

Page: Submitter's Information
Chapter Name ACC Middle East
Page: Achievement Award
Category Best Membership Strategy Implemented
Chapter Name ACC Middle East
Chapter Size Mid-Sized (301-850 members)
Entry Title Pioneering ACC MENA's Greenfields Expansion: A Blueprint for Regional Growth and Member Engagement
Entry Description <p>The majority of the Association of Corporate Counsel Middle East (ACC MENA) membership is concentrated in the UAE. The UAE, being a melting pot of cultures, has a number of in-house and lawyers' networks of various degrees of formal organization, which makes it a highly competitive market. ACC MENA had to come up with a strategy to enhance and develop brand recognition and presence in such a diverse market.</p> <p>Historically, ACC MENA has been concentrating on the Dubai market. In response to the need for broader visibility, the ACC MENA Board pivoted and has thrown a wider net for its membership and engagement. Through its personal networks, the Board identified individuals across the MENA region who have been appointed as country representatives.</p> <p>In addition to engaging a wider community, these country representatives also constitute a qualified pool for succession planning. As a result, the Board has been able to overcome legacy issues of being highly visible in only one market. Through a dedicated network of country representatives and focused outreach events, ACC MENA has significantly increased its visibility, member engagement, and overall reach—laying a strong foundation for future growth.</p>
When was the program initiated? 10/1/2024
What was the project objective? Describe the steps you took to achieve this objective, including key strategies, activities, or milestones. <p>The primary objective of the strategy was to significantly increase the visibility of the ACC MENA chapter across the MENA region and to better engage in-house community by highlighting the tangible benefits of ACC membership.</p> <p>To achieve this, the ACC MENA Board pivoted from a historically Dubai-centric approach to a broader, multi-level regional strategy. This pivot was essential to address both the crowded UAE market and the untapped potential in other jurisdictions.</p> <p>The strategy unfolded across three key levels:</p> <p>Country Level</p> <p>The focus was not only on maintaining visibility in the competitive Dubai/UAE market but also on expanding into "greenfield" countries where ACC had no prior presence. The Board identified and appointed country representatives through its networks, establishing a credible local presence and enabling informed engagement in each jurisdiction.</p> <p>Sponsorship Level</p> <p>Efforts were made to engage with smaller legal outfits and select conference organizers. A key priority was ensuring that local in-house counsel had a voice on discussion panels, which helped build relevance and trust within each market.</p> <p>Membership Level</p> <p>To better understand the needs of in-house lawyers, surveyors were sent out to gather feedback on topics of interest and pain points. This data informed the development of more targeted programming and communications.</p>

How was the objective achieved? How did you measure success, and to what extent do you believe the objective was met?

The objective was achieved through a multi-pronged strategy:

Strategic Country Representative Appointments

The ACC MENA Board appointed highly motivated and influential country representatives in key markets including Egypt, Qatar, Oman, Tunisia, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Dedicated Leadership

Director Akram Razek was assigned the crucial role of Countries Lead, overseeing and coordinating the efforts of all country representatives.

High-Impact Local Events

- A series of successful events were held across the MENA region, tailored to local needs and designed to maximize engagement and introduce the ACC to in-house communities in Tunisia, Bahrain, Qatar, Egypt, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

- The ACC MENA Board is particularly proud of its successful event in the previously untapped jurisdiction of Oman.

- Groundbreaking Collaboration in Saudi Arabia

Country representatives partnered with an external organizer to host the inaugural Legal Middle East Awards night in Riyadh.

How did you measure success, and to what extent do you believe the objective was met?

Success was measured through both quantitative growth and qualitative impact:

Membership Growth

Membership increased by 180 members between April 2024 and May 2025.

Digital and Social Media Engagement

ACC MENA's LinkedIn following grew 107% from 2,900 to over 6,000 followers in less than one year, significantly boosting its online presence.

Strategic Implementation

The success of the strategy is evident not only in numbers but also in the depth of engagement and regional reach achieved through local events and leadership.

We believe the objective—to increase ACC MENA's visibility, member engagement, and overall reach—has been met. However, we also recognize that the challenge now is to sustain this momentum and continue growing the membership through consistent strategic efforts.

Please describe the total budget allocated for your program or initiative. Include a brief breakdown of how the funds were distributed across key areas. In addition, explain how the budget was used effectively or creatively to maximize impact.

ACC MENA's budget was only required to subsidize country representatives and board members' travel to various ACC MENA-organized events. The main burden of financing venues, catering, and other logistical needs has been achieved with the support of local partners and sponsors, demonstrating a highly cost-effective approach to expansion.

What significant obstacles or challenges did you encounter during the planning or implementation of your program or initiative? How did you address or overcome them? If you did not face major challenges, please explain why that may have been the case and what factors contributed to the smooth execution of your work.

The main obstacle in developing and implementing the strategy was overcoming the legacy issues. Cost-benefit analysis had previously shown that it was beneficial to concentrate on only very few countries. However, the ACC MENA Board was able to recognize the new reality and was prepared to pivot and break away with the tradition.

Once a new strategy was formulated, the board members actively engaged their private networks. This required intensive engagement to identify those contacts and build trust within nascent in-house legal communities in countries where ACC had no prior presence.

Navigating diverse local legal landscapes, cultural nuances, and logistical complexities for event planning across multiple countries also required significant coordination and time investment on the part of the board members.

Overcoming the initial unfamiliarity with ACC's value proposition among potential members was another hurdle that required consistent and clear communication.

The hurdles were plentiful but overcome thanks to:

- The commitment of the board members to engage with their personal networks for the benefit of ACC.
- Active engagement with the wider sponsorship landscape, which was activated to offer more compelling events to the membership.
- Clear and consistent communication across multiple channels.
- Last but not least, engagement of a dedicated events manager from January 2025.

What do you anticipate will be the long-term impact of your project or initiative? Describe how the outcomes will extend beyond the immediate results, including any lasting benefits to the local/global ACC community. If applicable, explain how the initiative might be sustained, scaled, or replicated in the future.

ACC MENA has changed from being a Dubai-centric association to being a name recognized across MENA jurisdictions. The membership strategy has created a strong foundation for sustainable growth by establishing active local networks and raising brand awareness.

Engagement of country representatives, in our view, is a guarantee of such membership approach having a potential to be sustained and scaled across further, as of today, untapped countries in the MENA region.

Local networks mean not just an active local engagement but a potential pool for the future board members. We are hopeful that so-called home-grown board members with a hands-on approach will be proactive board members engaging at a much wider level across the region.

In the long term, we expect to see continued robust membership growth, increased engagement from in-house counsel across the region, and the emergence of new, vibrant ACC communities in these "greenfield" countries.

This proactive expansion will solidify ACC MENA's position as the leading association for in-house counsel in the region, fostering professional development, networking, and advocacy for years to come.

Please share what you are most proud to report about execution of this program. Please explain what this accomplishment means to you and how it reflects the values or goals of your work.

We are most proud of the exceptional team spirit and collaborative effort demonstrated by the ACC MENA Board of Directors and the newly appointed country representatives. Their collective dedication, proactive engagement, and willingness to work together across borders were instrumental in achieving such remarkable results in a short period. The dramatic increase in member interest and the 45% growth in regional membership are direct testaments to their hard work and commitment (180 new members between May 2024 and April 2025 = 45%).

Prior to taking a leadership position on the ACC Board, I have been actively engaged across various networks in the UAE and abroad. However, having taken over the position, I have recognized the unique benefits of the ACC membership and was keen to bring it to the wider in-house community.

To that end, I have actively engaged my personal networks and encouraged other board members to do the same. We have utilized the principle of six degrees of separation.

I am particularly proud of the Board which has enthusiastically supported our new approach and has dedicated considerable personal time in achieving the ACC MENA chapter's goals and objectives.

Not resting on one's laurels, not giving up, and driving by example.

Please share how your project or initiative is innovative. Describe any original approaches, strategies, or tools you used to address a problem or achieve your goals. What makes your work stand out from more traditional methods.

This project is innovative in its "greenfield" strategic approach to membership expansion. Instead of focusing solely on existing markets, ACC MENA boldly ventured into new territories, proactively identifying and cultivating relationships with in-house counsel communities where ACC had no previous foothold. The decentralized yet coordinated model with dedicated country representatives and a central Countries Lead allowed for hyper-local engagement while maintaining overall strategic alignment. Furthermore, the diverse and culturally sensitive event programming, ranging from intimate dinners to large community gatherings and even the first-ever Legal Middle East Awards, showcases an innovative understanding of how to effectively reach and engage varied in-house legal communities in a rapidly developing region. This initiative serves as a replicable model for other chapters seeking to expand into new geographical areas.

We recognize that we have not invented a wheel or come up with an unusual, unheard-of strategy. However, we have worked for a full year with minimal administrative support. We have committed substantial personal time and engaged at a completely different level with sponsors and country representatives.

What has previously been the task of the chapter manager and the respective law firm's marketing team has become the daily task of each and every board member. Each of us reached out to our personal contacts within law firms and personal networks. We have engaged previous board members to tap into their experience and knowledge.

We have lived the engagement to the full—not subcontracting it or leaving it to others. We have broadened the scope, engaged with grassroots, and looked further and wider.

We are enormously proud of the spirit of engagement, increased network, better brand recognition, and the increased membership numbers. We believe that this is the success which deserves recognition.

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