

RETAIL THOUGHTS  
Marwan J Al Sarkal

INTERNATIONAL VIEW  
Missguided

FEATURE STORY  
Physical meets digital

CITYSCAPE  
2018

MALL WATCH  
City Centre Sharjah

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May 2018



**Fahad Al Othaim**

**Vice Chairman, OREIDCO**

**NEW WAVE IN LEISURE & AMUSEMENT**

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your neighbor

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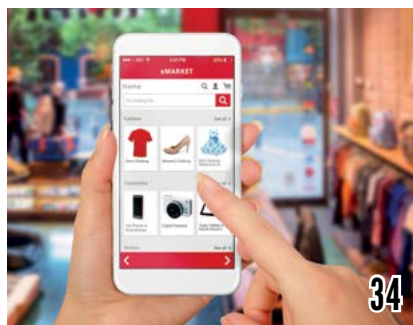
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**COVER STORY**

Fahad Al-Othaim, vice chairman of Saudi Arabia-based Al-Othaim Real Estate Investment & Development Co., was recently named as the 'Leisure and Entertainment Personality of the Year' at the first edition of the MENALAC Awards. We trace his significant contributions to the leisure and amusement industry in the region.

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# Dear reader

## The change sweeping Saudi Arabia

April saw some landmark events taking place in Saudi Arabia after many years. First, cinema returned to the Kingdom on April 18 with the first significant movie screening in 35 years in a spectacular new theatre in King Abdullah Financial District in Riyadh. The gala screening of the Hollywood blockbuster Black Panther was viewed by hundreds of guests in the cinema complex owned by AMC cinema chain.

Saudi Arabia plans to open nearly 350 cinemas, with more than 2,500 screens, by 2030 with the cinema business projected to contribute more than \$24 billion to the Saudi economy and create more than 30,000 jobs.

The news of the launch of Qiddiya, a new mega entertainment city, arrived just at the time of going to press. Qiddiya is one of three Saudi giga-projects, on top of Neom and the Red Sea project, launched by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, as part of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. The project targets local, regional and international tourists by becoming the pre-eminent entertainment, sports and cultural destination. With a total area of 334 square kilometres, the project will surpass Walt Disney World in Florida, which is only 110 square kilometres.

The first televised World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) event in the Kingdom was a huge success, with 60,000 fans cheering their heroes at the King Abdullah Stadium on April 27. It was another historic moment for Saudi Arabia when women could attend and enjoy the show.

All the developments mentioned above amply complement our cover story on Fahad Al-Othaim, vice chairman of Saudi-based Al-Othaim Real Estate Investment & Development Co., who recently received the 'Leisure and Entertainment Personality of the Year' honour at the first edition of the Middle East & North Africa Leisure and Attractions Council (MENALAC) Awards.

Marwan Jassim Al Sarkal, CEO of Shurooq, who is instrumental in taking Sharjah to new heights, shares the Sharjah story in this month's 'Retail Thoughts'.

'Physical meets digital' is our special feature of the month for which we spoke to a select group of people whose brands have embarked on a transformation path, with an aim to integrate physical and digital channels.

Last but not the least, we have our regular columns, besides a preview on Brazilian footwear and the announcement of dates and venue of the Middle East Retail Forum and RetailME Awards 2018.

*Lawrence Pinto*

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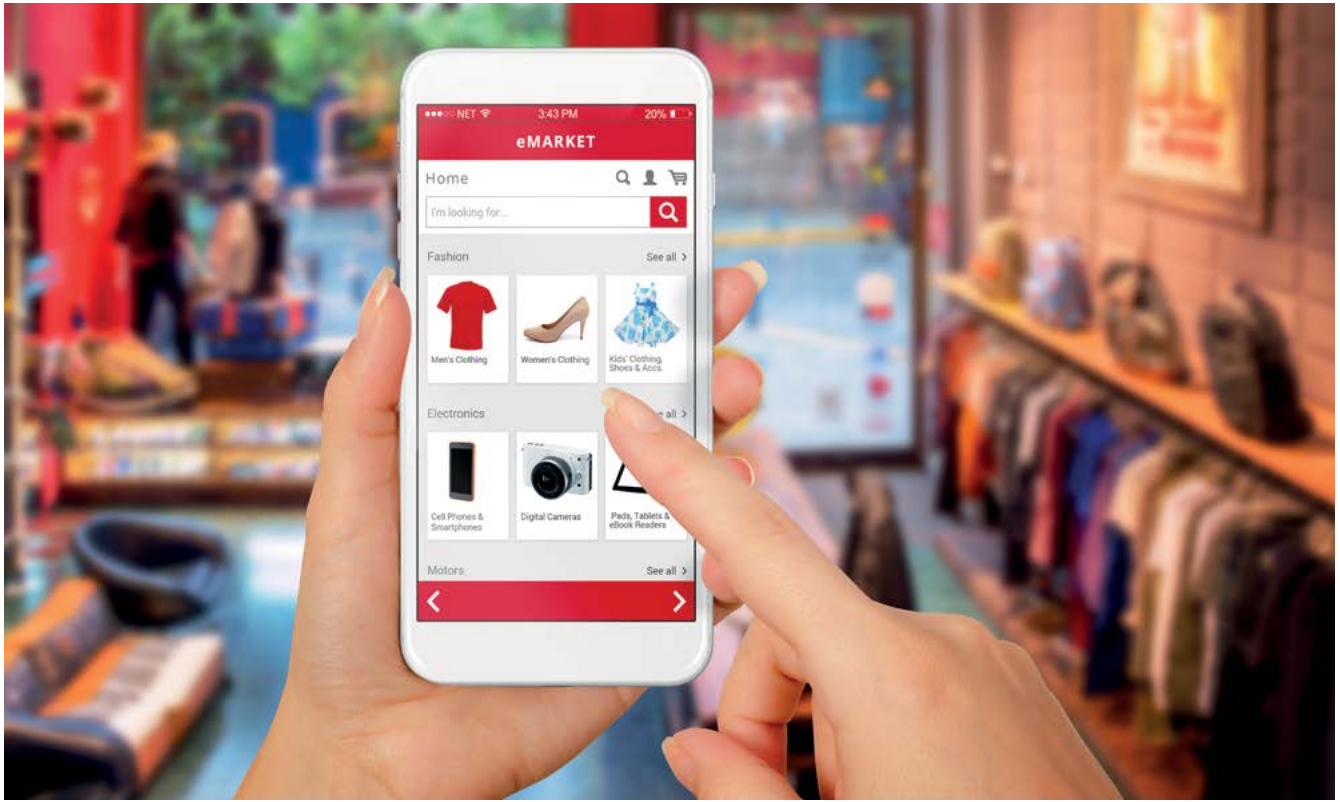
# The Sharjah story must be told

**A** relaxing sea salt spa in the middle of the desert. Sighting Arabian Collared Kingfishers and Hawksbill sea turtle nesting areas amidst one of the oldest mangrove reserves. Being in oneness with nature and endangered species, which include the Arabian gazelles among others. Experiencing Emirati homes from the 50s. Even more mesmerising is finding archaeological traces from the Neolithic age. Now throw into it a mix of retail outlets, alfresco dining options, a waterpark and a ride on a giant Ferris wheel. You can find all this in the emirate of Sharjah, the cultural capital of the UAE.

*It must take a lot of effort and foresightedness to make all this happen. Let's also not forget that Sharjah used to be the first port of call when trading activities started in the UAE. An organisation is working tirelessly to reinforce Sharjah's position as an investment hub alongside being a culturally rich emirate with profound legacy. But to do all this requires someone at the forefront to drive the vision. And one man is indeed working relentlessly to ensure people – residents and tourists – get a 360° experience of Sharjah.*

*Under the able guidance of the ruler of Sharjah, and member of the UAE Supreme Council, His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, and his daughter Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, chairperson of Shurooq, Marwan Jassim Al Sarkal, CEO of Shurooq, is taking Sharjah to new heights. **Rupkatha Bhowmick** recently met Al Sarkal who weaved the Sharjah story beautifully*

*“The only mandate is every single project we undertake must have a positive social, economic and environmental impact on Sharjah. We have our challenges but also a unique positioning. So far, it has been a rollercoaster of a ride. But it has been an exciting one too, transforming destinations and creating a niche positioning for Sharjah, which always existed but never showcased,” Al Sarkal stresses.*



# Making retail channel-agnostic

Are you looking to try on some make-up virtually? French cosmetics chain Sephora has made that possible by using augmented reality (AR). Meanwhile, Spanish fashion retailer Zara is smartly integrating its online and offline channels. Alongside launching a pop-up dedicated to e-commerce at Westfield's Stratford Shopping Centre in London, it is refurbishing its bricks-and-mortar full-line store in the same mall. Zara is also planning to use AR in its store environment. The AR displays will allow customers to not only browse through outfits

displayed on a mannequin but also make a purchase.

Puma's RS-100 sneakers are analytical footwear that uses computing to aid performance. A custom-designed computer chip built into the right heel automatically records time, distance and calories, which is then communicated to the user. In the food space, Starbucks uses data analytics to not only curate menu according to consumer preferences, but also while selecting real estate. It uses data to gauge population density, average incomes and traffic patterns before choosing a location for a new store.

Closer to the region, a good example is what furniture store Home Centre has done to blur the line between physical and digital. You can shop at any corner of the store and checkout at a mobile point of sale (POS) and collect points on loyalty programme Shukran, all the while interacting with a store executive. More recently, Shurooq (Sharjah Investment & Development Authority) leveraged virtual reality (VR) to showcase one of its archaeologically significant projects Mleiha to visitors at the Arabian Travel Market 2018.

The discussion has slowly shifted to evolving and adapting the physical environment, even products, with digital elements to meet the current retailing – and importantly consumer – needs. It is no longer about physical retail touchpoints closing, but more about how 'smart', 'experiential' and 'differentiated' they are becoming to address the new age, connected consumer.

*We, at RetailME, spoke to a select group of people whose brands have embarked on a transformation path, with an aim to integrate physical and digital channels*

# MENALAC working to enhance the amusement bouquet

The day-long Leisure, Entertainment & Attractions Conference – organised by the Middle East & North Africa Leisure and Attraction Council (MENALAC), the trade body for the Middle East and North African leisure market – took place on April 8.

With a central focus on good operational systems within the leisure and entertainment industry, the conference touched upon a range of topics. The status of the regional leisure market and projects was analysed with projects that are open including LEGOLAND Water Park, Dubai Safari, Louvre Abu Dhabi, Etihad Museum and La Perle, to name a few. While there are many other exciting projects in the pipeline – such as Fox Studios, Motor City Theme Park and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, among others – there is no set deadline.

Developing human capital received due attention. Safety remained a critical area of discussion. The present and the future of entertainment, ranging from adventure-based amusement facilities to virtual reality (VR) oriented experiences, was discussed. Also addressed were the role of technology in amusement facilities as well as implementing loyalty programmes for repeat play.



Prakash Vivekanand

When **RetailME** spoke to the secretary-general of MENALAC, Prakash Vivekanand – who plays an instrumental role in organising the MENALAC conference – he was visibly pleased with the way the second edition panned out

“We are pleased with the turnout at the conference. Our diverse mix of speakers has a rich level of regional experience. These people have and are working in this region. They are aware of the operating conditions in this region. They can discuss the regional leisure and amusement landscape as insiders, ensuring good takeaways for the operators,” stressed Vivekanand.

Commenting on the theme of this year’s conference, he said, “In the previous editions of conferences organised by MENALAC, the key focus was safety – which is crucial. This time, however, we chose to focus on operations – how to revamp operations, what new things to add, how to engage visitors and so on.”

“During the first half, the conference focused on human factor behind operations; progress on projects – those that are going live, ones that are stalled and also the upcoming opportunities; use of technology in leisure and amusement facilities through things like gamification, RFID and redemption, among others. The conference also looked into adventure-tainment. The second half looked into safety, virtual reality as well as human capital,” he added.

Vivekanand also emphasised some key factors that differentiate the MENALAC conference. The first and most important differentiator, according to him, is that MENALAC operates as a not-for-profit body and the conferences run with educational, as

opposed to commercial, objectives. “Our drive is to enhance this region in the way amusement facilities operate, state of everyday conditions, safety compliance as well as educate and empower the human capital to better engage with guests,” he elaborated.

“Today we are dealing with the Generation Z whose engagement with anything is

fairly limited. They look for something new every day. With the customer profile and expectations constantly changing, the big question is should assets change, which is not easy to do. Rather, we will have to find ways to engage the customer differently. It could be adding gamification features, exciting reward programmes and so on. And these were

## New ways of guest engagement

The way we are trying to ‘gamify games’ is fascinating. We are trying to understand how we can use games differently. We know that customers are looking for instant gratification and that’s a key thing to remember in the way we engage with them. We know that the ride side of the business is not as dominant as the games, purely driven by gratification.

# Flagship projects dominate the UAE capital's real estate show



Sheikh Hamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan tours the exhibition after inauguration

The UAE capital once again played host to the 12th edition of Cityscape Abu Dhabi from April 17 to 19 at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC). The three-day show provided an ideal platform for many of the big names in the regional property industry to launch of their flagship real estate projects, **Lawrence Pinto** reports

**S**heikh Hamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, chief of the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince's Court and member of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council, inaugurated the event.

Leading local and international developers, including Aldar Properties, Bloom Holding and IMKAN, were out in full force, showcasing the latest developments and upcoming projects in the emirate.

## Ambitious project

Aldar Properties announced the launch of a new AED10-billion master plan Alghadeer, located close to the border of Abu Dhabi and Dubai within its Seih Al Sdeirah landbank.

The Alghadeer masterplan consists of 14,408 units, including villas, townhouses and maisonettes. Total residential GFA is set to exceed 14 million sqft and complemented by the office, retail and hospitality spaces, education and community amenities.

"The launch of Alghadeer underlines Aldar's ambition. From its strategic location to its sustainable living initiatives, Alghadeer signals the creation of a new way of living for UAE residents, now and in the future," says Talal Al Dhiyebi, CEO, Aldar Properties.

"This launch further underlines how Aldar is expanding its successful destination-led strategy to additional areas of Abu Dhabi, capitalising on the UAE's flourishing population as well as our reputation as Abu Dhabi's leading developer," he adds.

## Integrated communities

Bloom Properties, a Bloom Holding company, specialising in the development of integrated and sustainable communities, announced that it is on track to deliver its primary projects on schedule. Unveiling details on a range of mixed-use developments, the developer also showcased existing projects such as Bloom Heights and Bloom Towers in Dubai's Jumeirah Village Circle (JVC) and Park View and Soho Square mixed-use developments on Saadiyat in Abu Dhabi.





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