

Marketing in a Conflict Zone: Coaching ICT Outsourcing Companies to Reach International Markets Even in Uncertainty

THE CLIENT

The Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) saw the need to develop the skills of IT graduates so they would be better poised to find success in freelancing and software outsourcing. A project entitled “FreeSoft” was created and received funding through the World Bank to accomplish this goal. One aspect of FreeSoft involved coaching outsourcing companies in Gaza on networking and market penetration in hopes of strengthening the ecosystem of information and communications technology (ICT) outsourcing.

SITUATION

Jobs are critical in the Palestinian Territories (PT) for stability, economic growth, poverty reduction, and peace. Unfortunately, Palestine’s unemployment rate remains high and the current economic situation in the PT has gone from bad to worse: Gaza’s economy has been continually suffering due to the blockade imposed in 2007. It stands to become a large-scale humanitarian issue, particularly in Gaza, if strong measures for enhancing job opportunities are not taken immediately. Technology-enabled services, such as ICT and business services, can circumvent movement restrictions and provide the Palestinian economy with a wider market, thus increasing employment opportunities.

It was essential to improve Gaza ICT companies’ networking and market penetration skills to enable them to secure and create more remote international jobs. The main challenge here is

showing potential clients that their work can be performed successfully in Gaza despite the region being known as a conflict zone. Additionally, the blockade imposes a restriction on movements outside Gaza, which affects local ICT companies’ abilities to conduct meetings with their clients or secure contracts.

IUG was seeking a qualified expert consulting company with proven international work experience, a deep and nuanced understanding of Palestine, proven success with software outsourcing, and knowledge of the IT industry. The expert also was required to have experience in coaching, training, and consulting services to implement this assignment in a very limited time frame. Finding all these requirements in one company or individual was a big challenge of IUG, but MENA Alliances rose to the occasion.

IDENTIFYING ICT OUTSOURCING COMPANIES’ CHALLENGES IN GAZA



Through assessment and coaching sessions, MENA Alliances dug deep to understand Gazan ICP companies' challenges. Some of these challenges included:

- Uniquely finding, acquiring, and retaining clients amid movement restrictions and the uncertainty that comes with working in a conflict zone.
- Due to the ongoing blockade and a lack of funding, outsourcing companies in Gaza are forced to offer a wide variety of services all at once. This can help attract clients but, without careful strategic planning, it can distract from the ability to create clear and focused value for those clients. Additionally, this multi-hyphenate business approach can often result in a muddled marketing message.
- White labeling - creating a product or service that is rebranded by the client to make it appear to be their own - posed a challenge when it came to creating a portfolio.
- Lack of experience in penetrating new markets, communicating, and offering high quality customer service.
- Unfocused marketing content that lacked "stickiness."
- A shortage of skills due to more young talented Gazans freelancing rather than working for local companies.

SOLUTION

IUG approached MENA Alliances for help in improving ICT companies' networking and marketing skills. MENA Alliances has more than ten years of experience in coordinating with international clients and has a long track record of working successfully within a conflict zone. MENA Alliances has built many successful partnerships during times of war and continues to

deliver quality work no matter the situation, so IUG knew they had the exact knowledge their companies needed.

MENA Alliances provided practical coaching for Gazan ICT companies through peer-to-peer sessions. MENA Alliances provided a detailed agenda and crafted a customized action plan for networking and market penetration coaching including a training matrix, methodology, tools, objectives, outcomes, materials, assignments for the most robust results possible.

ASSIGNMENT SCOPE

ASSESSMENT

- MENA Alliances conducted a thorough assessment of client expectations and goals through multiple meetings.
- An electronic assessment was sent to each outsourcing company. One-on-one assessments were conducted to better understand existing skill sets, the nature of the work, challenges, and expectations for the program.
- A customized orientation session was developed and conducted based on the analysis of the assessment results.

PLANNING

Based on assessment results and observation and feedback from the sessions, the team of consultants at MENA Alliances selected the most effective approach for the assignment. MENA also provided criteria for the selection of five companies to benefit from peer-to-peer coaching sessions.

TRAINING

The ICP companies created customized sales and marketing training that included creating customized solutions and tools to deal with challenges like security concerns, white labeling, diversification, and unclear marketing messaging.

COACHING & CONSULTING

- Peer-to-peer coaching sessions were conducted with each of the selected five ICP companies to discuss and offer advice on their internal capabilities, marketing and sales process, communication, and customer service.
- Group coaching sessions discussed important topics like marketing content, strategies and tools to penetrate the market, customer service and business communication tools, and lesser-known differences between global business cultures.
- An assignment was given to the participating companies to be an enduring tool, guide, and road map to entering new markets.

NETWORKING

Some of the participating companies were connected to international organizations, potential clients, and investors as appropriate. This helped them launch their next chapter in implementing the results of the training.

CUSTOMIZED TOOLS

MENA Alliances developed and customized tools to fit with each company's needs while facilitating their marketing and sales process.

OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

MENA Alliances crafted effective individualized solutions and tools for Gaza ICP companies by:

- **Helping** companies connect with customers through a clear sales strategy that focused directly on solving the customers' problems.

MENA Alliances helped them focus on technical capabilities and value creation in their marketing messages for clients through innovative marketing and sales techniques.

- **Providing** the StoryBrand template for designing and developing effective websites and marketing material through a clear and simple message.
- **Creating** powerful tools such as Lead Generation Tools (LGT) to capture, collect, analyze, track, and manage leads.
- **Explaining** technical and legal methods, such as GDPR restrictions, to demonstrate to potential clients that their work is in safe hands.
- **Offering** solutions to overcome white-labeling and diversification challenges, and positioning business brands as authoritative by instructing how to utilize use case templates and identify common themes in their services.
- **Providing** revision, editing, feedback, and suggestions on their marketing content and online presence.
- **Connecting** companies that were a fit with potential clients and investors from MENA Alliances' wide-reaching international network.
- **Sharing** methodology for finding and reaching out to potential clients in new markets.

ABOUT MENA ALLIANCES

MENA Alliances is a woman-owned business dedicated to connecting global companies with highly skilled, vetted talent from the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. MENA Alliances has over 10 years of outsourcing and remote work experience, as well as expertise in translation and localization, computer vision, IT, training data for AI/ML models, and more. MENA Alliances partners with global, regional, and local

clients to offer training and coaching models designed to integrate within existing program frameworks for nonprofit and for-profit organizations, universities, or government workforce systems. MENA Alliances is on a mission to create one million jobs for women and young people in the MENA region by 2025 through training and recruiting.

MENA ALLIANCES AT A GLANCE.....

- Access to more than 2000 highly skilled, vetted professionals in the MENA region.
- 10+ years of experience providing high-quality translation and localization, IT, and human-annotated data to support machine learning for speech, search ecommerce, and more.

MENA ALLIANCES MISSION

At MENA Alliances, we're working toward a world in which everyone with the drive, dedication, and skill has the opportunity to thrive. When everyone has the chance to reach their full potential, business is a better place, making a more profound impact. MENA Alliances is on a mission to create one million jobs for women and young people in the MENA region through training and recruiting.