

# STARTUP PANORAMA

EDITION 2.0

دبي للمشاريع الناشئة

DUBAI STARTUP HUB

AN INITIATIVE OF DUBAI CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY



## **If you think about Dubai's warp speed progress**

from a tiny desert settlement to its global superlative metropolis status, its foundation is simply the sheer force of its entrepreneurial spirit. The extraordinary entrepreneurial vision and contagious ambition of the nation's leaders propelled both public and private sector, starting from scratch, to scale unprecedented heights.



With small and medium enterprises (SME) as the backbone of the economy, billions worth of government and semi-government initiatives have been put in place to support the sector, and help startups realize their contribution towards local, regional and global sustainable development. But it's not just the public sector- the UAE's private sector is also putting its skin in the game. Sharaf DG and Emirates are two examples of the many companies supporting and driving forward entrepreneurial activity in the region by actively participating with the startup ecosystem. Perfectly in sync with Dubai's vision for the future, both organizations, which started-up in Dubai too, are now looking forward to their own future based on the innovative ideas that emerge from the ecosystem.

Emirates started its journey with just two aircraft in 1985. Over the past three decades, Emirates has grown to become the world's best and amongst the largest airlines in the world with a fleet of more than 265 aircraft, flying to over 155 destinations in more than 80 countries around the world. Today, Emirates Group, along with co-founders GE and Dubai Tourism, leads an initiative called Intelak, a travel technology entrepreneurship incubator that seeks to strengthen promising ideas focused on building the country's innovation ecosystem in the travel and aviation sector. Intelak develops teams, comprised of early-stage entrepreneurs and students, to become part of the conversation in travel and aviation. "The objective behind what Emirates is trying to do as a part of Dubai and the UAE is to make us the aviation capital of



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the world,” says Aya Sadler, Intelak’s Incubator Manager. “In order for us to reach that goal, we need to set more absolute crazy ideas to be able to understand the current obstacles we’re facing and how we’re going to tackle those challenges in a constructive and collective way as organizations. So setting big audacious goals is part of what Emirates is trying to do in order for us to challenge the norms of what has kept the aviation industry obsolete for about 60 to 80 years now.” How do

you crack an old industry like this? “You work with other partners and broaden your perspectives,” Sadler points out. Amongst the various Intelak alumni success stories, Sadler makes mention of the Conceptualisers team at the incubator. The team came up with a way to transform inflight trays, and have signed a partnership with Diab, one of the leading manufacturers in the world, to produce the first of its kind trays. The NEOS In-flight Economy Tray is re-designed to combine, functionality, sustainability and add convenience not only to the airline, but also to its passengers during inflight meal services and to its crew during service and clearance. Its driving factors result from a new material and design approach that allows a reduction in over 80% of the current tray’s weight, which in-turn produces fuel savings



Aya Sadler, Incubator Manager, Intelak

for the airline. In addition to Intelak, Emirates is also working in collaboration with Dubai Future Accelerators (DFA), an intensive nine-week program for forward-thinking public and private sector organizations and startups that use the city of Dubai as a living testbed to co-create solutions for global and local challenges of tomorrow. Emirates’ challenge to entrepreneurs as part of the program is to create a customer journey through the airport that will introduce a seamless passage



Area 2071 website

Area 2071 is an initiative launched by H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to become the experimental nucleus of the Centennial Plan 2071.

through all touch-points including check in counters and baggage drop. This, Emirates says, should be achieved through the use of robotic process automation, artificial intelligence, biometrics, big data analytics, natural language processing, sentiment analysis and by connecting systems and data across various aspects of

airline operations in order to generate the optimization insights needed to improve service delivery. This will be the first step in creating the airport of the future.

Meanwhile, the future-focused airline has also announced that it will build an Aviation X-Lab at Area 2071 along with a consortium of partners. The Experimental Lab will host senior executives and global experts from every facet of aviation industry including host airlines, manufacturers, ground logistics, regulators, engineers, academics, and startups under a single roof, to co-create industry shaping challenges. It will also host an annual challenge at Area 2071 to rethink the transportation industry, the first of which will be announced in November, with teams convening in Dubai in the Spring of 2018 to begin their work.

### Rethinking industries

Since its inception in 2005, Sharaf DG has become a leading powerhouse retailer in the region. The UAE's first ever Big-Box concept started its journey as a 15,000 square foot electronics store in Dubai, and has since grown to 33 stores across the region with more than 25,000 electronic products and accessories in stock. More than a million customers visit Sharaf DG stores every month. It's also expanded to omni-channel retailing and a business division that now serves networking and device requirements of more than 50,000 SMEs in the UAE.

With its retail muscle, the company now extends its spaces to startups from around the world to showcase their innovative products at its Solution Bar spaces within its stores. "Our strength is our retail experience spaces, and



MovieMask

“The startup ecosystem is able to add immense value to big businesses through products, software and services. We have worked with many such startups and seen the benefits of some of these new ideas on our core business.”

we are offering these to startups who would like to leverage this to showcase some of their new products to end consumers,” says Sharaf DG CEO Nilesh Khalkho. The purpose is to give the inventors an environment where customers can touch and feel the solutions and experience them for themselves. “Our Solution Bar initiative has brought in more than 40 unique products from around the world, which consumers can interact with at our Times Square Centre store and some of our other stores,” Khalkho adds. One such product is the MovieMask, which is a wearable that lets you turn your phone into a cinema anytime, anywhere. Developed in collaboration with opticians, the unique, patented single-lens system lets users choose any content on their phones and place it inside the device to view it at full

resolution. Meanwhile, Square Off is the world’s Smartest Chess Board that’s received more than 2,000 preorders from 70+ countries on Kickstarter and Indiegogo. For users who want the feeling of a real board but also want to play with opponents online, the board allows you to challenge any online opponent across the globe or play against the artificial intelligence on this automated chess board. It uses a compact two-axis robotic arm with



Square Off chess board



Nilesh Khalkho, CEO and Co-Founder of Sharaf DG

a magnetic head beneath the box to move the magnetic chess pieces. “We have also continuously experimented with software and services from various startups around the world to help us improve our business results,” Khalkho adds. “Some of these were quite successful and we continue to use them in our day to day operations.” The CEO says he cares about supporting and encouraging startups is because he believes that “innovation has now become

“The bigger your vision, the bigger your achievement will be.”

democratized”. He explains: “The startup ecosystem is able to add immense value to big businesses through products, software and services. We have worked with many such startups and seen the benefits of some of these new ideas on our core business.”

#### ▣ Making it work

Sharaf DG is also continuously working with various startup organizations to conduct experiments with their offerings and if successful use them in their business. “The corporate-start up partnership is beneficial for startups to perfect their offerings by testing it in a ‘live’ environment with real customers rather than just in a simulation environment,” Khalkho says. “For corporates, it helps us identify potential game-changing products, which can help us stay ahead of our competition.

Of course, the right fit between a corporate and a startup is required to be able to get the most out of such a relationship.”

When approaching Sharaf DG or other corporates for support, the CEO advises startups to be “clear” on how their solution can impact business, and more importantly how it can be measured.

“Many solution providers may build a great product or service, but if you are unable to measure and quantify the benefit, it becomes difficult for someone to be convinced to buy,” he says.

Sadder stresses that an entrepreneur’s attitude is just as important as their idea, if not more. “The most impressive entrepreneurs in the world are the most humble about their businesses,” she says. “They’re extremely curious and they will do anything in their power to get the best result by the deadline.



H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

These are the type of entrepreneurs that clients/ customers will be happy to work with. The objective is trying to come up with something that’s original, that makes a positive impact, and that feels good genuinely.”

To put it quite succinctly, in the words of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed: “The bigger your vision, the bigger your achievement will be.”