



ENTERTAINMENT SAUDI ENTERTAINMENT

KSA's UTURN Entertainment To Create Original Content For Snapchat

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Kaswara Al-Khatib, CEO and Chairman of Riyadh-based online content producer, UTURN Entertainment.

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Entertainment, has announced the launch of new original shows for multimedia messaging app Snapchat.

Speaking to *BroadcastPro ME* at the UTURN offices within the In5 Media premises in Dubai Production City, Al-Khatib says: "We are creating tailor-made content for Snapchat. We are among the first in the Middle East to do that. As one of Snapchat's Discover partners, we have been creating 10-second snackable content for Snapchat, which is not the easiest to create given the time constraints. The new format will allow us up to seven minutes to tell our story."

UTURN Entertainment, established by Saudi nationals Kaswara and Soraka Al Khatib, is an online entertainment network for Arab speakers. Established in 2010, it has grown from a producer of online videos to a multi-platform network, with more than 35 million subscribers across its various social media platforms.

In 2016, UTURN joined eight other regional publishers – Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera, Eurosport Arabia, Layalina, MBC, Sayidaty, Sky News Arabia and Zahrat Al Khaleej – to publish on Snapchat's Discover channel.

Al-Khatib reveals that UTURN content on Discover has garnered more than nine million views in the region. "We used to publish three days a week on Discover. We are now going to produce five days a week."

The online content production company's focus on Snapchat is based on its enormous popularity in Saudi Arabia, with more than nine million daily active users. To further consolidate the Kingdom's affinity with the social media platform, parent company Snap Inc. received investment of \$250m from Saudi billionaire Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal earlier this year.

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The significance of the region for Snapchat is also indicated by advertising revenues. In the first three months of Snap Ads being available for purchase via self-serve tools, Snap reportedly tripled the amount of advertiser spending in the auction – and of all the international offices, the MENA region was the top contributor to growth in Q4 2017.

We meet Kaswara Al-Khatib just as his team of young Arab nationals are brainstorming to produce Snapchat clips reflecting contemporary Arab youth. Elaborating on the Snapchat Original initiative, he says: “We are excited about this. Snapchat is probably the most active social media in KSA. Most of the youth is on Snapchat, and as an entertainment company we need to move where the youth is rather than wait for them to come to us. We have now created content for Discovery for close to a year. With Snapchat Original, new possibilities have opened. We are moving very quickly, and in two weeks’ time we will present ideas.”

On the nature of content, given the conservative audiences in Saudi Arabia, Al-Khatib is quoted as saying that his philosophy is to create content that is halal with harmony and honesty. In another interview he has said that the company will not touch “upon religion, politics or sexuality. Our content is more social and we do not stir public opinion or oppose norms or governments”.

From a commercial perspective, UTURN’s growth has been meteoric since its early days in 2010. With a mission to create quality online content by Saudi Arabian talent, the company has more than 33m subscribers on social media, and over 10bn minutes of video have been viewed since the group’s creation. In early 2011, the company became an online partner with YouTube and later became a premium partner. In 2012, it started broadcasting content through Yahoo, followed by Facebook.

Through these deals, UTURN has grown from a multichannel network (MCN) to a multiplatform network (MPN).

In 2013, UTURN launched its own iOS and Android apps, through which users can watch UTURN content. Partnerships have been explored with Samsung and the telco Zain for VOD initiatives. In November 2015, UTURN Entertainment landed a \$10m investment from Beirut VC Leap Ventures. The company also reported more than \$10m in revenue from advertisers such as Nissan, Unilever and Nestlé.

From a revenue point of view, with multiple platforms, Al-Khatib has brought in economies of scale which allow him to produce and deploy vertical video content for multiple platforms. On the resilience of revenues for content on social media platforms, he believes online advertising is typically at the lower end of advertising compared to linear television. With a move into new social media avenues, he forecasts revenue growth of 30-40%.

Reiterating the UTURN philosophy towards quality online content, Al-Khatib says: “We wanted to create professional content with an identity. We wanted the consumer to wait for the content and not just access it when bored online.”

Commenting on UTURN’s presence at In5 Media, Al Khatib clarifies: “In Dubai we are operating in the In5 incubator. It is an initiative by the Dubai government, and the objective is to make this a hub for online content creators. This is a co-working space and we help start-ups with equipment and other production facilities. WE have 5-10 offices occupied by start-ups as we speak. We are trying to push for a similar incubator space in Saudi Arabia.”

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