

PRWeek

Global Thinktank





How PR helps
Coca Cola
drive its
content
ambitions



Focus on UAE

Vital Statistics

Population: 5,188,000
Monetary unit: dirham (AED)
Capital city: Abu Dhabi
Major languages: Arabic
Major religions: Muslim c. 62% (mostly Sunni); Hindu c. 21%; Christian c. 9%; Buddhist c. 4%; other c. 4%
Ethnic composition: Asian Indian c. 29%; Pakistani c. 21%; U.A.E. Arab c. 15%; Bangladeshi c. 8%; other Asian c. 17%; other c. 10%
Age breakdown: under 15, 19.1%; 15–29, 32.3%; 30–44, 36.6%; 45–59, 10.5%; 60–74, 1.2%; 75 and over, 0.3%
Life expectancy: male 73.2 years; female 78.3 years
Education: Percentage of population age 10 and over having: no formal schooling (illiterate/unknown) 9.4%, (literate) 13.9%; primary education 14.6%; incomplete/complete secondary 43.7%; postsecondary 4.0%; undergraduate 12.8%; graduate 1.6%.
Urban/Rural split: urban 80.0%; rural 20.0%
Income per household (USD): -
Broadband internet users (%): -

Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

Introduction

Since the discovery of oil in the 1970s, the United Arab Emirates has undergone a remarkable transformation from a collection of impoverished desert principalities into a modern state with a per capita income of \$58,000, the fifth highest in the world. Furthermore, it has managed to reduce its reliance on oil and gas to such an extent that it now makes up only 25% of its income.

The country was hit hard by the global financial crisis of 2009, and struggled to rebound in 2010. Dubai, with its reliance on the property and finance sectors, was especially vulnerable Abu Dhabi on the other hand had invested in infrastructure and diversified and so remained relatively insulated from the worst of the downturn.

The media and PR industries continue to grow in the UAE. In 2011 the Arab Spring produced a fresh challenge for brands in the country. Nick Poneroy is marketing director for **dmg::events** in the Middle East. In this role he works with many PR agencies in the region, from the big networks to smaller independents. He says: "Brands here have had to work hard to communicate that the political situation in the UAE is very different to that in Libya, Syria, Bahrain and so on. This has been most difficult with US clients."

Media

Television and press remain the dominant media in the UAE. Satellite television is led by Qatar-based **Al-Jazeera** and **Al Arabiya** news channels. Indeed, **Al-Jazeera** retains something of a legendary status, credited as it is with revolutionising television in the region and bringing an unprecedented level of scrutiny to governments and corporations across the Gulf.

Daily newspaper readership is led by Arabic-language titles: **Al Khaleej**, **Al Ittihad**, **Al Emarat Al Youm** and **Al Bayan**, along with Arabic business

daily **Al Roya Al Eqtisadiya**. Other Arabic titles are the London-headquartered newspapers: **Asharq Alawsat** and **Al-Hayat**.

English-language titles tend to lead the business debate, with business monthlies **MEED** and **Arabian Business** particularly prominent. An expanding English-language newspaper sector, meanwhile, includes **The National**, **Gulf News** and **Khaleej Times**. Key international media outlets include the **Financial Times** and **CNN**, both of which are headquartered in Abu Dhabi

Digital media usage is surging in the UAE. There is an internet penetration rate of 69%[2], and industry experts add that, because online news is rarely censored, it has a disproportionately high level of influence. Poneroy reports that **AMEInfo**, **Zawya**, **Arabian Business**, and **IKOO** are important online news sources.

Major Brands

A relatively high proportion of PR spend is driven by the government or linked entities. In Dubai, these include **Dubai World**, **DIFC**, **Emaar Properties** and its Department of Finance.

Abu Dhabi, say observers, is even more reliant on government PR spend. Important vehicles include investment arm **Mubadala**, property company **Aldar** and the **Abu Dhabi Media Company**.

Outside of government, financial and real estate players have been hit hard in the past three years and the companies now leading the way on PR are **Apple**, telecom brands **Etisalat** and **Du**, and national airline **Emirates**.

Agencies

Having opened its Dubai operation in 1989, **Hill + Knowlton Strategies** is generally considered the longest-established PR agency in the UAE. Among its rivals are the largest local player Asda'a - now 60 per cent owned by **Burson Marsteller** - **Jiwin**, **Impact Porter Novelli**, **Promoseven Weber Shandwick**, **Edelman**, **DABO & Co** and **Spot On PR**.

The financial and corporate boom has drawn several financial specialists to the UAE, including **Brunswick**, **Finsbury**, **FD** and **M:Communications**.

Salaries are bolstered by a tax-free regime, with those in Abu Dhabi generally commanding the largest pay packets. Attracting and retaining talent remains one of the key challenges in the region, with a paucity of homegrown talent proving a particularly complex hurdle for agencies to overcome.