

Sustainable Endeavors

As Jordan's first Endeavor Entrepreneur, **Mansour Mansour** is one of the country's most recent faces of success. Thanks to Endeavor, a global organization committed to finding and supporting "high-impact entrepreneurs," the success he has accrued thus far is being added to the range of benefits he is to undoubtedly attain in the future by joining some of the world's most notable and powerful people in business. **Zaina Steityeh** sat down with Mansour to ask if his recent success has resonated into his day-to-day activities.



As reported in the December 2008 issue of *Jordan Business*, Endeavor, a global organization seeking to foster and bolster entrepreneurs it believes can make a definitive difference to the economies around them, has recently added Jordan to the list of countries in which it operates. Indeed, even before its official launch, the Jordanian chapter of Endeavor announced the successful selection of its first Endeavor Entrepreneur, Mansour Mansour. The Jordanian businessman, now added to the fold of the some 333 high-impact entrepreneurs supported worldwide by Endeavor, is the chief executive officer (CEO) and founder of Javna, a company dedicated to mobile media services and wireless-solutions technologies.

"We are delighted with Mansour Mansour's achievements at our South African International Selection Panel - the largest stage of Endeavor's unique and rigorous multi-stage selection process," said Carmen Saad, the managing director of Endeavor-Jordan. "Mansour is Jordan's first Endeavor Entrepreneur and is very representative of the type of high-impact potential necessary to drive economic

development in emerging markets," she added. "We are currently working with Mansour on a Needs Assessment [a type of study] in order to identify the main areas in which Endeavor can support and add value to him and his business." *Jordan Business* sat down with Mansour to find out what this "high-impact" entrepreneur thinks of his recent success.

Q Congratulations on becoming Jordan's first Endeavor Entrepreneur. How has the Endeavor experience to date affected you as an entrepreneur and your business? How is the model working out for you?

A It truly has been an incredible experience from day one. For starters, I met with so many different, high-caliber people here in Jordan during the local selection process, including Fadi Ghandour, Ali Al Hosry and others. We talked thoroughly about Javna, from its inception to its present-day operations. I was then recommended to the international selection board in South Africa where the final nominations took place. I was among approximately 13 other entrepreneurs and

companies from the countries in which Endeavor operates. I, through Javna, was the only company to win unanimous 'yes' votes from all six judges on the selection panel within the first of the three rounds available.

Going to South Africa and talking to so many company representatives and entrepreneurs was an invaluable experience. Many were astonished to find that a company like Javna, and the vision behind it, could have emanated from this part of the world. A few were even interested in pursuing venture-capital investment with Javna, especially investors from the US and South Africa. I was very proud of Javna at that moment. However, I am very aware that our success didn't come out of the blue, but was rather the result of thorough planning, a sturdy vision and a strong belief that we could do it.

Q As an entrepreneur, what was your definitive source of inspiration when you started Javna?

A Since graduating in 1986, I've worked in small and big companies alike, both within the region as well as internation-



ally. I thought to myself that if I could contribute to the success of such companies, then I have what it takes to make it on my own. Moreover, I firmly believe that the Middle East as a whole has missed out on everything from the agricultural and industrial revolutions to the more recent computing revolution. If you think about it, you can't attribute names, flags or entrepreneurs from this part of the world to the successes in any of the aforementioned eras. Even with the Internet revolution, we haven't heard of a genuine Google of the Middle East or an Amazon.com. I've asked why a great many times but have decided that we are not going to miss out on the mobile-technology revolution. In five or ten years down the road, people will attribute even 5 or 10% of the success of mobile technology to this part of the world. This is where my vision started.

Q Could you explain what you mean by mobile technology and shed light on some of the applications Javna has made headway on so far?

A We develop wireless-technology applications that can be used on any interface, as well as building on available mobile technology and mobile-media services. We very much believe in media and advertising, especially when it comes to mobile phones. Never in the history of mankind have we had such an addressable market, with over 3.5 billion users. It's more than the Internet, more than television and growing faster and more widespread by the day.

When I established Javna over seven years ago, we had just retained a futuristic vision of how things were going to be but we were also committed to working on technologies that were commercially feasible and that we could actually sell. At the time, we decided that the best platform to address was messaging. To this end, we built a full suite, called Epicenter Family, which comprehensively addresses the challenges of

that has been around for the last couple of years, called Javi, working on a mobile social-network communication medium, among other technology packages.

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We've also created technologies for new forms of advertising. If you notice my handset, you'll find that my operator logo is Sony rather than Zain or Orange, and that my mobile desktop is actually an ad for Pepsi. Moreover, if I receive a call on my mobile, it flashes an ad for Jaguar in the background. This form of advertisement is the fun new way of advertisement delivery that marketing and advertising managers have been searching for; straight to the mobile phone of potential customers and yet not too intrusive. This is the future of Javna.

Q What are some of the more specific obstacles you face in implementing this new method of advertising? How does it counter, if at all, the recent bombardment of spam advertising messages we've all received on our mobile phones?

A One of the challenges of mobile-media advertising is coming up with a proper business model as it's a very complex one. The first rule of our service is that recipients have to opt in; that is, you have to agree to receive ads. You do so by filling in a small profile, selecting your age, gender and occupation, and we store it in our profile section. You may ask why someone would accept to receive these ads. The answer is we offer them various options to encourage their participation, including deals stipulating that the more ads they receive, the more money is deducted from their monthly bill. Another example is offering a free handset, free messages or free voice-call minutes. There are numerous and very different reward mechanisms.

get people in the 16 to 20 age bracket, we can acquire a targeted list from our database system. It is important to note that this is a very viable way to get rid of the spam advertisements that people have been plagued with recently. To make ourselves attractive, we've priced our services at the price of spam advertising. Advertisers would thus, rationally, go for our more targeted advertisements delivered to people who have opted in.

Q Javna, by all accounts, sounds like it has ticked the box of having an innovative idea at its core. Critically, Endeavor focuses on what they call “high-impact entrepreneurs.” What element of yourself or your business do you think they picked up on as being “high impact?”

A Mobile advertisement is very high-impact. If we're talking about Jordan, we're talking about 100,000 opt-in profiles that enable us to create an inventory of about 700 million ads. That's worth more than \$70 million. If you capture only 1% of that in your first year, then that's still considered very high impact. Moreover, if you consider the Saudi Arabian market, for example, we have a chance to create a market of four billion ads a year, totaling over \$3 billion. This is how much we can create. As for how much we can capture (1%, 5% or a more 0.5%), that is another formula. Whatever the figure, it's still very high impact.

Marketing and advertising managers are looking for new mediums of advertisements; this is one of the freshest out there. In advertising, they say 50% goes to waste and 50% goes to the right place, though no one seems to know which one is which. The world is dealing with saturated mediums. Mobile advertisements, on the other hand, are extremely targeted and they have a viral effect. It's definitely the way forward.

I think Javna has also had a major im-

ing, where we've taken over the entire ground floor in a bid to accommodate our expansion; from five to 70 employees in the last six years! Our plan is to expand to 190 employees by the end of 2009.

Q One of the benefits of being an Endeavor Entrepreneur is the networking platform that you are introduced through, either through Endeavor's Venture Corps members, or the entrepreneurs (local and international) you meet along the way. Have these benefits resonated with you yet?

A I felt it as early as when I participated in the Silicon Valley emersion tour last October and then again at the selection panel in South Africa. Indeed, when I was in Silicon Valley, they said, 'You name the big company you want to work with, we have access to them and we'll help you get connected to them.' Endeavor has huge access to the market and key executives. We've already started sharing our thoughts with heavyweight entrepreneurs and global companies. Everyone associated with Endeavor helps in some way, and that's what is important. It quickly evolves into a community-like approach to helping. Everyone has a value and a way to help other members.

Even before becoming an Endeavor Entrepreneur, I received a great deal of help and advice from people I met. After my selection, Endeavor-Jordan began to perform a thorough analysis of my company, promising to report back with a list of key performance indicators (KPIs) and objectives for us to implement.

Q As the CEO of a company operating within the Kingdom's information-technology (IT) sector, how would you rate the overall quality of our IT college graduates? Would you say they have the inclination for innovative thinking or is this one of the significant hurdles you face? Also, if you were to send a message out to young Jordanian entrepreneurs, what would you focus on?

A When I decided to start Javna, I quit a high-paid job in Jordan. How-

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ever, believing in what I was embarking on, I took the risk, knowing full well that I had a family to support and so forth. However, I had the power of my convictions and I took the leap.

I think the problem with our graduates is that they believe that college is merely a continuation of high school and they pin their success too closely to the professors who teach them.

We used to say that success is a prod-

uct of 20% from the professor and 80% from the student. Unfortunately, I think it's the other way around with many of our current graduates. At present, I receive an average of 100 resumes a day, most of which are completely sub-standard - unfortunately. On the other hand, we do find talented people. All the technology I've just mentioned has been developed by talented Jordanians, with very minimal interjections by foreign specialists.

My message to you entrepreneurs is to basically work hard and realize that no one will do the hard work for you. Read, research and don't depend solely on your instructors. Finally, you have to continuously challenge yourself. ■

