



mWomen



## Case Study: Vodafone Qatar's Al Johara: Empowerment through Entrepreneurship



*The Vodafone Al Johara Mobile Entrepreneur Sales Team with their Mobile Store suitcases*

### Introduction

Vodafone entered the Qatari market in 2009 with the intention of targeting women as part of a broader strategy heavily focused on acquiring new customers. In Qatar, there are firm beliefs governing women's behaviour: women are to communicate only with men to whom they are related and may only remove their head coverings when in the company of close family or other women. The home is considered the natural, safe place for a woman; women socialise in small circles of family and close friends in the home and chaperones escort women when moving outside it. Therefore, autonomous access to mobile products and services is difficult for women, as mobile phone use carries the ability to communicate outside the close social circle. Female mobile phone ownership can only occur when a male relative authorises it and women are unable to go to mobile phone retail outlets that are operated by men. As a result, Vodafone Qatar needed to devise an innovative solution to reach the female market.

The late Vodafone Qatar CEO, Graham Maher, envisioned an initiative that not only allowed Vodafone Qatar to reach female consumers, but also to empower women, whilst working within the cultural norms of Qatari society. In order for Vodafone representatives to directly reach women, Graham Mayer saw that those representatives had to be female. Therefore, Vodafone decided to create a network of female sales agents who sell to other women, doing so within appropriate Qatari cultural norms and in the 'female' realm of the home and family environment. Vodafone provided the sales agents with mobile products to sell as well as in-depth training and support resources to enable the women to succeed in their entrepreneurial efforts.

'Al Johara' was chosen as the name of the initiative, meaning 'jewel' or 'diamond' in Arabic. The name was chosen to represent how the programme aimed to metaphorically 'uncover the jewel within' the female sales agents. The women were called the 'Joharas' or 'Diamonds' and this positively positioned the women as valuable and as worthy of being treasured and protected by Vodafone as they are by their families.

## Challenges & Solutions

There were many challenges in recruiting and training the Joharas. In Qatar very few women work; there are no databases of women's contact details and if women receive a phone call from a number they do not recognise, they will not answer. Thus, the initial step of identifying a pool of potential candidates was very difficult. Further, once a candidate was identified, written permission from a male relative was required in order for a woman to be allowed to be interviewed or to work.

However, word-of-mouth within the women's communities spread news of the initiative and Vodafone approached the male heads of household of the women they identified as potential participants to assure their families that the women would be working and operating in ways that were culturally appropriate.

The initiative began as a pilot with a team of twenty-two women in August 2010. The Al Johara members varied in age from 18 to 54 and came from differing social backgrounds. Half are studying - some to complete high school - and collectively the Joharas have 44 children between them. None of the ladies had previous experience working in a business environment or within large organisations, thus their training included not only the duties of the role but also information regarding the structure of the business and how they fit into it. Also, the sales training (translated into Arabic) was designed specifically to the culture of Qatari women, which does not include traditional Western styles of marketing involving animated presentation of products. All of the Joharas were initially shy and lacked business confidence, so the training also included life skills and self-awareness, focusing on building assurance and knowledge with each success.



A team of Al Johara sales agents at their first Vodafone Qatar all hands staff day

The Al Johara female sales agents became Vodafone employees and are today managed by two team Managers and a Coordinator. Vodafone pays them a monthly salary, which protects the income of the women, but the company also incentivises the women via a commission structure to encourage them to meet sales targets. On their first day as a Johara, the women each received a mobile phone and a branded suitcase containing a range of products. The sales agents are not required to invest in the stock but are liable if it goes missing.

Weekly sales progress meetings are held at Vodafone offices where the sales agents meet with their Manager to do reconciliation, refresh stock, and receive additional training.



Al Johara female sales agents ready to sell into their communities

The initial investment on the part of Vodafone consisted only of agents' mobile phones and the products contained in the suitcases (approximately US\$1,200 per agent). Operating expenditure consists of agents' salaries (56%), supporting staff salaries (26%), and other expenses (18%). Vodafone estimates a 'break-even' date of two years, assuming an average of 15 SIMs sold per month per agent. Commission is paid when activation targets are reached and is also paid on handsets. A very small commission is paid on airtime sales.

Once the Joharas began their businesses, the personal challenges they faced cannot be underestimated. Despite their participation having been sanctioned by their male relatives and despite the adherence to Qatari societal norms, the Joharas still met extreme resistance from certain sections of the community. With the support of Vodafone, their families and each other, they persevered and achieved some excellent results.

## Results

To date, participants have developed into successful businesswomen, with 100% achieving their sales targets.

### Average monthly sales performance per agent

# SIM cards sold	# handsets sold	# airtime units sold
25	7	2,100

They utilise their own networks of family and friends to market Vodafone products in the secure and culturally appropriate environment of their own homes or those of trusted contacts. They are now extending their activities into their wider communities to build their businesses.

Al Johara founder, Susie Kelt, Head of Direct Channels at Vodafone Qatar, attributes their success to the training and support they receive, coupled with the women's intimate knowledge of the ladies in their personal networks to whom they are marketing - enabling the Joharas to make strategic decisions about how to best run their businesses.

Most importantly, Susie also feels the Joharas' courage and determination have enabled them to succeed: between August 2010 and the time of writing in May 2011, many of the Joharas have achieved their driver's licence, continued to study and have achieved other personal and professional goals they set for themselves whilst continuing to run their households and families. In turn, the sense of empowerment and increased self-esteem amongst this group of women is now extremely strong: the Al Joharas have become role models and are well respected within their communities.

“ I am very proud to be a Vodafone Johara. My friends and family are impressed with the changes they see in me, since I started. I have just had a baby and my family and community are helping me to continue to work. ”

- Aisha, an Al Johara sales representative

The families of the sales agents are also very supportive.

“ Al Johara has been very good for everyone in our household and our family. I am pleased to see these changes for our women. ”

- Hamad, brother of an Al Johara sales representative



*Celebrating: Joharas make the hand sign 'Habitane' for 'Everything's great!'*

The realisation of the vision and success of the project is a fitting tribute to the memory of its conceiver, Graham Maher.

## About the GSMA mWomen Programme

The GSMA mWomen Programme is an unprecedented global public-private partnership between the worldwide mobile industry and the international development community designed to accelerate women's ownership of mobile phones and provide life changing services for women in the developing world. The Programme will close the mobile phone gender gap by 50% over three years, enabling mobile phone ownership for 150 million women and leveraging the mobile channel to provide value added services in women's health, education, finance and entrepreneurship.

The GSMA mWomen Programme includes 25 mobile network operators representing over 115 developing countries, as well as other key companies in the mobile ecosystem, including Ericsson, Google, Microsoft and Nokia. International development community support includes Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), BBC World Service Trust, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. State Department.

GSMA mWomen Programme Champions include Cherie Blair, Founder, Cherie Blair Foundation for Women; Helen Clark, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme; President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberia; H.E., Mrs. Sia Nyama Koroma, First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone; Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago; Dr Judith Rodin, President, Rockefeller Foundation.

For more information, please visit [www.mwomen.org](http://www.mwomen.org)