsake, is just part of the human nature,” reads the Autography website—the app powering the tablets installed within the Campanile di Giotto and Brunelleschi's Dome.

According to Italian news organization *The Local*, the signs next to the tablets read: “If you -virtually- leave us a message, we will preserve it: just like a masterpiece.” True to its word, the devices allow visitors to leave a digital message at one of two points— one on the way up to the top of the cathedral, and another on the way back down. Offering an option to users to customize the background and writing tools (paintbrush, spray pen etc.), visitors can now register their presence with messages that are stored online, and will also be printed annually to be kept in the monument's archives. Not surprisingly, messages “that contain insults, unauthorized material or judged

inappropriate,” will not be allowed, says the Autography website.

Interestingly, *The Local* also reports that having launched almost a year earlier, this digital campaign has “proven successful at the bell tower,” with over 18,000 digital messages been left already, and the authorities reporting “a noticeable decline” in graffiti left on the walls of the heritage structure. As quoted in the report, a statement by the Opera reads, “The idea was to raise awareness among visitors about vandalism, but also give them the chance to leave behind a record, an everlasting sign of their passing through, without damaging the monument.”

From symbols to doodles, graffiti left behind by visitors has been a key problem for conservators the world over, who are working to restore historic monuments. Emerging as an idea by Alice Filippini, the marketing manager of Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, the Autography digital tool is a step towards change, creating a win-win situation with a mission “to preserve visitors' testimonies while avoiding any damage to the monuments and the artworks.” Given the impact observed at Florence, it shouldn't be long before we start seeing this technology at other historic sites. So, the next time you are at Florence, you may not have to think twice about scrawling, “I was here” — but just make sure you do it on a digital surface.





ARE YOU YOUR ENTERPRISE'S CHIEF SALESMAN?

As an entrepreneur, selling is something you should celebrate—not delegate *By Matthew Chaban*

WHEN I STARTED my first business, I remember the idea of being the chief salesman for my enterprise to be something I didn't exactly like the sound of. After all, I saw myself as "the entrepreneur," the "company CEO," and not as the "salesperson" for my business.

As it turns out, this is a dilemma that many entrepreneurs face—do I have to be the chief salesperson of my business, or is delegating sales to someone else the smarter thing to do?

Selling can be a scary thing, especially if you've never done it before; however, if you think for a moment, it's very likely that you already have plenty of experience in selling. How, you ask?

Well, think back to when you were a child, wanting an ice cream from your parents

on a hot summer day, or even better, wanting to get your hands on that amazing new toy that all the other kids in the neighborhood already had. Without even knowing it, you were engaged in the art of selling to your parents, so that they would buy you the ice cream or that fancy new toy. Perhaps there were also a few pressure tactics involved at that time, but hey, you were only a kid!

As adults, we also face similar situations where we are required at some basic level to "sell ourselves" to other people. For example, it could be during a job interview, or when seeking investors for a startup, or even when proposing to a future spouse. In all of these situations, we had to establish a level of trust, then influence and ultimately convince that person to give

us the job, invest in our new company, or (and perhaps the biggest decision of all) marry us!

Once I discovered that all of us were in fact "selling" to each other as we went through the journey of life, it really helped me to alleviate my own reluctance about selling. Also, I really can't blame other entrepreneurs for being reluctant to sell, given that "selling" has such a negative connotation about it. It usually conjures up images of the proverbial used car salesman, arm-twisting us to buy something we don't really want, through high-pressure tactics.

This, of course, is far from the vision most entrepreneurs have of being the creative geniuses that conquer the world. No, they don't want to be doing endless cold call-

ing, pressuring people to buy something that they don't want. But if entrepreneurs want to achieve stratospheric growth for their new company, then, ironically, the delegation of selling can often prevent them from achieving this.

It's a shame that selling has developed such a negative reputation, because when done properly and professionally, it truly is what drives value in the world—the exchange of value between a business and a customer, who both walk away with a sense of mutual satisfaction.

"Selling" has almost become a dirty word, and it's for this reason that so many entrepreneurs feel reluctant about it, and this reluctance about selling can even paralyze some entrepreneurs from successfully growing their new business into something big.

The key is to realize that we're all selling from the moment we're born, and that selling is not only a good thing, but something that can be very valuable to both you and your customer.

It starts by choosing to be a consummate salesperson, a professional who prioritizes the needs of the customer above your own revenue and sales quota. By approaching your prospective customers as an expert adviser rather than a pushy sales representative, you're actively building trust and credibility right from the beginning.

IT'S A SHAME THAT SELLING HAS DEVELOPED SUCH A NEGATIVE REPUTATION, BECAUSE WHEN DONE PROPERLY AND PROFESSIONALLY, IT TRULY IS WHAT DRIVES VALUE IN THE WORLD—THE EXCHANGE OF VALUE BETWEEN A BUSINESS AND A CUSTOMER, WHO BOTH WALK AWAY WITH A SENSE OF MUTUAL SATISFACTION.



Matthew Chaban is the founder of Marketing Masters Consulting, and he helps companies and consultants with impressive growth trajectories to date reach their next level of growth. Matt relishes the challenge of championing innovation and growth within a company and writes regularly on strategic marketing and entrepreneurship. www.marketingmasters.net.au

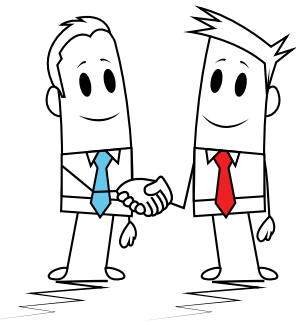
Driving growth

SOURCING NEW CLIENTS REQUIRES YOU TO DECIDE ON A MARKETING STRATEGY FIRST

The bottom line is, the more trust prospective customers have in you or your business, the more receptive they will be to buying from you. Your job as your company's chief salesperson is to advise and assist your customers to make the right purchasing decision.

In fact, your prospective customers will most likely have done quite a bit of research about you, such as visiting your website, LinkedIn profile, Twitter feed or Instagram account before they even speak to you—so once you're at the point of meeting with them or talking on the phone, it's all about building trust and rapport, rather than ramming product information down their throat.

The answer to growing revenue and making more sales may not necessarily lie in the delegation of selling— it may, in fact, lie in the celebration of selling within your business.



Celebrating selling means perfecting you and your team's selling skills and systems to the point where you're closing the deal time and time again, so when the time comes to delegate, you can do so with absolute confidence. So the next time you're thinking of ways to boost your business, you need to remember to celebrate sales as a function of your enterprise— instead of simply delegating it. ■

For most business owners, referrals and word of mouth are the main channels for sourcing new clients. But is that really enough if you're looking to really drive substantial business growth?

Word of mouth is definitely a good thing— it confirms to us that our products and services are valued enough to be recommended and referred by our clients, but there are also limitations when relying solely on word of mouth as the only channel.

When sales become slow, businesses usually start looking at what marketing strategies they can use to increase sales; however, the problem then is figuring out which marketing strategy to make use of.

The list of marketing strategies and options can seem endless, from things like advertising, search engine optimization, telemarketing, social media, trade shows, content, and networking events to name a few.

Which of these strategies works best? And more importantly, which one of these strategies will increase sales?

This is quite a difficult question to answer, as there is no single marketing strategy that increases sales for all businesses. Different businesses will require different marketing strategies, depending on a whole lot of variables such as the type of clients they're targeting, the average purchase value of their products/services, and whether they are focused on client acquisition or retention.

With that said, I do believe there is a way to begin making sense of the myriad of marketing choices out there, and it starts simply with looking at the three primary functions any marketing activity should be doing for your business.

1. Creating a regular flow of quality leads Marketing starts with lead generation— the ability to find and attract potential clients who are interested in your

products and services. Leads are the lifeblood of any business, and without a regular flow of new leads, revenue can quickly dry up. When generating leads, you need to get both the quantity and quality right— quantity in terms of the volume or number of leads, and quality in terms of the type of lead that is suitable for your business. (For example, if you're a luxury brand, you'll need leads with a willingness to spend on your products/services.)

In today's globalized environment, social media is one of the most cost-effective methods of lead generation. In the pre-social media days before sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook, obtaining a lead could cost you up to one dollar per lead, meaning a relatively small database of 1000 contacts could cost US\$1000! These days it really is so much easier. I recommend leveraging the power of social media to any business looking to cost effectively generate new leads and build up a high quality database.

2. Converting prospects into paying clients

The second primary marketing function is prospect conversion, that is the process of converting a prospective client into a paying client. This part of marketing is usually referred to as "sales," however, it should not be looked upon as exclusively "selling." One of the biggest mistakes I've seen companies make is to separate both the sales and marketing functions and often each function doesn't necessarily understand its relationship to the other.

Marketing's primary role should be to support sales, so that when a lead is generated, the sales team has the best chance of converting that lead into a paying client. This means firstly generating a high quality lead, the type that is a good fit for your business' target audience, and ensuring that the lead has had the opportunity to learn as

much as possible about your business, as well as the product/service they're interested in, before any sales contact is made. I recommend having a prospect conversion system that precisely maps out how your business can educate and influence as many prospects to become paying clients.

3. Growing existing client relationships

The third primary marketing function is client retention— looking at what your business can do to not only retain, but grow existing customer relationships. This is often a neglected part of marketing that many businesses fail to look at before getting started on lead generation— often a business' client database is a gold mine of potential just waiting to be tapped into.

Marketing's role is to keep on top of the changing wants and needs of clients and to ensure your business' product and services always meet those needs (more than your competitor's products and services). I recommend examining your current client database first, before undertaking any client acquisition or lead generation activities as you may be pleasantly surprised what you find. From there, look at how you can grow existing client relationships in order to uncover new revenue opportunities.

Sourcing new clients starts with mapping out a process for your business— a client sourcing process that shows step by step, how your business will generate quality leads, convert those leads into paying client, and finally how you can grow existing client relationships to uncover revenue opportunities.

Remembering these three primary functions of marketing can help you reduce dependency on word of mouth as the only source of new clients, as well as enable your business to reach the next level of revenue growth.



shway,” to the much loved shawarma, as well as the huge mandi often shared by families in the Arab world, and even an ode to Chips Oman- these are just a few of the icons you can now express yourself with, from Arab emoji app Halla Walla.

Halla Walla –which is a form of a friendly greeting in Arabic- actually started as a side project for the founders. The duo, whose backgrounds are in arts and business, heads creative agency YERV, with the self-funded company having previously launched Waastaa in 2015, a platform and directory for creative professionals worldwide. In building Halla Walla, they found it an enjoyable pursuit to look into their everyday life and redevelop an appreciation for their local culture. A four-month development process, it consisted of researching, brainstorming, designing, and conducting focus groups in the GCC, New York and London to hear from their friends on what kind of Arab emojis they want, before releasing it on the App Store and Google Play and introducing it to the public with a launch party in Dubai. As with any venture, they had their share of roadblocks too. Their biggest one was managing various components of their operations in three different cities, with the process being a learning curve as they worked with developers and engaged with the Arab tech space. Having a strong foundation was a significant aspect they focused in overcoming problems ahead- this is also distinct in their outlook to having investors. Though they’ve been approached by offers, they’re currently focused on growing organically, and intend to remain as such. They add that companies who receive investments tend to spend without engaging with their audience, and so they want to take their time.

Filled with more than 200 emojis of popular and nostalgia-inducing references to people, culture, food

Halla Walla co-founders Eriko Varkey and Yasmine Rasool

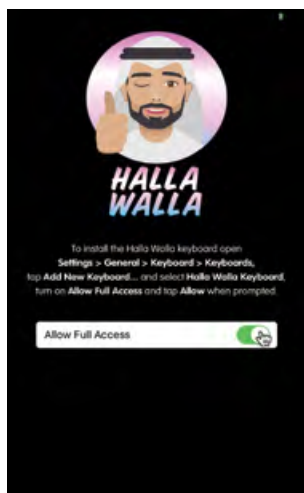
Made for the Middle East

HALLA WALLA OFFERS EMOJIS THAT ARE CHARACTERISTIC TO ARAB CULTURE *By Pamela de Leon*

LIVING BETWEEN NEW YORK, London and Dubai, Halla Walla co-founders Eriko Varkey and Yasmine Rasool often faced the dilemma of explaining their background and the reality of living and growing up in the Middle East. Driven to alter the perception of Arabs in the West, especially with the current state of discourse worldwide, the duo set out to create Halla Walla to depict expressions and emotions in colloquial conversations representa-

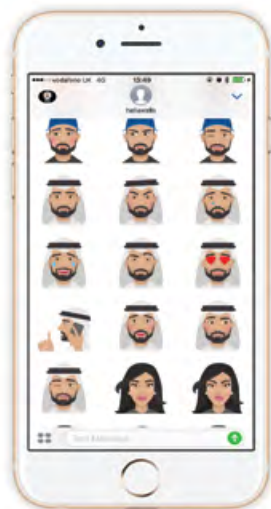
tive of the region. “When it came to representing the modern Middle Eastern voice, we felt there was really a gap in social messaging platforms,” Rasool says. “From our loud families, endless cousins, gatherings and shared meals, to signature phrases, fashion statements, football, shisha and late night shawarma runs- our lives are brimming with inside jokes and over the top emotions that needed a platform to be expressed.” From “Yalla!” and “Shway

and phrases, it's currently available for iMessage at AED3.69, and as a keyboard app at AED7.69 on both iOS and Android. Being a paid app, when asked whether they were worried if it would hinder growth and usability, the co-founders were confident as based on their research, they found that paid services are more stable and often cultivate a dedicated user base. "We believe in quality over quantity, we are building our brand in [the] hopes to attract [ing] a loyal audience following," says Rasool. "We want to grow with our customers and cater to their needs. With that being said, a charging mechanism creates quality control, hence [we can garner] loyal customers from the start." As for their marketing approach, Varkey and Rasool are firm in their strategy of fostering a brand story- letting their audience connect with the brand. Their early adopters' feedback conveyed how the app's characters relate to personalities seen among Arab culture. "We all know a Shaikha, Lulu, Waleed and Ahmed [characters from Halla Walla]. We brought these characters to life, as we depicted their characteristics to emulate a friend, cousin or neighbor we all may know."



They engage with their audience on social media, focusing heavily on content creation, but also keeping in mind web users' attention span by having content presented briefly- case in point, their marketing videos last about 30 seconds. And the strategy is working- the duo says feedback has been "overly positive and encouraging." Gifs are popular among the users, notably the "shway shway" hand gesture, and the gif of a slipper being thrown- a throwback to growing up in the Middle East: "It was the notion of [a mother] bending down to get that slipper, [and] that's when you knew you had to run!" The founders also are pleasantly surprised with the range of demographics eager for the next batch of emoji. "We started Halla Walla with the intention of entertaining people, but also to educate people on the beauty of our culture beyond the stereotypes. The more people who join our quest, the more determination we have to make our project a positive part of their lives."

On the region's cultural representation in tech and business, Varkey and Rasool note that it's a definite growing market, with opportunities for niche ideas too. They were keen to create something specifically for the Arab market, and say that the current tech-savvy culture is constantly demanding change: "With the increased competition and constant demand for updates, only the best will flourish, and this is how the industry will continue to improve and become better." Going along with the market shifts is evident in their business approach too- with the traction of Halla Walla, YERV has now released an augmented reality (AR) game called



"WE ALL KNOW A SHAIKHA, LULU, WALEED AND AHMED [CHARACTERS FROM HALLA WALLA]. WE BROUGHT THESE CHARACTERS TO LIFE, AS WE DEPICTED THEIR CHARACTERISTICS TO EMULATE A FRIEND, COUSIN OR NEIGHBOR WE ALL MAY KNOW."

Wain Waleed, using localized digital content. In the AR game, Halla Walla emojis "come to life," as its characters are prompted to interact with its environment, and users have to find objects and characters to win prizes such as dinners for two, and even concert tickets. As of now, it's currently available for iOS devices. Meanwhile, Waastaa has an upcoming second phase, and Halla Walla has new packs that will be released too. The duo says that with YERV's mission to "explore, inspire and connect," they assert that popular culture shouldn't be underestimated and can have a positive impact on society. On a final note, the duo is ready for more and says, "It is a constant research and building block ratio. We both believe that if you want something in life, you got to roll those sleeves up and get it." ■

TREP TALK

Eriko Varkey and Yasmine Rasool, co-founders, Halla Walla

WHAT ARE YOUR THREE TIPS FOR CREATING AN INNOVATIVE, FUN PRODUCT FOR THE REGION?

1. MARKETING MATTERS

"Never cut costs when it comes to good branding."

2. QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

"If you want something reliable and worth putting into the market, then take that extra plunge into creating a quality product."

3. KNOW YOUR MARKET

"[Do] constant research, focus groups and welcome criticism- understand that this region is a unique market, so the more you listen, the closer you will get to create an innovative, fresh new product tailored for your audience."

GIVEN THE NUMBER OF APPS AVAILABLE TODAY, DO YOU THINK THE BOOM DAYS FOR APP BUSINESSES ARE COMING TO AN END?

"Market research shows that the App Store's middle class is small and shrinking and the easy money is depleting. However, apps for massive social networks, on-demand services remain in high demand. Digging deeper we discovered that last year, 85% of all app revenues went to games, according to [market researcher firm] App Annie. Supercell, the top-grossing developer of Clash of Clans, reported revenue of US\$1.7 billion in 2014- it spent US\$440 million on marketing. That being said, we feel customers know what they want, and are more likely to be picky in their download curation of apps filling up on their devices- since realistically they only use up to 2-3 apps daily. And repeat- quality over quantity any day!"



A CBJ outlet

Partnering for profit

Five things to look for in a franchise partner

By Angela Sawan

We launched Classic Burger Joint (CBJ) with just one restaurant in Lebanon in 2010. Since then, the franchise, which is owned by the Beirut-based Ministry of Food s.a.l., has grown to have 30 branches across the Middle East in 2016. Famed for its classic bright yellow New York look and upbeat city vibe, CBJ is now a valued brand that has restaurants across the region, including Cyprus, Kuwait, Lebanon and the UAE, and its first Iraq branch is scheduled to open in 2017.

CBJ was established by a team of passionate F&B ex-

perts, including Joint Partner Donald Batal, a culinary guru with more than 25 years in the industry. “CBJ is a hit with people who want a real burger— flame-grilled Australian Angus, grain-fed and freshly cut fries,” Batal says.



A burger by CBJ

“Our customers are burger-connoisseurs, and when they experience the iconic CBJ vibe, most become fans for life.”

As a brand that’s grown rapidly in a short amount of time, I can say that the CBJ approach to building a franchise network differs from the typical model. Our franchisees are partners to us— we work closely with them on a daily basis to provide all the support they need. Given that today’s markets have become so demanding, one must be operationally very agile to adapt to trends and opportunities in order to maximize profitability, and thus stay on top of the game.

At CBJ, we have a well-defined franchise development strategy, and have thus established our criteria to choosing the best partner that would help us expand our brand into new markets. Here are five traits that we expect from our franchise partners:

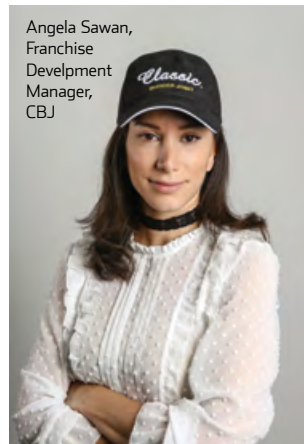
1. BE A CHAMPION OF OUR BRAND First and foremost, our partner needs to be a fan of our burgers and the brand. We highly believe that our business was founded and is constantly goaded by passion, the number one drive towards the success of any business, and we expect these of our partners as well. “When people buy your franchise, they buy your brand experience, not your menu offering,” explains co-founder Walid Nasralla, Brand and Marketing Director of CBJ. “So the right franchisee is one who sees the value of the brand experience, and understands the importance of marketing the brand in his own territory to keep an edge on the competition, and to achieve their sales targets.”

2. BE AN F&B GURU Second of all, we seek partners with a solid background in the food and beverage industry, and

a successful track record of lucrative brands’ development and operations. We look out for their willingness to develop the brand into a thriving chain in their territories.

3. BE ALIGNED WITH OUR CORPORATE CULTURES A long-term business relationship is one that is built on a basis of shared visions and core values. If you are a franchisor that believes that your human capital is your biggest asset, you should look for a partner that takes pride in growing his/her people. If you’re a believer in the saying “quality comes first,” you should not sign a deal with a franchisee that seeks lower quality products to save on some pennies and raise profits.

Angela Sawan,
Franchise
Development
Manager,
CBJ



4. BE EQUIPPED WITH THE REQUISITE IN-MARKET RESOURCES We have now reached the fourth criterion, which is access to real estate and the qualified human capital. Before you decide on any potential franchise partner, tackle the topic of acquiring prime locations to locate your brand, and trust me, in this part of the world, it is not easy. Typically, retailers and F&B operators with a diversified portfolio of good brands have access to prime malls and high profile developments, especially if the brands they



A CBJ outlet

operate are desirable by the developers, and this takes us back to criterion #2. As for staffing, a lot of countries have quotas on the number of staff and the nationalities companies can acquire, and that's a real challenge. In many times, your franchise partner would have done his homework of finding the right location, fitting the store and sourcing the approved ingredients; however when it comes to the staff, he could be still struggling with their visas.

5. BE FINANCIALLY SECURE AND COMMITTED TO THE FRANCHISE

Ensuring that the candidate is fully capable of what the full financial commitment is likely to be, and that he/she has clear access to those funds, is quite key to the long-term success of a franchise. Hence, qualifying a franchise lead financially should be a deli-

cate process that takes considerable amount of time and resources and may require professional due diligence, strong cooperation and goodwill from both ends.

Choosing the right partner to join in a so-called "commercial marriage" is never easy.

You will find it difficult to select a qualified franchisee to operate your brand the way you do in the best way possible. However, always remember that this kind of preparatory work is at the heart of a successful franchising relationship. Given you have done your tedious homework of preparing your brand for this step, franchising is the natural amplification to your brand's success and one of the easiest business models to expand.

Start with the aforementioned fundamental criteria, but be sure to also take your time with the process. Be careful, follow your rules, and don't cut corners. Regardless of whether you use these tools or not, assessing the job of the franchisee -and ultimately doing what you can to assure the franchisee's success- is the most important and the most difficult job of every franchisor. ■



Interiors of a CBJ outlet

WWW.CBJ.ME

Angela Sawan is the Franchise Development Manager at Classic Burger Joint. www.cbj.me

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TERMS & CONDITIONS APPLY



“YOU’RE FIRED!”

How to manage a termination in a fair (and legal) way

By Asma Bajawa

TERMINATING AN EMPLOYEE

is sometimes an absolute necessity for a business. Companies are not expected to employ staff indefinitely if they are not performing as per the expected standards and job requirements. However, letting an employee go is a difficult situation that many companies try to avoid. This is particularly tough for startups and small companies, as they do not usually have HR policies in place or HR professionals working in the business to handle the termination.

There are different obligations and employee rights that need to be taken into consideration when ending an employment contract. Depending on the reason, terminating an employee can take a number of forms, and it is recommended that employers follow a robust policy and set of procedures to ensure the separation is han-

dled in a professional and legally compliant manner, which is aligned to best practice.

Here are five steps that you need to follow to manage the termination in a fair and legal way:

1. PROVIDE A REASON FOR THE TERMINATION

When it comes to the UAE, if you want to terminate an employee, you must provide a valid reason, otherwise if the employee pursues a claim against the company, it is likely that the UAE court will deem the dismissal as arbitrary. Currently, the maximum compensation for arbitrary dismissal is three months remuneration, and a guaranteed bonus or commission may also be considered. The reason needs to be relevant to the work in order to be considered as valid, and typically includes an inability to do

the job, poor performance or conduct, changes to operational requirements, or gross misconduct.

AS AN EMPLOYER, GETTING THE TERMINATION WRONG CAN HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS ON YOUR BUSINESS, SO YOU NEED TO PROTECT IT BY ENSURING IT IS DONE IN THE RIGHT WAY.

2. ADHERE TO THE NOTICE PERIOD

It is important to provide advance notice of the termination, unless in the case of gross misconduct where you can initiate the termination without prior notice or end of service benefits. The notice period has to be in accordance with the contract, and it is vital that you put it in writing so that it can be documented to protect your business against possible future litigation. The minimum notice period is 30

calendar days, however during probation, if the employee is not performing up to the required standards, you can terminate them without giving any advance notice.

WHEN IT COMES TO THE UAE, IF YOU WANT TO TERMINATE AN EMPLOYEE, YOU MUST PROVIDE A VALID REASON, OTHERWISE IF THE EMPLOYEE PURSUES A CLAIM AGAINST THE COMPANY, IT IS LIKELY THAT THE UAE COURT WILL DEEM THE DISMISSAL AS ARBITRARY.

3. STAY LEGAL

The principal legislation that governs employment matters is the UAE Labor Law, and companies need to comply with its regulations. If you want to avoid legal consequences, there are rights and obligations that you need to adhere to. The law dictates when you can terminate an employee on disciplinary or medical grounds, sets parameters for job abandonment and provides reasons for gross misconduct. The law has further provisions in place that govern statutory procedures. For example, prior to terminating someone on disciplinary grounds, the employee will need to have received the required number of warnings, and you will need to be able to demonstrate that you have provided a reasonable time for them to correct their performance or behavior. The law further includes time limits to initiate the disciplinary and determine any disciplinary sanction

4. SET A HR PROCESS IN PLACE

As an employer, getting the termination wrong can have significant implications on your business, so you need to protect it by ensuring



Asma Bajawa is the founder and Managing Director of PeopleFirst HR Consultancy. Born and bred in the UK, Asma started her career with British Airways where she spent 22 years working in different aspects of the business, but predominately in HR and training and development. 10 years ago, Asma moved to the UAE where she held a number of senior HR Director roles before setting up PeopleFirst. Since then, she has spearheaded the company to become one of the leading HR consultancies in the region.

it is done in the right way. Therefore, it is important that you set a fair and responsible in-house process to manage the separation. Let's take an underperforming employee for example; if you are dealing with such a case, you should discuss your concerns with the individual, provide an improvement plan, and hold regular meetings to review their progress. They should be made aware that a termination is one possible outcome if things don't improve to the expected standard. So as long as you have set and gone through a process, there should be no surprises for the decision. In

this way, you can demonstrate that you have handled the separation in a professional and cordial manner, and have worked with the employee during the process.

5. DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

It is considered best practice to keep a record of any discussions and meetings to ensure that you and your employee's expectations are clearly understood. Even though it takes time, it is used as a baseline if you are required to defend your decision. Information such as written performance evaluations, disciplinary records, and warnings should

be gathered and kept in the employee's file. If you do not have formal documentation, it is best to postpone the termination until you gather the right evidence. The decision to terminate should be backed up by sufficient documented evidence, otherwise your interests, as a business, will not be protected if the termination becomes problematic.

And lastly, we often advise our clients to stay within the legal parameters and *only* consider termination once all other options have been exhausted to protect the business from any reputation or financial damage. We

recommend that companies should develop and maintain an employee handbook or HR policy manual that outlines the minimum requirements set out in labor laws, and use it as a communication tool to ensure the process is smooth, and that all necessary information has been provided. ■

IT IS CONSIDERED BEST PRACTICE TO KEEP A RECORD OF ANY DISCUSSIONS AND MEETINGS TO ENSURE THAT YOU AND YOUR EMPLOYEE'S EXPECTATIONS ARE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD. EVEN THOUGH IT TAKES TIME, IT IS USED AS A BASELINE IF YOU ARE REQUIRED TO DEFEND YOUR DECISION.

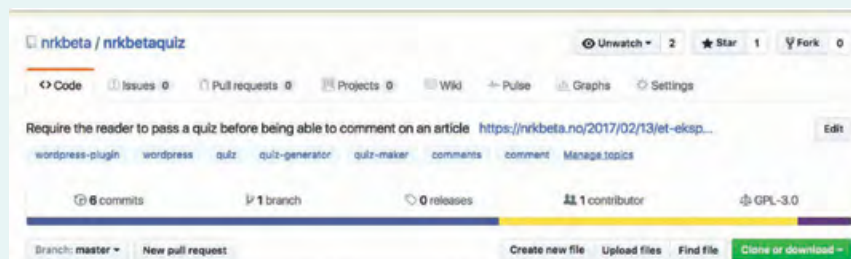
SCREENING RANTS

THIS NORWEGIAN SITE REQUIRES YOU TO PASS A QUIZ BEFORE COMMENTING ON ARTICLES

Even as journalists all over the world dread the arrival of robots and algorithms capable of taking over their jobs, reviewing the comments section on their articles is a task that most writers would gladly outsource, considering the toxicity and "trolling" that's often seen. Derived from a term that originally referred to a method of fishing, internet "trolls" are today one of the key reasons we see comments section escalating into hate rants. While a few online publishers, such as *The Verge*, *Recode*, and *Reuters* decided to tackle this by doing away with the comments space, *NRKbeta*, the tech arm of Norwegian broadcaster NRK counts such interactive platforms as vital to reader engagement, and hence has come up with a novel way to fight trolls. As per a *NiemanLab* report, *NRKbeta* has introduced a feature (on some of its stories), by which potential commenters are required to answer three questions about the article before they're allowed to post a comment. Developed by *NRKbeta* developer Henrik Lied in the form of a WordPress plug-in with questions randomized for each user, the quiz comprises of fairly basic, multiple-choice questions, and is said to be in early stages of experimentation.

Speaking to *NiemanLab*, *NRKbeta* journalist Ståle Grut says, "We thought we should do our part to try and make sure that people are on the same page before they comment. If everyone can agree that this is what the article says, then they have a much better basis for commenting on it." In the same chat, editor Marius Arnesen says that spending the few extra seconds to understand the story, and think about what they are posting does make the difference. "If you spend 15 seconds on it, those are maybe 15 seconds that take the edge off the rant mode when people are commenting," he says. The Norwegian media organization decided to structure the tool as a quiz to ensure that commenters were all on "common ground" getting into the discussion, and to keep the interactions all on topic, thereby attempting to keep away the personal attacks and rants.

With the current information overload, media companies globally continue to think of ways to stay clear of abuse and maintain civility in user engagements. Just last month, *Mashable* reported tech giant Google achieving a breakthrough in this area with the release of a tool Perspective API, which uses machine learning to assess the impact a comment might have on a conversation, and assigns score based on how "toxic" the posts are. Commenters and moderators can then use this score for real-time feedback on the nature of interactions. Similarly, there's also the Coral Project, a joint initiative by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, Mozilla Foundation, and Knight Foundation, that is working on creating open-source tools with the aim of using technology to improve interactions online, and ensuring that voicing one's opinion is not an unpleasant experience.



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Shailesh Dash, founder, Al Masah Capital at the Annual Investor Forum

SHAILESH DASH
 Founder & CEO
 Al Masah Capital

Forecasting opportunities

Insights on the 2017 MENA investment landscape from Al Masah Capital's Sixth Annual Investor Forum at Dubai

By Shailesh Dash

held in February at The Ritz-Carlton, DIFC in Dubai, this year's edition of Al Masah Capital's Annual Investor Forum saw banking and investment experts from around the world come together to discuss the overall economic climate in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as shed light on some of the most important issues faced by the region's real estate, healthcare and consumer-driven industries. Here's a roundup of some of the noteworthy insights that were shared at this event:

1. THE DIVERSIFICATION OF REGIONAL ECONOMIES NEEDS TO PICK UP SPEED The region's heavy reliance on the oil sector needs to change rapidly, and investments need to diversify into non-oil sectors in order to ensure consistent and sustainable positive growth. Non-oil GDP has been growing

at a faster rate, but this still needs to accelerate, especially for countries that have a high break-even oil price. The UAE has done well with its strong commitment towards diversifying its investments and finding new revenue engines. Saudi Arabia has put in place an ambitious diversification plan, which bodes well for the future if implemented correctly. Qatar and Kuwait have lower oil break-even points, and so are less anxious, but still cognizant of having a blueprint for more revenue streams. Egypt needs to focus on the right sectors and, due to the lack of oil revenue, has a more difficult job ahead in driving its GDP towards active growth. Recognizing problems, rectifying errors, reducing unnecessary cost, becoming more efficient and diversifying plans for the future will be important themes for the region. In such a dynamic environment, active portfolio

management will be the key to finding positive investment returns, positioning portfolios in appropriate asset allocations that best utilize the prevailing opportunities.

2. GLOBAL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RISK REMAINS HIGH The changing political landscape in Europe and the US -rising nationalism and trade protectionism- has the potential to cause a significant spillover effect on global capital markets including the MENA region. Brexit will have a lasting negative impact, but for the time being, confidence amongst British consumers has stayed surprisingly high. A weaker GBP continues to act as a buffer as foreign investments flow in. The US elections have been greeted by an upsurge in market confidence, predicated by President Donald Trump's promises of lower taxes, less regulation and more infrastructure spending,

but how much of this will be implemented remains the big risk going forward. China's fresh credit expansion in February 2016 should not be underestimated, especially the significant effect it has had on the rest of the world markets—the question now will be how long this effect will last.

3. THE GCC HEALTHCARE SERVICES SECTOR REMAINS AN ATTRACTIVE INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY Each respective regional government in the GCC is actively encouraging greater private sector participation, which is enhancing the efficiencies of the industry and allowing for greater organic growth. At the same time, the governments' own active role as a progressive regulator is enhancing and complementing the healthcare services industry by allowing a more competitive landscape to develop. Despite strong years of growth, institutional investors still see immense opportunity in the region's healthcare industry's next evolution, especially the huge potential to deliver returns in specific sub-sectors. The healthcare sector is a consistent growth engine for the region with 2016 showing 90% of the sector portfolio registering growth between 16-17% in terms of revenue.

4. KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF K12 EDUCATION INDUSTRY THAT MAKE IT ATTRACTIVE TO INVESTORS This sector is witnessing a strong demand due to its burgeoning young population, with the long-term revenues being locked in, starting with a child's early education years. In addition, there is room for further increase in fees, based on the quality being provided and

Shailesh Dash is the founder, CEO and Board Member of Al Masah Capital. A veteran of the MENA alternative investments sector, Dash has over 20 years of alternative investment experience. In 2010, he started Al Masah Capital, which has successfully raised over US\$1 billion and established itself as one of the fastest growing alternative investment management and advisory firms focusing on the MENA & SE Asia region. Before Al Masah Capital, Dash had managed \$4 billion of assets and executed 14 IPOs and five trade sales. In addition, he created the second largest PE business in the MENA region (extrapolated from rankings of PEI Asia) and served on the boards of 12 companies.

high barriers to entry. However, finding the right business partner remains a challenge in this industry and the cost of setting up a school is also rapidly rising. The increase in population and rising income levels keep fueling supply and demand for high quality schools, thereby allowing for significant scope for expansion for existing players in the market as long as economic efficiencies are met and the right sub-sectors are targeted. State-of-the-art facilities, progressive education curriculums, well-trained staff and the increasing use of technology in the educational field will be differentiating points for schools to help them stand out and flourish.

5. THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL REAL ESTATE ASSET MANAGEMENT SERVICES The GCC real estate sector is one of the fastest growing in the world. Within it, the sub-sector of asset management services is showing the fastest growth rates and clearest opportunities to tap an underserved, young market. Amongst the regional markets, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha have emerged as the strongest due to their international projects, foreign investment flows and growing populations. In addition to this, the upcoming Expo 2020 in Dubai and FIFA 2022 in Doha will drive the demand for specifically designed amenities and world-class infrastructure spaces. Overall, the real estate sector's performance has been stable despite oil price fluctuations, providing a healthy hedge to multi-asset portfolios. This sector looks likely to be resilient going forward, and by continuing to register growth, it will create greater opportunities for real estate asset management service providers. ■

IMAGE CREDIT EKAR

| STARTUP FINANCE |

GET MOVING

UAE CAR RENTAL STARTUP EKAR SECURES FUNDING FROM AUDACIA CAPITAL

The first quarter of 2017 has been hectic but a rewarding time for UAE-based startup Ekar, a pay-as-you-drive hourly and daily car rental service. While Ekar kickstarted operations with 100 car-share vehicles in Dubai in January 2017 partnering with Roads and Transport Authority (RTA), the startup has now managed to raise an undisclosed amount of funding from Dubai-based investment firm Audacia Capital, which also secures a 25% ownership stake in Ekar. Not just that, Ekar, in a statement on the fundraising, adds that “a Series B raise is scheduled to take place within the next 18 months.” Commenting on the investment, Ekar CEO Vilhelm Hedberg says that the funding boost will provide the startup the financial capacity needed to expand its current operations (tie-ups with RTA, Emirates Airlines, and Etihad Airways), as well as add new car-share programs for the city. “We aim to have over 1,000 Ekars over the next three years across the GCC, including Saudi Arabia,” says Hedberg.

Ekar aims to provide UAE

residents the freedom of getting around in a car without ownership hassles, and strives to promote sustainability- a mission in line with the RTA's objectives to support “bespoke alternative transit means for public transport riders in Dubai,” and offer access to the global best practices of car-sharing to residents. According to the company's website, Ekar's fleet of cars are available for booking from convenient public locations such as metro stations and other central spots, discoverable via the Ekar app. Unlocking the assigned vehicle using the app, the user needs to return the car to the same area, from where it was booked. Users can book the service by 15 minute, one hour, daily, weekly, or monthly rentals (depending on member groups), both for instant use and for “Later” options. Speaking about the adoption of the service in the UAE, Hedberg says, “The Ekar Book Now, Book Later option is ideal for tourists looking to plan ahead for their trips, and is also gaining increasing popularity with public and private companies look-

Vilhelm Hedberg, CEO, Ekar



ing to optimize its own car fleet.” He notes that further to the startup's partnerships with large corporates such as Etihad Airways and Emirates Airlines, they are now looking at working with international airports too.

In a statement on the investment, Emad Mansour, CEO, Audacia Capital says that the investment firm found Ekar's business model to be unique, “working in alignment with the UAE government's vision to promote sustainability, and economic growth, and [that] car-sharing will serve to be very beneficial for this purpose in the long run.” Audacia Capital launched its Dubai operations in 2015, encouraged by global trends in deal activity and “the MENA region's investment opportunities.” Engaged in direct investments (through a Sharia-compliant private equity business model), and providing investment banking advisory services, Audacia Capital marked its presence in the UAE investor ecosystem by acquiring a 30% stake in Al Safadi, a popular Lebanese food chain, in 2015.



SEAL THE DEAL

[THE HOW-TO]

A PRIMER FOR ENTREPRENEURS
LOOKING TO MAKE
VENTURE CAPITAL DEALS

By Bo Yaghmaie

There is an old adage in venture capital amongst those of us that have seen the tides come in and go back out: “Take the money off the table.” I have seen too many companies fail, because they failed to raise enough capital to get them to the milestones that would have created a point of validation and driven a next financing event. Things always go wrong. Things will never turn out as you plan today or as you project today. You will make mistakes. You will hit unexpected hurdles. Things will take longer than you think. As an entrepreneur, you have to accept that as the reality. And so, be prepared for the worst. Take the money off the table. And learning how venture capital deals work is a good way to get prepared for such an eventuality- hence this handy how-to guide.

PART ONE **SHOW ME THE MONEY**

What every entrepreneur should know about valuations

Getting your first term sheet from a venture capital firm is among the most exhilarating moments that you'll experience as an entrepreneur. It probably sits up there with the college acceptance letter in the pantheon of milestones. Getting a call from an entrepreneur who has just received a term sheet is one of the highlights of my day. The excitement is palpable. But unlike the college acceptance letter, a venture term sheet can quickly be followed by the dread of trying to understand the gobbledygook that you've been presented with. To manage that inevitable angst, you'll quickly need to wrap your head around what matters a lot, what matters less, and what doesn't really matter in a term sheet.

So, what really matters in a term sheet? I will try to give you an insider's look at the things that really matter by deconstructing a venture term sheet. So it's fitting that we start with valuation, arguably the single most important thing in a term sheet.

PRE-MONEY VS POST-MONEY

Valuations are driven by a handful of variables. The first thing you'll want to consider is whether the valuation in the term sheet is presented as a "pre-money valuation" or a "post-money valuation." You will want to make sure that there's no confusion about the valuation being presented. A US\$20 million valuation on a \$5 million investment could mean either a \$20 million pre-money valuation and a \$25 million post-money valuation, or a \$15 million pre-money valuation and a \$20 million post-money valuation. The amount of dilution of your ownership will differ vastly under these two circumstances.

The second thing you'll want to consider is the manner in which the pre-money valuation and the price per share that the venture investors pay is being calculated. In the venture world, we arrive at the price per share investors pay by taking the valuation and dividing it by the "fully

diluted" outstanding share count. What gets included in the fully diluted share count, which is the denominator, will affect your price per share.

So what should go into the denominator? Certainly all of the outstanding equity should be included. But what else? In venture term sheets, an option pool reserve, ranging typically from 10-20%, is almost always included in the pre-money valuation. This is a common market practice designed to ensure that the venture investors aren't diluted by equity grants to future hires.

While there's little value in debating the inclusion of this market term in your term sheet, you're within your rights to have a discussion about the size of the pool that's being calculated. Obviously, a larger pool

A RECENT AND EVOLVING TREND IN THE DETERMINATION OF PRICE IS THE INCLUSION OF BRIDGE NOTES AND OTHER CONVERTIBLE SECURITIES IN THE PRE-MONEY, FULLY DILUTED CALCULATION. CONVERTIBLE NOTES ARE A VERY COMMON AND POPULAR MECHANISM FOR RAISING SEED CAPITAL. HISTORICALLY, THESE BRIDGE NOTES CONVERTED SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH THE NEW VENTURE MONEY.

means a larger dilutive impact on the founders, which effectively means that your pre-money valuation is lower. So when you think about valuation, you should always consider the size of the option pool.

BRIDGE NOTES, CONVERTIBLES, AND MORE

A recent and evolving trend in the determination of price is the inclusion of bridge notes and other convertible securities in the pre-money, fully diluted calculation. Convertible notes are a very common and popular mechanism for raising seed capital. Historically, these bridge notes converted side-by-side with the new venture money. But given the significant amounts of capital that many companies have been able to raise in their seed rounds using convertible notes, many venture investors are increasingly taking the view that these securities should be viewed as a completed financing round, and therefore, should be included in the pre-money calculation.

Obviously, the inclusion of your bridge financing notes in the pre-money calculation will have the net effect of reducing your valuation. Therefore the inclusion or exclusion of these notes is simply a price issue that is important to consider when you think about the valuation in your deal. These are the issues that you should think about when considering the valuation in your term sheet. >>>



PART TWO THE TIES THAT BIND

Control and voting rights when making venture capital deals

Control is a critical component of every venture capital deal. Control can be used to dictate desired outcomes or, through “negative controls,” to block undesired outcomes. Negative controls are typically enumerated as “protective provisions” that give the venture investor the right to unilaterally block a variety of corporate actions.

A majority of the board and a majority of the stockholders generally control the outcome of all decisions that require a vote. Venture capital funds, which typically own minority positions, rely on protective provisions in the corporate charter to block actions they do not support. There is nothing sinister about protective provisions. They are a standard part of the basic covenant the entrepreneur enters into with the venture capital investor: “thou shall not do anything that will impact my investment and financial terms without my blessing.”

Common categories covered by negative control rights are dissolution or winding up of the corporation; sale or merger of the corporation or a disposition of the corporation’s assets; amendments to the corporation’s charter; creating or issuing senior or *pari passu* securities; paying dividends; redeeming securities; borrowing money (often above a specified threshold); and changing the number of directors.

These protective provisions effectively give an investor a veto right to protect the investment by not allowing a majority of the board or stockholders to unilaterally undertake actions that would diminish a venture investor’s equity value or return by:

- Shutting down the company.
- Raising senior or *pari passu* capital, which would negatively impact the value of the investors liquidation preference or, in a low valuation scenario, create the potential for significant ownership dilution.
- Selling the company at a price that isn’t acceptable to the venture capital investor, which would limit the investors upside potential.

- Creating a debt load that would put the venture capital investor’s equity investment at risk by creating a heavy debt load and otherwise abrogating the investors liquidation preference since debt always gets paid before equity.
- Paying dividends or redeeming equity, which in both cases can amount to distributing value to the detriment of the venture capital investor.
- Altering the composition of the board, which is often a very fragile and carefully crafted balancing of competing interests over control.

THERE IS NOTHING SINISTER ABOUT PROTECTIVE PROVISIONS. THEY ARE A STANDARD PART OF THE BASIC COVENANT THE ENTREPRENEUR ENTERS INTO WITH THE VENTURE CAPITAL INVESTOR: “THOU SHALL NOT DO ANYTHING THAT WILL IMPACT MY INVESTMENT AND FINANCIAL TERMS WITHOUT MY BLESSING.”





There is always room for a productive conversation but it isn't productive or useful to take offense to the inclusion of protective provisions or to try to remove them in their entirety. Appropriate areas that can be discussed start with the block on charter amendments and the issuance of senior or *pari passu* securities.

It isn't unusual to discuss narrowing this protective provision to limit the blocking right to a charter amendment that will adversely affect the preferred stock issued to the venture investor in a manner that is different than other preferred stock, and to dispense with the block on the issuance of senior or *pari passu* securities. This means the venture investor can protect its negotiated investment terms without necessarily having a block on your ability to attract future venture capital.

Similarly, you can have a productive conversation around an M&A exit and try to agree on an exit value that will serve as a floor. Then, an M&A outcome yielding a higher value will not require your investor's consent. That, basically, is conceding that a venture investor expects a minimum return without necessarily ceding to your investor total control over a possible exit.

Expect greater adoption of these types of compromises in earlier stage deals but these compromises are still viewed in the market as exceptions to the rule. The strength of your negotiating posture and the general disposition of your venture capital investor towards these types of provisions will ultimately dictate whether or not you will see a deviation from the market norms in your deal.

Regardless, you should always remember that covenant which binds you and your venture investor when it comes to control. ■

Make it work

Seven elements investors want to see in a pitch

It all starts with a great pitch deck. The pitch deck is arguably the most important single document you will generate in the life of your company. It is the opening salvo and "the hook" by which you will (or will not) capture the attention and imagination of a potential investor. There is no such thing as a "perfect" pitch deck. Pitch decks are continually refined to optimize for the immediate audience to whom the deck is being presented. There are some basic guidelines, however, that can help you prepare a pitch deck that will answer the questions most investors will ask.

1. HIGH-LEVEL SUMMARY SLIDE(S)

These are one or two opening, preliminary slides that highlight your business. These slides capture the "essence" of your story. Include the points you would communicate if asked to distill everything into one or two slides.

2. THE PROBLEM YOU'RE SOLVING

These can be a couple of perfunctory slides or three, four or more educational slides, depending on your audience's sophistication. Convey the nature of the market opportunity you address with your business or product by highlighting what is "broken" or "not working." If possible, scope out the size of the market opportunity. Ideally, these slides make it clear market participants are spending real dollars for imperfect products that do not adequately address their needs.

3. YOUR PRODUCT Having set up the problems faced by your customers, the next few slides are all about YOU. First and foremost, describe your solution, at a high level, for the unmet market demands described in the preceding slides. Drill in on how your products are differentiated. Convince your audience you have a better "mouse trap." You want to make sure these slides leave no holes in your story or questions unanswered.

4. MARKETING/STRATEGY Having wowed your audience with your product and business model, proactively articulate a go-to market strategy. Obviously, the scope of these slides is dependent on your stage of development but clearly demonstrate you have thought about how to roll out your product and how to capture market share.

5. TEAM If you haven't already heard this, here it goes. Team, team, team. That's what investors are looking for. They are investing in your team, your passion and your dedication. Introduce your team in a few slides. Highlight your team's strengths, make it clear they are committed to building something big and they will be great to work with.

6. FINANCIALS/PROJECTIONS

The truth is, unless you are a later-stage company, the numbers in your projections typically don't matter. Nonetheless, putting together a set of thoughtful projections on both the revenue and cost sides enhances your credibility with potential investors. Moreover, in these slides you can, and should, demonstrate an appreciation of the capital you are raising and how you intend to deploy it to meet milestones that will be critical for future fundraising. While your audience may feel projections are premature in assessing the business, they will appreciate that you understand financial metrics and how to "operate" a business.

7. TONE When pulling together your presentation, consider the tone you want to convey. Nothing is more important in determining the right tone for your audience. Be creative. Avoid a dry, mind-numbing presentation. Always gauge your audience and play to them. At the end of the day, content is king when it comes to a deck. Layer in creativity with great content, show some personality and you will have a winning combination.

ENGAGING E-COMMERCE

Experts at global advertising media planning agency MEC explain how MENA businesses can achieve a successful customer-centric digital transformation *By Tamara Pupic*

"E-COMMERCE MAKES EVERYTHING DATA-RICH. WHAT E-COMMERCE IS DOING NOW IS ALLOWING US TO MAKE MUCH MORE INFORMED DECISIONS. IT GIVES YOU A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH YOUR PROSPECTS AND YOUR CUSTOMERS."

E-commerce is the most immediate and tangible manifestation of digital transformation today, and it is with this view that MEC, a global advertising media planning agency, established a specialist e-commerce consulting unit, MEC Commerce, in 2015. Launched by London-based Mudit Jaju, Head of E-commerce and Digital and Data Partner at MEC Commerce, the UAE-based practice has grown to 15 dedicated specialists across the EMEA region, in large part as a response to clients' needs. In sum, their focus is on helping businesses to develop a holistic, 360-degree view of e-commerce and not to be tied down to one modality or route to market, enabling them to advise across consumer businesses, e-retail, and marketplaces.

During a short visit to the Dubai-based team of three led by Julio Cesar Rodriguez, Head of E-commerce MENA, MEC Commerce, Jaju explains that e-commerce helps businesses to connect with their consumers in a completely novel and a very personal way. "The fundamental of business is that you have a product to sell, and what was happening in traditional retail was that there were three different stakeholders, —manufacturers, retailers,

and consumers— doing three different things," he says. "It wasn't really very joined up. The ones who lost most were consumers because manufacturers made some assumptions what retailers

Mudit Jaju,
Head of
E-commerce
and Digital
& Data
Partner,
MEC
Commerce



wanted, retailers made some assumptions what consumers wanted, and there was a friction around with consumers losing out. E-commerce makes everything data-rich. What e-commerce is doing now is allowing us to make much more informed decisions. It gives you a holistic perspective of what is happening with your prospects and your customers. Another thing is that e-commerce is becoming extremely experiential. The way that e-commerce used to work was that people took their products and stocked them on the internet. Essentially, it was not too dissimilar to traditional retail. But then what companies have started doing is building real experiences around it. One good example

is L'Oreal in the US, with a quiz on their website to help their consumers identify their skin condition which personalized their search for suitable products."

In making that interaction much more personal and engaging, e-commerce has massively lowered the barriers to entry for startups and SMEs, who often find it very expensive to hire a sales force. Raj Jerath, Director of E-commerce, MEC Commerce, adds that the last decade has seen companies investing in different channels separately, but now the sector has matured to start focusing on developing omni-channel experiences. "It is about determining what their customers want," Jerath says. "From our experience, we know that customers don't engage from one channel, but via different channels."

However, the key to choosing the right channel, or a combination thereof, is in deciding on an adequate data strategy behind it, explains Jaju. "Brands don't have joint data overview," he says. "They would have one analytics package on their app, one on their website, one that manages their CRM data. So, that data breaks so much that you can't meaningfully use it. The magic happens when we join all the data so that you have one integrated review. It does happen, sometimes, that companies take a divide-and-conquer approach, which is appropriate in some cases, and then they use independently what might be the right solution, from an analytics perspective, for each individual product. The fundamental shift in online advertising is that previously we would make assumptions based on the media, for example, that a *Vogue* reader is interested in luxury brands, but that is not always true.

Raj Jerath,
Director of
E-commerce,
MEC
Commerce



That *Vogue* reader might be there because of some article about Sheryl Sandberg, meaning that that reader is maybe more interested in technology. So, what programmatic media does is that it allows us to follow our consumers no matter where they are on the web. Therefore, taking an audience- and data-led approach is far more important than what particular channel they focus on.”

Rodriguez explains that in the MENA region, businesses need to move faster when deploying e-commerce strategies, adding that some of the most common e-commerce-related mistakes he has noticed among local startups include their reliance on outdated technologies, a massive lack of content capable of educating their web visitors, and not embracing conversion rate optimization (CRO) systems. “Also, what they are doing wrong is that they do not understand their audience,” Rodriguez says. “For example, if I am selling a \$20,000 piece of jewelry, I want to target someone who lives in certain, more wealthy areas in Dubai, and not everybody in Dubai, which is what they often do. So, they burn money in a wrong way.”

Jaju adds that entrepreneurs often overcomplicate their approach to data.

“There are free analytics packages which, if used with a little bit more thought, could give the most value. For example, a data management platform is a very expensive piece of technology that startups sometimes do not need. The data needs of a client in the insurance sector are far different from a company that sells moisturizers. So, more education is needed in the industry because startups are critical to a thriving digital economy.”

In 2015, MEC initiated MEC Tonic to facilitate the connection between UK-based startups and brands, helping the latter use expertise of startups to compose sufficiently creative digital briefs that have the potential to lead to successful digital campaigns and add real value to their offerings. In the UAE, MEC Commerce focuses on helping businesses make more informed digital decisions by enhancing collaboration among all relevant stakeholders, rather than just delivering playbooks without a clear path on how those should be put into action. While unable to disclose more information, Rodriguez assures us that MEC Commerce will soon have their doors wide open for local startups to identify their potential and find ways to introduce them to their clients. Stay tuned. ■

Julio Cesar
Rodriguez,
Head of
E-commerce
MENA, MEC
Commerce



THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SEVEN TIPS TO GET YOUR E-COMMERCE BASICS RIGHT FROM THE EXPERTS AT MEC

1. GET YOUR PRODUCT TITLE RIGHT

You would be surprised how many people misspell their own brand name because they ask an intern to set up a product page. Even Fortune 500 companies have their brand name spelled incorrectly on their product page.

2. IMAGES

The way we navigate the web is visual, so it is not enough to take a picture with your phone and stick it on the platform and wait for the money to roll in. You really have to think about the way that different images work, such as whether you are showing the right features of your product.

3. RATINGS AND REVIEWS

Consumers really want to understand what other consumers do, and ratings and reviews help to build that bridge of trust about the product more effectively. The secret of ratings and reviews is what it does for your SEO.

4. RICH CONTENT

Video can be really powerful in driving conversion and that is something that brands should start thinking about.

5. VISIBILITY

You have to figure out how the consumer finds the product as they are going about their daily life. There is a lot that happens before the consumer makes the purchase and a lot that happens after it.

6. TRACK EVERYTHING

Any activity that you have on your website has to be tracked. The visitor journey has to be mapped out and make sure that you can monitor all the conversions.

7. TEST

There are many tools that you can use without modifying the backend technology that allow you to modify each specific element and create a call for action. Those small changes can have a massive impact on the behavior of consumers on your website.

www.mecglobal.com

"WE GOT FUNDED!"

UAE-BASED STARTUPS ENERWHERE AND CARSWITCH REVEAL HOW THEY GOT THEIR FUNDRAISING WINS

By Sindhu Hariharan

From solar power to used cars marketplace, two startups based in the UAE -Enerwhere and CarSwitch- have recently closed substantial fundraising rounds. While one company tapped crowdfunding to understand investor appetite for its solutions and managed to nail its target in a few weeks, the other marketplace startup was clear that it wanted to bring strategic investors on board and waited to raise funds until it found them- here are their stories.

ENERWHERE

www.enerwhere.com

Dubai-based commercial solar power company Enerwhere firmly believes that its offerings have the potential to make the world better. But, in order to execute its mission, the capital-intensive entity was smart enough to realize that it needed to look beyond conventional financial institutions and venture capitalists for funds. In January 2017, Enerwhere raised a corporate loan of AED1 million from regional peer-to-peer lending platform Beehive. That's not all though- the startup managed to crowdfund the entire

amount under Beehive's reverse auction system (which has investors bidding against one another to fund the company's target, thereby driving down the interest rate) in a few weeks' time, and also received the entire proceeds in the same week.

Explaining why the company picked crowdfunding as their investment route, Enerwhere CEO Daniel Zywieta says that the mode presented huge advantages for the company, both in terms of accessibility and speed. "The commercial-scale temporary power business is, by its very nature, much more fluid, and requires very quick turnaround



Enerwhere solar installations at Nurai Island resort

times (sometimes less than a week). Contracts are also much smaller (typically less than US\$1 million), so keeping overhead costs and fees as low as possible is critical," says Zywieta. "The traditional banks simply weren't able to handle our business within their standard processes, and we weren't big enough yet to get special treatment," he adds. At the same time, Enerwhere also found Beehive to be a more flexible platform, where the startup was able to raise the amount much quicker and at a cost "much lower" than conventional sources. Till date, over the last three years, Enerwhere has raised about \$3 million from angel investors. "Most of those investors are based here and work in the energy or related industries, so they quickly grasped the opportunity, and this way helped us to get started," notes Zywieta. As opposed to the nature of temporary power offered by

IN JANUARY 2017, ENERWHERE RAISED A CORPORATE LOAN OF AED1 MILLION FROM REGIONAL PEER-TO-PEER LENDING PLATFORM BEEHIVE. THE STARTUP ALSO MANAGED TO CROWDFUND THE ENTIRE AMOUNT UNDER BEEHIVE'S REVERSE AUCTION SYSTEM IN A FEW WEEK'S TIME."

generator companies that run on fuel, Enerwhere provides a cleaner alternative power source for consumers in the region who lack a grid connection- labor camps, construction sites etc. Backed with Zywieta's more than seven years of consulting expertise in the renewable industry, the company operates commercial-scale solar mini grids, offers solar roof top solutions, and also solar generator rental solutions across the construction, oil & gas, tourism, and other sectors in the Middle East. Enerwhere's projects including deployments at a construction site on The World Islands, a 5 MVA solar-diesel hybrid production



Enerwhere solar installations at Nurai Island resort

IMAGE CREDITS: ENERWHERE

system at Saadiyat Accommodation Village labor camp in Abu Dhabi, and others.

Enerwhere was successful in meeting its target investment of AED1 million thanks to the 100+ individual investors/lenders who pitched in, with “several” of them providing substantial amounts (less than AED 100,000), qualifying them to be angel investors. “We are now in the process of ordering a bunch of solar equipment, which we will then install in our various plants in the UAE,” says Zywiets commenting on the utilization of the proceeds. As to whether the entrepreneur expected the quick turnaround for Enerwhere, Zywiets believes that they were able to raise the target quickly since people on the platform seemed to like both their technology and business model. “We also made sure to personally invite people that we knew were interested in our company to the Beehive platform, so it wasn’t just a random crowd that financed us, but rather also a lot of people that already knew and liked us,” he explains.

The growth of crowdfunding and peer-to-peer lending portals, though originally fuelled by decline in bank financing post the 2008

financial crisis, is seeing increased adoption on its own merits as MENA’s entrepreneurship ecosystem matures. The Middle East region’s commitment to further grow this segment was also seen in two recent moves of the regulator Dubai Financial Services Authority (DFSA). In February 2017, DFSA launched a consultation paper on its proposal to regulate loan-based crowdfunding platforms (that may provide a clear governance framework for such fintech ventures); Beehive also became the first peer-to-peer lender in the region to receive the official authorization from DFSA earlier in March 2017. As for Enerwhere, the startup plans to raise “a few million dollars in equity in the coming few months,” to further fund their R&D costs and expansion plans. When asked if he will again look to crowdfund this investment, Zywiets is quick to endorse the new-age investment avenue saying: “We will nearly certainly do this again.”

“WE ALSO MADE SURE TO PERSONALLY INVITE PEOPLE THAT WE KNEW WERE INTERESTED IN OUR COMPANY TO THE BEEHIVE PLATFORM, SO IT WASN’T JUST A RANDOM CROWD THAT FINANCED US.”



‘TREP TALK

Daniel Zywiets, CEO, Enerwhere

Can you take us through the steps you had to go through to run your crowdfunding campaign on Beehive?

“The key steps aren’t that different from a conventional bank financing. We provided our basic company information and financials, which was screened by Beehive and an external accounting firm. After that pre-approval stage, we then posted our profile on the platform, and started the reverse auction. In parallel, we talked to a lot of our existing relationships and helped them sign up on the platform, to make sure that we wouldn’t rely

only on random outsiders. The auction itself is quite exciting to watch, even if the company doesn’t really have to do much—but it’s nice to see the amount going up and the rates coming down over the space of the 14 days. At the end of the auction, once the target amount of AED1 million was reached and the rate was confirmed, we signed the financing agreements, provided our guarantees and had the money in the bank the next day. So overall this process took only a few weeks and was a really pleasant experience.”

What are your tips for entrepreneurs looking to take the crowdfunding route to raise funds?

“Spend enough time beforehand to market the raise to your existing network, and make sure that anybody who is interested is registered on the platform in time. The administrative procedures typically only take a few days, but in an auction that only lasts 14 days; this could already mean missing the chance to invest. So better start early, and save a lot of stress for everyone involved.”



Enerwhere solar installations at MyCityCentre Al Barsha

CARSWITCH

www.carswitch.com

Owing to its large expat population, the UAE is no stranger to buying and selling used cars; however, we have all heard about the challenges and scams people have had to encounter sometimes (buyers and sellers alike) in dealing with conventional dealerships in the region. UAE-based used cars marketplace CarSwitch.com launched with the aim to use technology and the

marketplace model to address these woes, and the startup has now raised US\$1.3 million investment from Glowfish Capital, a Dubai-based boutique venture capital firm investing in the region’s early-stage businesses. Having received a “sizeable tranche” to fund the company’s expansion plans and targets for the next six months, CarSwitch plans to utilize the funding to develop its technology and take steps to “keep up with surging demand” it has seen in its solution’s adoption. The

startup aims to achieve these targets by scaling its platform to support customers’ end-to-end needs in buying/selling their car, and by launching an “online car valuator” tool to help customers estimate fair value of the car being sold/bought by them.

Launching CarSwitch with seed funding “of a couple of hundred thousand dollars,” co-founders and former consultants Imad Hammad and Ali Malik had their beta product live by March 2016. Since launch, CarSwitch.com >>>

claims to have interacted with over 6,000 sellers, and says they have currently featured over 400 cars on the website. As for business performance, despite the presence of heavy competition in the segment, CarSwitch.com says it's "profitable on an operating basis," and is clocking 30% month-on-month growth in revenue. While for sellers, CarSwitch.com takes on tasks including advertising, coordinating offer calls, arranging test drives and closing the paperwork, the startup's proprietary 200-point inspection process helps provide transparency to buyers about their chosen vehicles as well. The company believes that facilitating such pre-inspections is critical in streamlining the process for both parties, and going by CarSwitch founder and CEO Hammad's definition of the startup's USP, it is "more than just an advertising portal trying to marry supply and demand, it's a marketplace that removes the inefficiencies in used car sales."

Speaking about how CarSwitch went about its fundraising efforts, co-founder Malik says that funding talks were more in the nature of "ongoing con-



Ali Malik and Imad Hammad, co-founders, CarSwitch

"THERE WAS A MUCH-NEEDED MISSING PIECE IN THE UAE'S CAR MARKET, AND THIS FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND VENTURE HAS SUCCESSFULLY STEPPED FORWARD TO FILL THE GAP."

versations" for the startup. "We've interacted, and continue to interact, with various investors and other digital automotive ventures in other markets," he says. It's during these conversations that the founders found investor Glowfish Capital share "a lot of the same DNA" as their startup. "We're both very passionate about tackling large market inefficiencies, and share similar exciting aspirations for the regional used cars opportunity (\$20 billion per year, predominantly locked in traditional channels),"

Malik notes. Another aspect that particularly appealed to CarSwitch about their investors was Glowfish's investment model of creating a learning community, which "extends beyond capital to provide shared infrastructure with other startups." The admiration seems to be mutual. Commenting on the potential of CarSwitch's business, Sanjeev Kohli, Managing Partner, Glowfish Capital, said, in a statement, "There was a much-needed missing piece in the UAE's car market, and this first-of-its-kind venture has successfully stepped forward to fill the gap. CarSwitch has already established itself as a leader in the region's online marketplace." ■

TREP TALK

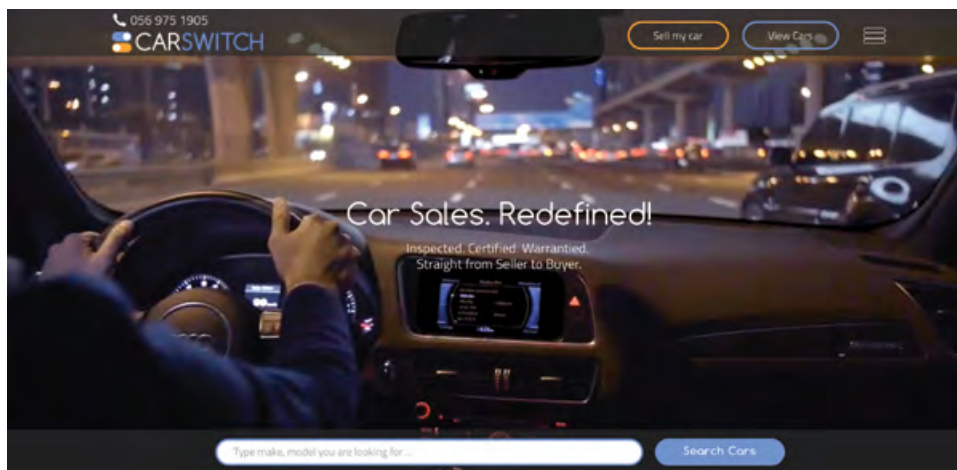
Imad Hammad, founder and CEO, CarSwitch.com

How did CarSwitch team and the investors arrive on the valuation for the round?

"As an early-stage startup, it's an immensely challenging question. At the end of the day, it was a discussion and we each had our own way of arriving at the number - we naturally thought about dilution, while Glowfish considered risk/return- but we found common ground. To be honest, we were more focused on who would best enable us to meet our aspirations in two, three, four years from now, and that we would trust and enjoy working with, rather than get hung up on a specific number. That would also be my advice to any entrepreneur."

What will be your top three tips for MENA startups to successfully pitch to investors and raise funds?

"If I had to narrow it down to three, I would say, [first], upfront, give careful consideration to what you really need to move the needle for your business, and what it's worth/how critical. Beyond capital, do you need the right network to unlock regulation? Access to infrastructure? Expertise? Media? [Second], consider how closely you share objectives, aspirations, and ways of working. Without that alignment, I would question the sustainability of longer-term value creation for either party. [Third], start now! Don't wait until you are running out of cash and your back is against the wall. Starting conversations early gives you time to better understand what you're getting into, and besides investors have their timelines and life cycles as well that you wouldn't want to miss."



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Loyyal CEO and co-founder Gregory Simon at the Dubai Future Accelerators

Keep 'em coming back to you

Startup Loyyal uses blockchain tech to keep customers, well, loyal

By Pamela de Leon

THE COMPANY DESCRIBES ITSELF AS A PLATFORM THAT "INTRODUCES INTEROPERABILITY TO THE CURRENTLY FRAGMENTED INDUSTRY, MULTI-BRANDED COALITIONS, SUPERIOR PROGRAM LIABILITY MANAGEMENT AND DYNAMIC ISSUANCE/REDEMPTION OPTIONS, CUSTOMIZED FOR EACH UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP."

DATA FROM A STUDY by Bain & Company indicates that increasing customer retention rates by 5% increases profits by 25%–95% (*Harvard Business Review*), so essentially, the ideal loyalty reward programs can enhance the customer experience. However, implementing and maintaining loyalty programs can be difficult, as a 2016 report by 3Cinteractive states that 70% of consumers don't sign up for a loyalty program due to the inconvenience and time required to complete registration. Well, that could change with the offerings of the startup Loyyal, with entrepre-

neurs Sean Dennis and Gregory Simon taking a stab at creating a solution for loyalty programs using blockchain technology.

For the uninitiated, blockchain is a public ledger network which records and verifies global transactions using ownership and time stamp, within a secure and decentralized network, enabling peer-to-peer transaction. In theory, blockchain can be beneficial for loyalty solutions—for starters, from the consumer side, it would provide a better and centralized experience as a blockchain-enabled network would let them access their various loyalty rewards

across different companies and industries in one digital wallet, and at the same time, blockchain can enable providers and other parties to function in one system without comprising data, privacy or competitive advantage, and streamline the programs. Taking advantage of this opportunity is Loyyal, a loyalty platform leveraging blockchain and smart contract technology. The company describes itself as a platform that "introduces interoperability to the currently fragmented industry, multi-branded coalitions, superior program liability management and dynamic issuance/redemption options, customized for each unique relationship."

With backgrounds in international business, finance and investment banking, co-founder and CEO Gregory Simon, along with co-founder and Chief



Yousuf Al Mulla, Chief Strategy Officer, Dubai Holding, with Loyyal CEO and co-founder Gregory Simon

of Happiness (yes, that's the real title!) Sean Dennis, found a shared interest in blockchain and its potential applications in 2014. "I wish I could say we knew exactly what we were going to do in the space right away, and [then] came up with what we have today," says Dennis. "But the truth is, we have come on a long journey to get here. We wanted to focus on an industry we enjoyed and had a passion about, and we wanted to avoid the pitfalls of industries that have high regulatory barriers, which so many of the blockchain applications have." The duo initially launched their startup as Ribbit, a loyalty program offering focused just on the consumer (B2C), but in true startup form, as they progressed, they saw the advantage with pivoting to business to business to consumer (B2B2C). "The benefits of blockchain and smart contracts are, for us from a B2B2C perspective, to enable existing program operators to improve themselves and their offering."

On their rebranding, Dennis said they wanted the startup's name to reflect their identity, with the two Y's in Loyyal signifying a "modern" spin and "the interoperability that we are able to bring with our technology stack by having the two Ys joined." The co-founders were nervous when

pivoting their startup's focus, but they point out that an advantage of being a startup is having a lot less brand equity as compared to larger companies, adding that the cost of rebranding is low and it can be a chance "to show your target industry and companies that you have established, or change your focus towards them." Dennis recalls their early hurdles: "When coming up with a startup, it's more of a jump first and force yourself to figure it out right away." Getting people to understand blockchain was a roadblock, and he says it's all about being persistent with talking to people and explaining your concept. "Everything you think you need, and as prepared as you think you might be- ignore all of that. Everything will happen in the wrong order; everything you thought you were prepared for, you aren't." But those initial obstacles have since panned out- Loyyal, which was started in 2014 as a Delaware based C-Corp headquartered in New York, is currently in

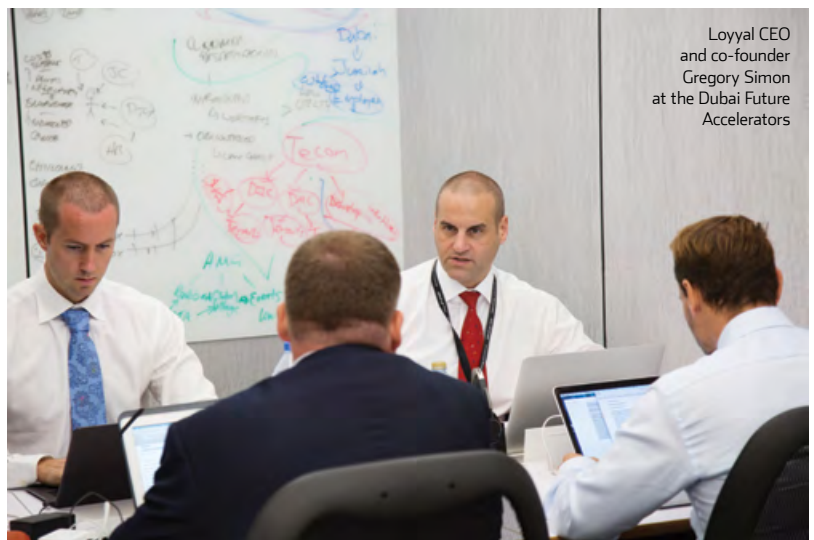
Barclays' Rise fintech office space in New York City, with regional representation in Zurich and London, and is also in the process of setting up MENA operations in Dubai, following the interest showcased by the region.

This level of interest was brought on with their involvement as a Dubai Future Accelerators (DFA) participant- last August, the startup joined as one of the first batch of startups from DFA's program to be allocated with over AED120 million and project collaborations with different UAE government entities. Loyyal was pegged to work with Dubai Holding, and Dennis speaks highly of the experience. "It was a fantastic experience from start to finish," says Dennis. "The support of the staff and direct access that were given to key members and bodies within the government was out of this world. We were working with Dubai Holding umbrella for them to provide a loyalty solution, and to help them 'realize undiscovered relationship,' as we like to call it, between the various verticals they have, namely Jumeirah and TECOM." Dennis also says that what makes

DFA noteworthy is its intent of incubating startups that would support government initiatives. With the team's ties with the region -Dennis grew up in Dubai and has family in UAE- and traction in MENA, following DFA and consequent work with Dubai Holding, Dennis states that it has "positioned us strongly to become a major blockchain resource for the region," adding that the startup now has a global network and has ignited them to expand to other markets including Asia, South America and Europe.

"WE HAVE COME ON A LONG JOURNEY TO GET HERE. WE WANTED TO FOCUS ON AN INDUSTRY WE ENJOYED AND HAD A PASSION ABOUT, AND WE WANTED TO AVOID THE PITFALLS OF INDUSTRIES THAT HAVE HIGH REGULATORY BARRIERS WHICH SO MANY OF THE BLOCKCHAIN APPLICATIONS HAVE."

As a separate business line and to further demonstrate their platform's capabilities, Loyyal has also launched Dubai Points, a program bringing together government bodies and private sector companies, to enhance a tourist's experience by enabling >>>



Loyyal CEO and co-founder Gregory Simon at the Dubai Future Accelerators



From left to right: Loyal Director of Strategic Partnerships Matthew Hamilton, Loyal CEO and co-founder Gregory Simon, Loyal Chief of Happiness and co-founder Sean Dennis, Dubai Points Managing Director and Loyal EVP Loyalty Strategy Stuart Evans

"INDUSTRY GIANTS AND ESTABLISHED COMPANIES MOVE SLOWER THAN STARTUPS. IT CAN BE AN EXPENSIVE PROCESS AND A STEEP LEARNING CURVE ADAPTING TO THEIR WAY OF DOING BUSINESS AND FORMALITIES THAT MUST BE ABIDED BY. THIS IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF SURVIVAL, AND MUST BE DEALT WITH CORRECTLY."

points that can be earned and redeemed at partnered locations based on the user's preferences. The concept proved to be quite popular- in fact, it has gained interest in the Norway market. ACN Newswire states that, AiSpot, a company that received grants from the Norwegian government, has selected Loyal to increase tourism

through promotion of its spots and activities, and provide businesses with a means to incentivize tourists. The startup is also included in IBM's Hyperledger project, an open source global collaborative effort of companies working towards advancing blockchain technology across various industries. As part of IBM's ecosystem, Loyal has global access to advancements in the space, and Dennis says that a definite advantage of their association with the tech giant is that their customers feel more assured with the startup's intent to stay in the field, and can bring a global partner on board, if required. Did they have any reluctance working with established companies as a startup? Dennis says not at all, since their business models calls for it. And for startups

considering the advantages and drawbacks of working with large enterprises, Dennis advises: "Industry giants and established companies move slower than startups. It can be an expensive process and a steep learning curve adapting to their way of doing business and formalities that must be abided by. This is an essential part of survival, and must be dealt with correctly, if one is to thrive. Don't take no for an answer and push. If you have an incredible product, then it is your duty to make sure it succeeds."

As for the nitty-gritty details, Loyal was funded with a combination of the co-founders' funds, angel investors and VC, and most recently gaining a "substantial amount" from the GCC, led by Hayaat Group in its seed round. The startup



Loyal CEO and co-founder Gregory Simon at the Dubai Future Accelerators

aims to be the network orchestrator for the loyalty, rewards and behavior incentivization industry, and is currently targeting travel, hotels, banks and financial services companies, healthcare, government, large-scale retail companies and e-commerce to use the platform. At the same time, Dennis is quick to reiterate that they see themselves as the purveyors of the “internet of loyalty,” and their goal is to have every existing loyalty operator on Loyal. Dennis asserts the market’s need for Loyal, stating the stagnant state of the loyalty industry: “[Most] loyalty program operators work individually within existing technology constraints to match the needs of its consumers and the demands of doing business in today’s digital age,” he says, stating that Loyal’s tools could take these limitations forward. That’s not to dismiss the progress in blockchain tech though—Dennis notes that he feels that last year, it was about laying the groundwork through testing and educating entities on the tech’s capabilities, whereas 2017 is the year wherein it can be implemented. He continues, “I think, particularly in our industry, we will see major understanding and acceptance of the technology and some very big names associating with Loyal. It’s a sentiment that speaks of the startup’s passion for the nascent, albeit exciting space. “You will see a lot of Loyal in Dubai and GCC region,” says Dennis, sharing that part of their short-term goals includes geographic coverage and increased network of clients on Loyal, and in the long run, they want to scale to global network coverage—and “become the truly global internet of loyalty.” ■

‘TREP TALK

SEAN DENNIS, CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF HAPPINESS OFFICER, LOYAL

TIPS FOR STARTING A BUSINESS IN THE MENA REGION

“Never take no for an answer! And even when you get a yes, follow up, follow up, follow up—yes means nothing unless it actually gets actioned. Relationships [are] incredibly important in MENA, more so than anywhere else I have ever been. Enjoy the ride, it will be the best experience of your life.”

ADVICE TO STARTUPS LOOKING FOR FUNDING AND PARTNERSHIPS

“Don’t ever stop! If you think you’ve done enough or talked to enough people, or if you got lucky a few times, you haven’t done enough. The best advice I can give is this: to you, this startup or your idea is your life. You live and breathe it and there is nothing else. To the person you are pitching, whether it is an investor, partner [or] client, they have a hundred other things going on in the day, week or lives, you might have the wrong person in an organization, be catching them on a bad day, or you might not mesh on a personal level...so much can go wrong, so it is important to just keep going and going and going.

A point worth noting when it comes to large companies is that you are asking the person to take a risk on you, to change the way things are done, to put their job on the line potentially, because let’s face it, startups don’t all make it. That is a huge ask for someone who has job security and probably doesn’t need to rock the boat—just because you are and your life depends on it.”



Sean Dennis, co-founder and Chief Happiness Officer, Loyal

ON PIVOTING YOUR STARTUP’S CONCEPT

“A lot of startup guys use the quote “pivot every day,” and to a certain extent, I believe that to be true. We are startups and we are here for a reason— to meet a need not being met, to disrupt an industry, open up new business lines or any one of a long list of ground breaking reasons— what use are we if we don’t respond to market needs or changing market conditions? Our advantage over the established players is that we can pivot, and we are adaptable and can

react instantly, so it is our responsibility to do that in order to survive.”

ON LESSONS LEARNT FROM BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR

“You will be challenged more than you ever have been in your life. Self-belief is enormously important. It sounds ridiculous but Greg and I always joke— you have to be stupid enough to think you can do it to start, and then you have to have too much self-belief to realize that [when] you can’t, never give up!”



Making everyone a Regular

HUMANIZATION BY AUTOMATION

Qatar-based startup Feed wants to reinvent communication between food lovers and their favorite restaurants

By Aparajita Mukherjee

“THE SHARED RESOURCES AT QBIC, (BOTH HUMAN AND PHYSICAL), COVER A SKILLSET THAT IS VERY BENEFICIAL TO STARTUPS IN THE DISCOVERY PHASE. WE’RE FREE TO RUN OUR BUSINESS AS WE SEE FIT, BUT THEY’RE THERE WHENEVER NEEDED, AND THEY REACH OUT TO MAKE SURE WE’RE SET AND ON THE RIGHT TRACK”

“It all started with a personal experience,” says Abi Elamin, co-founder of Feed, a new mobile app that has come out of Qatar. “One year ago, we were at a coffee shop where we are regulars. We know all the staff by name, they know our orders by heart, but we started to notice a pattern. Come rush hour, when the place gets packed, something would be amiss! We’d get the wrong order, our waiter wouldn’t be smiling anymore, and there’d be a certain kind of tension in the air. We started observing them and all we could see were robots, going back and forth getting menus, placing orders and lining up at the cashier to settle bills. So, we thought: ‘In this tech-savvy era, wouldn’t automating these tasks help our waiters be more *present*?’ If we could place an order, or settle a bill at the click of a button, wouldn’t that eliminate this tense atmosphere? And voila, Feed was born.”

Armed with that idea, Abi Elamin, along with co-founders Nour Moussalli and Moe Shibib, applied to the Qatar Business Incubation Center (QBIC), and in May 2016, the trio joined Wave 6 of the Lean StartUp Program, ranking first among eight other accepted teams. What followed was their fine-tuning of the Feed business model by combining their personal experience of usual pains at restaurants, with their ability and thirst for learning, using both to their benefit. “As people who were on the other side of the restaurant-service equation, we asked questions that challenged the norm in the restaurant business and realized that our problems as guests were a result of problems on the restaurant’s side!”

Elamin adds: “It was apparent that the implementation of interactive technology was a gap in the hotel-restaurant-café (HoReCa) industry. Furthermore, after we had

conducted our first round of market research at around 20 restaurant branches, we understood that the problem was repetitive, persistent, and not limited to Qatar, herein came a fresh concept that Feed came to address by identifying a gap in the industry worldwide. One of any restaurant’s main goals is to cater to the guests and retain them, and Feed’s purpose is to enhance the level of service at restaurants by minimizing the recurrent communication errors and reducing the mechanical tasks of waiters, such as getting menus and bills. By automating these processes through the use of technology, we’re giving waiters more time to attend to their guests on a personal, interactive level, thus breaking the ice between the guests and restaurant staff and bringing the human touch back to the fast-paced lifestyle.”

Given Nour Moussalli’s and Moe Shibib’s computer engineering degrees from

the Lebanese American University in Lebanon and City, University of London, respectively, a digital business idea was the logical way forward for the three co-founders. Moussalli had pursued a career in project management with EMC, in Dubai and Doha, prior to co-founding Feed as its Chief Technology Officer. Shibib worked in finance and media before joining the Feed team as a project manager. Elamin, a pharmacy and health sciences graduate from Ajman University of Science and Technology, had a media career that spanned 12 years. Commenting on their everyday roles, Elamin mentions, “Our three-member team is composed of multicultural, passionate, knowledge-driven and experience-hungry individuals, with a skillset that is rich with science, visual art, technology and finance. All of that has made it easy for each of us to wear multiple hats, which precisely is the formula of every startup. It is the glue that keeps us together. But, overall, Mousalli is more product-focused due to her computer engineering background that puts her in charge of everything related to technology and development. I’m more customer focused, which puts marketing, partnerships and sales in my turf, while Shibib manages sub-projects.” The trio is unanimous on the fact that neither of them wanted to pursue a traditional 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. job, explaining: “There’s so much to be done outside of those established industries! How many times do we find ourselves stuck in situations with a repetitive nuisance that hasn’t been solved? That’s where entrepreneurs

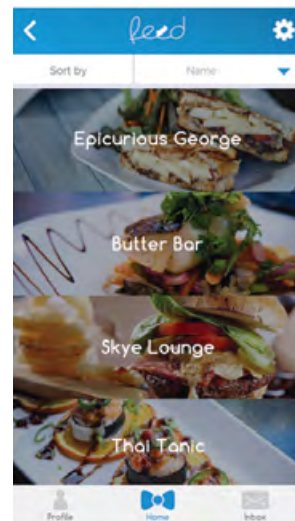
come in to save the day. Entrepreneurship is the way forward in identifying the gaps in every industry and creating solutions that solve pertinent problems in our daily lives.” They add that when one is introduced to the world of entrepreneurship with the freedom to imagine, research, create and watch the creation come alive and improve the quality of life of those around, “the satisfaction of doing your own thing is so rewarding, it’s like a bug. Once you’ve caught it, you can’t get rid of it and that’s why people go on to become serial entrepreneurs, reliving the experience again and again,” they say.

Commenting on the role that QBIC is playing in their growth, the trio is of the opinion that aside from the intensive coaching sessions, mentorship programs and

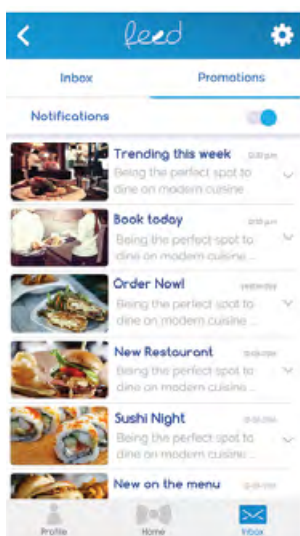
speaker series that invite successful entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs from around the globe to share their experiences with the incubatees, the QBIC’s team itself has forward-thinking people who have had their own entrepreneurial success. “The shared resources at QBIC, (both human and physical), cover a skillset that is very beneficial to startups in the discovery phase. We’re free to run our business as we see fit, but they’re there whenever needed, and they reach out to make sure we’re set and on the right track,” says Moussalli. She adds that the government of Qatar is making huge strides to create an ecosystem where entrepreneurship can thrive, with the testimony of the seriousness of their effort being the multiple incubators and initiatives



The Feed team with a QBIC representative



that have launched across the country in recent years. In her view, the next step for the government would be to induce an entrepreneurial mindset into the educational curriculum at the schooling age, adding, “That would be quite encouraging for youngsters to pursue entrepreneurship as a career option.” Both Elamin and Moussalli disagree with the commonly-held view that the US breeds more entrepreneurs since the culture has a differing criteria of rating success, compared to the Arab world or in Asia. Correcting the hypothesis, they stress that on the contrary, the region is filled with huge businesses today that started as small shops in the 1960s and 1970s. “The concept of entrepreneurship is an old one, and the ones who practice it are still described as risk takers today as they were before. When America was dubbed the land of opportunities that saw people migrating there to start businesses and settle as well, it was because the infrastructure there was laid to aid that movement to flourish. But the infrastructure in the Arab and Asian region sets a challenge to entrepreneurs. >>>



Up until recently, the logistics behind opening a new company, support from the community or governmental entities, and obtaining affordable office space were some of the biggest hurdles, but they're slowly ebbing away. Then there is the issue of expatriates who, though bringing healthy and vital inputs, can only reside in the Arab countries on work permits with employers, and cannot settle here. This is still an issue to be tackled."

In the trio's opinion, the most prominent challenge was selling a product that still did not exist. Describing what that entailed for the team, Moussalli says, "Until about a month ago, our system was still in the developmental phase. Our sales pitches and meetings were based on prototypes and demo kits. Restaurant owners and decision makers understood the value and welcomed our 'idea' but wouldn't sign any legally binding document unless they saw Feed working in action. That is understandable considering that the HoReCa industry is a late technology adopter, especially in the front-end

operation. Thankfully, we are now ready with a product, having been able to overcome this challenge very quickly." Another challenge for Feed was what Elamin categorizes as a 'Catch 22' one, and adds, "Consider this: restaurants need the users to fuel our platform, and the users need restaurants to use it in. We were to be caught in an endless loop had we not come up with our beta phase concept. We decided to run a month-long, beta testing, on weekends only, free for restaurants in different locations. Doing this allowed us to gather a decent database of users from different hotspots around Doha, as well as to test our system in real life and showcase it to users and restaurant owners. Finally, and as with any other startup in the world, sustaining ourselves financially was a challenge and what we did along the way was to learn from it and embrace it, which was how it got easier to overcome it. Being put in such a situation teaches you to become resourceful, self-reliant and minimalistic in the best way possible. You learn that not everything needs money, and with extra hard work, you can do wonders with very little." Speaking about the future, Elamin informs, "Feed is a scalable module beyond recognition! At this point, we have multiple stakeholders and we are focused on the here and now. Evolving the user experience within and around Feed while perfecting the current module is our main goal. Yet, we do have plans to scale regionally very soon. As for what the future holds, who knows?" Well, we certainly hope for good days ahead for Feed! ■

'TREP TALK

FEED CO-FOUNDERS
ABI ELAMIN, NOUR MOUSSALLI AND MOE SHIBIB

In terms of Feed's scope, which category of restaurants have you included in it, and why?

"Feed is focused on making every guest a regular at any restaurant, elevating waiters to dining consultants, evolving human interaction and user experience. We're driven by service excellence. So, our target then become full-service restaurants, which are mostly casual, and fine dining outlets, where the guests are seated, waited on and tended to."

With Qatar having a large number of expats, have you made any effort to make the choice of restaurants representative of the population mix?

"The restaurants we are targeting are based on their type of service, regardless of the audience they cater to. The service in any restaurant is delivered to a human being at the end of the day, which is why our launching platform has both English and Arabic interfaces to cater to us-

ers of all nationalities and backgrounds. This way we ensure that the users have a variety of restaurants where the elevated level of service is applied through Feed."

"Feed helps restaurants understand the habits of their customers which enables them to accurately target specific audiences and cater to current needs, while anticipating future trends."

Can you take us through this module of your business?

"Currently, restaurants are able to generate reports that specify what their best-selling item is, but they don't know to whom they are selling it, which is vital in the service industry nowadays. The sales reports we generate will allow them to match this existing information against the demographic distribution of their guests. Restaurants will be able to understand the internal environment of their premises! We can only imagine how this intelligence can help in designing their promotions and updating their menus based on their guests' habits and trends. At this point, we haven't developed this module fully yet since we will need to study the behavior of our system once it has launched. We are looking forward to seeing this in action, as this by far is the most interesting feature we are providing restaurants. So you'll need to stay tuned to know more about this."



Feed co-founders
Abi Elamin,
Nour Moussalli
and Moe Shibib

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Sustainable ventures

How to create long-lasting success in family-run businesses

By Nahel Selo

FAMILY BUSINESSES surround us daily, from local mom-and-pop stores to the millions of SMEs that strengthen economies, to the bigger household names. When considering the hierarchy of management, many often think it's a given that the next generation is to take over without hesitation. The reality is that a lot more goes into an enterprise's continued success over the years, and, as family businesses expand from their humble beginnings to full-fledged organizations, a balance needs to be learned while facing unique performance and governance challenges. Here are six lessons we learnt at Sedar, which started as a family enterprise, and is now celebrating 125 years of successful business and growth:

1. MAINTAIN A VISION

A vision is what allows a company to move forward by giving everyone working in the organization a direction to follow. It helps focus on a unified and streamlined future. A clear vision makes it easier when hiring new

staff, as everyone is aligned in the right way, and they need to ensure to do the same. At a young age, our fathers would always tell us how important it was to stick together as a family- and as a working team.

2. EMBRACING SUCCESSION- BOTH AS A PERPETUAL PROCESS AND AS A CRITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

When Sedar first started in 1891, there were five employees. Now, as we celebrate 125 years in business, the organization is a leader in its field, with over 3000 employees. My father, also the CEO, would always talk about Sedar as a family, and never as a workforce. He always adopted an open-door policy, in the literal sense. Everyone, regardless of his or her position within the company could walk in for guidance or help at any given time.

3. DELIVERING STRATEGIC CHANGE

In the case of Sedar, strategic change continues to be directed by the CEO, and encouraged and executed by the

team. Albeit challenging at times, change is necessary, as it involves moving the organization or program forward to create or change something, and is effective once we learn to embrace it. Some plans have been and continue to be created out of the need for the organization to move in a certain direction, and other plans develop organically; it's all about finding a balance.

4. STAY TUNED TO THE BIG PICTURE

Change can be a difficult process and sometimes requires time. When rebranding and franchising, the main concern was losing our long-term and loyal employees. To prevent this, it was a lengthy guided step-by-step process to explain and allow the team to understand the new vision for Sedar. It's not always easy, but it is critical to maintain the longevity of the company. Any successful change in a company will necessarily involve communicating and repeating mission and vision statements, which helps prevent people from becoming discouraged in the event of small failures along the way.

5. ENGAGE ALL OF YOUR EMPLOYEES

When in a family business, it's always important to make room for non-family members to shine; otherwise, this will bring forward a lot of conflict and wariness; therefore a highly demotivated workforce. Leaders should continue to highlight the strengths of the strategic plans and involve important stakeholders in the process. Additionally, by engaging employees and volunteers, it will help them to recognize and take ownership of the change. Involving employees also helps to provide more minds to prevent possible problems.

6. COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Just like in any relationship, communication is key for success and delivering a message. In the case of Sedar, in order to drive the team forward and have everyone aligned, it required communicating the reasons why change was underway and responding in a detailed manner to any question that was asked. Not only does this build loyalty, but trust and appreciation, as that's what makes a business last longer and a team remain solid.



Nahel Selo is the Creative Director of Sedar Global. Founded in 1891, Sedar is one of the top global companies in window treatments and wall coverings industries with operations in Bahrain, Oman, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Al Ain, Qatar, KSA and Egypt. www.sedarglobal.com

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