

SAUDI ARABIA

THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY IS TAKING POSITIONS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE PLETHORA OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES NOW COMING TO THE KINGDOM COURTESY OF THE VISION 2030



Expanding Globally

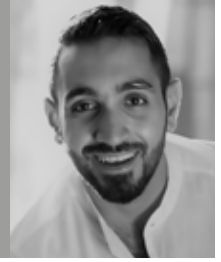
idworks Global delivers expert interior design, fit-out and furnishing solutions with professional excellence.



INTERVIEW WITH ENG. MOHAMMED ASHA

**Chief Executive Officer
IDWORKS**

Saudi and foreign companies are rushing to take advantage of the opportunities that Vision 2030 is bringing to the market, and one company that has seen its growth turbocharged is the fit-out and office design market leader Idworks. Its founder and CEO explains what it takes to win in this new yet competitive market, both in Saudi Arabia and beyond



As new businesses, both local and foreign, spring up around Saudi Arabia, those firms providing innovative office design and furnishings are doing a roaring trade.

Saudi companies are being created or expanding their existing office facilities while international ones are opening up to meet the requirement that their regional headquarters must be located in Riyadh.

One of those design and furnishing companies is Idworks which after ten years in operation is going from strength to strength, one of which is its ability to strike a fine balance while serving both types of clients, says CEO Mohammed Asha.

"There are some differences between the foreign and Saudi markets and you have to make it in the way that the Saudis will like it and the foreigners will like it," he explains.

"So you need to make the workspace with open areas and collaboration areas and they're happy with the quality but you need to add a touch of luxury for the locals. Foreigners are here to work so everything is practical and they're not into luxury details, but the Saudis want to see that travertine marble.

"You just have to find the right equilibrium and we know how to do that for everyone," the executive says.

Rapid Expansion

Since its founding in 2015, the firm has learned many other lessons which have fueled its success. One of those is how the market has expanded so rapidly, especially after Vision 2030 got into gear.

When Idworks started out their job was basically to come up with a design, implement the plans on site and turn it over to the client.

Now things are more complicated.

"These days all the projects are fast-tracked and you need to finish a project of 6,000 square meters in four months while logic says it should take more than twice as long," Asha says.

"At the same time you must focus on a lot of things like quality assurance, material purchases from overseas, and logistics so the pressure is on. And then you have several layers of executives who have to approve the design. But we've developed our operation so all the departments and all resources are in tune and on time."

Prestigious Projects

Idworks is dedicated to the idea that workspaces that are creatively designed using fresh thinking boost employee engagement, productivity, and in doing so, grow overall company performance, research shows.

The company's teams work closely with clients on each step in the process to discover their work place needs and their design, material, furnishings and color scheme preferences, always in an innovative manner.

"When we started our vision was to research new ideas for how we can design and build office spaces in a fresh and correct way for maximum efficiency," the CEO explains. "That was our mission and it continues being what we are looking for.

"Before, it was all closed offices or cubicles and everyone was working by themselves without interacting with their colleagues. It wasn't easy at first but over the past three or four year it has become a trend that everyone appreciates and needs."

Although the company also designs and furnishes for the residential sector, its work in offices has caught the attention of both public and private entities and as Vision 2030 developed, Idworks won contracts with large government organizations like the non-profit Misk Foundation.

It went on to become involved in a range of other prestigious projects designing for the headquarters of Red Sea Global, one of the world's most ambitious regenerative tourism destinations, along with the Kingdom's most famous giga project, NEOM.



Vertical Integration

This year the company finished the headquarters of the Savvy Games Group, a video game investment, development, publishing and e-sports company based in Riyadh which is a subsidiary of the Public Investment Fund.

"That was one of the best projects we've done and it's running now and everything is perfect. Last year we did the Saudi Space Agency's tower, very futuristic and distinctive with a lot of new ideas. It gave us a lot of prestige in the market," Asha says.

In addition to Saudi Arabia, Idworks has a full office in Dubai to handle mostly residential developments in the United Arab Emirates and another operation in Jordan which serves as a back office for the engineering department.

Looking ahead, the CEO says plans call for a holding company to be activated by the end of this year. "We'll start taking some existing companies here and there and invest in startups. We already have factories for glass and aluminum which are now operating so we're becoming vertically integrated.

"We also have an IT company as well and a consulting firm, plus a software programming company. Our idea is that within five years the holding company will be stable, active across the Gulf region with a really impressive market share and then we can go to the stock market."

Meanwhile, Vision 2030 is keeping the economy rolling along at a breakneck pace, construction is booming and that means more projects for Idworks, the executive predicts.

"Vision 2030 is magnificent. I was born and raised here so I've seen how the country has changed and what the Vision is all about. And I know that when they say it will happen, it will happen. This country is only at the beginning!"

SAUDI ECONOMY TO SURGE AHEAD

VISION 2030 SET TO POWER A BUSINESS REVOLUTION IN THE SAUDI KINGDOM

Saudi Arabia is generating news stories around the globe every day about the awe-inspiring economic, social and governance transformation the country is undergoing thanks to the reforms and mammoth projects embedded in Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's Vision 2030.

With the Middle East's largest economy and the world's major oil and gas producers, the Kingdom is the richest in the region and now the government is spending billions of dollars to ensure it reaches its ambitious goals contained in the Vision.

A visit to the capital, Riyadh, provides clear evidence of the transitions taking place.

Construction cranes punctuate views of the skyline as the city stretches out beyond its traditional borders, foreign business people crowd the newly-opened luxury hotels for meetings with local partners and a shopping mall seems to pop up every other week.

And in the coming years, the capital will experience the Expo 2030 world's fair and be the main host city for the World Cup four years later. Major projects are also underway in other cities such as Jeddah, Dammam, Medina and Makkah.

Announced nine years ago, the plan has three main goals: slash the country's heavy economic dependence on petroleum by diversifying its economy; fully develop sectors such as financial services, infrastructure, education, recreation, entertainment and tourism to world standards; and get more women and young people into the labor market.

A glance at just some of Vision 2030's economic targets gives an idea of how ambitious the plan is: boost the GDP share of non-oil exports from 9 per cent to 50 per cent; increase private sector contribution to the GDP from 40 per cent to 65 per cent; and raise foreign direct investment contribution to the GDP from 4 per cent to 6 per cent.

On the labor front, the government is working hard to increase women's partici-

participation in the workforce from 22 per cent to 30 per cent, and lower the jobless rate from more than 12 per cent to 7 per cent.

In a further bid to modernize the nation of 38 million, the government has taken giant strides in digitizing all its operations so citizens and foreign residents alike can more easily negotiate the wave of new rules and regulations aimed at smoothing the changes set to be in place by 2030.

But it's not only about the economy and streamlining officialdom. There is also a fun element to Vision 2030 with the Kingdom hosting regional and global artists at brand new entertainment venues, organizing prestigious art festivals, and staging major athletic events in football, motor racing, tennis, golf and other sports.

And locals and international travelers alike are delighting in Saudi Arabia's largely unknown tourist attractions now being ambitiously promoted such as glittering Red Sea resorts, the ancient city of AlUla and Riyadh's bustling 21st century malls.

In addition, Saudis, foreign residents and visitors are all abuzz about the magnificent, so-called "giga-projects" like NEOM, a purpose-built, 10,000-square-mile urban area on the Red Sea budgeted at \$500 billion.

Planners say it will encompass a floating industrial complex, global trade hub, tourism infrastructure and a linear city, The



MOSAED
KAREEM ALEZEZY

CEO OF
SUNTECH

"VISION 2030 SHIFTED I.T. FIRMS FROM JUST RESELLING SOFTWARE TO CREATING NEW PLATFORMS"

Line, stretching 110 miles near the Red Sea, and all of it powered by renewable energy.

Fintech Growth

All the economic and financial activity spawned by Vision 2030, coupled with the scheme's heavy emphasis on technology, has created the perfect playing field for companies like Sun Technologies or Suntech which is pioneering fintech services in the Kingdom.

"When we started this company back in 2012 we were just trying to redistribute some accounting software based on internal networks and servers, and also doing some networks for businesses," says CEO Mosaed Kareem Alezezy.

"In fact, fintech wasn't even a word in those days. Then along came the Vision and its strong enablement of IT like boosting internet speed. That shifted the whole





business from reselling software into designing and developing platforms to sell to businesses.

The executive says the company found a huge demand for fintech solutions across the banking and financial services industries which turn to Suntech for services such as risk and credit assessment, monitoring investments, conducting due diligence properly and other tasks.

Along with providing fintech solutions, the company's services cover AI tools, web and app development, graphic design, cybersecurity, IT and cloud consultations, and white label solutions perfect for fintechs, agencies, and digital-first businesses.

A sampling of its projects include the Qarar Crowdfunding app that links land owners, real estate developers and investors through a platform offering debt instruments to finance real estate developments.

Another app, S-POS, is a point of sale system for retail stores and car service stations focusing on engine oil change services, while the Qaraark app provides comprehensive due diligence services including credit assessments and decision-making reports.

There are other platforms for buying and sell automobiles, wedding planning, beauty salon appointment management, and crowdfunding for debt instruments issuance in compliance with Islamic law.

Suntech currently employs 15 people and posts annual revenue of between \$6 million and \$12 million.

"Concerning staff, our biggest challenge a few years ago was the scarcity of talent but now it's actually establishing the trust needed to conduct business properly," the executive says.

"We have found that it's better for everyone to do business with people we know as we are dealing with financial instruments, investments, etc. and all of this has to be kept well within the company."

Alenezy sees his company going beyond

Saudi Arabia through a natural process and compares it with Apple whose technologies were developed just for the sake of technology, not to conquer the world.

"Our services will spread without us having to trumpet their advantages and convenience because we are presenting a technology that is for all the financial institutions and players worldwide," he explains.

"There might be certain differences in regulations, compliance, audits and performance in regions and countries but not so much as to have a negative effect on distribution."

The CEO sees cybersecurity as a real growth sector as it will require increasing attention with new rules and functions and is looking forward to Suntech introducing more AI-based cybersecurity technologies.

Al Enezy is also bullish on Saudi Arabia as a regional center for the fintech industry and its supporting sectors.

"There is no other country in the region which has the strength in high tech, IT, AI and all the rest of it when it comes to resources, geographical position, GDP, market size, international trade and investment," he argues.

"And the Kingdom is secure when it comes to the government support for what we are doing in technology taking place in a safe and dynamic environment for venture capital."

New Rules

Among Vision 2030's major consequences was the almost total overhaul of the country's legal framework with particular attention paid to ways to attract foreign investment, boost employee rights and make the business environment more efficient and transparent.

These legal reforms including significant changes in such areas as corporate law, investment law, labor law and commercial



"FIRMS SEE THAT RULES HAVE CHANGED TO MAKE IT EASIER TO ENTER THE SAUDI MARKET"

law which foreigners interested in investing in the Kingdom need to understand clearly.

And while everyone, locals and long-time expatriates alike, acknowledges that it is now so much easier for foreigners to deal with the bureaucracy, they also advise those coming to the country to engage local legal experts to facilitate the many necessary steps.

"Over the past 12 years that is exactly what we have been doing," says Dr. Abdulaziz Alshaymi, the CEO of the The Fattin Law Firm, "working as liaison providers between foreign companies and local governmental agencies like the ministries of finance, commerce and investment."

"The reasons these companies are insisting on entering the Kingdom are many, but near the top of the list is that the rules have been changed to make it easier to do that and, of course, the fact that it's a huge and wealthy market."

Another reason is that the Saudi government requires foreign corporations to base their regional headquarters in the country if they want to be able to contract with government agencies and entities.

Analysts say the primary goal of this rule is to stimulate economic growth so as to reach Vision 2030's objective in reducing reliance on earnings from the oil and gas industries with the government offering incentives such as a 30-year tax holiday.



“We have seen the most interest in moving to Saudi Arabia from companies in the construction, medical and IT sectors and the leading countries these firms are from include China, India, the United Kingdom, the United States and some other Arab nations like Jordan and Egypt,” the CEO says.

“Most of them want to get their license and commercial registration to do business as soon as possible.

“Although some of them have the briefest understanding of Vision 2030 once we show them that everything has been changed by the Ministry of Investment for foreign companies they realize that the country is wide open for investment.”

Alsuhaymi explains that many foreign executives do not have enough background in the Saudi culture and little knowledge of how to go about tasks like recruiting. Therefore, they need to hire people with local expertise to make everything go easier.

Vision 2030 has allowed local law firms like Fattin to get in touch with international law firms and with the ease in the regulations the local firms can work with foreign law partners and provide extensive information on how they can help their foreign clients to open businesses in the Kingdom.

“Another plus for the Saudi side is that local firms get to work with these foreign companies coming here to obtain their know-how and develop in a more modern way their systems, policies and procedures,” he points out.

“So it’s a win-win situation for everyone whether it’s a foreign company expanding their business into the Kingdom, a local company gaining knowledge from the outside or for Saudi Arabia itself which benefits in our objective of broadening our economy.”

Innovative Products

In the often harsh climate of Saudi Arabia air quality is of vital importance whether inside or outside and Climatech has been operating in that sector for the past 30 years accumulating experience and earning a stellar reputation.

“We started with two main business pillars in 1995,” recalls CEO Bashar Albahli. “The first was air treatment which is everything involving air purification, humidification, dehumidification and outdoor cooling.

“In short, everything related to air except HVAC and air conditioning itself,” he adds. “Our second pillar is solar water heating



“THE GOVERNMENT IS VERY SUPPORTIVE FOR INNOVATIVE LOCAL CONTENT PRODUCTS ”

and no one back then whether a service of product provider, outsider or business was thinking about solar power to heat water in the winter.”

Some of its earliest projects involved solar heating for domestic and swimming pool water at large-scale accommodation compounds. Installed 25 years ago, they required a minor upgrade just last year.

As a pioneer in the sector Climatech was clearly ahead of the game when Vision 2030 came along with its emphasis on renewable energy and energy efficient products.

“Lots of government entities were formed to boost this Vision towards its goals as fast and as efficiently as possible. So we started working with them and the Saudi Energy Efficiency Center because we wanted to diversify our range of products,” the executive explains.

“We’re basically a consulting/trading company supplying advice and selling imported air treatment and solar heating products. Certainly, Vision 2030 had an effect on our business as our employee numbers rose from nine to around 30 between 2016 and now.

“And over the same period our revenue



went from \$1 million to some \$5 million,” Albahli adds. “Our main customers are contractors who reach out of us after they land a project either for consultation or a specific product they need which we provide from prestigious global brands.”

Along with humidifiers, dehumidifiers, air purifiers and solar water heaters Climatech’s range of products includes heat pumps, tanks, ventilation equipment. The company is now moving into electrical vehicle chargers.

The company installed its first EV charger in Boulevard Riyadh in 2019 well ahead of the curve as its policy has always been to try to create awareness of new and innovative products. Since that debut Climatech has installed many more at large companies, hotels, hospitals and other sites.

He now want to move into local manufacturing of some of the products it supplies such as air treatment equipment and solar water heaters. They plan to manufacture EV chargers once the market matures.

“With our current growth and the way the economy is going here I believe we can increase our profits by some 300 per cent over the next three years and there are still products we have yet to introduce,” Albahli says.

“My advice for those foreign businesses thinking of setting up manufacturing here is to first determine that there is a demand. Secondly, Saudi Arabia is a neighbor to many countries which you can rely on for sales and thirdly, the government will be very supportive of your efforts when it is local content.

“Any company related to energy efficiency or green energy will be very appealing except perhaps for photovoltaic because there are many here already doing that. But if you have something really new and innovative in this field, Saudi Arabia is the place,” he says.

Fast Recovery

A major restructuring after the traumas





AHMAD AL-AMOUDI
CEO



“THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR IN SAUDI ARABIA IS WITNESSING AN UNPRECEDENTED BOOM”

of the pandemic years has been instrumental.

to the recent success of Dar Al-Najat Medical Technology which supplies sophisticated medical equipment and other products to dozens of hospitals throughout the Kingdom, says CEO Ahmad Al-Amoudi.

“I took over this standalone subsidiary of the Deyarat Group founded in 1998 as they wanted to grow in the medical field, relying on my 20 years in the field.

During the Pandemic, the company faced huge challenges, like most distributors, as the government directed all their budget toward supporting the pandemic while most of the countries has suspended export of pandemic related products,” he recalls.

“So we took the decision to restructure and get into medical consumables and supplies as well as digital products which is the future in this sector, so we engaged with new vendors.”

One of the strategic new business lines he decided to target was Hemodialysis. The firm cooperated with Bain Medical from China, one of the largest specialized manufacturers in this field. This has supported the goal of the Kingdom’s Vision 2030 toward offering high quality healthcare services with efficient spending.

Winning the contract in 2022, Dar Al-Najat was on the road back to success. This year the company has expanded its business line again, this time into surgical supplies and equipment, digital health care solutions, expanded ICU equipment offerings and other



products.

“Under Vision 2030, localization and spending efficiency are two of the key pillars that need to be considered by distributors, manufacturers and investors. Yet, the Saudi medical market is one the highest regulated markets in the region and the world,” he explains.

“Additional strategic move by the Saudi health authorities is adopting national strategy for prevention an early diagnosis,” he adds.

“There is also the new emphasis on digital health. Dar Al-Najat has entered this by offering Home Care remote monitoring from Foracare Suisse. Also, tracking of blood products and blood transfusion cross-matching using RFID Technology from HealthRFID, Australia.”

Dar Al-Najat’s product line includes laparoscopic surgery, dialysis, endocrinology, respiratory, neonatology, mortuary, medical education and biomedical testing & calibration.

Its suppliers come from the USA, Germany, Canada, the UK, Italy, Turkey and China.

“Part of the corrective action that has taken place is studying the market and adjusting the company’s salaries to maintain our outstanding team members and attract new talented candidates,” Al Amoudi explains.

With the new business lines, fresh approach to management and more opportunities under Vision 2030, the CEO says he is optimistic of continuing success.

“Our goal is to play a strategic role in the 2030 Vision and be part of the success under the guidance of our board and the dedication of our team members.”

Opportunities Galore

Harnessing the power of the sun served as the initial success for Amjad Al-Sahly, the CEO of Desert Sun for Contracting which in four short years has established itself firmly in one sector and has now expanded and di-



AMJAD AL-SAHLY
CEO OF
DESERT SUN FOR
CONTRACTING

“I FOLLOWED MBS’ ADVICE, AND IN THREE MONTHS MY NAPKIN FACTORY WAS DOING VERY WELL”

versified into three others.

“I came back to Saudi Arabia after graduating in the United States with a bachelor degree in energy engineering, one of the first Saudis to do so and I began to search for a solar energy company I could work for,” he recalls.

“But I found out that all the companies in the sector were largely from outside like Egypt or Jordan. So I asked myself as a Saudi energy engineer why can’t I do this on my own and I started in 2019 taking on projects without an office.”

Business ceased with the arrival of the pandemic but when the situation eased, the young entrepreneur officially opened Desert Sun for Contracting in 2021, gathered a team, received a government qualification of solar operations and landed solar energy projects with a private agricultural company and with a university.

Al-Sahly then had the idea to carry out testing and commissioning for high voltage electrical substations around the country, opened a department for performing those tasks and was soon doing very well.

“By the end of 2021 the solar energy and substation businesses were going great and continued to do so for the next two years and I started a trading company importing things like paper napkins and cleaning supplies for which I saw in niche in the market,” he says.

“Almost everything was imported from outside the country, from China mainly, but with the government encouraging local manufacturing they give you everything you need to get set up operations and so we did.

“Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman is always saying that one of his goals of Vision 2030 is to give the people the courage to make the country number one in the world in industry, I followed his advice and in just three months my napkin factory did very well,” the executive explains.





That was followed by a production plant for cleaning supplies which has become the main business. In total, the group employs around 100 people and annual revenue ranges between \$4 million and \$5 million.

Al-Sahly says he would be interested in partnering with foreign companies active in his group's industries noting that "when you mine gold from the mountain you need others to refine it and take it to market."

"There are so many opportunities created in Saudi Arabia by Vision 2030 and it seems the whole world is focusing on Riyadh. If someone wants to invest now is the time because things are changing so rapidly," he says.

"You'll find no place better than the Kingdom to make money. If you arrive today with \$1 million to invest, by the end of the year you'll have made \$4 million. Whatever business you're involved in, just bring it to Saudi Arabia with a strong heart and you are going to be very happy!"

Another World

In a country as wealthy as Saudi Arabia, it stands to reason that the financial services sector would play an important role in the

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economy and that the government would ensure that it all runs smoothly.

According to analysts, the goals of the financial services sector in the Kingdom are to obtain financial and economic stability and enhance the investment environment, and provide funding for economic activity with special attention paid to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Further objectives include improving private sector performance, increase and diversify income sources, boost job numbers for Saudi citizens, raise the standard of living and improve the quality of life.

These targets have largely been achieved and with the advent of Vision 2030, the financial services sector and the financial advisory market have undergone deep changes with the latter expected to experience spectacular growth.

Experts who study the financial advisory market say assets under management should reach \$200 billion this year and largely maintain that figure through 2029.

One executive who has years of experience in Saudi Arabia's financial sector is Hani S. Al-Shadoukhi, the founder and CEO of Dar Almayda Financial Advisors who began his financial career at a local bank decades ago.

"But after three years I asked myself why I was spending my life as an employee so even though my salary was good I decided to leave banking and open a construction company because I love construction," he recalls.

"I had some money so I parked it in the stocks of two of the best companies in the country but then the financial crisis of 2008 hit, the whole market collapsed and I immediately lost half my money."

Al-Shadoukhi wound up his brief career in construction and joined a finance company as the general manager and after another job change made the fateful decision to open his own business.

Armed with two degrees from the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran in financial advisory and management advisory, he acquired the proper licenses from the Ministry of Commerce and opened for business.

"We started raising funds for finance companies and went on from there presenting filings to the Saudi Central Bank. I don't like doing this kind of work because it takes about six months to complete the project but fund raising for me is very easy," he explains.



"THE FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT HAS CHANGED, THE CENTRAL BANK HAS A MORE OPEN MIND"

With over 35 years of experience in the Saudi finance sector, he was able to obtain the finance support for his new endeavour and hence has been contributing to the major changes that the Saudi economy is undertaking.

Al-Shadoukhi credits Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and his advisers for thoroughly modernizing the Kingdom's financial sector and cites the creation of mortgages as one important change.

He also says there is much more opportunity now for contracting, trade, industry and every other sector of the economy and there is an increase in the demand for funding.

"The central bank, for example, came up with something called crowd lending in which a group of lenders can access a platform that will evaluate every opportunity and provide a rating.

"The whole environment of the financial sector has changed and the central bank has a much more open mind to renovate that environment to suit the needs of the industry. Now everything is done on one's cellphone and you sign electronically. It's another world," the CEO says.

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ELITE CONSTRUCTION EXPANDS STRATEGIC ROLE IN SAUDI ARABIA'S VISION 2030 DEVELOPMENT DRIVE

Elite Construction, a leading regional engineering and construction company, has reaffirmed its commitment to advancing Saudi Arabia's ambitious Vision 2030 by leveraging its technical expertise, diversified investments, and

proven execution capabilities to deliver transformative infrastructure and commercial projects across the Kingdom.

Elite Construction, founded in 2013, is a regional leader in engineering, construction, and

project management, delivering high-quality commercial, industrial, and infrastructure projects across Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the GCC, with a strong record of on-time, on-budget execution.



Hani AlKhiary
Managing Partner of Elite Construction

BUILDING ON REGIONAL SUCCESS FOR A LONG-TERM VISION

Mr. Hani AlKhiary, Managing Partner of Elite Construction, noted that the Saudi branch's rapid growth reflects the company's proven track record in Egypt and across GCC markets, combined with Saudi Arabia's robust economic climate and fertile investment environment.

"The Kingdom's visionary strategy extends far beyond 2030, and we are already witnessing its positive impact on every sector of the economy. Our role is to be part of this momentum—delivering excellence today while building for the opportunities of tomorrow," AlKhiary said.



Amir El-Sheikh
CEO of Elite Construction

ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE AT THE HEART OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Eng. Amir El Sheikh, CEO of Elite Construction, highlighted the company's pivotal engineering and execution role in driving the construction and development of commercial facilities that are central to the Kingdom's modernization plans.

"Our mission aligns directly with the vision of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, under the guidance of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. We are committed to delivering projects that serve the long-term prosperity of the nation while fostering a sustainable and thriving investment environment," said El Sheikh.



Mahmoud Harbia
GM of Elite Construction

DIVERSIFIED INVESTMENTS DRIVING ECONOMIC IMPACT

Mr. Mahmoud Harbia, General Manager of Elite Construction, underscored the company's diversified approach to the Saudi and Gulf markets, revealing significant investments in information technology, industrial security, and cybersecurity, alongside pioneering leadership in specialized and high-tech project management in partnership with leading GCC telecom operators.

"These advanced technology and infrastructure capabilities run in parallel with our core construction operations, positioning Elite Construction as a strategic engineering and execution partner for high-value economic projects that empower the private sector and strengthen Saudi Arabia's position as a global investment hub," Harbia stated.

Commitment to the Kingdom's Prosperity

In closing, the company's leadership extended their heartfelt wishes for continued progress and prosperity to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its people, under the wise leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the founder and architect of Vision 2030.



CONSTRUCTION IS SET TO GROW FASTER

PUBLIC WORKS AND HUGE FLAGSHIP PROJECTS TAKE THE SECTOR EVEN FURTHER

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's Vision 2030's array of giga-projects has captured the attention and the awe of the entire world as hundreds of billions of dollars are being poured into such developments as NEOM, The Line, the Red Sea Project, Diriyah, King Salman Park and half-a-dozen others.

Then there are the facilities for Expo 2030 and sports events like the 2034 World Cup and Formula 1 racetracks. And these are just the ones generating headlines.

At the same time, the Kingdom is also experiencing a surge in government-funded construction of new airports, highways, seaports, hospitals and other civil infrastructure, while private investors are putting up office complexes, hotels, residential developments, entertainment venues and shopping complexes.

Analysts who have studied the construction market estimate that it is worth now around \$70 billion and should hit at least \$90 billion by 2029 as it rises over 5 per cent at a compound annual rate of growth.

Industry experts say it is certain that the Saudi building sector is emerging stronger than ever from the sharp drop triggered by Covid-19 and the resulting plunge in oil prices with a record number of new construction projects announced and awarded.

Along with stumping up the cash for much of this, the government is urging Saudi citizens to jump into the housing mar-



CHARLES TRAD

CEO OF UNIMAC

“UNIMAC IS A FAMILY BUSINESS WITH AN INHERENT PASSION TO GROW TO ANOTHER LEVEL”

ket while there is also a rising demand for offices as existing businesses expand, new enterprises open and foreign businesses arrive to take advantage of this new day in the Kingdom's fortunes.

At the same time, the country's young, expanding demographic and rising income are fueling consumer spending in Saudi Arabia with the profusion of new shopping malls, restaurants and retail outlets popping up across the country as clear evidence that the Vision is transforming the Kingdom.

Inherent Passion

One of the giants in the Kingdom's civil engineering sector with almost half a century of experience is UNIMAC, or United Maintenance and Contracting Company, which is involved in many of Vision 2030's stellar projects. Focused on the design, construction and maintenance of infrastructure and roads, this Class 1 heavy civil and infrastructure construction company was founded in 1979, according to newly-appointed CEO Charles Trad.

Having held senior posts in North America, at Acciona in heavy civil and infrastructure and, separately, within the nuclear industry, and in the Middle East with Ferrovial and Omrania, the executive was invited earlier this year to lead Unimac through Saudi Arabia's next phase.



“What attracted me about UNIMAC was that like any private business they have an inherent passion about growing to another level,” he explains. “I already knew the owners for several years and we not only saw eye to eye on many things but I admired their passion and I was offered the job.

“I am here to take whatever we have achieved in almost 50 years and build on that and make it even better and bring my experience from other markets to the table.”

UNIMAC's construction division handles major heavy civils and infrastructure works including everything from highways, airport runways to Formula 1 Race Tracks. The company also carries out major mechanical, electrical and plumbing tasks, while other departments tackle substructures, landscaping, and irrigation tanks and networks.

One of its most prestigious projects was building the Formula 1 track in the Red Sea city of Jeddah which hosted the first Saudi Arabian Grand Prix in 2021 which garnered high praise from the Formula 1 drivers.

“After that first race, the drivers said it was the track with the gold standard because of out of all the tracks in the world, the Jeddah Track has the highest coefficient of friction which enables the driver to accelerate and take turns faster,” the



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executive recalls.

“So we were subsequently invited to bid for the circuit and related infrastructure for the Qiddiya Speed Park Race track which is targeted to host its first Grand Prix in 2028 and we are now about one year into that project. We also constructed the Formula E racetrack in Diriyah.”

Along with the high standard of infrastructure and other works it performs, UNIMAC is also proud of its ability to complete projects in record time such as the recently completed King Khaled Road diversion to which diverted 4 + 4 lanes to 5 + 5 lanes over a distance of 3.7 kms and was completed in record time, thanks to the full collaboration of client, consultants and UNIMAC teams.

“That speaks for our engineering ability and the dynamics of this company’s team,” Trad says.

The company is betting on additional projects in infrastructure, transport, power, water and logistics thanks to projects linked to the Vision 2030. It is bidding on two large airport contracts in Riyadh and is completing its scope on the Oxagon and targeting new work at the floating port city that is part of NEOM on the Red Sea.

“Right now we are in the final stages to close one project and we are hoping to get another one there. When the port eventually opens, ships sailing for Dubai from the West can avoid having to go around the Arabian Peninsula and up the Gulf and just dock at Oxagon as much of the Dubai bound cargo ends up in the Kingdom anyway,” he explains.

Having been raised in Kuwait, Trad understands regional and Saudi culture and the mindset very well and describes the people of the Kingdom as “dynamic”. He is deeply impressed by the scale and pace of the national transformation under



Vision 2030 and by the energy of the Saudi people driving it.

“If the current pace holds, Saudi professionals will soon carry the full mandate; their technical mastery, professionalism, and responsibility are firmly established. I am just overwhelmed by the talent out there and I am so happy to see it.”

Long Experience

Vision 2020 smoothed the path of the Ozod Group on its way from a small time investor to one of the Kingdom’s most successful and respected contractors which has branched out into related sectors.

“Our idea in setting up the company was as a non-Saudi investment firm starting out a decade ago and then we’ve been active as a contractor for only the past five years,” says CEO Ahmed Elsheikh.

“We started investing in small businesses in 2015 but we grew from 2020 to concentrate on general contracting as investment became much easier thanks to Vision 2030.”

Although business slowed considerably for the nascent group with the onslaught of Covid, everything improved once that crisis had passed and the group grew and grew over the next several years.

Now the group employs more than 1,000 people and the executive says he



AHMED ELSHEIKH

GENERAL MANAGER OF OZOD CONSTRUCTION

“VISION 2030 HAS UNLEASHED A BOOM IN THE REAL ESTATE AND CONSTRUCTION SECTORS”

expects revenue this year to approach \$100 million.

Along with contracting, the group also operates a wood manufacturing company, a concrete firm and other subsidiaries within the general construction industry.

Along with general contracting, Ozod’s principal services include design and build, a fully streamlined approach through consolidation of both disciplines under one contract, enhancing efficiency, cutting costs and accelerating project timelines.

The division’s structural works department is a precision guided operation boasting engineering expertise along with quality materials from foundations to ceilings to ensure a secure building whether it’s a gym or a retail establishment.

Growth has been swift for the group but there were challenges along the way.

“There were two main obstacles we’ve had to overcome,” says Elsheikh. “One was that as a non-Saudi company bank financing can be a struggle and the other was finding laborers with the right education and skills.”

“But we’ve managed to largely overcome these partly through partnerships with well-known names in banking and real estate and our clients include many household Saudi brands from sports clubs and entertainment centers to residential



“COMPETITION IS GROWING, BUT SO IS THE MARKET AND THERE’S SPACE FOR EVERYONE”

complexes and healthcare facilities.

“At this time, we’re working on call center for 4,000 employees, a huge logistics facility and we’re involved with further development of residential buildings,” he says.

Elsheikh explains the group is also currently in talks on a contract with a chain of private hospitals, serving a sector which analysts say is bound to surge as increasing healthcare services for Saudi citizens is one of the goals of Vision 2030.

Diversification Drive

As the construction industry continues to experience phenomenal growth it is not only the companies doing the building which are prospering but also those firms supplying the contractors, subcontractors and others.

Contractors Ambassador Trading Company is just such an outfit, founded in 2006 and is now diversifying into other sectors to get in on more of the action taking place in Saudi Arabia.

“Basically, the company was founded to supply building materials and personal protection equipment, or PPE; for the industry importing these items from China and Pakistan,” says CEO Asad Malik.

“I joined the company in 2020 and once I started here my focus was on all these major construction projects happening thanks

to Vision 2030. The business environment was amazing with just huge potential and I realized this was the place for me.”

In the five years the executive has worked at the company he has seen how the Vision has eased the task of doing business and how the government’s new attitude and efforts have benefitted the business community both among locals and foreign firms.

“Before there were a lot of restrictions, especially for foreigners,” he recalls. “But now with time it has become so easy for investors as everything is online and streamlined.

“And just here in Riyadh alone you have so many construction projects and even though we are based here we are providing our entire product line to everywhere in the Kingdom, including to a French company involved in the NEOM giga-project.”

In a bid to take full advantage of the opportunities now available, Contractors Ambassador Trading Company has diversified into customizing portable cabins for projects like the Riyadh metro and is working with a tech company based in Pakistan on an e-commerce business.

It is also preparing to become a player in Saudi Arabia’s emerging automotive industry supplying paint protection film from a U.S. distributor

Diversifying the business will help the

company face the heavy competition in the construction materials supply business in Saudi Arabia which logically has increased with all the projects going on.

“You have Chinese working here who used to be our providers but are now in the market directly,” he explains. “And there are countries doing the same from South Korea, Australia from every part of the world.”

“However, while competition is growing, so is the market and there are enough pieces of the cake for everyone. I tell people that you cannot fail in Saudi Arabia at business if you know the dynamics and want to work because the market is so huge.”

One of the lessons Malik has learned is that honesty goes a long way towards sealing one’s success in the Saudi business world.

“When I started out here I was 20 or 21 years old I wasn’t always honest with clients and made up excuses if, for example, there was a delay in a materials delivery,” he recalls.

“I know now that was the wrong way to do things and if you want things to work for you in Saudi Arabia you must be straightforward and honest and you will be rewarded with great business relationships.

“My message to everyone is it is wonderful place to do business, the standard of living is high and if anyone is thinking of





YOUSSEF MARROUN

GENERAL MANAGER OF YMCO

“THERE WILL BE SO MUCH WORK, THE GOVERNMENT IS PLANNING MAJOR INDUSTRIAL GROWTH”

relocating here, it is the right time.”

Long Experience

Over the past decade, Vision 2030 has spurred the rapid growth of YMCO, Youssef Marroun Contracting Company, which got its start 40 years ago as a steel constructor of warehouses and is now a general contractor carrying out a large range of projects.

“Compared to our business back before the Vision, we’re working three times more with the company three times as large with over 2,000 employees,” says owner and General Manager Youssef Marroun.

“And the same with our annual revenue which back then was around \$100 million and we’re posting revenue recently of some \$300 million.”

YMCO’s principal activity is industrial buildings as well as factories, followed by hospitals, educational institutions and structures for retail establishments such as fast food outlets and luxury automobile showrooms.

Its client list includes international and local names like DHL, IKEA, Daily Food, Hempel, AlBaik, Al-Dawaa Pharmacies, Aquat Food Industries and many others, along with semi-government Public Investment Fund companies.

Since its beginnings, the contracting firm has carried out close to 1,000 projects serving more than 100 clients across the Kingdom from Al-Jawf in the north to Jazan in the south, and from Medina in the west to the Eastern Province.

“Our biggest project ever in the history of the company and one we are very proud of is the Dallah Hospital in northern Riyadh which is now 50 per cent completed, but our core business is industrial buildings which account for between 60 and 70 per cent of our projects,” the executive explains.

“And there will be further growth in these buildings and factories as well because the government is planning to make Saudi Arabia the biggest industrial power in the region over the next ten years.

“Also, so many foreign companies are coming here now to set up shop so it’s clear that we’re in the right place at the right time as we have 40 years of experience and well-honed expertise just as this demand is surging,” he says.

Marroun says that he is pleasantly surprised at the speed in which Vision 2030 is developing with the scheme hitting almost of its targets on time. When it was launched he was expecting growth but on



a much smaller scale.

“That has indeed exceeded my expectations and I believe YMCO will grow along with the country in a stable and steady manner at the same pace we’ve enjoyed so far. We expect 2025 to be a good year as well the next five years for us,” he says.

“It’s all being assisted by how the government is facilitating business in so many ways and investors should understand that now laws here concerning investment, regulations, the banking system, transparency, etc. follow global standards.

“So I hope anyone considering coming here to do business takes all of this into account and that they receive a warm welcome here in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”



INTERVIEW WITH IBRAHIM MOHAMMED AL HAMMAD

**Chief Executive Officer
OBEIKAN GLASS CO.**

An early study and quick alignment with the pillars of Vision 2030 has allowed this market leader to take advantage of the booming demand for glass products in the Kingdom. New product lines and stepping up the value chain are examples of such initiatives, while the company keeps an eye on foreign markets for future growth opportunities



Vision 2030 has supercharged the business of Al Obeikan Glass Company as it adheres to a number of the plan's principal pillars such as boosting local content, starting green-friendly business lines, supporting the surge in construction and introducing foreign tech knowhow.

"We've built our strategy on Vision 2030," boasts Ibrahim Mohammed Al Hammad. "When the plan was revealed in 2016, we reviewed what we were doing and announced the opening of a second line for making automotive glass here in the Kingdom.

"In addition, we're contributing to this wave of building and infrastructure taking place which will all require new glass from our traditional lines and this again fulfills the call for increasing local content in these prestigious projects popping up all over Saudi Arabia."

Wide Production

One of Al Obeikan's lines is float glass which is used in everything from windows, table tops and mirrors, to bullet-proof applications, frameless doors and reflective applications.

And another is laminated safety glass that holds together when shattered, bonded together by an interlayer of polyvinyl.

Its 375,000-sqm production facility in the Saudi city of Yanbu has a daily capacity of 800 tons of glass panels or an annual production rate of 250,000 tons, making it the largest glass manufacturing facility of its kind in the Middle East.

Since 2015, the company has partnered with AGC of Japan of which it owns around 20 per

cent, to produce coated glass at the Saudi firm's plant specifically for the construction industry.

With the new automotive glass production, the company is entering into the higher added value sector but the executive says he expects it will not be too difficult of a process.

"It's challenging but we do have the experience that we've built up over many years. We have the talent and digitalization all in place and that will help overcome any problems," he explains.

"We've built up our staff talent from the very beginning and we have a good reputation in the labor market so we don't have the problems some in attracting and holding on to people.

"Our business culture regarding our employees is very well developed and they have a high level of very impressive loyalty to the company," Alhammad says.

The only real challenge he sees in tackling higher added value production is acquiring the technology or obtaining special licenses for importing and operating sophisticated machinery.

Aluminium Expansion

In addition to glass, Al Obeikan has launched itself into the growing aluminum business by acquiring 60 per cent of a casting company.

"Our initial capacity will be around 5,000 tons and the factory will be commissioned in December of 2024," the CEO says. "Gradually we'll increase that output to 10,000 tons over ten years and we want to eventually reach some 15,000 tons.

"There's a big market here for aluminum casting as it goes into automotive spare parts, cons-



truction and electronics, and all of it produced right here in Saudi Arabia, so again we're answering the Vision's call for local content."

Although glass is not easy to export because of its weight and fragility, the company has shipped its products around the world and at one point served clients in 37 countries from South Africa to the United States where it has a sales office.

"In the past we used to export around 60 per cent of our production and sold the remaining 40 per cent locally. But over the past two years and with the upturn in business here in Saudi due to Vision 2030, the local share of our business has flipped," Alhammad explains.

"So we're taking advantage of the local boom to keep growing while still keeping a presence in the export sector with a focus on nearby markets like Jordan and Yemen."

In the near future, the CEO says he would like Al Obeikan Glass Company to be number one in glass manufacturing in the region and the company is working to that objective.



Obeikan Glass manufactures durable, ultra-clear float glass for architectural, automotive and specialty applications.

www.obeikanglass.sa



REAL ESTATE FACES A GOLDEN DECADE

NEW PROJECTS AUGUR A BRILLIANT YEARS AHEAD FOR REAL ESTATE SECTOR

Saudi Arabia is probably the hottest real estate market in the region at the moment and in most likelihood, the entire world. Vision 2030's budget of many billions of dollars is primarily aimed at building projects, whether the storied giga-projects, civil infrastructure, transport infrastructure and much more.

At the same time, the Vision is also encouraging both local and foreign business development which translates into increasing demand for everything from retail shops and malls to office towers, warehouses, factories and other industrial facilities.

According to sector analysts, the Kingdom's real estate market size is estimated at \$75 billion this year and is forecast to rise to \$110 billion by that magic year of 2030.

Riyadh is a particularly hot market and is certain to remain so with a projected population growth of more than 125 per cent by 2030 when it is forecast to reach 17 million residents.

This urbanization trend is further intensified by internal migration patterns, with Saudis and resident foreigners increasingly relocating to the capital and other major cities for employment opportunities.

In Riyadh and other big cities such as Jeddah, Dammam and Khobar office space occupancy levels are in the high 90 percentile and average rents increasing by above 6 per cent year-on-year.

Residential real estate development is also booming as the government pushes to boost local home ownership by 70 per cent over the next ten years through new regulatory initiatives to broaden the mortgage market and setting up financing assistance systems in an ambitious affordable housing program for first time buyers.

Much of the demand for new homes is driven by demographic shifts and trends in urbanization with an estimated 70 per cent of the population in that key demographic of young, middle-class Saudis.

There is also a shift away from Saudi



buyers seeking villas and other large residences towards more affordable apartments and homes in carefully planned and developed gated communities with schools, retail outlets and parks.

And as the Saudi economy soars, attracting foreigners participating in all the new Vision 2030 projects or setting up or expanding existing businesses they too are seeking out homes either for purchase or rent adding more vigor to the real estate market.

A related development comes from the government's massive effort to facilitate and streamline the acquisition of property so companies, families and institutions can easily carry out the finance, purchase and registration processes.

Good Reputation

Qetaf Investment and Real Estate Development is a perfect example of how the Saudi real estate sector, especially the commercial business, has evolved in recent years.

Marking its 20th anniversary this year, the company started by developing small properties for restaurants with a focus on mid-size cities around the Kingdom, accor-



FAISAL ALMUSHIGIH

CEO OF QETAF INVEST

“SMALLER CITIES PRESENT SOME CHALLENGES, BUT WE MADE A GREAT SUCCESS OUT OF THEM”

ding to CEO Faisal Amushigih.

“These smaller cities sometimes presented a challenge in that they had less-developed civil infrastructure like water supply and other issues but my colleagues at Qetaf made a success of this subsector in the industry,” he explains.

“We were increasing our business working with both global and local restaurant brands and then eventually we started doing larger scale, build-to-suit projects in which we put up a building to meet the very specific needs of a single client.”

In build-to-suit, the tenant leases the finished property from the developer.

Amushigih took over as chief executive officer in 2019, three years after Vision 2030 was announced and he pivoted the company away from its previous business model by shedding immature assets that had no prospect of growth in rental value and tackling large scale commissions.

“As we moved into these larger-sized projects for bigger clients we also began to carry out work in Riyadh and one of which was for the Landmark Group, a retail conglomerate selling clothing, consumer electronics, footwear, cosmetics and beauty products, baby products and home improvement,” the executive explains.

The project was a mall in AL-Kharj city, some 60 miles southeast of Riyadh. Very Impressed with Qetaf's work, the group asked it to build another 23,000-square-





**AYED BIN
OBAID AL HARFI**

CHAIRMAN OF
EMAAR ADVANCED
REAL ESTATE CO.

“WE HAVE MANY OPPORTUNITIES NOW WITH THE EXPO 2030 AS WELL AS THE WORLD CUP 2034”

meter project in the Saudi capital.

“This is what put us on the map as from that time we started to enjoy a good reputation within the local real estate development market. That led to further prestigious regional clients like Americana Foods which operates U.S. franchises like KFC, Hardee’s and Pizza Hut,” he recalls.

Amushigih argues that as he works on each project of any size he uses a project manager, a consultant supervisor, a good contractor and others so in order to have higher return a larger scale is better.

Now, the company has carried out multiple projects in Riyadh but still with a focus on second-tier cities. Qetaf has acquired various tracts of land for building but the executive says his largest challenge is finding parcels in the capital.

“People in our industry are also facing problems with things like the quality of contractors which has come under discussion in the industry. We work with several contractors but only with those we’ve given a proper pre-qualification,” he explains.

“We are particularly proud of a building we developed in the Eastern Ring Road area of about 50,000 square meters with two medical entities. Along with these two there is an insurance company as a tenant which operates the clinics and a radiation treatment facility.

Now firmly established as a respected developer in the capital, Qetaf is eager to begin searching out opportunities in northern Riyadh which after much regulatory delay is open for development.

“So we’re looking forward to working there. And I see a lot of opportunity in Jeddah and Dammam as some people are claiming that Riyadh is perhaps reaching its limit,” the CEO says.

“And as we grow we’re open to partnerships and I would suggest to those foreign companies thinking of working here that they will definitely need a local partner that goes with the growth of the market all the time.”

Opportunities Ahead

“Riyadh is the big prize, it’s number one,” declares Ayed Bin Obaid Al Harfi, chairman of the board of the Emaar Advance Real Estate Company which has carried out a range of projects in the north of the capital but is also active in Jeddah, Makkah, Tabuk and other cities around the Kingdom.

“There are still so many big opportunities in Riyadh because there is such a number of projects ongoing right now and well into the future like Expo 2030 as well as the 2034 World Cup.

“We also see opportunities all over the Kingdom and here we’re talking about

NEOM and The Line and the Red Sea projects,” he says.

Emaar Advance Real Estate Company is well placed to benefit from all the business being generated by Vision 2030.

And the executive says that the Vision and the government’s adherence to the grand plan has made it all possible, eliminating any challenges that could have been encountered in the real estate development sector.

“Vision 2030 has a solution for every problem which might emerge. For example, beforehand if there was a problem with a government regulation or rule it might take one or two years to resolve but now it just takes a day.

“People investing from outside Saudi Arabia claim that compared to other countries in the region it is much, much easier to go through the investment process with all the government help and streamlined bureaucracy that are available here,” he adds.

One of the key benefits in the real estate development sector for these investors is that land can be purchased and owned by foreigners or foreign corporations with certain conditions and restrictions.

While active at the moment only in the Kingdom, the executive says the company is searching for good opportunities across the Gulf targeting projects such as hotels espe-

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cially in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar through partnerships with local operators.

Emaar Advance Real Estate Company also has a small investment in Egypt and is in discussions with a potential partner from the United States.

And if the company continues with success in Saudi Arabia and does well in the Gulf, the chairman says the next step is to go truly international beyond the region as fast as it can and certainly before 2030.

"We've believed in Vision 2030 since Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman announced it to the world because we believed in him," Bin Obaid Al Harfi says. "We knew him before when he worked with his father, the king.

"So when the crown prince said 'We have a dream' we knew him as an exceptional person and we want to help achieve that dream and so far it has been a success year after year."

He also stresses that the Vision will benefit generation after generation over the coming years.

"Vision 2030 and the changes in this country have also had a positive personal effect," the executive says proudly. "My eldest daughter has a degree in finance and will soon come to work here and my second and third daughters are entering careers in medicine and that is also a result of Vision 2030!"

Major Player

Careful analysis of the real estate market is the first priority in the business plan of Yus Real Estate which has been operating for 40 years and is one of several companies in the Al-Hammad Group, according to CEO Abdullah Alhammad.

"Our strategy is to work with consultants to analyze which subsectors in the real estate industry are worth investing in by figuring out if the current demand in residential, for example, is temporary or is going to last," he says.

"Currently, we're heavily involved in the residential, commercial, which includes offices, and employee accommodation subsectors and there is definite demand in these or we wouldn't be there."

"For example if we see there is demand for office space because the regional operations of multinationals are moving to Saudi Arabia there is a huge spike and everyone is jumping in to develop.

"If we feel that this is organic growth over a long term we get involved," he explains. "If we believe that its only companies coming here to grab government contracts and then leave, we'll stay out of it."

At the same time, Saudi companies are expanding as they add new divisions, take on more employees and grow their businesses, the executive says.

Alhammad began with the family group five years ago when activity in the sector was on hold while the government worked through drawing up and publishing new regulations covering real estate development.

Once Covid was over the boom began, fueled by government spending on Vision 2030 projects coupled with low interest rates leading to a peak in activity by government entities and the private sector which continues to this day.

Yus Real Estate works only in Riyadh where it has multiple office towers and residential buildings in the north and center of the capital, with its employee accommodation compounds in the south of the city.

"In the residential sector, there is solid demand for good quality homes for expatriates and young Saudis who are executives and can pay premium prices in a prestigious residential tower or compound," he says.

"We see there is huge demand now and it's all coming from Vision 2030 and those events like the 2034 World Cup and the 2030 Expo."



In Alhammad's opinion, the Vision is the "backbone" of everything that's happening. Before it was only plans and regulations but now, he continues "you're seeing the projects actually being built around the capital and the country.

"Everyone believes in this Vision and you know that when something comes into play you can build on that because it's reliable information, it's long term and it's sustainable."

With all the economic growth, Alhammad is planning on becoming a player in logistics and industrial real estate arguing that when all the Vision's major projects are complete companies will still be setting up shop in the Kingdom and will need warehouses and factories.

"When foreign investors come the hardest thing is to get permits for warehouses and industrial spaces. But if we build it with all the permits in hand those investors can just 'plug and play' as they say.

"There is huge potential in this country and I see at least a good decade of growth."

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INTERVIEW WITH MOAAZ KHANANI

**Managing Partner
KAMS Global**

Aviation has become one of the most dynamic sectors of growth in the last few years, with brand-new airlines, upgraded airports and a whole new regulatory framework requiring investment, expertise and sound advice. KAMS Global was the right company at the right time to provide the right services, as its co-founder and Managing Partner explains



As a key element in the overall ambitions of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia's air transport sector is set to soar. According to the General Authority of Civil Aviation, or GACA, the government's Saudi Aviation Strategy calls for investing \$100 billion in transport and logistics to meet some impressive goals.

These include eventually serving 330 million passengers or triple the current number; ensuring that the Kingdom becomes a truly global transit hub; increasing connectivity to more than 250 destinations worldwide served by 29 airports, and easing the creation of a host of new aviation companies.

But it is not all about the government. Under Vision 2030, private operators are also being encouraged to enter the sector especially to develop, refurbish and modernize airports and related infrastructure.

"Privatization enables development of Saudi airports to raise their operational efficiency and provide the highest standards of passenger services." According to GACA, privatization will encourage competition and set Saudi airports on the path to greater operational efficiency and higher standards of customer service across all areas. This strategy will open up investment opportunities, attract foreign direct investment and boost GDP.

Privatization Opportunities

KAMS Global recognized the growth potential of Saudi aviation early. Established in 2013, its operations predate Vision 2030 enabling it to provide critical advisory and consulting support to the government during the early stages of the sectors transformation.

KAMS Global has built a sterling reputation while helping establish policies and guidelines, and carrying out certifications of aviation assets to ensure compliance to international standards.

While Saudi Arabia is the company's main market, it is headquartered in Bahrain and has operating offices in the United Arab Emirates, the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey and India.

KAMS Global was set up to leverage emerging opportunities across the GCC and particularly Saudi Arabia, as the world began



to recover from the financial crisis," explains Founder and Managing Partner Moaaz Khanani.

While working as a CFO for a private aviation company, Moaaz realized that there was a clear gap in the local market in terms of advisory solutions, consulting, project management or any services of a technical nature.

"If anyone wanted to set up an airline, for example, there was no one to bridge the gap between regulators and the operators. An airline operator wanting to enter the market must know what the process is, what documentation is required and which approvals must be completed to gain a license to operate. It was to help solve these problems that we decided to set up KAMS Global," Moaaz explained.

These days the company's range of services includes strategy and operations development, regulatory compliance, licensing and certification, engineering design and development including turnkey project and asset management services.

Additionally, the company offers a complete suite of technical services for aircraft entry into service and is not leveraging technologies to streamline aviation operations.

Moaaz describes the opportunities for the company created by Vision 2030's emphasis on expanding the Kingdom's aviation sector as "phenomenal" and is working closely with public and private sector players on several projects; the focus is now on aviation infrastructure.

GACA is now enhancing regulations and standards. "Over the years we've worked a lot with stakeholders and supported alignment

with Vision 2030; it all comes down to safety and customer experience, which is absolutely paramount," Khanani says.

New Airlines

Most recently KAMS Global assisted the Kingdom's new airline, Riyadh Air with the process of obtaining an Air Operator Certificate. Other AOC clients include The Helicopter Company, Aloula Aviation, Alpha Star as well other local and international clients.

The executive says along with the boost in business for his company from Vision 2030, he is extremely impressed by how the plan has evolved.

"Saudi Arabia's transformation has been incredible. I have been here since 2010 and the acceleration of the changes just over the last five years is unbelievable," he explains.

"We at KAMS Global were in the right place at the right time when we set up shop. By the time Vision 2030 came along we had the experience and expertise to capitalize on the opportunities to grow.

"And now we're in the position where we can add tremendous value for our customers. Client satisfaction and maintaining our reputation and credibility is very important. We have the quality and the track record to support our customers in streamlining and scaling operations.

"Our focus is on developing local capability and we are supporting clients on localization opportunities across the aviation domain. We are privileged to be part of this transformation and growth in Saudi Arabia, and would encourage others to come and ride the wave."

INDUSTRY TAKES A GREAT LEAP AHEAD

THE SAUDI INDUSTRIAL SECTOR IS GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

One of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's principal pillars of Vision 2030 is to expand Saudi Arabia's industrial output so as to wean the country's overreliance on the petroleum sector with lots of help from local and foreign entrepreneurs in the private sector.

And by most counts, the Kingdom is already well on its way to accomplishing this goal to widely diversify the economy.

Saudi Arabia already has the largest industrial sector in the Middle East and North Africa region, analysts point out, and so can easily build further on this manufacturing base producing plastics, food and beverages, construction materials, cement, electrical appliances, medical equipment and much, much more.

More than 11,000 Saudi factories produce industrial exports worth a total of around \$30 billion, with manufactured goods making up close to 100 per cent of the country's non-oil exports.

The ultimate goal is to triple the industrial GDP to reach \$238 billion by 2030, double job opportunities in the sector to over 2 million and aim for industrial exports of \$150 billion, according to officials.

Along with diversifying the economy, Vision 2030 calls for developing human capital through education and job training, boosting productivity in key sectors and creating quality, long-term employment for Saudis, all of which is expected to trigger unprecedented growth for the manufacturing sector.

The government has vowed "to support promising sectors and foster their success so that they become new pillars of our economy. In the manufacturing sector, we will work towards localizing renewable energy and industrial equipment sectors."

In addition, the government vows "to create suitable job opportunities for our citizens by supporting small and medium-sized entrepreneurship, privatization and investments in new industries."

Among the ambitious steps Vision



"WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE GROUND PROVES THAT WE ARE ALL FOLLOWING VISION 2030"

2030 envisions are developing a local pharmaceutical and biotech sector, localizing the automotive and related parts industry, creating production centers for light industry and establishing a viable military manufacturing capability.

This diversification has been assisted by improvements in the regulatory and business environment with new laws to encourage entrepreneurship, protect local and foreign investors' rights, and lower the costs of doing business while the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) has been creating businesses and distributing capital to stimulate private investment.

At the same time, under Vision 2030 the government is taking steps to promote sustainable growth in the industrial sector, including investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy, encouraging the use of advanced technologies and backing the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Stellar Growth

With construction on a roll across Saudi Arabia, companies supplying vital material are doing very well indeed as is the case with Transgulf Readymix Concrete Company KSA, a firm with its origins in the United Arab Emirates and now with more than decade of experience in the Kingdom.



The decision to invest in Saudi Arabia came following the economic recession of the late 2000's and production began in 2014 when General Manager Abdul Razaq Manko joined the company.

"Our first task was establishing trust in the construction industry because you are selling a product and if it fails you will be out of business in one month," he explains.

"So we started from zero producing small quantities in a location around 100 kilometers north of Riyadh to build that trust among potential clients so we could become known as a quality concrete company.

"Two years later we established another production plant just south of Riyadh so we were covering about 80 per cent of Riyadh from these two facilities," he recalls.

Initial production was between 40,000 and 45,000 cubic meters a month and the company worked hard to increase output with heavy investment in mixers, pumps and other equipment, while at the same time pitching its products to builders.

"It was not easy and we asked ourselves how we were going to survive," Razaq Manko says. "But we decided to continue and at the same time maintain our quality which was all important."

When Vision 2030 was first announced, the company's fortunes changed for the better. Luckily, its production facilities



near Riyadh helped as 50 per cent of the Vision's projects were located in the city.

According to the general manager many people were skeptical about the plan as during the previous decades the government had announced similar, if much smaller, schemes but many were never carried out.

"However, now I believe that many people see that what has been decided and was is actually happening on the ground proves that we are all following the Vision's road map in the right way," he says.

"Housing is a big part of the government's plans and last year we added two more production facilities one of which is in an area where there will be 50,000 housing units so that shows we're benefitting from the Vision."

In the infrastructure sector, the company is supplying concrete to a suspension bridge in southern Riyadh near one of its plants. "There will be a lot of highways and bridges in that area of the city so again, development is coming along at a very fast pace."

In order to meet the surge in demand over the past two years Transgulf Concrete Company KSA's production has increased from 55,000 to 60,000 cubic meters a month to between 80,000 and 90,000 cubic meters.

The company's product line includes standard, fast track and special performance concrete developed from the highest quality materials available in the region and are both green and durable.

Razaq Manko readily admits that finding local people with the right technical skills can be a difficult task as is meeting its assigned quota of Saudi employees. "Among the 450 people we have now, there are hundreds of Saudis but they are in our finance, technical, safety and administrative departments," he explains.

"And one of the benefits of working for us is that all the managers have been with us for eight or nine years as they don't leave because we have a happy location, work as a team and achieve our targets together."

The general manager says that over the next three years he expects to see the company grow by 50 per cent noting that Saudi Arabia is wealthy, it is easy to do business and that there are so many projects in Riyadh.

"Once these are completed, I am sure the government will move on to cities like Makkah and Medina and we can be a part of that. We've invested a lot in equipment



"WE'LL NEED TECHNOLOGY & KNOW-HOW FROM FOREIGN PARTNERS AS WE GO FORWARD"

and we don't want to see it sitting idle."

"The crown prince who is responsible for the Vision is young and at some point will become king for the next 40 to 50 years and all of this will continue," the executive predicts.

"The economic growth we're enjoying is one thing. But it is also important to work on changing the mentality of the people and that happening as it is not a closed culture anymore and we're becoming true citizens of the world."

Foreign Partners

Many of the Saudi private sector groups prospering from Vision 2030 have a diverse range of activities and one of the largest of these is the Mohammad AlRubeaan & Sons Holding Group.

"We are involved in contracting, real estate, city services and maintenance but our most important business is the manufacturing of heavy equipment including garbage trucks and street sweepers," says Chairman of the Board Mohammad Al-Rubeaan.

"And our industrial arm has benefitted most from Vision 2030 because of the government support regarding things like special salary subsidies for some of our 2,000 employees, assistance with permits and these issues."

Much of the group's manufacturing output is exported to regional markets like the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Algeria, Morocco and others, with official support through helping the group in attending international trade fairs.

Its contracting division handles city cleaning across the country while its real estate division is involved in warehouses and storage spaces.

According to the executive, the group's annual revenue is around \$40 million.

"One area is which we trying to improve also thanks to government backing is in our manufacturing division. Under Vision 2030, the Kingdom wants to boost machinery automation and robotics so as to ease the labor shortage here," the chairman explains.

"Manufacturing is one of the main growth areas in Saudi Arabia and we're also looking at possibly entering the tourism and hospitality sectors which have a lot of potential.

"And perhaps we'll need foreign partners as we go forward, partners from countries that have recently experienced similar growth in their economies and who can provide us with know-how and technology," he says.

Al-Rubeaan says he has been pleasantly surprised by the depth, speed and efficiency of the changes that the King-





ENG. FAHAD M. AL-RASHEEDI

CEO OF SAUDI LIME INDUSTRIES CO.

“VISION 2030 HAS BEEN BENEFICIAL, AS IT CALLS FOR INCREASED EFFICIENCY ACROSS ALL INDUSTRIES”



dom has undergone due to Vision 2030 and lauds the stability of the economy as a good reason for foreign investors to bet on Saudi Arabia.

“Right now there is huge demand and a strong economy and these are the two most important factors for investment: demand and purchasing power. Saudi Arabia is not like what it was before all this happened,” he says. “This is a tremendous opportunity.”

Operational Efficiency

Perfectly positioned to reap the rewards of the ever-expanding national economy, Saudi Lime Industries Co. is one of the Kingdom’s leading producers of lime-based products including limestone, quicklime, hydrated lime, dolomitic hydrated lime for industrial applications, limestone blocks and bricks for construction, all manufactured to the highest international standards and being strategic enablers of the Kingdom’s 2030 Vision that seeks to build a diversified and sustainable economy, and that lime products are essential to many of the sectors driving this transformation.

Saudi Lime products are used in steel and metal manufacturing, construction, paper and pulp production, agriculture, food, glass, sugar, oil and gas industries, which are central to Saudi Arabia’s economic, industrial, environmental and construction development plans.

“We are expanding both our production capacity and technological capabilities to align with international mining and lime industry standards, enhancing efficiency and sustainability” stated Eng. Fahad Al Rasheedi, the CEO of the company.

After 25 years in the cement industry, Eng. Al Rasheedi joined Saudi Lime 18 months ago, a company with nearly five decades of operational legacy and he has been tasked with the responsibility of driving a massive internal reform, based on in-

frastructure hauling, operational excellence, capacity building, business expansion, premises’ rehabilitation, promoting innovation, and aligning the company’s ambitions with the Kingdom’s Vision 2030.

“We see ourselves as a strategic pillar in the industrial ecosystem of Saudi Arabia. By continuing to innovate, localize, and integrate our solutions across sectors, Saudi Lime will remain an essential partner in building the sustainable, knowledge-driven economy envisioned by Vision 2030”, said Eng. Al Rasheedi.

“The acquisition by Saudi Lime of a similar mining and industrial company was a strategic milestone for us. By bringing in a well-established competitor, we’ve significantly expanded our production capacity and operational capabilities. It allows us to integrate our value chain, streamline logistics, and enhance supply reliability” stated Eng. Al Rasheedi.

“By the end of 2023, our revenues stood at USD 40 million, and I’m pleased to share that by the end of 2024, we have achieved a remarkable increase to USD 55.6 million.

This significant growth reflects not only our efforts in operational optimization and market expansion, but also the increasing demand for our products across strategic industries” said Eng. Al Rasheedi, adding that the net profit has increased by 119% from USD 2.6 million to USD 5.7 million, which is a clear validation of the strategy and the value that Saudi Lime brings to its clients.

“One of the key enablers of growth for mining and industrial companies in Saudi Arabia is the strong and strategic support provided by Saudi government, through the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources and many other public institutions”, said the CEO.

“Our vision is to become a leading local and regional player in GCC, MENA and Africa in the mining and industrial manufacturing sector, delivering sustainable growth, and shared value for our stakeholders. We want to be known not just for what we extract, but for how we transform resources into opportunities, responsibly and competitively and we are proud to be part of the Kingdom’s industrial future, remaining fully committed to supporting Vision 2030 by creating jobs, empowering local talent, protecting the environment, and delivering world-class products to the world with most competitive pricing” concluded Eng. Fahad Al Rasheedi.

Local Context

It’s not every day that a son’s love for his mother inspires the creation of an industry but that was the case for Mohammed Althubiti who built Saudi Arabia’s very first wheelchair factory almost a decade ago.

“We lived in the United States for ten years which is where I attended medical school and on our return my mother suffered renal failure and she became handicapped,” the CEO and founder of Khatmah Medical Factory explains.

His mother needed a wheelchair to get from home to the dialysis center and back

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MOHAMMED ALTHUBITI

CEO OF KHATMAH MEDICAL FACTORY

“SAUDI MEDICAL PRODUCTS ARE NOW INTERNATIONALLY VERY COMPETITIVE IN PRICE”

again but her son says it was impossible to find one that was well-made and reliable.

“At that time there were no Saudi-made wheelchairs and the ones imported from China were cheaply manufactured, had no warranty and often lasted for only a week so then you had to buy another,” he recalls.

“A Chinese wheelchair cost \$40 to the importer who turned it around to sell for double or triple that and we had to buy four a month because they were just junk.”

Althubiti carried out a feasibility study and in 2016 established the company named for his mother who had passed away. Now, Khatmah Medical Factory produces a whole range of not only electric and manual wheelchairs but also electrical and manual hospital beds, and other special needs medical equipment, in its factory near the capital Riyadh.

Still the only Saudi manufacturer of wheelchairs, the company has received extensive help from various government ministries, employs almost 40 people and is posting revenue of between \$6 million and \$8 million.



“Our biggest challenge so far has been finding Saudi personnel who know how to operate the machines we use in the manufacturing process because all of this is so new to us,” the CEO says.

“The other headache is importing quality parts because quite frankly most of the stuff is trash or junk. But with the support of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and the Ministry of Industry we are penetrating the market.

“This is helped immensely by the requirement for government agencies to purchase goods of local content if at all possible. So hopefully by 2026 we can maintain at least 20 to 25 per cent of the market,” he adds.

By the end of next year, the executive also hopes to have a new factory up and running built on 10,000 square meters of recently-purchased land and also have finalized an agreement with a foreign strategic partner providing expertise.

The company is also planning to widen its export markets. Currently it sells some items to Syria, Yemen and other neighboring nations and is in talks with African importers.

Assisting the company in providing its products to other countries is the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre which is actively involved in exporting medical equipment and supplies to various countries, particularly those facing humanitarian crises.

“Saudi medical products, including our own, are competitive internationally regarding price, quality and warranty policy. In our case, our customers receive two to three years of warranty with spare parts available 24/7,” Althubiti explains.

“This country has changed so much over the last ten years and if you told me the Kingdom would be like it is now I wouldn’t have believed you but Vision 2030 has transformed everything for the better.”

Strong Future

Yet another example of competitive local production comes from Shaheen Com Company, part of the Alshahin Metal Group.

Its general manager Anas Saheen has a long experience in the manufacturing of molds for plastics and a special expertise in the plastics industry.

“Vision 2030 has made the construction industry increase in volume by more than forty percent, and this has had a major effect on the demand for us,” says the CEO.

With a revenue of over four million USD, the company is already exporting to several Gulf countries, as the metal molds made in the country are competitive in international markets.

Regarding the technology needed in this fast moving sector, Shaheen says that “We are interested in partnerships with European players, as long as they provide us with the right quality and efficiency. European companies are clearly leaders in this field over its Asian competitors.”

As construction increases, and demand for plastics for fit-out is expected to increase in the coming years, and the general manager is optimistic that the production of the company’s products can only increase.

With three operational factories, one for injection, one for coating and the third for cabinet manufacturing, Shaheen is sure that “the future of the company is secure and we will go from strength to strength.”

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FIT-OUT TO FOLLOW REAL ESTATE BOOM

NEW AND REFURBISHED OFFICES ARE ALL IN NEED OF FIT-OUT SPECIALISTS

Visitors returning to Riyadh after several years or even months are struck by the new hustle and bustle of the capital, its skyline and the plethora of new office towers, retail outlets, restaurants and so much more.

All of these need what is broadly known as “fit-out”, the planning, designing and installment of interiors customized to exact client specifications and can include furnishings, lighting, floors, ceilings and many other elements to provide the perfect work, dining or living environment.

Business is brisk. Industry analysts say the fit-out market in the Kingdom was worth more than \$3 billion last year and is forecast to be well over \$5 billion by the time 2030 arrives.

In these days of accelerated real estate development thanks to Vision 2030 and its encouragement of urbanization, private home ownership, public amenities, tourism infrastructure such as hotels, smart cities and the Internet of Things, Saudi companies involved in fit-out are scrambling to meet demand.

Local Presence

One of the youngest companies in the sector which has done very well and is also working hard to adhere to many of Vision 2030's goals is Mesahat which started out as an interior design firm and now is planning to move into local manufacturing.

“Without Vision 2030 we would never be doing what we are now,” explains CEO Mona Najm, an architect by training who came to the Kingdom from her native Egypt when her husband transferred there.

“My experience in Egypt was invaluable when I came here and when I joined Mesahat I was just an engineer but I was managing the company, dealing with clients and all the things a chief executive officer does so after a year I took over the company,” she recalls.

From its beginnings in interior design, the company expanded into fit out and turnkey solutions with most of its early work involving private villas for select clients.

Mesahat then took on designing and fitting out offices for large local companies and



government entities with business taking off over the last three years. Its biggest corporate client is a major government financial entity for which the firm did a two-floor design and renovations to the headquarters.

“We have eight people working here among whom are engineers and the on-site teams working with the clients, plus 15 engineers doing most of our design tasks at our back office in Egypt,” the executive explains.

“But we’re still doing residential units like villas and apartments, even palaces, and we also offer building façade design and consultancy services,” she says.

Najm says the company has to keep on its toes in Saudi Arabia's demanding market by offering clients something special and even unique. To that aim its engineers are constantly learning about new technologies and new brands from around the world.

The company firmly backs the Vision 2030 goal of supporting Saudi-designed and Saudi-made products and lauds the government for easing the once formidable bureaucratic processes.

“Everything now is easy,” she says. “Before it was more challenging but now for me as an investor the ministries are trying very hard to



MONA NAJM

CEO OF MESAHAAT

“EVERYTHING IS NOW MUCH EASIER FOR INVESTORS, THEY FACILITATE EVERYTHING FOR US”

facilitate everything for us. For example, I can send them an email about a problem I have and they call me the same day to solve it.”

“If it wasn't for the Vision I would not be investing in this country. It used to not be so open and especially because I am a woman it is so much better. Now women can work or even own a company.”

“Even the clients are not like before. These days they are well educated and knowledgeable so you have to level up to them. Without Vision 2030 Mesahat would not be where it is today, it would not even exist.”

Another change under the auspices of Vision 2030 is that foreign companies operating in the Kingdom must establish their regional headquarters in the country, and this could provide further work for the firm.

“This could open up more residential business for us as expatriates will come here to staff these companies,” the CEO says. “Once they are here it will be easy to contact them.”

“Concerning this effect on our work for the corporate sector, it could boost our client list but we're not looking at that quite yet.”

Over the next five years, Najm says she wants her company to not only grow in employees and in revenue, but also to add something more to her adopted country.

“We're now trying to establish two companies, one for Saudi-designed and manufactured furniture at the level of quality and sophistication that the Italians are doing. And we also want to set up an operation to sell our Saudi-made materials.”

“I'm encouraging everyone to come to Saudi Arabia because this place is booming and you can come here, work and better yourself and support the country.”

Supercharged Growth

In this age of widespread IOT, smart offices interconnectivity and audio-visual solutions a melding of fit-out and high-tech was a natural and Frontline Solutions is at the cutting edge of this phenomena after more than ten





“WITH THE WAY THE COMPANY HAS BEEN GROWING, WE’LL FOCUS ON AN IPO IN THE NEXT 3 YEARS”

years in business, says founder and Managing Director Fareed Osman.

“We divide our company into two main pillars. One is the audio-visual division with video conferencing, smart meeting rooms and digital signage, while the other is information, communication and technology, or ITC, where we do infrastructure solutions for connectivity like access control systems, CCTV and others,” he explains.

Osman founded Frontline Solutions in 2014 when even before Vision 2030 was announced his experience and expertise in the high-tech sector led him to see that Saudi Arabia was a hugely potential market and that it was the right time to start a company.

But the Vision supercharged the business, he recalls, leading to a major expansion with, for example, the payroll quintupling in size from 20 employees to around 100.

“We had to add a lot of resources to carry out our projects from design to implementation, coordinate with suppliers, integrate technologies based on client requirements, boost the engineering perspective, etc.”

“Over the past four years there has been a dramatic increase in our portfolio and it’s been especially notable in the last two years to the point that we expect to hit our revenue target in 2025 of \$20 million.”

There were challenges from such rapid growth but the CEO says that they were sur-

mountable and the company found that it was not difficult to fill its human resources needs with well-educated and skilled locals.

Frontline Solutions’ client list reads like a litany of the Kingdom’s ministries top companies and Public Investment Fund entities including Aramco, Sabic, Saudi and Misk City.

“Our audio-visual division does smart meeting rooms and board meeting rooms and we’ve done those for CEER, which is Saudi Arabia’s first electric vehicle manufacturer, and the giant mining company Maaden for which we won an award for the best board meeting room in the country, he says.

“So while we don’t do fit out in the strict meaning of the word it is a big chunk of our business because through technology we are associated with companies who help us in fitting out these meeting rooms.”

Osman explains that fit-out is a core area which is visible to the client whereas all the technology in the space is not. And if must be attractive with a touch of luxury to meet the demands of the Saudi customers.

“Moving forward, we are in negotiations with one or two fit-out companies where we are going to acquire one of those we’ve been working with closely and which is very good in delivering their projects,” Osman explains.

The company’s ITC division handles such tasks as end-to-end network and data center services, cloud and managed IT services, cyber

security services, structured cabling, security and fire safety systems, and others.

“We clearly expect to keep growing based on the market trend so far and with the way the company is growing I think we will definitely focus on an IPO within the next three years,” the executive says.

“There will be challenges in the years ahead as we expect to grow, whether regarding finance, resources or tech-related issues but we’ll make the effort to overcome those.

“Everything is moving in the right direction for Frontline Solutions and the country and my message to those considering doing business in the Kingdom is that if you have the expertise in your domain now is the right time to join this growth.”

Unique Way

Technology meets design is the mantra these days at In Arch Design & Build, a Riyadh-based firm whose CEO, Faisal M. Alshawaf, is developing a new device which will help small and medium-sized clients to design their own projects.

“What we’re doing is taking the clients personal involvement to a new level by converting the fit-out decoration process like choosing furniture to a mobile app,” he explains.

“If you’re a normal person and have no basic ideas about decoration you can finish the whole project for residences, small offices and other smaller spaces on your mobile phone. If it is big project than clients can go the usual route with consultants, engineers, designers and builders.”

In Arch Design & Build operates in a way unique to the industry with only management on permanent staff with all the rest of the architecture, design, engineering and consultations subcontracted out to trusted partners.

“Why do we do this?,” the executive asks. “Because when we had lots of employees there was a high overhead and rising expenses and our market was being whittled away by both smaller companies and bigger companies.

“So we decided to make deals with subcontractors and that way we can balance the costs and expenses which allows us to offer our services somewhere in the middle price range, not too cheap and not too high.”

The company is currently concentrating on offices as firms from outside are attracted to the Kingdom and it is concentrating less on its previous focus on villas and residences.

One notable change in the market, Alshawaf says, is that Saudis’ taste is changing regarding what they want in either their ho-





FATEN ALDELEJAN

GENERAL MANAGER OF GOLDEN RMZ

“WITH NEW RESTAURANTS AND FIRMS EXPANDING IT SEEMED RIGHT TO GET INTO FIT-OUT”

mes or workplaces.

“Before, people used to just ask us to do basic decoration in the walls, cabinets and floors with a regular ceiling and basic furniture. That was it. However, nowadays its very different with clients creating an entire decorative look for the whole place with deep details.

“So that is why we are specialized now in mixing between the styles and as an artist myself I try to inject my own ideas into the projects creating our unique architectural touch.

The CEO believes this approach will help In Arch Design & Build differentiate itself from rivals in an increasingly crowded field with some clients connecting directly with Europe for their needs and even China for materials and services.

At the same time, he complains, international design consultants and large construction companies are setting up in Saudi Arabia trying to grab a slice of the market.

Another issue affecting the local design sector as a whole is some operators are outsourcing much of the work to countries like India and the Philippines where professionals’ wages are lower or buying furnishings like closets and cabinets abroad.

Despite these concerns, the executive fu-

lly expects the company to continue on the path of growth and is studying ways to attract new customers such as developing the “design it yourself” mobile app.

“We’d love to have international partners join us in this project perhaps bringing in their expertise in AI. Everything in Saudi Arabia, including our company, is open to doing business with others,” Alshawaf says.

New Atmosphere

A desire to get back to work coinciding with Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman’s pronouncement on Vision 2030 inspired Faten Aldelejan and her business partner to set up fit-out company Golden RMZ which now has an impressive roster of both local and foreign clients.

“I worked in the residential sector for two decade and then took a two-year break,” the founder and general manager recalls. “Yet I wanted to get back to work so we decided to get into the fit-out sector back in 2020.”

By then Vision 2030’s liberalizing effect on Saudi society had taken root and Aldelejan noticed that the more relaxed atmosphere inspired people to go out and enjoy leisure activities which had been proscribed before.

“People’s outdoor activities were very limited before the Vision, but it all changed after the crown prince’s reforms” she says.

“So entrepreneurs were opening new places for dining, shopping and entertainment, while firms were building or expanding offices and it just seemed right to get into the commercial side of the design and fit-out business,” she says.

Golden RMZ offers its clients a full range of services such as interior design, engineering, custom-made wooden furniture, fit-out and global procurement.

One of its showcase projects was carrying out the design and fit-out of a prestigious Lebanese restaurant in Riyadh. The company has also worked with Domino’s Pizza and celebrity chef David Burke’s chain of eateries.

“This influx of foreign companies into the country is a big opportunity for our business, especially in Riyadh. Over the last two years we worked with two newly-arrived companies and there are more companies in the pipeline.”

Aldelejan credits the changes under Vision 2030 for easing the task of setting up a business pointing out in one example that importing materials from foreign suppliers has become quicker and less bureaucratic.

Looking ahead over the short term, the general manager says she would like to handle larger office projects.

“Real estate development in Saudi Arabia is doing very well. Offices are becoming the big thing and a lot of these complexes will be opening in 2026 and 2027 so there again is a lot of opportunity.

“It’s the same with the residential sector with houses and apartments. The Saudi population is somewhere around 70 per cent young people many of whom are seeking new homes in towers or in compounds and as we work only with developers, we can do entire structures,” she says.

“Things have changed so much and not only economically. I’ve been in this business since 1996 and it was difficult as a woman back then to do an onsite inspection. There were only three or four women in this sector and now they’re everywhere. We have Vision 2030 to thank for that as well.”



INTERVIEW WITH ABDULELAH ALUJAN

Managing Director
EVENTASTIC

Young entrepreneurs are taking up the many opportunities that Vision 2030 is bringing to the table, and the events sector is perhaps one of the most interesting and exciting ones in the new Saudi Arabia. With many major international events coming in the next decade, this dynamic self-starter decided that the time to jump into the success wagon is now



Since the launch of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's Vision 2030, the country has undergone an amazing metamorphosis, becoming a more open society not only for its citizens but for leisure and business visitors as well.

Along with its cultural, artistic and archaeological attractions, many of which are being enjoyed for the first time, the Kingdom is also now hosting musical, sports and other events, along with major entertainment shows.

And the Kingdom is set to present two of the biggest spectacles on earth in the coming years.

First will be Expo 2030 in Riyadh with the theme "Foresight for Tomorrow," with sub-themes focusing on transformational technology, sustainable solutions, and prosperous people and expected attendance by 40 million visitors.

Four years later, stadiums around the country will welcome hundreds of thousands of global football fans to the World Cup with matches being played in five cities with the opening and final taking place in Riyadh.

But Saudi Arabia as an event host is not all fun and games. There is the convention, events and trade shows business which is growing as the government, international organizations and multinationals choose Saudi Arabia as the showcase for many events.

Saudi Arabia has clearly become a "must-go" destination on the global events calendar and its citizens are proud to show off the progress and development the country is going through.

Learning Curve

The desire to run his own business, the ability to persevere through challenges, and the opening up of society thanks to Vision 2030



gave Abdulelah Alujan his opportunity to create and run Eventastic, an event organizer that is slated for success.

After working for 15 years at an insurance company, the founder and now managing director wanted to attempt something different.

"Eventually, I asked myself why do I have to work for other people and why don't I have my own company, and work for myself?" he recalls.

"I had invested in the events sector since 2011 while I was in college through a small business which staged exhibitions and I liked being sometimes able to solve problems that occurred at exhibitions we were handling."

Still working part time at the insurance firm, the executive put on an event for one of Saudi Arabia's major corporations and another involving the Saudi royal family which the managing director describes as "amazing."

"However at the same time, I had 550 people under my control so that was a difficult learning curve. After that, Covid came and of course everything stopped," he says.

"I was at a real loss about what to do to ensure that a business could survive through those extremely difficult times. I called some friends for

advice and they told me to forget my company because there is no future in that business."

Assured Growth

But Alujan held on through the end of the pandemic which triggered major events in the capital such as the Riyadh Season, the annual city-wide entertainment and cultural festival which attracts people from around the world, spurring renewed interest in the events industry.

Finally, in 2022 he left his insurance job to devote all of his attention to Eventastic which now employs 38 permanent staff and around 150 freelancers. Revenue this year is projected to be around \$6.5 million.

"At the moment we are working on things like event construction, building event fun zones and other projects," the executive says. "In our projects for the media we do all the design and set up for three or four important television programs."

But challenges exist, he points out. One of those is the lack of skilled and, most importantly, experienced events specialists among the Saudi workforce. Alujan suggests that the government should establish a trade school to train locals interested in working in the industry.

"There are people around who have five or ten years' experience but in the events world that's nothing and so we have to bring in people from other countries," he says.

It is clear that the demand for skilled professionals will continue to rise with all that's going on in the Kingdom and with the run up to Expo 2030 and the World Cup.

"So growth in the sector is assured and I'd like to see us become a trusted consultant company for major events and be one of the leading events and media companies both here in Saudi Arabia and in the Middle East, God willing," Alujan says.



A.I. COMES TO HELP VISION 2030 GROW

NEW START-UPS AS WELL AS ESTABLISHED FIRMS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A.I.

Artificial intelligence and Information Technology are perhaps the two most important new technologies which Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his advisers are currently promoting to ensure that Vision 2030 becomes the once-in-a-lifetime transformative success it will almost certainly be.

According to the Crown Prince, “scientific innovation, unprecedented technology, and unlimited growth prospects” will help fuel “new technologies such as AI and IOT and if used optimally, can spare the world many disadvantages and can bring enormous benefits.”

The Saudi Data and AI Authority, a new government agency overseeing the country’s high-tech and information technology efforts, said 70 per cent of the almost 100 strategic goals of Vision 2030 involved using data and AI.

Examples of the Vision’s emphasis on information technology include digitizing all government operations in a plan known as “e-governance” and offering generous financial aid to sector players whether major international tech companies setting up shop in Saudi Arabia or newly formed startups.

Over the next four years, revenue from the country’s IT market is forecast to register 3.4 per cent annual growth to yield a market volume of \$1.64 billion by 2028, attracting investors with deep pockets both domestic and foreign.

Every startup that spends at least 90 days in the Kingdom and registers their company locally receives a grant of some \$40,000 along with the chance at a further \$100,000 investment which they must spend in the country.

So far, the program has attracted dozens of startups from around the world getting in on the IT and AI environment that is developing in Saudi Arabia today, while existing companies are using these cutting-edge technologies to boost their business.



Applied AI

One company with deep local roots is KluesAI which like many private sector companies in the Kingdom was founded by former senior government officials who became entrepreneurs after seeing at first hand the opportunities Vision 2030 was creating.

“This company was actually founded by Walid Alrashoud,” recalls CEO Hussein Y. Alharbi. “We worked together at the Ministry of Justice where we saw all these companies working with the government or suppliers telling us they needed a project and develop their KPIs in order to achieve the goals of the Vision.

“These companies had knowledge, international experience and technology, and we decided to leave government service, join the private sector and established KluesAI in 2021.”

At the very beginning, the partners focused on computer vision within AI and was carrying out a proof of concept for the Riyadh municipality to detect and measure the pollution on the streets of the capital.

At the time, city inspectors would go to a particular street and take photographs and



HUSSEIN Y. ALHARBI

CEO OF KLUESAI

“THERE’S A HIGH CHANCE FOR FOREIGN INVESTORS TO COME AND DISCOVER START-UPS”

would perhaps gather ten or so pieces of visual evidence of pollution daily. When KluesAI used its method, the visual evidence soared to 40,000 items a week, an amount of data the municipality could not adequately process.

“So we sat down with them and came up with the solution of identifying the priority problem areas which needed to be resolved,” the executive explains. “This is vital for Vision 2030’s Smart Cities Concept and it was our first project and a success.

“We are now in the process of renewing that project for another year. We’re also working with NEOM where the project’s scope is larger. So this type of computer vision is the main focus for KluesAI to resolve public sector issues.”

Along with these examples, the tech firm also provides consultation services for clients on how to plan, design, and implement AI strategies, concept-to-execution solution building, and innovation and R&D.

The company’s CityKlues division is exclusively dedicated to the Smart Cities Concept and works with deep-learning models trained specifically to comb through thousands of hours of street footage to monitor and detect everything about an urban environment, particularly in Riyadh.

It uses cameras that talk directly to AI connected to dashboard and decision making systems and monitoring tools gathering extensive, accurate and actionable

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ABDULAZIZ S. BASHATAH

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RETAIL PARTNERS CO.

“RETAIL IS A TRADITIONAL BUSINESS SO YOU NEED TO INNOVATE BY GOING ONLINE”

data to deliver the necessary insights for solutions.

In addition, the company's SpaceKlues division operates advanced state-of-the-art technology to process aerial & satellite imagery.

“This year we expect to double our income from 2024 to around \$5 million so we're already beyond the revenue for a startup which is not bad for a company at this stage,” Alharbi says.

“Our own vision is to expand not only within AI and the computer vision or in the environmental sector. One project we are developing is related to large language model similar to ChatGPT but customized for the Saudi public sector.

“We've also entered the field of digital transformation with consultation on building applications, platforms and business intelligence to merge all of that into one entity to be analyzed for the client's use,” he says.

Looking ahead the CEO says he wants to see KluesAI grow much larger until it becomes a very attractive acquisition target by a larger outfit like Humain, the new and full AI value chain subsidiary of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, or go for an IPO.

“I don't believe any of this would have been possible without Vision 2030,” the executive says, “because it is such an enabler for the AI domain. If it wasn't there I would say that we at Klues AI would only be doing classic IT.”

“There is a huge chance for foreign investors to come here where they will discover lots of startup companies with Saudi brains and capabilities and for sure they will benefit. The opportunity is there now for the taking!”

Opportunities Online

Saudi Arabia's burgeoning e-commerce sector, plus knowing when to change up its business model has helped leading foot-

wear chain Retail Partners Company maintain its success despite market uncertainty, according to Executive Director Abdulaziz S. Bashatah.

Another former public sector employee who has opted for the private sector, in his previous job he was covering several industries as an equity research analyst at state-owned Saudi National Bank, including retail.

“I covered one particular retail company and that helped give me some insight into the business. So along with a friend I decided to set up a retail company,” he recalls.

“We began with children's apparel representing the prestigious German brand Steiff. We thought that with the Kingdom's young demographic with a high level of disposable income, it would be a good investment.”

But the partners found out that international brands like Zara had the children's clothing market pretty well sewn up so they switched to footwear starting with brands from Spain, Italy and Brazil.

They also created their own brand with production in China. However, the market soured in 2023 and 2024 and they shut

down the Chinese operation and focused on only one Spanish brand.

And the other major change was the partial transition to online sales spurred by Vision 2030's emphasis on IT and a revolution in young Saudis' shopping habits.

“Under Vision 2030, retail became one of the main business sectors and because of that and because most of the Kingdom's population is what is known as ‘Generation Z’, online shopping began to replace the practice of purchasing at physical stores,” the executive explains.

“Retail is a traditional business but now you need to make it innovative by going online or coming up with something new. We were also having issues like falling sales and rent hikes from our landlords.”

With the shift to online sales, the partners expected a slowdown but after changing over to focus on e-commerce, Retail Partners Company saw that 50 per cent of sales were from its online operations.

In 2022, the footwear firm had 25 stores and now it has less than half that number plus two online platforms. It currently employs around 60 people and posts annual revenue of more than \$5 million.

“So far this year we're doing better than the previous two and our strategy of balancing online with physical stores seems to be working well,” says Bashatah.

“We're expecting a further boost to the retail sector with the opening of the mammoth The Avenues - Riyadh shopping mall in 2026 which should be a real game changer and become a destination for Saudis and tourists alike.”

Along with his position at Retail Partners Company, he is also executive director of FPC, a food and beverage franchising operation based in the United Arab Emirates and which he says may soon move into Saudi Arabia.

Bashatah plans to have Retail Partners Company be one of the country's main foot-





wear retailers thanks to a new and much larger e-commerce platform incorporating AI to provide customers with a truly innovative online shopping experience for its products.

“We’ve seen the high-tech transitions brought about by Vision 2030 and its impact. Most of its goals have already been achieved across many of its sectors,” he says.

“We’re open to partnerships with companies related to our sectors and I would urge foreign investors to take true advantage of all of this as now is the time to invest in the Kingdom.”

Opportunities Galore

E-commerce has also supercharged sales at the Alhomaiddhi Group which has been in the luxury brand watch business in the Kingdom since its founding in 1959 as a small enterprise in Riyadh.

Dealing at the beginning almost exclusively in Swiss-made personal timepieces with Candino watches as its debut brand, today the company represents around two dozen brands.

“It was a super success,” says CEO Shaik Omar Zubaidi. “Riyadh was very small at the time and we had very few customers and most of them locals. Then we added other brands like Givenchy, Gucci, Versace and Fendi.

“Business was growing as Riyadh expanded and we increased the number of stores beginning around 1994 to three in the capital and then the group spread across the Kingdom to about 120 branches, or points of sale.”

A decade ago, annual revenue had reached between \$70 million and \$80 million but then fell when the Covid pandemic

arrived.

“However, it was only for a few months and business started up again as people weren’t traveling, they were stuck in the country and they had money to spend,” the executive explains.

“So 2021 was very good but then sales eased over the next two years when the country opened up, flights were resumed and people began to travel again.”

Vision 2030 helped the Alhomaiddhi Group through this period with import and customs procedures made easier. At the same time, the company’s product line underwent a major change.

“During Covid, people turned away from luxury watches and began to demand entry-level timepieces which were more affordable. We continued with some luxury brands but the cheaper brands like Tommy Hilfiger, Armani and Michael Kors have done very

well,” Zubaidi says.

Another change in the market was the boom in online purchases which led to the closing of some of the group’s stores and points of sale in shopping malls which were not performing as well as in the past along with those which suffered rental increases.

An additional positive development was that Saudi customers were turning away from the big online shopping platforms like Amazon, preferring to do their e-commerce purchases from a local, long trusted and reliable company.

“It was tough at first,” the CEO recalls. “We started with a social media campaign, raised awareness of the online shopping option in our stores and people began to respond.

“Now we’re receiving orders from places within the Kingdom that we have not heard from in a long time. This year we’re doing very well indeed, we think it will be a stable year and we predict sales will be around 70 per cent higher than 2024 with revenue of around \$48 million.”

Zubaidi argues that with Vision 2030 fueling the economic expansion of the country, it can’t help but have a positive impact on the group’s fortunes and sales from the increasing number of visitors will soar when VAT refunds for foreigners are introduced soon.

“We’re also boosting the training of our store staff with monthly training sessions and I think that will help sales as well,” he says.

“I believe Saudi Arabia is a very good place to invest as the growth is incredible. With Vision 2030, people are coming here from the United States and Europe and they see that the Kingdom has undergone deep and positive changes.”

