

PROFILE



NAME Nakhle El Hage
JOB Director of News and Current Affairs
COMPANY Alarabiya News Channel

MY CAREER

I started my career in a country where media was less restricted than in other countries in the Arab world. The civil war in Lebanon was at its height and news was a major part of people's lives. It was during my second year in college that I joined Voice of Lebanon as a junior reporter. VOL, a renowned radio station, was the main source of news in a war-torn country and people tuned to it for updates around the clock. It was at this time that I realized the role of media and its influence in people's daily lives. We had an abundance of news to give out, from war to kidnappings of Westerners, to hijackings and it was vital to have accurate information at a time when resources were limited and technology was not at all advanced. It was then that I had my first experience with citizen journalism and had to learn to gather information from the public, confirm its accuracy and deliver it in a fast and concise manner.

I took this experience with me

when I graduated from college and moved to television working as a reporter. At the beginning, television seemed less efficient than radio because of the amount of resources it takes to produce a two minute report. But I soon realized the power of visual media and the impact a short report makes on viewers.

In 1991 I moved to London, joining MBC two months before it went on air and was fortunate to participate in the launch preparations. We were the first Arab journalists to use computers and had to work with software providers to 'arabize' the system.

At MBC, I started as a reporter and eventually became the producer of the main news bulletin which for years was the top rated television programme in the Arab world. Working in the West gave us the chance to learn from the Western media and its freedom of speech. We also had more resources that helped us move to a new standard of professionalism.

ABOUT ALARABIYA

In 2002, when MBC decided to move to Dubai, I led a small team that was in charge of the relocation. The project of Alarabiya came up and we started moving towards establishing the departments of the channel. It was a challenge to set up in just a few months a channel that had news, business, sports, and current affairs programmes.

In 2003 Alarabiya was launched and in 2004, when Abdul Rahman Al Rashed became general manager, he appointed me as director of news and current affairs. Alarabiya News Channel is an independent satellite channel that offers a 24-hour news service and extensive business coverage. Alarabiya is a different experience in the Arab news industry because it is a business model.

We rely on advertising as a main source of income and watch our ratings very closely. We work to keep our viewers and get new

ones in order to keep our revenues coming. Seven years after its launch, Alarabiya is the leading news network in major markets such as KSA and GCC countries, ranking first in terms of viewership ratings in the Middle East. This was achieved by providing objective, timely and impartial news in addition to a wide variety of informative programming which has given the station a rating as the most credible news source in the Middle East.

LATEST INITIATIVES

It is always a challenge to keep this positioning and stay on top of the news industry. We want to be on top, delivering news that's fast, accurate, diverse and comprehensive.

We have expanded our operation worldwide and have bureaux in major cities around the world. Our network of correspondents provides us with up to the minute information on events which has given us an edge in the market. We were the first to interview President Obama after his inauguration. And we are the first Arabic channel to collaborate with YouTube on projects. With so many events going on and so many locations to cover, we're training reporters to shoot and edit reports in the field and going live from remote areas.

Alarabiya is constantly looking for ways to diversify and bring in new viewers. We're always working on new shows and developing programmes to take advantage of current events.

FUTURE STRATEGY

Our Alarabiya website was recently re-launched, and our broadcast can be watched live on the website. Our aim is to take advantage of technology and be part of it, giving our viewers news in their homes and on their phones. We'll be moving into HD in 2011.

OUTLOOK

Exciting and challenging! ■