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Marketing in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

Dubai is only one small part of the seven entities that make up the United Arab Emirates. Together, these emirates are part of one of the fastest growing economies and one of the richest countries in the world. A tourist destination, a hub for business, and a key importer of necessary goods, Dubai is becoming a substantial competitor in the industrial market. This paper will examine the benefits and drawbacks to marketing in an emerging market such as Dubai and will propose a plan of action for the marketing of a small, portable washing machine already for sale in the United States. Much of the information contained in this research was retrieved from the Government of Dubai and reflects the most current data available.

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Marketing in the United Arab Emirates

Introduction to Laundry Alternative’s WonderWash

The Laundry Alternative’s WonderWash is a compact washing machine. This alternative washing machine is an inexpensive, eco-friendly alternative to a traditional washing machine. This portable washing machine is ideal for campers, college students, individuals who are single, senior citizens, and consumers who wish to cut laundry costs. Additionally, the WonderWash may be especially appealing to those who have adapted a green lifestyle as the machine is entirely hand powered and requires no electricity (The Laundry Alternative, 2009). The portable washer also cuts laundry time down to only a few minutes, and may be particularly useful to consumers who find themselves with little time for laundry in their daily schedule.

Designed to be used for small loads and delicate clothing the WonderWash may find some if its most likely consumers in areas around the world with large populations and small living spaces. Exposing these consumers to a product that could increase their living space while decreasing their costs and providing a needed service can prove to be ultra lucrative. Consumers living in apartments with a shared laundry may find the WonderWash to be the solution to problems such as unavailable washing machines in a shared laundry room and occupied washing machines at a Laundromat away from home. These shared laundry facilities typically charge the consumer per use of each machine. The WonderWash is sold for $42.95 (USD) and can save the average person over $180 over the course of a year. Dubai, located in the United Arab Emirates, is a particular geographic area that meets the target consumer description and may be enticed by the ecological benefits of using a product such as the WonderWash. With a growing population and limited resources Dubai has potential to become a large consumer of this type of product.

Introduction to Dubai

Cultural Analysis

The emirate of Dubai began as a small fishing town at the mouth of a river. The river, which served as a harbor and port for trade and travel, began to silt and was ordered to be dredged to allow the emirate a chance to flourish. This costly decision, however, is what allowed Dubai to emerge as a major waterway hub for import, export and trade. After the discovery of oil, Dubai began to use its income and its resources to build an envied infrastructure. By focusing on sustainable growth and high quality infrastructure Dubai was quickly able to become a large tourist attraction as well as a desirable place of business (Government of Dubai; Municipality, 2011). Recognizing the potential for growth, Sheikh Rashid enforced no income taxes, no corporate taxes and very little import tariffs. Dubai, along with Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajma, Fujairah and other emirates compose the *United Arab Emirates*, which has evolved into one of the richest countries in the world (Government of Dubai; Recruitment and Employment, 2011). Dubai is home to some of the largest logistics organizations, shipping companies, and has major hubs for many other import/export related channels (Government of Dubai; Trade Relations, 2011). With few restrictions on trade, little to pay in tariffs, and much to gain in profit, Dubai has proven to be not only an emerging market, but a leading market for businesses looking to expand internationally (Government of Dubai; Free Zones, 2011).

While Dubai seems to be on the cutting edge of business, tourism, and travel they have seen some major setbacks that have the potential to harm future growth and prosperity. The quick and vast growth that Dubai experienced also resulted in a sudden depletion of resources. This, coupled with poor waste management planning, has the idea of a sewage-filled Arabian Sea plaguing many. Although one of Dubai’s natural resources is oil, the quick expansion of the UAE is quickly depleting its oil and is looking to begin using nuclear energy, which itself has multiple drawbacks, including the threat of terrorism. One of the biggest challenges facing Dubai is an accessible, consumable source of water (Alderman, 2010). Although Dubai is essentially surrounded by water, much of it is inconsumable due to pollution and without desalination plants. These plants which reduce the salinity of the water to a consumable level are necessary but are also responsible for the largest amount of carbon dioxide emissions in the United Arab Emirates. Desalination, along with the continuous growth and development of the local infrastructure, has given the UAE one of the largest carbon footprints in the world. (Alderman, 2010)

UAE counterpart, Abu Dhabi, has learned from the environmental mishaps, mishandlings and afterthoughts of Dubai’s growth and has implemented many western culture standards into their environmental protection and sustainability plans. Although Dubai has recognized these errors, little has been done to correct them. The first steps needed to remain a leading market involve addressing environment concerns that have the potential for a negative economical, social, and ecological impact. Failure to address this could result in the downturn of trade, importing and exporting in the entire region.

Social Structure of Dubai

Dubai is a composed of an array of ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Priding itself in being founded by expatriates Dubai strives to maintain a welcoming, accepting and friendly atmosphere for all cultures interested in visiting, living, or working in the UAE. Currently Dubai has a population of 1.9 Million people and is expected to grow by 5% over the course of the next year. A traditional family in Dubai is not much different from an American “nuclear” family – however learning a family trade and/or education are something more of a tradition and valuable in the UAE compared to its American counterpart. The country’s principle of success has become a standard in most households and the growing educated workforce is powering Dubai’s growth in the technology, financial, and logistics arenas (Government of Dubai; Recruitment and Employment, 2011). Higher education has become more common with as much as 10% of the population holding university and post graduate degrees. Additionally, western education has expanded to the UAE with universities creating satellite sites such as Michigan State University Dubai and Harvard Medical School Dubai Center (Michigan State University, 2010).

Dubai is built on what is often referred to as a constitutional monarchy. Dubai, in its conjunction with the United Arab Emirates, is ruled by [Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_bin_Rashid_Al_Maktoum) who also serves as the vice president and prime minister of the UAE. The political system in Dubai has been relatively stable with the same family in power since 1833. While the UAE follows a specific judiciary system, Dubai however, uses its own court system to handle civil and criminal claims and a traditional Sharia court for Muslims. The official religion declared by Dubai remains Islam, but the growing number of expatriates to the area has increased the acceptance of various other religions including Christianity. Sheikh Rashid has taken pride in the diversity of Dubai and has encouraged growth through his ‘visionary’ methods of governing, including collecting no income taxes, no corporate taxes and keeping import tariffs low (Government of Dubai; Customs, 2011).

The average household income for an Arab family in Dubai is approximately 327,000 AED, or the equivalent of $89,000 USD (Government of Dubai; Income, 2011). Keeping with the same Arab household, the average rent, fuel and energy expenses can be as high as 65,000 AED ($17,600 USD) or nearly 20% of the annual income. Industries such as clothing, dining, and entertainment only receive 5,000, 23,000, and 22,000 (respectively) AED from the average Arab family’s income (Government of Dubai; Expenditures, 2010). Embracing the traditional Middle Eastern clothing men most often wear a long white, cotton shirt that extends to the ground, while women often dress in traditional, fully covered, black veils that too sweep the ground.

The typical dwelling for individuals and families in Duabi remains a “flat” style apartment. More than 75% of the population in Dubai lives in one of these flats where space is typically limited (Government of Dubai; Housing, 2010). The majority of the buildings located within Dubai are multi-level or multi-story units that serve as both residential and commercial properties. Just over 10% of the buildings in Dubai are multi-story buildings used for residence; others include commercial buildings, private buildings, government buildings, and villas (Government of Dubai; Buildings, 2010).

Economic Analysis

Dubai, in recent years, has emerged as a strong and growing economy. Combined with the emirates of the United Arab Emirates, including Abu Dhabi, the UAE is one of the riches countries in the world (Government of Dubai; Statistics Center, 2011). The growth and economic profit has allowed Dubai and the UAE to emerge with leading medical centers, high-education programs, technology development and more. It is expected that Dubai will experience economic growth as high as 5% over the course of 2011, helping the UAE inch its way closer to becoming a well-respected economic power (Gulf News, 2011). In its process of growth Dubai focused closely its infrastructure, ensuring that they were able to leave room to easily expand the city as it developed. While much of the Dubai area is heavily populated in one central location, the UAE consists of several emirates that continue to embrace a more rural style of living (Government of Dubai; Housing, 2010).

Leader/Prime Minister Sheikh Rashid has laid out a plan appropriately titled the *Dubai Strategic Plan* (PromiseCorp, 2007). His plan calls for significant growth in many of its main industries as well as a significant growth in population. Job growth is expected to double by 2015 while the nation’s GDP is predicted to grow an impressive 11% over the next decade. The nations current GDP is expected to grow 3-5% in 2011 alone. As a response to P.M. Rashid’s plan of growth it has been said that Dubai’s health care system will need to be radically changed in order to accommodate the growing population as well as the aging population (Kronfol, 1999). This ideal health plan would include nationals as well as expatriates, laborers, and visitors (PromiseCorp, 2007).

The UAE is a country that relies heavily on import and export. Dubai alone accounts for nearly 80% of the United Arab Emirates non-oil trading (Youse, 2011). Additionally, Dubai imports almost 80% of its food resources and maintains a three month supply of food to fend off inflation and crises (Gulf News, 2011). It is expected that areas in logistics, trading and service will see the largest growth throughout 2011 and much of the UAE will experience higher rates of tourism as the global economy improves. While Dubai sits on a rich bed of petroleum, it does not count oil as its primary export, although it could be considered its primary natural resource. Should growth continue at its current rate, Dubai may soon see its natural oil supplies become extinct (Alderman, 2010). Because of this prediction Dubai and the rest of the United Arab Emirates have considered developing nuclear power. Although there are several ecological benefits to using nuclear power versus greenhouse has producing power, the political implications of nuclear energy use in the UAE could prevent this from being an option. As the Middle East is wrought with civil unrest and political uncertainty the United Nations has frowned upon, and even in some cases ordered the discontinuation of, nuclear development in the Middle East. In the future, however, the expansion of nuclear power in Dubai could lead to an even more successful economy and allow for an increased expansion of its current infrastructure which in turn would result in additional distribution channels throughout the UAE (Alderman, 2010).

As mentioned previously, Dubai relies heavily on trade for basic goods such as food. Following the basics of import/export trade relations, Dubai is a supplier (exporter) of raw materials rather than finished goods. In 2010 and expected to continue through 2011, Dubai has increased trade with other emerging markets such as Asia and Africa as much as 27% (Gergawi, 2011). China, for example has a growing need for oil, which Dubai can supply in exchange for finished goods. Africa, as an emerging market, can provide Dubai with the food supplies necessary to keep inflation down and food readily available in the event of an emergency, disaster, or crisis (Gergawi, 2011). In order to keep these channels of trade open, and to ensure Dubai has the potential for trade growth with additional emerging markets there are few customs restrictions on imports and exports, and imports are hardly taxed. These methods are currently working for Dubai and have undoubtedly played a role in the success and growth of the UAE, but one must wonder how long Dubai can sustain its economy and its volume of trade without imposing tariffs and taxes on goods from other countries.

Developments in Dubai

Dubai’s current strengths center around its infrastructure. Its complex and sophisticated architecture is what most often comes to mind when travelers are asked to think of Dubai. The innovative techniques used to build the city’s foundation are being copied around the world, only the rest of the world was able to learn from the mistakes of Dubai. Failing to account for water and electricity consumption in its elaborate city planning, Dubai finds itself now potentially facing an onslaught of sewage, a shortage of clean water, and not enough power to supply the residents of Dubai with electricity (Alderman, 2010). Although Dubai has some of the most technologically advanced buildings, infrastructure, and venues in the world, they are not a leader in developing technology. Their access to technology mostly comes from trade with Asia, and when combined with their superior engineering, becomes the epitome of useful technology. Sheikh Rashid, Prime Minister of Dubai, has listed technology as an industry he expects to see major growth by 2015. With an emphasis on higher education, Sheikh Rashid also expects to see a growth in the number of qualified Emirati’s in fields such as technology, transportation and medicine by 2015 (PromiseCorp, 2007).

Channels of Distribution

Dubai serves as a major hub for several forms of logistics. The UAE hosts a major waterway central to trade in several countries throughout Asia as well as a large airport that can accommodate imports and exports easily by air. Dubai also has a large highway transportation system that can easily serve ground transportation needs to provide manufacturers with several logistical solutions to their distribution plans. Dubai and the UAE are home to several retail chains as well as hubs for various international chains. “Better Life” is a retail chain native to Dubai that carries home appliances and accessories. With six locations and still growing, Better Life is one of the larger home appliance stores in the UAE and has a respectable reputation – something that is far more important in Dubai (Better Life, 2011). While the stores themselves vary in size, they are most typically a boutique, European style shop, complete with furniture displays and mock living spaces. The stores are located in both urban and rural areas throughout UAE and carry products from small appliances to large appliances (Better Life, 2011).

In addition to retail, Dubai is also connected to the World Wide Web, allowing Emirati’s to reach global products online. Additionally, products made in Dubai can be sold online direct from the manufacturer with ease and without the need for a middleman. The traditional method of payment for goods purchased or services received remains cash – the UAE Dirham; equivalent to $.25 USD – however as a major tourist destination Dubai is equipped to accept most any form of payment for goods and services. On an international scale, Dubai speaks most of its trade and exchange with its global partners, including OPEC, Asia, Africa and the OECD (Gergawi, 2011) (Elliot, 2011). On the retail level in Dubai the future is looking promising. Retail trade in Dubai has been on the rise since the global recession. The Dubai Financial Market (DFM) reported in February 2011 that retail trade had reached $3.9million USD up from $1.6 million USD in August of the previous year. A year prior, in February of 2010, retail trade values in Dubai were valued at more than $133.4 million USD but fell to only $71 million USD as of February 2011 (Elliot, 2011).   
  
Being a large tourist destination Dubai has various media outlets. While billboards decorate city streets, magazines fill newsstands and commercials air during television programming. It is assumed that nearly 75% of the population in Dubai has a television, and more than 40% of the population is fluent in more than one language, as the country puts an emphasis on English as a second language (Government of Dubai; Statistics Center, 2011).

Market Audit and Competitive Market Analysis

Given that the WonderWash, laundry alternative product, is a small, compact, eco-friendly device that reduces the cost of doing laundry, the UAE may prove to be a prime location for international expansion. The future of Dubai looks to yield larger buildings, a larger population, and a larger economy, but what the future of Dubai also holds is the potential for negative impacts of years of poor energy conservation programs. With this thought in mind, and the potential for both an energy and water shortage in the future, the population of Dubai can greatly benefit from a product that uses zero electricity and minimal water. In addition to conservation, Emirati’s are limited in space. With the population expected to grow substantially space will continue to be scarce and living quarters, or “flats” will also continue to shrink to a size that will allow more people to be housed in single buildings. The simple use of the WonderWash makes it easy to use for any demographic. Its lightweight portability makes it appealing to the older population and its compact size makes it ideal for large families residing in small apartments.

With strong economic growth in the UAE, the growth of competing markets will also follow. The low cost of the WonderWash makes it appealing to a wide audience, while also making it difficult for competitors to enter the market with competitive prices. The current WonderWash unit, as designed, meets the needs of the unique American home. It is, however, possible for the WonderWash to meet the common needs of an Emirati home. The lifestyle differences between a traditional American home and an Arabic or Emirati home vary in such that the WonderWash may be seen as more beneficial in Dubai, while still having the appeal of a “unique” western product. As the population in the UAE grows and research results become more available as to the conditions of the water in Dubai and the power sustainability in Dubai it will be easier to understand and determine how the WonderWash can play a role in the average Emirati home.

While the WonderWash typically sells online in the United States, the best method for distribution may prove to be a retail outlet, such as the Better Life retail chain stores for home appliances and accessories. The product, available with other small appliances, can easily be displayed, touched, and more easily demonstrated than its full-size counterparts. In addition to chain retailers the WonderWash would be carried by individual, private retailers who wished to carry the product and agree to shipping quantities and sales quotas in exchange for distribution.   
In the traditional Muslim family the male head of the household is the primary income earner and the female head of household is the primary caregiver and housekeeper. Given this information it would be ideal to target women between the ages of 18 and 65 through outlets that directly impact specific age groups. The Dubai Newspaper may be an appropriate outlet to reach the female audience ranging in age from 40-65 but may fail to reach the college aged demographic. This difficulty highlights the various channels of media advertising that need to be considered in marketing WonderWash.

Competition in such a booming market like Dubai is inevitable. Similar products exist around the globe, and the function and use to the consumer is essentially the same, making competition even more difficult. With competitors such as Haier offering similar products in a slightly more convenient package, WonderWash may face some challenges. The Haier portable washing machine is also compact, slim, lightweight and efficient, however it requires more water and requires electricity to operate – a potential selling point for consumers who do not wish to use a hand crank to operate their washing machine. Additionally, the Haier portable washing machine holds 1.0 cubic feet of clothes, versus the slightly smaller WonderWash. These factors, along with the overall design and more aesthetically pleasing design of the Haier model give the WonderWash much to improve. Conversely, while the Haier model is more high-tech than the WonderWash washing machine, the WonderWash relies heavily on the fact that it does not require electricity, and less electricity means less to repair (The Laundry Alternative, 2009).

Pricing is often a key determining factor in competition. The consumer will choose the best quality product at the lowest possible price, or some combination in the middle. The WonderWash retails for $42.95, versus its competitors that fail to come in below $100. Sometimes, however, a lower price can adversely affect the reputation of your product with an incorrect assumption or connotation with low price insinuating low quality. The Haier model portable washing machine retails for $199.99 on the WalMart.com website, which is accessible to the UAE. The price difference between the two products is nearly five times the amount of the WonderWash and consumer reviews on each favor WonderWash’s portable washing machine far more than Haier’s version. Haier, however, has the benefit of brand recognition and WonderWash must compete with that as well.

Initial entry into the market in the UAE will most likely be met with limited welcome. Being a relatively new population and with such a large growth in such a short period of time, Emirati’s may not be interested in such troglodyte products or technology. The city that boasts the world’s tallest building and an indoor ski resort in the desert may not welcome a product that exhibits none of the cultural advancements over the course of the past 60 years. To combat this potential resistance, a specific level of attention should be paid to embracing the pride and ethnocentricity that encompasses Dubai. Given that a great majority of the products in Dubai are imported, and there are little restrictions on imports and minimal tariffs on imports it is not necessary to consider manufacturing the product in Dubai, however, the idea may be tabled for the future as Dubai continues to grow and political climates in the Middle East continue to change. Advertising how such a low-tech appliance can mesh in their high-tech world is the first place the Laundry Alternative should start. In addition, advertising should pay special attention to the message of conservation. In contrast, a message broadcast in the United States highlighting how a particular product decreases dependency on oil may be received positively, whereas a similar campaign in a geographic location that relies heavily on the production of oil will most likely have a negative response to such a message. Messages that encourage preserving the area’s natural resources and caring for the land and water in the area may be better perceived.

Conclusion

The United Arab Emirates, and specifically in this paper, Dubai, is one of the fastest growing countries in the world and quickly becoming one of the richest countries as well. With a GDP that has more than doubled, a growing economy and an educated workforce, Dubai has much to offer the international marketplace; both as a consumer and as a supplier. The primary industries in Dubai revolve around trade; import, export exchange, and logistics. Additionally, they have continuously growing infrastructure to meet the needs of a continuously growing population. During this expansive growth it seems that Dubai forgot to consider one significant factor that could have detrimental effects on its region. In its rush to become the largest, the quickest Dubai failed to ensure its ecosystem and the environment could sustain its growth; two unforgiving and essentially unchangeable factors. Dubai’s current waste management system, for example, is unable to handle the waste demand of the population and has had to resort to dumping raw sewage and waste into bodies of water, tributaries and municipal water supplies that run to outlying suburbs. This continuous contamination of the water supply has resulted in the need for desalination plants to reduce the salinity of the water before it can be consumed.

In addition to the potential for decreased water availability in the future of Dubai, they must also face the possibility that they have little resources to provide power to the inhabitants of Dubai should oil resources be consumed. Based on the growth rates provided by the government of the United Arab Emirates, and the current estimated oil levels in the area, Dubai could face a power shortage in the next decade. Steps are being taken to try to reverse the damage, such as installing solar panels on sky scrapers and creating “green spaces” on rooftops, however it is unlikely that these small steps will have much impact without a drastic decrease in both water and energy consumption on a regional level.

This possibility, the potential for both a water and power shortage to hit the city of Dubai and possibly the entire UAE, is a prime example of a target consumer for a product like WonderWash. Using absolutely no electricity and very little water the WonderWash can replace a traditional washing machine to provide a green, compact and inexpensive alternative. It is important to recognize that the WonderWash may not be for all consumers, as its small size and manual agitation is not a feature some will find attractive, however, it is these exact features that may appeal significantly to a separate target audience such as college students, travelers, and those who previously could not afford a standard size washing machine. The competition is varied, from similar products retailing at a higher price, to slightly evolved variations of the portable washing machine that are electric and more appealing to display in a small home.

With retail sales in UAE expected to grow significantly, and retail trade expected to be a priority, it would be the ideal time to enter the market in Dubai as well as the emerging Abu Dhabi, a separate emirate that makes up the UAE. Abu Dhabi, having learned from Dubai, is taking steps to implement plans similar to western energy conservation plans and may offer incentives for products that follow such plans. Entering the market in the UAE can open doorways to the additional emerging markets in Asia and Africa with which the UAE is currently doing close business. The potential to establish a relationship with a booming economy and leading market is one that should not be passed up.

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