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CASE STUDY

Print.sa: Technology Enabling Literature

This case study is part of a project focusing on Investing in Culture, which is a collaboration of MBSC Case Centre and the Ministry of Culture. The case was developed by Dr Larissa von Alberti-Alhtaybat, Associate Professor of Accounting and Vice Dean at the Prince Mohammed Bin Salman College of Business & Entrepreneurship. It is intended to be used as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a management or administrative situation.

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Print.sa: Technology Enabling Literature

Abstract

Print.sa provides home-grown technology solutions, enabling the connection of culture and society. Their first project was launched in 2018 and was an instant success. They have since developed further, and now provide large scale technological solutions to the Ministry of Culture but also society at large, to connect people with culture, provide access to literature. It has also become the Literary Commission's technology partner, because Print.sa facilitates the connection to literature, rather than manages literature itself.

The new initiative, Literature Everywhere, around major cities and landmark sights, such as airports or malls, will see digital banners providing access to creative literary pieces for free – and Print.sa is responsible for the digital banners. Its products serve as a facilitator to consume the final creative output – reading or listening to literary work. This project is a significant investment in making literature and poetry accessible and interesting to everyone, and is jointly driven by the Ministry of Culture and Print.sa.

Case Study

In 2007, when Khaled Bamohamad was at university, he noticed a need for a platform connecting users with printing companies in Saudi Arabia. He decided to start this business one day. It took him ten years to gather the necessary resources and another year to make the idea a reality.

Starting Up Print.sa

*"Print.sa (@PrintDotSa) is an online printing service that delivers printed materials to customers' homes."*¹

In 2018, Bamohamad and two other partners started their venture, Print.sa, with an initial investment of US\$3,000 (SAR11,000). They planned to gauge the market response to the project and explore the business concept further. Bamohamad, being a student, noticed that both students and faculty

¹ Twitter Success Story of Print.sa.

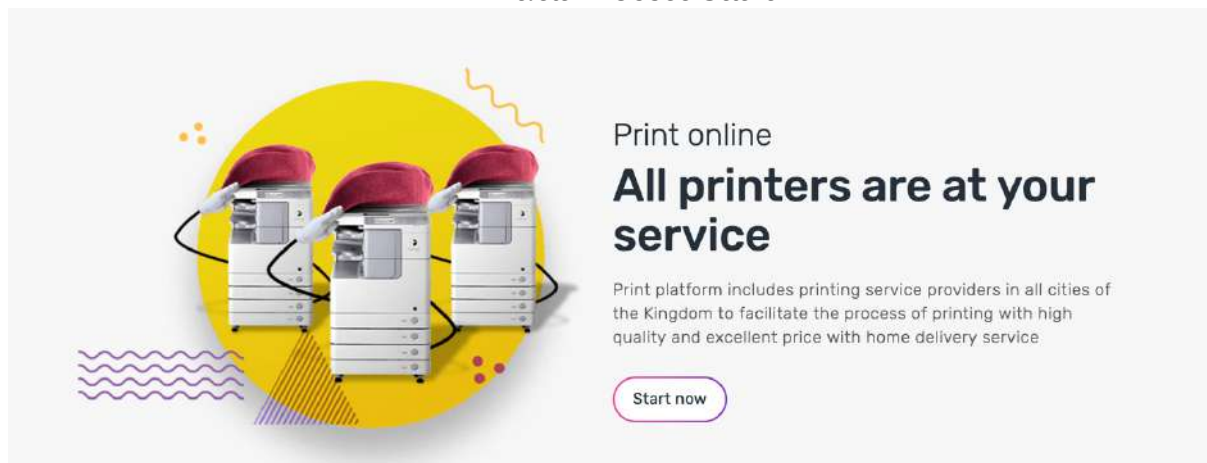
members required access to printing facilities. However, getting such access was not easy and convenient, as they had to drive to far-off places, use expensive services, and often face limited options.² Typical concerns included: “It is costly,” “I must drive to get the best price possible,” “waiting time in the copy/printing center is killing me,” and ‘I don’t have enough time to print and arrange my work properly.’”³

Print.sa’s Operations

The platform they created was intended to address the issues faced by their fellow students. Their decision to invest in a minimum viable product to gauge the market's response proved successful. Encouraged by the positive feedback, they continued developing their platform in-house and became the first in Saudi Arabia to offer technological solutions for linking people and printing centers.

Print.sa's printing platform serves as a mediator between printing centers and customers who need documents printed. This solution has made the printing process much easier because customers can upload their documents, select their desired options (such as format, binding, and color), and then choose based on their preferences for order completion time, price, and location. The platform is accessible on laptops and iOS and Android mobile devices. The following exhibits provide a breakdown of the process stages:

Exhibit I Print.sa Process Start



Source: Print.sa website

² Conversation with the founder.

³ Conversation with the founder.

Exhibit II
Print.sa Process Outline

How I print?

Get the Job Done in 4 Steps



Upload Your Documents

Login to your account after signing up and upload your PDF document to be printed.



Select Printing Option

Select printing options like type of printing, colors, type of binding and delivery option.



Make Your Order

Place your order securely using your Visa Card, Master Card or your Print Wallet.



Get Your Documents

Get your documents delivered to you by any of the delivery options offered on the website.

Source: Print.sa website

Exhibit III

Print.sa Printing Process Options

Printing Options

We offers many printing options on different paper sizes and types. It also provides printing several types of packaging to suit the needs of customers. With this tool, you can see the available options. To find out the prices, register and add the file, and the best prices will appear for you according to your city.

The screenshot shows a web interface for selecting printing options. It is organized into four rows, each with a title and a set of buttons or icons:

- Paper Size:** Buttons for A5, A4 (highlighted in pink), A3, A2, A1, and A0.
- Paper Type:** Buttons for Normal (highlighted in pink), Glossy, Sticker, and Thick.
- Printing Color:** Buttons for Black (highlighted in pink) and Color.
- Printing Layout:** Five icons representing different page layouts: a single page (highlighted in pink), two pages side-by-side, two pages stacked vertically, two pages side-by-side with a central gutter, and four pages in a 2x2 grid.

Source: Print.sa website

The printing platform charges a cost-plus-20% fee,⁴ which is considered expensive in the printing market.⁵ It primarily operates on a print-based-on-need business model with low volumes. Due to academic semester dates, its busiest seasons are September, December/January, and March/April. In 2019, it experienced a significant increase in sales by 400% thanks to its successful Twitter marketing outreach, suggesting there is still untapped market potential.⁶

“Reaching our target audience at a specific time during the first week in the back-to-school season [was crucial] ... It was a very successful campaign cleverly by showing our brand name and boosting awareness,” says Ibrahim Mutahar, Marketing Manager.⁷

New developments during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant changes in the demand for printed documents, and Print.sa took advantage of this opportunity to expand its business in a new direction. Rather than focusing solely on individual customers, Print.sa developed a business-to-business revenue stream. The Saudi Organization for Chartered and Professional Accountants (SOCPA) is one of its primary

⁴ Conversation with the founder.

⁵ Conversation with the founder.

⁶ Twitter success story of Print.sa.

⁷ Twitter success story of Print.sa.

and ongoing clients. In 2020, SOCPA utilized Print.sa's services to print books on demand for their professional qualification candidates. By the end of 2021, it had switched to on-demand printing for 90% of its training course-related books.

Print.sa recognized the importance of on-demand printing for businesses and expanded its services with the launch of Print Bookstore in 2021 at the Riyadh Bookfair. This platform enables authors to publish their books directly to the market while publishing houses can offer books low in demand. Books are listed on the platform, and interested buyers can easily purchase them from Print.sa, which handles book printing and shipping. The platform is now a sales, printing, and distribution channel. Although print-on-demand can be costly, publishing houses find it more economical than maintaining a fixed inventory of low-demand books. This allows them to offer a wider variety of books to the market. Major publishing houses have reported significant financial benefits using Print.sa, as they save on storage costs. Typically, When printing in bulk (typically, 1000 copies at least), the cost per copy is SR10 for a publisher. When printing through Print.sa, it is possible to print only one copy, not in bulk, but the cost per copy is SR 25. While the cost per copy is higher, there is no need to print the high quantity of 1,000 copies, which incurs storage costs as well, when offering the book through Print.sa.

The bookstore currently has 2000 books from 100 publishers across eight countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In Saudi Arabia, government organizations have subscribed to Print.sa's services, and individual writers use the platform as a direct-to-customer channel. Customers can select a book from the library to have printed, and authors receive payment after the cost of printing is deducted. Print.sa is the only platform in the MENA region competing with Ingram Content Group internationally. Recently, Print.sa attracted their first regional customer thanks to the *“easy flow of the system and the full reporting of process and cost approach.”*⁸

The Print Library division of the company currently needs to generate profits. It demands substantial investments in technology, platform maintenance, and marketing, particularly in the business-to-customer segment. Print.sa actively participates in events in Egypt to boost its marketing efforts. Although most independent authors are in Saudi Arabia, publishing houses are primarily in Egypt. Therefore, Print.sa is consistently expanding its collection. Its library section currently features approximately 50 books by independent authors, representing 20% of its business. Publishing houses account for 80% of its library business.

⁸ Co-founder's statement.

Obeikan Bookstore, part of Obeikan Investment Group, is one of Print.sa's essential business customers. It uses Print.sa's library service for books no longer in high demand, and printing thousands of copies is not feasible. Print.sa's platform offers an easy solution where customers can request printing and pay directly on the platform, although it is a more costly service. Additionally, Print.sa plans to collaborate with printing partners in Egypt, where the printing cost per book would be SAR5 for the local market. This move aims to tap into the sizeable Egyptian market, where printing and distributing books within the country is cheaper and more accessible. Print.sa sees Gulf countries as one region regarding market size and distribution costs.

Ministry of Culture Commissions: New technology opportunities

Print.sa is expanding beyond its printing platforms and embracing new technologies to stay ahead of the market and prepare for future developments. This includes exciting opportunities stemming from collaborations with the Ministry of Culture. Through a partnership with the Ministry's Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission, Print.sa aims to increase access to literature and promote a love of reading among the public.

*“The Literature, Publishing & Translation Commission is establishing a national strategy to support the publishing business and unlock creative writing potentials in Saudi Arabia.”*⁹ A recent project aims to achieve multiple objectives, including encouraging reading, supporting digital transformation, and utilizing innovative technology solutions.¹⁰ It has partnered with Print.sa to execute the "Literature Everywhere" initiative to make literature accessible to all in Saudi Arabia and to increase interest in reading.¹¹ It is divided into three programs that aim to provide literature in various forms to the public and engage them in different settings, such as cafes, malls, public meeting spaces, and airports.

“The Literature Everywhere program expects to contribute to raising cultural awareness directly through the project’s diverse activations (Literary Cloud, Literary Partner, and Short Stories), targeting different segments of society, focusing on their sustainability factor while also empowering the private and third sector to contribute,” states Mohammed Hasan Alwan, CEO of the Commission.¹²

Print.sa supports the Commission by providing technological solutions for its first and third programs. The first program manages 300 banners in public places across Saudi Arabia with QR codes

⁹ Ministry of Culture website.

¹⁰ Ministry of Culture website.

¹¹ Arab News: New initiative set to make literature available across Saudi Arabia.

¹² Arab News: New initiative set to make literature available across Saudi Arabia.

for accessing various forms of literature, such as short stories, audiobooks, and poetry. Print.sa holds the digital versions of the literature that can be accessed through the codes. The third program is in the initial stage, with ten machines installed at airports to provide free access to printed short stories. This project was launched in February 2020. Initially, the Commission planned to import the technological solution from France, and then Print.sa was supposed to maintain the system. However, Print.sa offered to develop an in-house solution. Presently, there are 55 machines in operation across Saudi Arabia.

Exhibit IV Machine at a Saudi Airport



Source: Arab News: New initiative set to make literature available across Saudi Arabia

Digital transformation in the literary sector

Print.sa is also focused on the future developments of the literary sector, aligning with the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission's objective to prioritize innovative technology in literature's digital transformation.

The company is working on two new projects to contribute to the digital transformation of literature. Firstly, they are developing an e-reader application that will enable readers to access all the content available on the Print.sa Library directly from their smartphones or tablets. Secondly, it is designing a device that consists of AI-powered glasses, which will translate books into audio for the visually impaired or blind.

Print.sa is taking steps to stay ahead of the shift from print to digital publishing by introducing its e-reader.¹³ The company aims to innovate its business model before a competitor does so.¹⁴ Currently, only 10% of readers in Saudi Arabia use e-readers. Still, the e-publishing market is projected to grow

¹³ Conversation with the co-founder.

¹⁴ Conversation with the co-founder.

by about 2% annually until 2027, reaching a total market volume of approximately US\$85 million.¹⁵ Print.sa plans to unveil its e-reader at the upcoming Riyadh Bookfair.

Currently in its preliminary development stage, the reading assistant glasses are designed to assist the Arabic-speaking population. In Saudi Arabia alone, approximately 3% of the population is blind or visually impaired. Across Arab-speaking countries, about 3 million are blind, accounting for approximately 0.5% of the total Arab-speaking population. Additionally, a further 3.5% experience moderate to severe vision impairment. Unfortunately, no existing device caters to their needs when reading a document transferred to audio as the reader looks at it. Introducing these glasses has the potential to significantly enhance the lives of the blind and visually impaired, providing them with better access to literature.

Print.sa has experienced significant growth over four years due to its response to market opportunities and changes. Its average revenue growth potential is 40% per year.¹⁶ The business has continued to grow pre-, during, and post-pandemic, indicating a stable and in-demand market with untapped potential.

¹⁵ Statista, ePublishing Saudi Arabia.

¹⁶ Conversation with the co-founder.