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THE GUIDE TO GOOD BUSINESS AND BETTER LIVING

**“TO PROMOTE
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
VIA EDUCATION
WILL ALWAYS
BE MY GOAL”**

**TALAL AL AJMI,
FOUNDER AND CEO
OF VI MARKETS**





COVER STORY

AN INVESTMENT IN KNOWLEDGE SHARING

HOW **TALAL AL AJMI**, FOUNDER AND CEO OF VI MARKETS, IS EDUCATING GULF RESIDENTS ON HOW TO TAKE THEIR FIRST STEPS INTO THE ONLINE TRADING SPACE - AND BUILDING A PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL BRAND ALONG THE WAY

By **RIAZ NAQVI**

If you build it, they will come.” For Kuwaiti entrepreneur Talal Al Ajmi, it feels appropriate to swap out one word of the famous line from Kevin Costner in 1989’s *Field of Dreams*: If you teach it, they will come.

With a keen passion for financial markets, Al Ajmi has not only built his country’s most popular online trading platform but also established a name for himself as a thought leader and social media influencer in the space.

Every week, the founder and CEO of VI Markets shares his opinions on the hottest stocks and commodities with a 62,000-strong following on Instagram, speaking directly to both his platform’s own users and anyone interested in learning more about online trading. Beyond a means of personal branding, Al Ajmi believes this connection serves as an effective means of drawing more clients to his online trading platform.

“The main reason I adopted this strategy is the lack of awareness in our society in regards to trading online in international markets,” he tells *CEO Middle East*. With terrible advice and bad-faith actors widespread on social media – think back to the ill-advised gambling on Gamestop just a few months back – Al Ajmi decided to bypass traditional marketing channels and speak directly to the public in a bid to help people make more informed decisions with investing their money online. “To promote sustainable development via education was and will always be my goal.”

Minding the education gap

The world of finance is large, complicated and often intimidating. Al Ajmi aims to cut through the noise to provide viewers with nuanced, relevant advice on trading.

“Education is the key to build a good profile, therefore we have weekly seminars and workshops that are carried out on premises by our instructors along with online training free of charge to give those who are interested a chance to learn more.”



↑ **Expert.** Al Ajmi is a proponent of education to provide viewers with nuanced, relevant advice on trading.

Any good entrepreneur looks for a good gap in the market, a problem that needs solving. For Al Ajmi, 11 years ago, that gap was education – specifically, the ability to provide the right education that could establish a good base for potential clients.

Besides downloadable desktop programmes and smartphone apps for trading, the VI Markets site has a train-

ing academy that outlines, in accessible language and textbook detail, concepts such as CFD trading, forex, analysis tools, investor types and, perhaps most importantly, trading psychology.

“We have developed our lectures and have certified educational materials from different universities,” says Al Ajmi, himself a University of Philadelphia IT graduate who held various positions in



“ONLINE TRADING HAS COME A LONG WAY. TEN YEARS BACK WE COULDN’T CARRY OUT THE SAME TRANSACTIONS WE DO TODAY.”

Egypt, Oman, Dubai and many more.”

Another aspect benefitting VI Markets’ success, Al Ajmi adds, is its partnership with the London-based One Financial Markets. Through the partnership, his company is one of the few in the Gulf region to be regulated by the UK’s Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), which proffers an invaluable commodity: trust.

Trades of change

Technological improvements coupled with the economic uncertainties raised by the pandemic has seen interest in online trading as a means to diversify one’s income streams reach unprecedented levels. “The nature of online trading has definitely come a long way – ten years back we couldn’t carry out the same transactions we do today,” says Al Ajmi.

One of the biggest differences, for him, is the immediacy with which transactions can now occur. “We can perform our transactions through our smart-phone; all you need is the platform and internet connection and your sell/buy trade will be executed immediately.”

However, looking forward, he believes rapidly advancing technologies such as artificial intelligence will reshape investment strategies and methods, ultimately reducing risk.



\$659.8BN

The value of traded stocks in the GCC markets in 2020, according to Statista

investment firms prior to launching VI Markets.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and Al Ajmi points to competitors following in VI Markets’ footsteps in terms of regional expansion as a testament to his platform’s success.

“We have succeeded in opening branches outside Kuwait reaching as many people as we can, mainly in

COVER STORY

Another trend he's keen to highlight is 'copy trading' – as the name suggests, this involves tracking and imitating the trades and deals being carried out by a particular investor or account.

"Some real, experienced traders will take this as a full-time job and provide all the trades to those who wish to implement copy trading. This technology has become widely used and in the coming five years, we are expecting a huge development in it, allowing traders to explore many options in the future this definitely will revolutionise the trading space."

Al Ajmi hopes to soon allow VI Markets users to link their accounts with others for automatic copying, in addition to tech tools that analyse a client's position through a report that focusses on their successful strategies. "This analysis will give the client an idea on how to manage their portfolio and, specifically, how to minimise risk."

VI Markets will also look at funding "well-deserved" portfolios revealed through these reports, he adds.

The new normal of work

As someone who thrives on face-to-face meetings, Al Ajmi admits that last year's transition to working from home was initially challenging. However, he credits a structured plan for helping maintain VI Markets' success through the lockdowns of 2020.

Like many others, he believes the pandemic has made permanent changes to established structures of work and business life. "Many businesses will no longer be fit in the coming years, because the whole world has shifted to the online arena, from retail shops to huge multi-billion companies. In my opinion, it is vital to build a strong internet base that allow employees and their managers to communicate and get their work done without going back to the office or to paper work."

Points of passion

As both a business leader and a worker,



↑ **Insight.** Al Ajmi believes the pandemic has forced permanent changes to structures of work and business life.

"I ADMIRE PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING, KNOWING THAT THEY WILL DO THE RIGHT THING AT THE RIGHT TIME."



Al Ajmi firmly believes in passion as a crucial ingredient in the recipe of success. “I do love what I am doing so I don’t call it a job.”

It’s little surprise, then, that passion is perhaps the single-most important trait he looks for in potential new hires.



↑ **Future plans.** Al Ajmi hopes to soon allow VI Markets users to link their accounts with others for automatic copying.

TALAL AL AJMI'S TIPS FOR ENTREPRENEURS

The decision I took to become an entrepreneur was very difficult and with that came along so many obstacles. I have faced both health and social difficulties, trying to prove that I was capable of handling my own business. So I do advise those who are looking to become entrepreneurs three golden rules:

- Choose your team carefully, because you will need a supportive and trustworthy one.
- Work harder than you did in your normal desk job, you will need double the effort and time to succeed.
- Learn and educate yourself before entering any new endeavour.

“A passionate employee will do the job differently and creatively, which in turn produces a different outcome. I also tend to admire people with different way of thinking, knowing that they will do the right thing at the right time.”

After kicking off his day with a steaming cup of espresso and picking his

watch for the day – “My watch selection is always the best part of my day, as it gives me joy and positive energy” – Al Ajmi is happy to work from 10am to 10pm, with coffee breaks, lunch meetings, football and PlayStation offering brief moments of respite.

A keen Manchester United supporter, he will always make time for his beloved Red Devils. Beyond the team itself, he respects the broader themes of unity, loyalty and pride that football can promote – and it’s something he looks for in his own team.

Al Ajmi’s other great love is watches, something he traces back to when his father gave him his first as a birthday present. “Since then, I had a magical connection with the mechanism of watches and my passion grew over the years, especially because I love seizing time to the fullest.

“I cannot specify a favourite piece, but I can definitely tell you that Vacheron Constantin is one of my favourite watchmakers – it produces wonderful unique classical pieces along with sporty ones that complement my personality.”