



# MULTI MEDIA FOR KIDS

**Malika Alouane**, Director of Channels' Programming at **Al Jazeera Children's Channel**, has reason to smile. Both **JCC** – a Pan-Arab edutainment channel aimed at age group 7-15 – and **Baraem TV**, the first free-to-view preschool channel in the Arab world which she launched in January 2009 are winning accolades the world over – including 'Channel of the Year' at the 2009 AIBs – for its quality offerings on various platforms. Here she talks about her experiences and latest projects

**J**CC is the first ever children's channel in the Arab world. In setting it up we learned a lot and that has helped us to launch Baraem and make it the success it is today. The pre-school Baraem is a completely new concept to the Arabic-speaking audience worldwide. Feedback from researchers and focus groups is very positive with requests to do more. Our main challenge today is to produce more pre-school content internally and bring more of an Arabic flavour from within this region to the audience.

### **JCC and Baraem address two distinct age groups – what difficulties does that bring for the programming strategy?**

There is no major difficulty except with the age group 6 to 8; they sit a bit in between. We have eight year olds who are watching Baraem and love it, and six year olds who watch certain content on JCC.

I see more of a challenge with the older age group. When we try to speak to 7-15's there is a huge difference in tastes, liking of programmes and content and even the 'personality' of the channel, and the scheduling part is challenging because you can never speak to all of them on prime time. So to decide

what content for what age group goes on prime time on certain days, that is quite difficult. And coping with the time zone differences will always be a challenge.

### **How much of your content is produced in-house?**

For JCC we are fine with 60% in-house which is one of the highest ratios in children's TV, but for Baraem we are looking over the next couple of years to add 10% to get us to 25%. We also have quite an active acquisitions department, and we make sure we don't have redundant content between what is bought in and what's produced and commissioned.

### **What's behind the move to partner with NHK in a huge-scale science entertainment series?**

Factual entertainment is missing on quite a few children's channels around the world. We have partnered with NHK before and science was always an attractive area for a joint effort. We said we wanted something really impressive, not just a conventional science magazine. So we came up with this idea of grand scale experiments – it works for children, it works for a 13 year old, and it works for a grown-up too. The series, Discover Science, is going on air on JCC in September.

### What interactivity do you offer on your delivery platforms?

The website started initially non-interactive. Today we have over 4m visitors a month which is tremendous. When we launched the VOD streaming, this brought a lot of audience.

We are engaging with the viewer – the latest is online games for multiple users and a lot more is planned. The number of hours of programmes watched online on JCC are really impressive. This is leading us to believe that with the teens and the children, digital will be winning.

### Where does this traffic originate?

It's worldwide but the majority is from the Arab world. Morocco, Algeria are very high, also Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Levant, Palestine. We know that it's the language that resonates well with Arab families living abroad. We are working on sorting out rights in the US, and we might start with an online offer, that would be easier to turn around than an actual feed.

### Tell us about the book publishing deal with Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation.

It's always been part of the strategy of this channel to come up with children's books. We want to reach the audience differently and promote the kids' education not just through digital or through the TV screen. We don't want children to watch for so long anyway. We want to give life to the programmes we make and get quality in everything we do for an Arabic speaking audience.

### Are you competing with other children's channels like KidsCo who are going global and targeting the Arab world?

No, the channel might be targeting the same viewers, but its mandate is very different. KidsCo remains a foreign channel – as are all the other channels that are today covering the Arab world from the West. And what is expected of them in terms of their own viewers and stakeholders is not the same as what is expected of us.

### JCC is funded by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. Do you have additional income?

No. What we are trying to do on exploitation level of rights, either in publishing or in DVDs, is primarily to reach our audience and make it a global offer, but that's not a source of income currently. I don't expect it ever to cover a budget to run these two channels. We are working to develop merchandising for agents and licensees but in that respect we have only just started. I don't target the Arab world especially, because it's small when it comes to merchandising and licensing.

### Which of the prizes you have won have pleased you most?

For Baraem there were two that cheered everyone's heart here. One is the Gold we got for the brand and the visual language of the channel. The second one was our pre-school animated series 'Nan & Lili' – the first ever conceived in the Arabic world and made in Arabic to win multiple awards. It was quite interesting for us to review what we did right there, it helps us benchmark some success factors.

### What's in the pipeline?

In September some of the long lasting shows are due to end so we are coming in with new concepts. We are trying to secure the next three years in terms of commissioned programmes, what genres we want and programming strategy. Long term, I want to see us as a full multimedia corporation able to do publishing, licence some of the IP, and be active in the global market. My ambition is also to have an international feed - yes, online is great but TV speaks to the viewers differently.

### JCC is committed to protect young viewers from improper content. What's the background to this?

All of Europe is regulated regarding audio-visual content and programming, including children's TV. In the Arab countries there is a lack of regulation and we need to



◀ **Main Image:** Malika Alouane  
**Above top:** Discovering Science  
**Below:** Bedtime Story - Nam Al Qamar

address that. We as broadcasters will never know the exact composition of the family that's watching – it could be a three year old plus a single mother, or kids between 6 and 18 plus parents and 80 year old grandparents. But what is a must is to put regulation in place regarding when and what content is broadcast, to provide safe content for the younger age groups.

Our youngsters and children are quite used to seeing channels promote bad content – in terms of junk food or in terms of adverts - and they start regarding it as normal. The consumption level that is pushed through TV is quite unhealthy at the moment.

### IS JCC spearheading this?

Yes, we are, together with the Qatar Foundation. First we need to change the way people think so that they understand that regulation is not censorship. It will take time to start the regulation process but I personally can see that within five years we could have some regulation in place.

More regulation will also help broadcasters to produce better and more specific content and meet their own objectives. In children's and family TV, what we produce enters the living room or bedroom of someone so I guess that's very intimate.

Thank you, Malika Alouane.

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