

Sami Hourani: The doctor with an entrepreneurial streak



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Image: TAKREEM

The entrepreneurial spirit takes one in all kinds of unexpected directions. This story is of such an instance.

Jordanian Dr. Sami Hourani, who graduated from medical school, went on to launch not one but two online platforms serving different sectors, with focus on education and art.

He was given the Young Entrepreneur Award during this weekend's TAKREEM Award Ceremony in Kuwait for his contributions to Arab society.

Among his notable achievements is the creation of the online education platform For9a.com (meaning 'opportunity' in Arabic), a site that helps connect young people to education opportunities that vary

from scholarships, training, conferences, exchange programs, and other curricular and extracurricular educational activities.

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An opportunity for Arab young people

Speaking to *AMEinfo*, Hourani revealed a rather interesting start to his journey than one would expect.

“My career started as a medical doctor,” he said. “I graduated with a medical degree from Jordan then I decided to seize my medical career and go into social enterprises and social entrepreneurship.”

He started For9a.com during his university days as a blog. “**For9a.com** was a blog where we post opportunities related to education and capacity building and career transformation. Eventually it started growing in the region – we started in Jordan.”

According to Hourani, the site reaches more than 8 million young people in the Middle East and North Africa.

“Right now, For9a.com is the number one site for young people [locally] to find education opportunities that can fill some gaps in their educational profile,” he noted.

Hourani plans on further developing the site to make it as optimized and useful for prospective users as possible.

“With For9a.com, we are currently working on introducing aptitude testing – online aptitude testing – and this will help people get personalized opportunities according to their passions and interests,” he said. “We are using AI and other machine learning technologies to improve this test and make it more and more personalized to the country and to the gender and user.”

Hourani is also the founder and the executive director of the regional organization “Leaders of Tomorrow” and the new and creative qualitative research methodology FADFED.

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Art meets e-commerce

But that’s not all. Hourani is also dabbling with an e-commerce offering, dubbed **Souq Fann** (meaning ‘art market’ in Arabic). It is the MENA’s number one e-commerce portal for handicrafts and local art products.

“We started Souq Fann 3 months ago, so we’re still young in the field.”

When asked about the challenges he expects to face in the MENA online retail market, he said:

“[Online] payment and shipping are the main challenges in the [local] market.”

Indeed, online payment in the MENA market remains an obstacle, as faith in online transaction security remains slim. According to 2017 data by Go-Gulf, cash on delivery accounts for 76% of MENA e-commerce orders.

“Right now, we are shipping inside Jordan and we are aiming to ship internationally very soon. The site’s main purpose is to connecting the artists and artisans in Jordan and the Middle East and North Africa.”

Breaking into the GCC and into countries like the UAE and Saudi could prove very beneficial for Souq Fann, where there is a growing number of online sales being made every year. Most artisan work and handicrafts in the GCC are sold by Instagram influencers and sellers. By entering this market, Souq Fann could provide artisans and artists the opportunity to sell and market their product on an optimized platform that fits their needs perfectly.

This proves an ideal financial opportunity for prospective investors, as we’ve seen similar platforms such as Souq.com and noon grow from a humble start into something much bigger. Souq.com created enough impact to even attract foreign rivals such as Amazon, and was bought by them last year.

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