



## SME MONITOR BOOKS AND PUBLISHING SECTOR

MONSHA'AT QUARTERLY REPORT  
Q3 2024

### Inside this report:

- › Quarterly highlights from the ecosystem and Monsha'at
- › Initiatives supporting SME growth
- › Exclusive interviews with leading experts and entrepreneurs
- › Insights from Saudi Arabia's growing publishing sector

# Dr. Mohammed Hasan Alwan

CEO, Literature, Publishing  
and Translation Commission



هيئة الأدب والنشر والترجمة  
Literature, Publishing & Translation Commission



Literature, publishing, and translation are key contributors to the cultural renaissance currently underway in Saudi Arabia. As important economic and social pillars, they also align with Saudi Vision 2030's strategic efforts to bolster the role of culture in local lifestyles, drive economic development, and enhance the Kingdom's global standing. Since SMEs are key to the growth and development of all three sectors, the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission has a range of programs and projects to empower related businesses and remove barriers at the legislative, financial, and training levels.

Since its establishment in 2020, the commission has launched five business accelerators that have benefitted over one hundred SME projects whose average revenues increased by 20% and created 115 new permanent jobs. Much of this was achieved through 54 partnerships with the public and private sectors. The commission also collaborated with the Ministry of Investment to attract regional and global publishing houses to the Saudi market to enrich local production, enable diverse experiences, and enhance the local market's professionalism and competitiveness.

Recognizing the importance of training, the commission also designed specialized training programs for entrepreneurs in collaboration with local and global entities such as Monsha'at and the Oxford International Center for Publishing (OICP). These programs attracted 250 entrepreneurs in the sector. It also launched intensive training programs for owners of commercial translation offices in various cities across the Kingdom, in addition to programs for entrepreneurs in printing, among others.

The commission is also committed to improving the overall business environment for SMEs in literature, publishing, and translation. In this context, it launched a professional

accreditation project for translators to improve the quality of work in the sector, designated a business area at local book fairs to support translators, and launched a literary agent initiative to improve publishing processes and raise contractual standards among the relevant parties.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Municipalities and Housing, the commission also introduced legislative improvements in activity licenses, a policy that significantly increased the number of sales outlets available to literature, publishing, and translation SMEs. To spur growth in the industry, it also provides grants to qualifying publishing houses to enhance their ability to provide diverse high-quality content.

The advancement of the Kingdom's literature, publishing, and translation sectors is a collaborative effort between various parties from the public, private, and non-profit sectors, including a wide range of individuals and institutions both local and international. In helping each sector achieve a high-quality level of production and sustainability, every stakeholder is contributing to the Kingdom's renaissance.

The commission looks forward to pursuing a wide range of avenues and opportunities for cooperation, growth, and prosperity within each sector, empowering a wide range of practitioners and beneficiaries along the way. Thanks to the strategic guidance of Saudi Vision 2030 and the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, his trustworthy Crown Prince, and His Highness, Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Farhan Al Saud, the Minister of Culture and Chairman of the Board of the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission, it is well-prepared to do so.

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# KEY COMMERCIAL INDICATORS

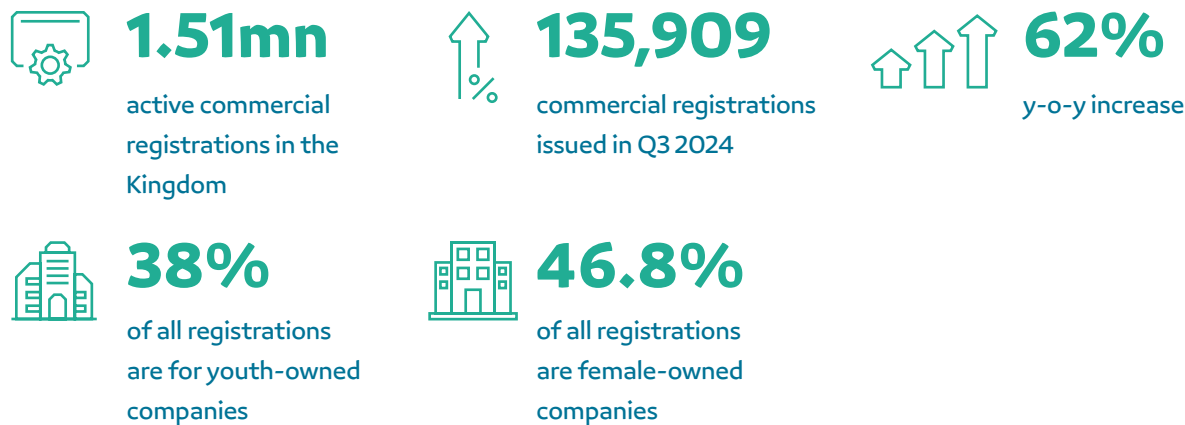
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Saudi Arabia's private sector exhibited another quarter of stellar growth, a trend underscored by a remarkable 62% y-o-y increase in commercial registrations. This reflects the success of its vibrant private sector, which now has over 1.5 million commercial registrations to date. In Q3 2024, 45% of new registrations were made by women, highlighting the success of policies that encourage broad-based economic participation.

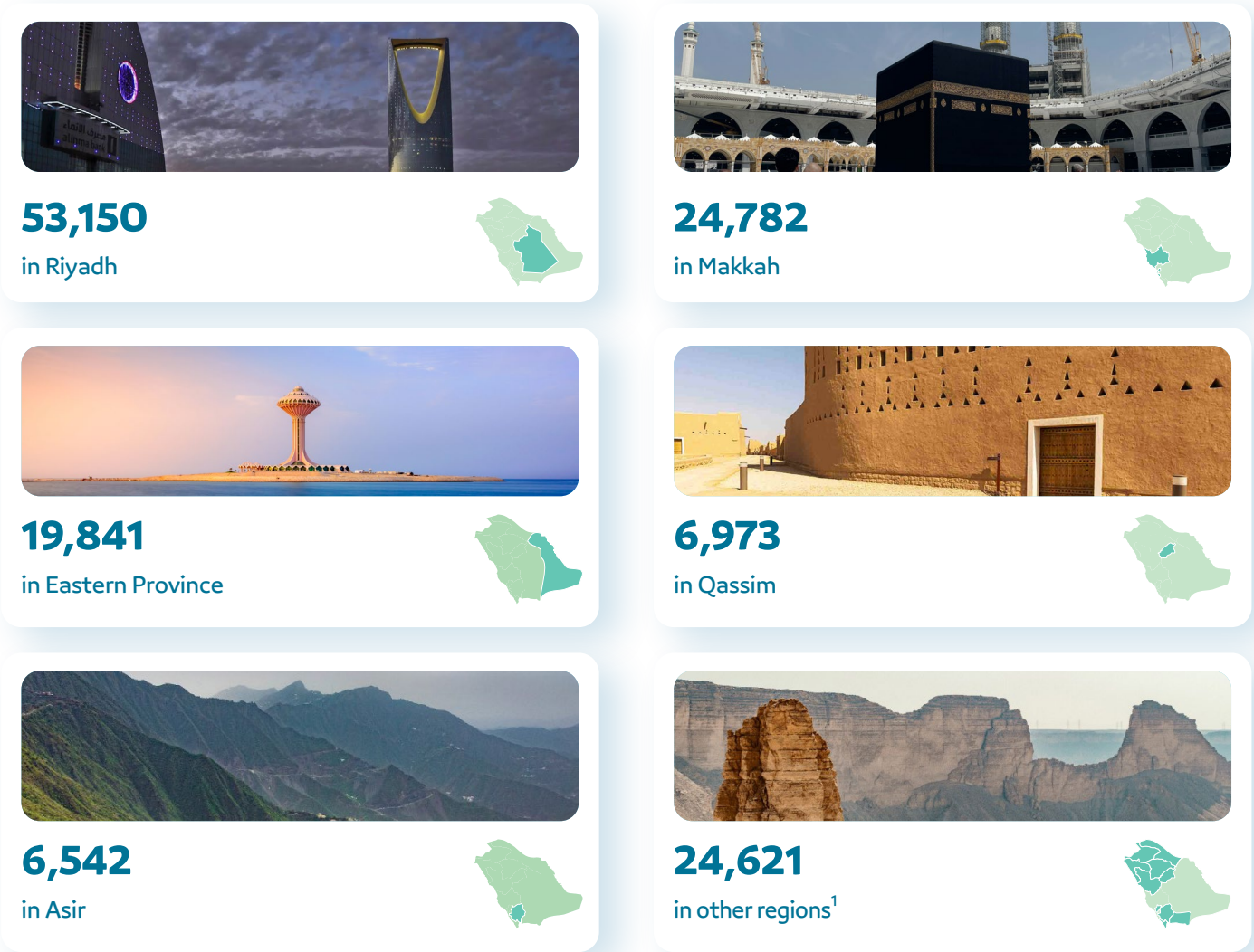


# COMMERCIAL REGISTRATIONS GROWTH SNAPSHOT

The Riyadh International Book Fair, organized by the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission, is Saudi Arabia's premier literary event. In 2024, the fair attracted over one million visitors from across the literary world, bringing together an elite group of writers, publishers, translators, and readers from both within and outside the Kingdom. Under the theme "Riyadh Reads," the ten-day event significantly contributed to fostering cultural and intellectual exchange by highlighting the works of Saudi authors, hosting book signings, and providing readers the opportunity to meet their favorite writers.



## New commercial registrations by region, Q3 2024



# LITERATURE, PUBLISHING, AND TRANSLATION IN THE KINGDOM

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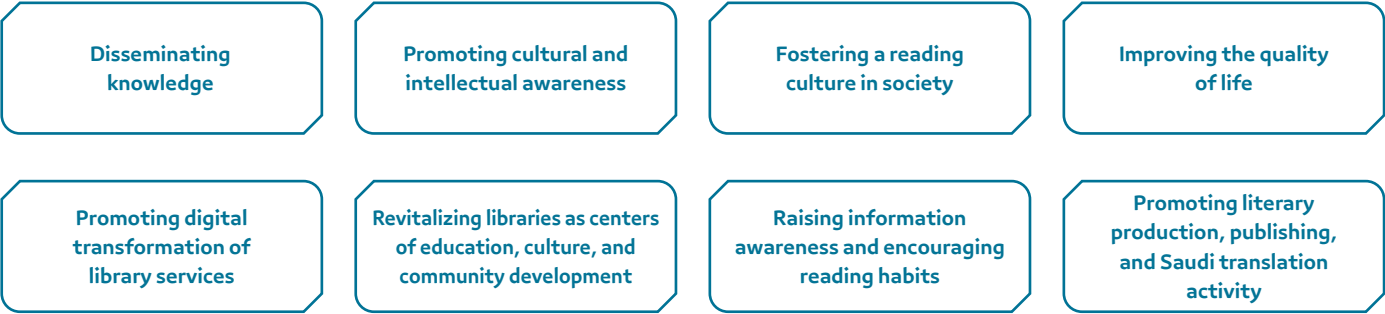
In the last few years, Saudi Arabia has rapidly emerged as one of the leading book markets in the Arab world. With a highly literate population and the Ministry of Culture's strategic initiatives targeting the sector to contribute 3% of GDP by 2030, huge investments are being made in literature, publishing, and translation.

## State of the sector in Saudi Arabia



## Ministry of Culture commissions drive literary growth

Established in 2018, the Ministry of Culture (MOC) has launched 11 cultural commissions to spur a wider creative transformation in the Kingdom, two of which are devoted to literacy and publishing: the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission and the Libraries Commission. Together, they are empowering authors, publishers, translators, and readers.



Thanks to more digital publishing, audiobooks, and electronic stores, the Kingdom is also increasing local content and readership in history, literature, religion, and children’s books.<sup>11</sup>

# THE LITERATURE, PUBLISHING AND TRANSLATION COMMISSION<sup>12</sup>

Established in 2020 to help achieve the National Culture Strategy, the commission promotes local literary production, publishing, and translation activity to advance Saudi culture, promote economic growth, and enhance the Kingdom’s culture of literacy.

- › Develop an environment that enables Saudi literary production by empowering writers, ensuring quality, and enhancing the reader experience
- › Support local publishing by attracting global investment, increasing competitiveness, developing translation field, enhancing cultural exchange, and increasing knowledge of Arabic content
- › Build effective partnerships and utilize innovative technologies

## Programs and initiatives

To enable writers, publishers, translators, and readers to tell and appreciate Saudi Arabia’s stories, the commission has a rich array of book-related initiatives.

**Riyadh International Book Fair:** First held in 1976, the fair hosted over 1mn visitors in 2024 and led to \$7.5mn+ in sales.<sup>13</sup>

**Tarjim Initiative:** Helps fund academic translations for books, articles, and journals.<sup>14</sup>

**Literary Creativity Competition:** Talent development program for university authors of poetry, novels, and short stories.<sup>15</sup>

**Literary Partner Program:** Local cafes that promote Saudi writers to win prizes totaling \$266,000.<sup>16</sup>

**Literary Agent Initiative:** Helps local literary agents participate in local and international book fairs.<sup>17</sup>

**Jeddah Book Fair:** Since 2015, has featured a wide range of intellectuals, writers, and publishing stakeholders to promote the city’s reading culture.<sup>18</sup>

**Al-Sharqiya Book Fair:** Launched in 2022, Eastern Province’s first book fair now features 500+ local and international publishers.<sup>19</sup>

**Madinah Book Fair:** In its 3rd year, the fair’s 300 publishing houses and 200 pavilions drew 170,000 visitors.<sup>20</sup>

**Frankfurt Book Fair:** The commission hosted a pavilion at the world’s largest book fair to link Saudi publishers & literary agencies with international counterparts.<sup>21</sup>

**Research Studies in Children’s & Young Adult Literature:** 10 grants awarded to develop both genres.<sup>22</sup>





## Cultural stewards: Enhancing the Kingdom's literary landscape (cont'd)

As a key component of the Ministry of Culture's efforts to empower the cultural sector in Saudi Arabia, the commission has an ambitious mandate to strengthen the Kingdom's literary scene.



**Support and incentivize writers, authors, publishers, and translators**



**Facilitate funding channels**



**Educational programs for literature, publishing, and translation sectors**



**Legislate regulations and regulatory standards**



**Encourage private sector to invest in cultural development**



**Scholarships for talented individuals**



**Create an enabling environment for literary production**



**Professional talent development programs**



**Saudi Publishing House launched to promote local authors & literary scene**

# RIYADH INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR<sup>23</sup>

Organized by the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission, Saudi Arabia's flagship book fair now hosts over one million visitors a year from across the literary world. In addition to bringing together countless local and international writers, publishers, translators, and readers, the ten-day event promotes cultural exchange and knowledge sharing by showcasing Saudi authors, holding book signings, and allowing readers to meet their favorite writers. This year's theme was "Riyadh Reads."



**1mn+**

visitors per year<sup>24</sup>



**2,000+**

publishing houses<sup>25</sup>



**30+**

countries represented<sup>26</sup>



**\$7.5mn**

in sales at a 10-day event<sup>27</sup>



**800+**

pavilions on display<sup>28</sup>



**200+**

events for all ages<sup>29</sup>

## Promoting literary engagement

In addition to being a key platform for intellectual and cultural exchange and a meeting point for writers, thinkers, publishers, cultural figures, and book enthusiasts from near and afar, the fair also features a large array of enriching cultural activities for attendees of all ages.

- › Seminars and lectures
- › Panel discussions
- › Poetry evenings
- › Theatrical performances
- › Workshops on a wide range of topics
- › Manuscripts and publications



# Hatem Alshehri

**Founder**  
of Harf Literary Agency



Harf Literary Agency is the first literary agency in Saudi Arabia dedicated to empowering authors and writers. With a focus on streamlining the publishing process, Harf provides creative services such as proofreading, cover design, self-publishing support, and expert advice on publishing and distribution.

**What inspired you to establish Saudi Arabia's first literary agency, and what challenges did you face in creating a local support system for authors?**

As an author I knew the difficulties facing authors all too well, so I tried to start a company that minimises the gap between authors and publishing houses. The difficulty lies in creating a new market that didn't previously exist, in addition to finding the confidence to believe in yourself, since many first-time authors have no example to look up to in their circle or community.

**How does Harf identify and cultivate literary talent in Saudi Arabia, and what impact have you seen from these efforts on the local literary scene?**

We engage with new literary voices through constant announcements of new books, as well as holding literary competitions, participating in local and international book fairs, and following special programs designed by the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission such as the Book Incubator Program, which provides an important platform for emerging Saudi authors. Together, these efforts have really helped influence the literary scene by creating more opportunities for writers and inspiring a new generation to share their stories. As a result, we are seeing an increase in both the diversity and quality of works coming out of Saudi Arabia, which is incredibly encouraging.

**Given your focus on creative publishing services, how does Harf approach the balance between traditional and digital publishing to reach a wider audience?**

At Harf, we recognize that digital and traditional publishing are not in competition but rather complement each other, each serving distinct audience preferences and needs. They are two sides of the same coin. As a result, our approach is to leverage the strengths of both mediums to maximize our reach and cater to a diverse readership through works and authors that speak to both timeless and trendy literary tastes.

**What role do cultural partnerships play in Harf's growth? Can you share an example of a collaboration that has advanced its mission?**



We have had the great honour of working with many government ministries and universities as well as private companies, which we are very grateful for, but the most beneficial partnership we have had was with the Cultural Development Fund because it gave us more credibility in the public eye and customer confidence in our brand.

**How has Vision 2030 influenced the Kingdom's publishing ecosystem, and what impacts have you seen at Harf Literary Agency?**

Vision 2030 has transformed Saudi Arabia's publishing ecosystem by boosting local content creation, digital expansion, and international collaboration. Thanks to increased government support, cultural investments, and greater readership, these initiatives have fostered a far more dynamic literary landscape that benefits readers, writers, publishers, and the wider public. At Harf Literary Agency, these changes have enhanced our publishing capabilities, led to more diverse content offerings, and improved market access, all of which aligns with Vision 2030's goal of increasing cultural awareness, education, and the strength and resilience of the local literary ecosystem.

**What are your biggest hopes for Saudi Arabia's literary scene five years from now?**

Over the next five years, I look forward to seeing Saudi Arabia's literary scene flourish by enabling diverse voices, innovative storytelling, and increasing the Kingdom's narrative reach around the world. As a strong and engaging literary ecosystem, we can achieve these by increasing support for emerging authors, increasing translations in and out of Arabic, and creating and supporting more innovative ways to engage with readers.

Through these comprehensive efforts, I look forward to seeing a vibrant literary community with more festivals, workshops, and accessible publishing platforms that foster creativity and cultural exchange, giving Saudi literature a stronger presence on the international stage and cementing its place as a source of national pride. These cultural commitments will not only ensure that Saudis of every background can tell their story, but seal the Kingdom's place as an emerging literary hub for authors from around the Arabic-speaking world and beyond.

# LITERARY LEGACIES: INITIATIVES TO SPUR PUBLISHING GROWTH

As part of its mission to drive the growth and development of the Kingdom’s burgeoning publishing and translation sector, the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission has launched a series of comprehensive initiatives to build the capacity of publishing entrepreneurs.

## Literary Agent Initiative<sup>30</sup>

Designed to promote the growth and development of the Kingdom’s publishing ecosystem, this initiative was launched to help literary agents and agencies licensed by the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission to participate in local and international book fairs.

In partnership with the UK-based Cornerstones literary consultancy, the initiative also designed a comprehensive training program to boost the capacity of Saudi-based literary agents.

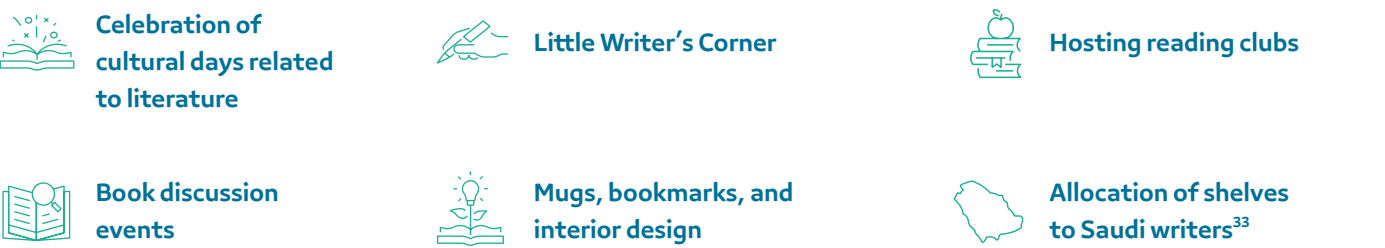


## Literary Partner Program

This unique program works directly with grassroots organizations, in this case local cafes, to promote local literary works in coffee shops by exposing customers to new writers and literary and cultural activities.



Participating venues have the chance to win \$266,000 in prizes through a variety of initiatives designed to help promote the local literary ecosystem.



## International Publishing Training Program<sup>34</sup>

Organized by the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission, this program provides Saudi publishers with an opportunity to gain insights from leading global publishers through a 10-day training, networking, and knowledge-exchange program in the UK.

In addition to studying the latest trends, it will position Saudi publishers to develop the Kingdom's publishing sector further.

- › Field visits to major publishing houses
- › Networking with publishing experts
- › Intensive training on best practices
- › Certification of attendance
- › Transfer of high-level expertise and experiences
- › Consultation sessions with leading international publishers

## Publishing Accelerator<sup>35</sup>

This program aims to empower 12-15 Saudi publishing houses in print and digital publishing through a business accelerator that provides training programs, advisory and consulting sessions, shared services, and a network of business partners and publishing-related investors.

In addition to increasing investment opportunities in the publishing sector, creating jobs and business opportunities for Saudi youth, and advancing Saudi publishing, the program is also empowering local publishers through a series of incentives.



Cash prizes



Presentation to a network of investors



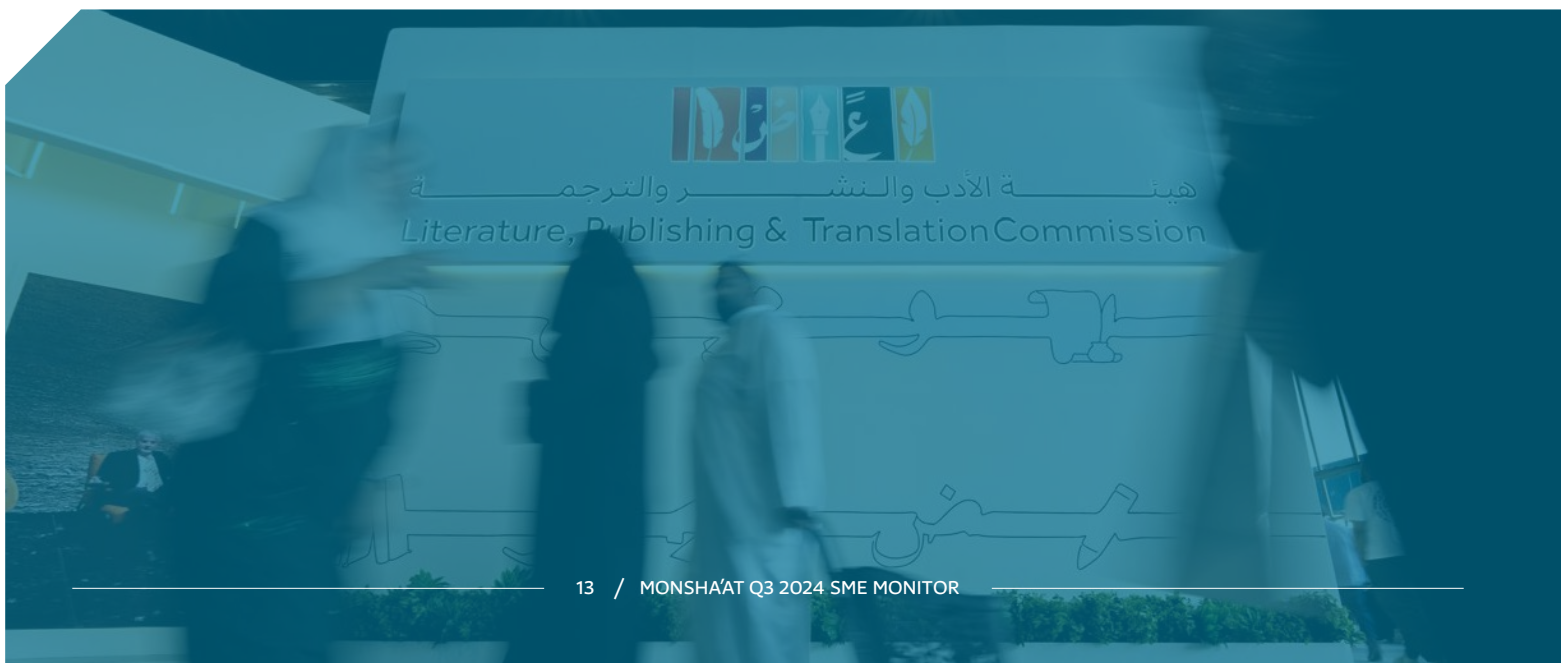
Network of experts and partners in the field



Private business development sessions



Intensive training program in business and commercial publishing





# Dr. Abdullatif Alwasel

**General Manager of Publishing Sector,**  
Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission



هيئة الأدب والنشر والترجمة  
Literature, Publishing & Translation Commission

## **Vision 2030 places significant emphasis on the cultural sector. How is the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission helping meet these goals?**

The commission is dedicated to helping achieve Saudi Arabia's National Culture Strategy, which aims to enhance the cultural sector's contribution to the national economy, develop the capabilities of its workforce, enrich the cultural lives of citizens, and make culture an integral part of everyday life. To fulfill these goals, the commission focuses on developing the sector's infrastructure, fostering a creative environment, supporting local entrepreneurial projects, and advancing, organizing, and incentivizing cultural industries. These efforts are coupled with an emphasis on expanding Saudi Arabia's cultural presence both regionally and globally.

Among its efforts to support local and international publishing are the introduction of the Literary Agency License to facilitate operations and empower Saudi publishing houses to expand into global markets. This includes providing grants and translation support to and from various languages, as well as supporting beneficiaries' participation in international exhibitions to foster connections between the local and international publishing sectors. The commission also emphasizes the development of the sector's workforce, including translators, authors, publishers, and literary agents, through diverse and intensive training programs.

## **Publishing accounts for 36% of the cultural sector's contribution to the national economy. What does this signify for the sector's growth?**

There is no doubt the Saudi publishing sector has long been an integral part of the economy, with a number of well-established publishing houses and printing and distribution companies holding a prominent position on the publishing map. This signifies that the sector, in terms of investment size, is capable of positive growth, particularly for smaller publishing houses. This can be measured through several indicators, such as increased products and revenues, business expansion, and job creation.

For instance, when examining a sample of publishing houses graduating from business accelerators, we observe notable revenue growth—

some achieving up to 20%—while others have expanded operations, introduced new production lines such as digital books, audiobooks, and applications, opened new branches, and diversified into events and cafés. This expansion has resulted in a significant increase in employment, a key indicator of business growth.

The introduction and revision of certain regulations and licenses has also contributed to this growth. For example, the Literary Agency License has enabled new authors to enter the publishing world and led to an increase in translation agreements alongside publishing contracts. Currently, there are 33 licenses issued to literary agents and agencies, with over 350 contracts for publishing and translation. Furthermore, the inclusion of book sales as a commercial activity has expanded sales outlets, providing publishers with diverse options to diversify income sources, particularly through bookstore sales.

## **With Saudi Arabia hosting large-scale events like the Riyadh International Book Fair, what impact have these fairs had on fostering cross-cultural exchange and enhancing the Kingdom's publishing industry?**

Saudi Arabia's organization of major cultural events, such as the Riyadh International Book Fair, serves as a cornerstone for promoting cultural exchange, developing the local publishing industry, and fostering international partnerships and trade opportunities. These fairs are not merely platforms for showcasing books; they act as hubs for publishers, authors, intellectuals, and agents from around the world, whose coming together enhances cultural dialogue and commercial collaboration in the sector.

Undoubtedly, this cultural exchange contributes to opening new channels of communication between local and international stakeholders. This is evident through the signing of partnerships and agreements to promote joint cultural production. With every edition of the fair, we strive to build on past successes and incorporate feedback from previous years. In the 2024 edition, for instance, the fair introduced a dedicated business area to facilitate market entry and growth. Supported by partnerships with relevant entities in Saudi Arabia, this initiative offers consultations, professional seminars, and the participation of commercial entities showcasing their products and partnership opportunities.

## EXPERT INSIGHT:

### **How does the commission help emerging Saudi publishers, especially SMEs, overcome challenges such as distribution, visibility, and digital transformation?**

The commission supports emerging Saudi publishers, in collaboration with Monsha'at, through a range of initiatives and programs aimed at addressing challenges related to content creation, translation, production, and distribution. To achieve this, the commission has launched several projects targeting entrepreneurs in the sector, such as business accelerators, which have graduated over 100 establishments. Additionally, local and international book fairs serve as vital platforms to enhance the visibility of publishers and market their works.

As part of its efforts to support digital transformation, the commission launched the Digital Publishing Initiative, which is aimed at encouraging publishers to convert their works into diverse digital formats, including readable, audible, and interactive content. This initiative caters to all audiences, including adults, children, the blind, and individuals with other visual impairments. Thanks to this program, over 1,000 books have been digitized and distributed.

In terms of talent development, the commission provides specialized training programs and workshops in areas such as digital marketing and electronic publishing. It has also introduced international training programs in collaboration with global publishing entities, enabling publishers to stay updated on the latest advancements in digital publishing and enhance their expertise.

### **What role can technology and digital platforms play in enhancing access to Saudi literature domestically and internationally?**

Technology and digital platforms are vital tools for enhancing the accessibility of Saudi literature to local and global audiences by enabling wider dissemination and strengthening the Saudi cultural presence on the global stage. The Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission firmly believes in the importance of technological advancement and its impact on the overall growth of the sector. International reports reveal a growing shift towards digital applications and formats, and the commission aims to encourage strategic investment in this technology through innovative projects and initiatives.

### **Where would you like to see Saudi Arabia's publishing sector in 2030?**

We are focused on positioning the Kingdom as the gateway to publishing in the Arab world by supporting Saudi talent in writing, publishing, and translation to deliver exceptional literary works that reflect the Kingdom's culture. We also aim to boost competitiveness in the Saudi market by attracting foreign investments, investing in digital transformation, participating in global cultural forums, and attract international publishers to collaborate with local publishers. By supporting local SMEs in particular, we seek to make the publishing sector a primary driver of cultural and economic growth in the Kingdom.

# MONSHA'AT ACADEMY: ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN THE PUBLISHING SECTOR<sup>36</sup>

Launched in partnership with the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission, this program provides online professional training programs for entrepreneurs in the publishing sector, including how to pitch investors and navigate the legal landscape of the sector.



**Verifying market need for product and its development**



**Business model, product flexibility, and market suitability**



**Managing legal matters**



**AI in the publishing industry**



**Building visual identity and digital marketing**



**Managing financial matters**



**Leadership techniques**



**User experience (UX/UI)**



**Building partnerships, identifying resources, and investment guide**



**Entrepreneurial environment in Saudi Arabia**



**The art of presenting projects**

# Khaled Bamohamed

Founder and CEO,  
Samawy Bookstore



Samawy was launched in 2022 under the name "Print Library" as part of the innovative initiatives of Smart Print Platform Company, which was founded in 2017 in Saudi Arabia. As the first Arabic platform specializing in print-on-demand services, Samawy not only revolutionizes book printing but also offers a comprehensive suite of services tailored to meet the needs of publishers, authors, and readers.

## How did Samawy come into being?

The idea started as a platform in which students could print documents and get them delivered to their home. During the pandemic, we received a request from a university to print books and decided it was time to do so. We do not print in bulk; we do not print in thousands. Once we receive a request, we print that. We later decided why not expand and provide this service to the public? Why not build a platform for publishers and for authors in the market to come in, upload their books, make it available to be ordered, and once the book is ordered, we deliver. So we built our platform and we named it Print Bookstore for books on demand. Then we explored market trends and discovered the demand for digital and audio books, which is when we had to consider changing our name. Today we serve around 200 publishers.

## Transitioning from a program to an independent entity presents unique challenges. What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?

Readers don't care about the print process, but publishers are used to printing 500 or 1000 copies at a time. Naturally, they question how they can make this work when the cost per copy is higher. We explain to them that for their high-selling titles, they should stick to bulk printing. But for the 80% of their catalog that doesn't sell as quickly, printing in bulk leads to unnecessary costs like storage, logistics, and unsold inventory. They overlook storage fees, distribution expenses, and the high commissions (often 50%) charged by traditional bookstores. We show them that while our printing costs per copy are higher, our model eliminates these hidden costs. It took effort to convince publishers, but the largest publisher in the market was the first to join our platform, which helped build trust with others.

## How has Samawy utilized technology and innovation to meet the changing demands? Can you discuss any specific ones that have been helpful?



Digital printing has revolutionized publishing by allowing us to print single copies instead of requiring bulk orders of 500 or more. While the technology has been around for 10 years, it has advanced significantly in quality and efficiency. With POD, publishers can avoid overprinting, easily update content, and correct errors. As a tech-focused business, we've built a scalable, cloud-based system that supports multi-format publishing—offering hard copies, e-books, and audiobooks to cater to diverse audiences, including Arabic readers worldwide. We empower publishers with tools to control pricing, track orders, and calculate royalties in real-time, offering valuable insights into market trends and customer demand.

## What advice would you offer to aspiring entrepreneurs looking to venture into this field?

Focus on understanding market trends, especially for Arabic content. If your content is rich and meets market needs, you're already on the right track. And think beyond print. Offer your content in multiple formats—eBooks, audiobooks, and print-on-demand (POD). Use tools and AI to make your work easier and cheaper, whether for editing, translation, or proofreading. Start small and avoid unnecessary expenses like fancy offices. A shared workspace is much cheaper, and the money you save can be put into marketing.

## What if any changes would you like to see in the broader sector?

More self-publishers would empower the industry and give independent authors a pathway to get noticed by publishing houses. Take Rich Dad Poor Dad, which started as a self-published book before being picked up and becoming one of the top books in the market. I would also love to see regulations simplified, which can be time-consuming. Many authors have completed manuscripts but don't move forward because the process feels overwhelming. If this could be streamlined and done in minutes, it would open the door for so much more Arabic content.

# GLOBAL SME PUBLISHING TRENDS

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As timeless as it is open to change, the world of publishing is constantly evolving to allow writers new ways to connect with readers. These are a few of the latest entrepreneurial trends.



## Rise of digital

Smartphone and e-reader penetration have created huge new opportunities for SMEs specializing in eBooks, audiobooks, and subscription newsletters.



**eBooks:** 1bn ebook consumers worldwide in 2024,<sup>37</sup> with 370mn+ ebooks accessing library books in North America alone in 2023.<sup>38</sup>



**Audiobooks:** 9% growth in US audiobook use in 2023 to \$2bn, with 52% of adult users.<sup>39</sup>



**Subscription models:** 3mn+ paying Substack subscribers in 2024,<sup>40</sup> up 300% on 2021.<sup>41</sup>

## Direct-to-consumer sales (D2C)

With better data collection, more control over branding, and higher profit margins, D2C enables writers to connect directly to readers through various subscription and membership models.



› **Substack:** 35mn+ subscribers and 3mn+ paying subscribers for newsletters and original writing from contributors such as Chuck Palahniuk, Junot Diaz, and George Saunders<sup>42</sup>



**PATREON**

› **Patreon:** 250,000+ content creators with 8mn+ active monthly users<sup>43</sup>

**Medium**

› **Medium:** Founded in 2012, has 100mn+ monthly users of its online publishing platform<sup>44</sup>



**WORDPRESS**

› **WordPress:** What first began for bloggers is now the platform of choice for 43%+ of sites across the web<sup>45</sup>

**weebly**

› **Weebly:** Website and online store builder with 30mn+ users<sup>46</sup>

## Do-it-yourself (DIY)

DIY publishing gives writers higher royalties and easier access to readers, helping self-published books reach new heights every year and creating niches for DIY-focused SMEs.



**Self-publishing:** 264% increase in self-publishing since 2019<sup>47</sup> gives SMEs niche new editing, design, and marketing opportunities in a rapidly growing market that produces 4mn books per year in the US alone<sup>48</sup>



**Instapoetry:** SMEs can take advantage of publishing influencers such as Rupi Kaur, whose first self-published collection of poetry sold 11mn+ copies in 43 languages<sup>49</sup>

# DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION RESHAPING SME PUBLISHING HOUSES

If SMEs have always thrived in the publishing sector, a spate of digital innovations have created even more opportunities for growth and innovation in recent years. These are but several of the chief advantages of SMEs in the publishing industry as it becomes more digital.

- › Cost reduction
- › Caters to self-publishing authors
- › Sustainability
- › Global reach and scalability
- › Rapid adaptability to changing winds
- › Rapid adaptability to changing winds
- › Data-driven marketing through personalized analytics
- › Enhanced content such as embedded audio, video, and hyperlinks
- › Agility through digital-only titles
- › Digital-first distribution
- › Interactive content and social media storytelling

In addition to receiving numerous prestigious literary prizes, including the Nobel and Booker prizes, SME publishers are thriving across a wide range of new digital mediums.<sup>50</sup>



eBook marketplaces



Audiobook stores



Online subscription platforms



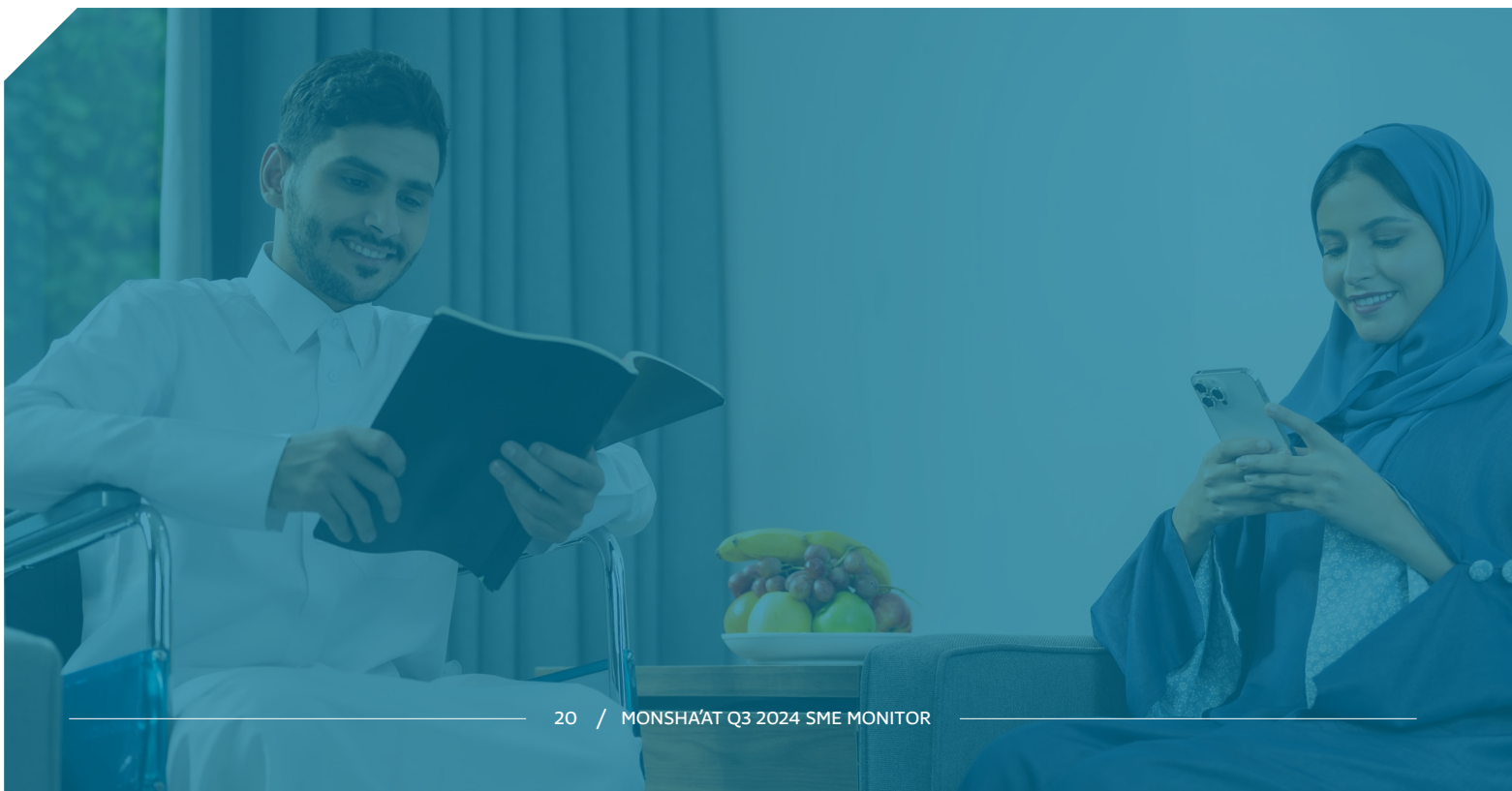
Podcast platforms



Serialized online content



Webzines and online publications



# Ashwaq Bin Rasheed

CEO,  
The Publishing Association



The Professional Publishing Association is a leading non-profit organization within Saudi Arabia's cultural sector, dedicated to representing and empowering professionals in the publishing industry. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders—including individuals and organizations—it serves as a vital advocate for the interests and growth of the sector.

**The Publishing Association has been instrumental in supporting Saudi publishers. How does it help SMEs in the industry?**

The Publishing Association supports SMEs in many ways, such as offering a 30% discount for members participating in local book fairs, which eases the financial barrier to market entry for smaller outfits. The association has also taken care to carefully develop a publishing directory that promotes members' publications at local and international events in order to garner greater attention and exposure. Additionally, it organizes training workshops to enhance publishers' skills and capabilities and encourages participation in initiatives led by the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission, which now has a wide range of programs to support additional growth opportunities for smaller publishers.

**What initiatives has the Publishing Association implemented to help small publishers expand their reach and contribute to Saudi Arabia's cultural goals?**

With support from the Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission, the association launched a project to convert printed books into audiobooks and distribute them on global platforms, which significantly increased their accessibility and reach. Additionally, we partnered with Samawy Bookstore to digitize an additional 1,000 printed books, allowing smaller publishers to tap into a rapidly growing digital readership and align with Saudi Arabia's cultural development objectives.

**The recent easing of publishing restrictions, especially around digital content, opens new avenues for smaller publishers. What guidance or resources does the association provide SMEs to adapt to these regulatory changes and maximize their digital presence?**

The Publishing Association offers tailored workshops to help SMEs understand and navigate new digital publishing regulations. Topics include a wide range of emerging trends and regulations, from managing digital rights and producing e-books and audiobooks to effectively leveraging online platforms. Dedicated as it is to helping SME publishers leverage new technologies, the association also connects smaller publishers with trusted technology providers, ensuring they adopt secure and scalable digital solutions that protect intellectual property while enhancing global visibility.



**Through translation programs like Tarjim, Saudi Arabia aims to increase cultural exchange. How can smaller publishers participate in these initiatives, and how might they drive SME growth within the publishing sector?**

Smaller publishers can participate in Tarjim by submitting books they have published or works for which they have acquired foreign rights. The association, for its part, supports them by preparing robust translation and rights agreements and ensuring compliance with the very highest international standards. In order to increase small publishers' global viability, the association also facilitates global partnerships to streamline the process of rights exchange, which opens up lucrative opportunities for smaller publishers in addition to fostering meaningful cultural exchange.

**In the face of digital transformation, what challenges do SMEs in the Saudi publishing industry face? Is the association helping them transition to digital and audiobook formats?**

The primary challenge for SMEs in the Saudi publishing industry is intellectual property theft, which discourages many companies from transitioning to digital formats. Limited technical expertise and resources further complicate this shift. The Publishing Association addresses these challenges by offering workshops on digital rights management (DRM), assisting in the production of audiobooks, and partnering with platforms that ensure that SME publishers have access to secure content distribution. These efforts are key to helping SMEs confidently embrace digital and audiobook publishing while expanding their reach.

**Looking ahead five to ten years, what improvements to the wider Saudi publishing ecosystem would most help small and medium-sized publishers?**

Advances in AI technology are very likely to play a transformative role in the industry by streamlining editorial, translation, and marketing processes for publishers of every shape and size. Expanded government initiatives to support digital infrastructure and protect intellectual property would also empower SMEs to innovate and compete on a more global footing. Finally, fostering stronger international collaboration in rights exchange and translation programs would enable small publishers to showcase Saudi content on a broader stage, bolstering their growth and sustainability.

# CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL SME PUBLISHERS

Small publishers have always played a huge role in our reading culture, and they have been even more successful in recent years because of their unique position to take risks, ignore passing fads, and pursue exciting new voices. These are a few of the most internationally successful.



**Oneworld (Oxford):** Founded at a Cypriot kitchen table in 1986 by husband and wife Novin Doostdar and Juliet Mabey, Oneworld's initial goal was to make academics accessible to a broader audience through rigorous editing, and no jargon or footnotes. It turned to fiction in 2009.



**Kalimat Group (UAE):** Founded in Sharjah in 2007 to raise Arabic-language literacy among children, Kalimat later expanded into adult literature and comics and has published hundreds of books by leading Arabic-language writers that have been translated into multiple languages.



**Transit Books (Oakland):** Founded by husband and wife Adam and Ashley Nelson Levy in 2015, Transit is one of the rare publishers that operates out of a house. Their writers have won the Nobel, a National Book Critics Circle Award, and PEN Translation Prize.



**Sort of Books (London):** Founded in 1999 by the founders of Rough Guides, this house publishes original and classic fiction and non-fiction titles. It was inspired by a desire to help a friend, Chris Stewart, publish *Driving Over Lemons*, which went on to sell over 1 million copies.

- › **3-4** titles per year
- › **2022** winner of Booker Prize for *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* by Shehan Karunatilaka
- › **100,000** copies sold of Tove Jansson's *The Summer Book* (1972), first printed by Sort of Books in 2003<sup>54</sup>

# INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SAUDI SME PUBLISHERS

There is a growing demand for stories that reflect life in the Kingdom in all its richness and variety, from ancient history to urbanization, evolving identities, tradition and modernity, women’s experiences, globalization, and national transformation. As themes that affect the entire Arabic-speaking world, Saudi SME publishers can expand internationally by promoting both Saudi and international authors across a variety of traditional and exciting new genres.

Children’s books

Young adult literature

Poetry

Fiction and non-fiction

Graphic novels

Audiobooks and podcasts

Digital comics

Saudi and regional history

Digital publishing

School and library partnerships

Arabic-English bilingual and translation

## Unprecedented Arabic-language opportunities for SME publishers

In addition to benefitting from their place in the largest market for printed and digital books in the Arabic world, SMEs Saudi publishers are also uniquely well-positioned to help voices from around the Arab world tell their stories in an underserved market with huge room for growth.<sup>55</sup>



25

Arabic-speaking countries



362mn

native speakers



4th

most spoken native language in the world<sup>56</sup>



8,000

Arabic-language audiobooks launched in 2022 alone<sup>57</sup>



2018

Amazon launch of Arabic-language Kindle<sup>58</sup>



Far less pirating in GCC than elsewhere in the Arabic-speaking world



10%

digitalization of Arabic-language books signals tremendous room for growth<sup>59</sup>

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# Thuraya Batterjee

Founder,  
Kadi and Ramadi Publishing House



Kadi and Ramadi is the pioneering Saudi publishing house dedicated to showcasing the talent of children's book authors and illustrators. Established in 2006, it has set a benchmark in the industry by adhering to internationally recognized publishing standards and has earned nominations for prestigious global awards.

## What inspired you to establish Kadi and Ramadi Publishing House? How has its mission or strategy evolved since you began?

As a mother who believes in reading to children from a young age, I was convinced that Arabic children's books had room for improvement. So in 2006, we launched Kadi and Ramadi to specialize in publishing, printing, and distributing children's books in Arabic for the Saudi market. It started as a social initiative to raise the level of Arabic children's books and fill the shortage in libraries for quality Arabic children's books with well-written stories with high-quality illustrations that that interest today's children, tackle their issues, and present their views.

Our strategy evolved over the years. First, we strengthened our relationship with well-known distributors in many Saudi cities and most GCC and Arab countries, in addition to participating in bookfairs and reading forums as much as possible. These were followed by a number of initiatives to reach a wider audience: educational games and toys to accommodate our books; children's reading clubs, storytelling sessions, and art and drama workshops; organizing the Jeddah Reading Forum for Children; launching our interactive Kadi and Ramadi App and online shop; and collaborating with the Tarjim Initiative to translate several books into English.

## How do you ensure your themes and values resonate with young readers?

First, we collaborate with authors and illustrators who have genuine connections to the cultures being represented, since authentic voices and accurate depictions create relatable and engaging content that resonates with readers. Second, we use storytelling techniques that actively engage young readers, such as incorporating interactive elements such as questions, activities, or thought-provoking scenarios that encourage children to think about cultural values and heritage. Third, we choose books, characters, and storylines that Arab children can relate to.

In addition to focusing on cultural heritage by relating traditional values to contemporary issues and experiences, we also utilize vibrant and engaging illustrations that capture the essence of cultural heritage. We also include educational elements that explain cultural traditions, values, and historical

contexts in an accessible way. Additionally, we provide resources for parents and educators to facilitate discussions around the themes of values and cultural heritage. Lastly, we encourage stories that explore cultural exchanges and interactions, showing how different cultures can enrich one another and foster a sense of global citizenship.

## What challenges did you face in launching, and how did you overcome them?

My experience relied mainly on learning from my own mistakes, teaming up with colleagues who were interested in the field, and constantly adapting to the requirements of young readers and the vicissitudes of the regional economy. The publishing industry is a highly competitive field. To overcome the competition for contracts and distribution opportunities, I focused heavily on attracting young local talent and helping them develop and grow.

Other challenges include the high cost of printing, commissioning illustrations, and finding the right distribution partners. Quality books are crucial for fostering imagination and critical thinking, which is why government subsidies can help offset costs such as printing, marketing, and distribution. By supporting these areas and promoting reading initiatives, governments can ensure that high-quality literature remains accessible to all families. This not only preserves storytelling but nurtures a lifelong love for reading.

## What role would you like to see literature playing in the lives of the country's children and youth going forward?

Children's books are one of the best ways to modify wrong behavior, present educational values, enhance confidence, develop personality, and instill good habits. In addition to cultivating empathy and understanding, reading also enhances critical thinking and imagination; builds language and communication skills; provides emotional and social support; inspires lifelong learning and curiosity; promotes ethical and moral reflection; and encourages resilience and perseverance. In short, we are helping develop young people that are familiar with their history, proud of their identity, and highly effective in their homeland and the international community.

# Mohamed Alfraih

**Director of Publishing and Translation,**  
Obeikan Education Company



Obeikan Education Company, established in 2005 as a subsidiary of Obeikan Investment Group, is a leading provider of comprehensive educational solutions. The company excels in developing high-quality teaching and learning content, innovative instructional methodologies, and tailored professional development programs for educators, empowering them to excel in their roles and enhance student learning outcomes.

**What lessons from Obeikan's journey have been crucial to its success in educational publishing?**

One of the core lessons for Obeikan has been the importance of delivering high-quality educational content that meets the needs of students and teachers in the Kingdom. In addition to developing educational materials that align with local curricula and international standards, strategic partnerships with global institutions have also been crucial in enhancing the quality and reliability of our content, expanding the horizons of education, and creating resources that equip students with the skills they need for the future. Finally, our commitment to listening to feedback from professionals, teachers, parents, and students—and continuously updating content accordingly—has fostered a supportive and inspiring educational environment.

**What are the most promising growth areas in Saudi Arabia's educational publishing sector, and how can companies seize them?**

Digital transformation and electronic content development are among the key growth areas in educational publishing in the Kingdom. There is a growing demand for interactive educational materials and smart applications that enhance the learning experience. The field of personalized education powered by AI offers opportunities to deliver tailored content for each student. SMEs can invest in digital solutions, creating products that blend traditional and modern educational methods, increasing content appeal, and meeting the evolving demands of the fast-paced educational market.

**Obeikan has localized and translated many educational resources. What approach do you take in doing so, and what has made it successful in the local market?**

Obeikan's approach combines professional translation with cultural adaptation, ensuring that educational materials suit the local market, which is why we have specialized teams in various academic fields, from science and mathematics to Arabic and Islamic studies. Our approach is based on aligning content with Saudi curricula and respecting language and cultural styles appropriate for students and teachers. This has proven effective in enhancing comprehension and trust in the content, making educational materials both practical and inspiring and strengthening Obeikan's position in the local market as a trusted provider.



**Digital transformation is reshaping educational publishing. How has Obeikan adapted, and what advice would you offer to others navigating this shift?**

Obeikan has embraced digital transformation by building interactive educational platforms and investing in comprehensive digital content that's easily accessible and enhances engagement. All our resources have been converted to digital formats and are available across 180 digital book platforms and 120 audio platforms worldwide. Additionally, we have trained our staff to use modern technical tools to support the educational process. For example, our multi-format content is available through our dedicated Nawras Platform, which combines learning and multi-content management. We also collaborate with platforms catering to all learning segments and adopt diverse teaching methods.

In short, my advice for other companies is to develop a fully integrated digital infrastructure, start their digital transformation gradually, and educate beneficiaries on its role, as modern technology has become an essential tool for enhancing learning and efficiency in today's educational landscape.

**How do international partnerships like that with Cambridge University enhance your impact, and what advice would you give to smaller publishers also trying to forge meaningful collaborations?**

International partnerships such as our collaboration with Cambridge University enhance the company's reputation and provide access to trusted global resources, contributing to high-quality educational materials. This collaboration elevates content quality and adds a global dimension to local education. For smaller publishers, I recommend seeking partnerships that match their specific educational needs and establishing relationships based on shared goals. Successful partnerships rely on mutual understanding and focus on creating added value for both parties. In the end, Obeikan Education's experience demonstrates that quality, localization, digital transformation, and strategic partnerships are essential elements in advancing the educational publishing sector in the Kingdom.

# COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

## Literature, Publishing, and Translation Commission

Since 2020, the commission has helped broker partnerships between stakeholders from across the literature, publishing, and translation world to achieve Saudi Vision 2030’s goal of developing the Kingdom’s literary ecosystem, increasing global awareness of Saudi literature, and enriching the stock of Arabic-language literature.



**Riyadh International Book Fair:** With 1mn+ visitors and 2,000+ publishing houses from 30+ countries, this year’s fair saw \$7.5mn+ in sales benefit many of the region’s leading writers, publishers, and translators.



**International Translation Forum:** In its third year, the 2024 forum featured panel discussions, workshops, interactive sessions, and an exhibition to give local and international translators a valuable networking platform.



**Frankfurt Book Fair:** Its 2024 pavilion showcased its programs and initiatives to advance Saudi Arabia’s publishing and translation industry and highlight investment opportunities in the publishing market.

## King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra)

Founded in 2017, this cultural resource and publishing center has served as a key destination for cultural exchange through workshops, exhibits, performances, library services, and translation competitions that empower new talent, forge new literary ties, and produce more Arabic-language literature.



**4mn+**  
visitors since opening



**20+**  
exhibitions



**350,000+**  
books in Arabic and English



**\$7.9mn**  
in support for Ithra  
content initiatives



**≤\$80,000**  
in grants for translations  
into Arabic<sup>60</sup>



**300+**  
job opportunities through  
Ithra content initiatives<sup>61</sup>

## Saudi Research and Media Group (SRMG)

Founded in 1972, SRMG is the flagship Saudi media group for international publishing collaborations, forging dozens of leading global media outlets in 7+ languages in many of the world’s most important markets.

**1st** English-language  
newspaper in Saudi  
Arabia, Arab News (1975)

**11 country** presence

**38+** nationalities

**18 offices** on **4** continents

**165mn** readers

News, economy, sports,  
lifestyle, and manga

**30+** publications in Arabic,  
English, Turkish, Persian, Urdu,  
Malayalam, and French<sup>62</sup>



## LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

While there is no magic wand for finding that best-selling title, there are certain best practices for SME publishers to consider when developing their business model and long-term strategy.

- › **Unique and culturally authentic content:** As the Arab world's largest book market, Saudi SME publishers are uniquely positioned to benefit from the Kingdom's cultural renaissance, enabling the entire region to share its distinct stories with the world.
- › **Attend international book fairs:** Fairs like Riyadh, Jeddah, Al-Sharqiya, Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, and other notable fairs are excellent ways to connect with literary agents and partner with rights managers to sell translation and publication rights to international markets.
- › **High-quality translations & bilingual editions:** These increase the appeal and lifespan of the work in question, in addition to helping reach a larger audience for children's literature, poetry, educational content, and other popular and accessible genres.
- › **Utilize digital platforms for global distribution:** Platforms such as Amazon Kindle, Google Books, and Storytel enable publishers to distribute eBooks and audiobooks globally at low cost, while technologies such as digital rights management "DRM" help protect digital copyright.
- › **Collaboration and co-publishing:** Working with established publishing houses can lead to wider and better distribution and reader networks, especially in high-demand genres such as children's literature, translations, and young adult and genre fiction.
- › **Patience is a virtue:** Publishers should remember that patience is a virtue. As Colleen Dunn Bates writes, "It takes years to build a backlist, to find and build relationships with talented authors, designers, and staff, and to learn how to make budgets and forecast sales with at least a shred of realism."<sup>63</sup>

# MONSHA'AT & ECOSYSTEM UPDATES

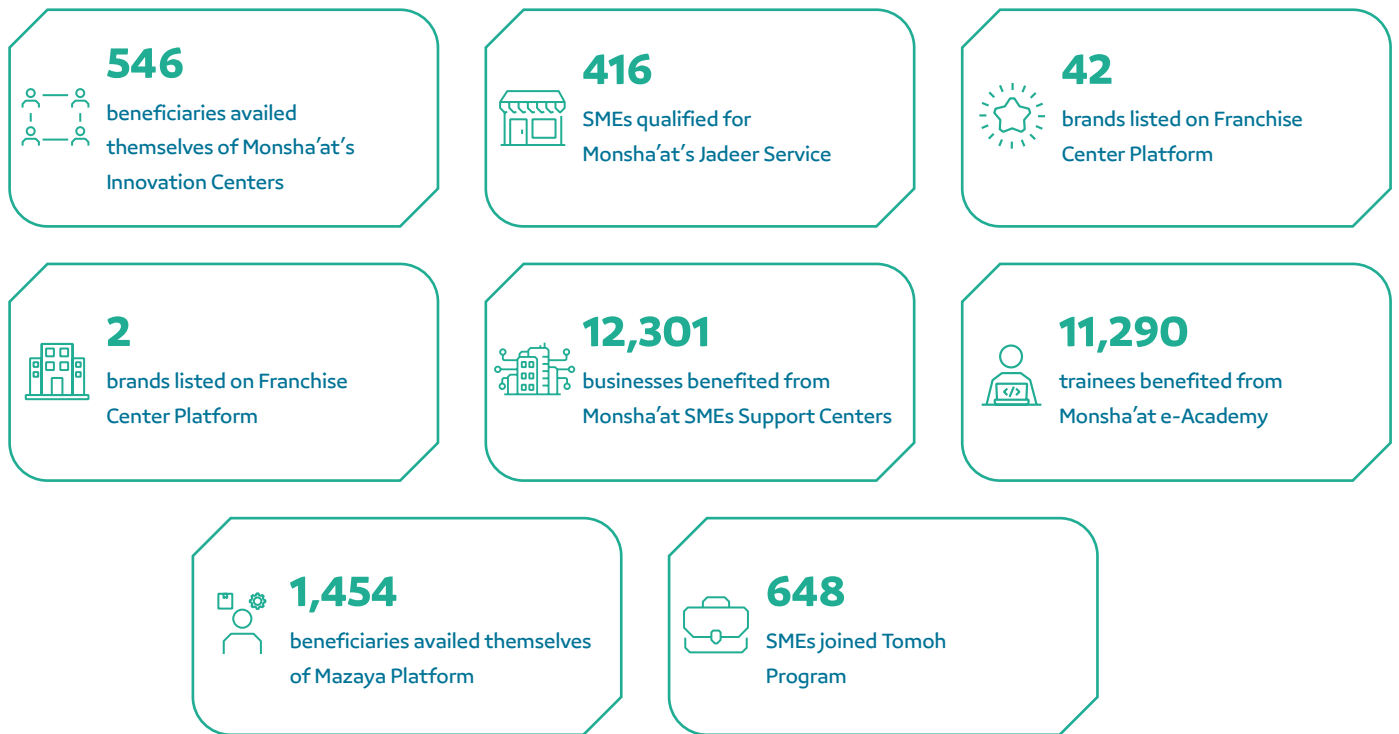
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The Kingdom's rapidly maturing SME landscape continued to show signs of growth and development in Q3 2024, with more than 25,000 businesses and entrepreneurs benefitting from Monsha'at services and \$509mn million being raised by Saudi-based startups in the first half of the year.



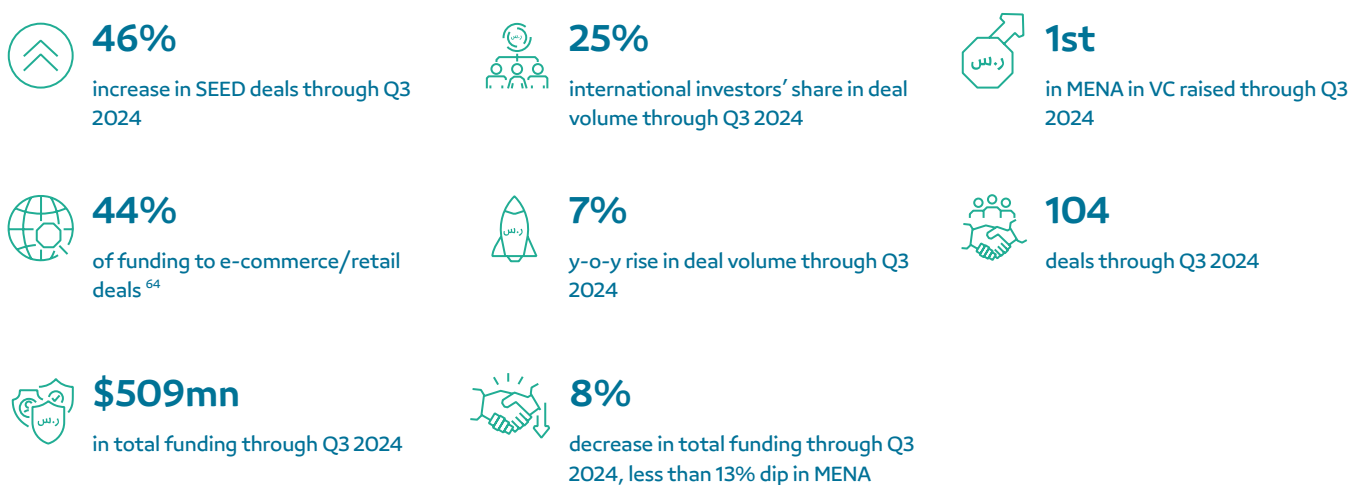
# MONSHA'AT KEY FIGURES

Thanks to robust and comprehensive support for every stage of SME development, over 25,000 businesses and entrepreneurs benefitted from Monsha'at's range of professional and business support services in Q3 2024.



## Quarterly VC funding

Driven in large part by successful SEED and Series A rounds, deal volume in Saudi Arabia through Q3 2024 increased by an impressive 7% year-on-year, further proof that the Kingdom's increasingly diverse SME ecosystem is helping create the next generation of leading MENA startups.



# FUNDING AWARENESS SERIES: SHOWCASING GROWTH POTENTIAL

SMEs at the funding stage are only as good as their pitch, a huge part of which is convincing investors of their growth potential. These are a few tips to ensure you have the best tool kit available for explaining your path to growth.



**Narrate purpose and vision:** Articulate your business's long-term value through a clear and compelling statement of purpose and vision.



**Highlight tangible metrics:** Emphasize revenue growth, customer acquisition rates, or market share increases through visuals that show positive and easily understandable trends over time.



**Showcase customer demand:** Customer testimonials and renewal rates are key to illustrating market demand, brand loyalty, and growth potential.



**Highlight expansion opportunities:** Identify underserved markets or new customer segments you plan to target through product line expansion, regional growth, or digital platform scaling.



**Small-scale testing:** Consider pilot programs or small market tests that indicate the scalability of a new product or service.



**Leverage industry trends:** Align your growth narrative with broader industry trends to illustrate how you are positioned to benefit, citing market data from reputable sources to boost credibility.



**Develop a clear growth plan:** Present a phased approach for scaling that includes set milestones and timelines, including those for entering new markets, developing new products, and hiring new talent.



**Highlight key partnerships:** Partnerships with established brands or industry leaders lend credibility to growth projections. Also mention partner suppliers, distributors, or tech partners that can help accelerate growth.



**Emphasize efficiency gains:** Explain to investors how scaling will lead to better margins through economies of scale, reduced production costs, or optimized operations.



**Project Customer Lifetime Value (CLV):** Break down average spend, retention rate, and upselling strategies to illustrate revenue growth potential from each customer.





## About Monsha'at

Established in 2016, the Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority's (Monsha'at) objective is to organize, support, develop, and sponsor the SME sector in accordance with best global practices.

Monsha'at deploys a wide range of initiatives that directly speak to the challenges that SMEs face in the market, with assistance being further broken down by company size and type. In addition to providing firms with critical administrative, technical, and financial support, Monsha'at also assists SMEs with marketing and human resources.

### Vision



To transform the Small and Medium Enterprises sector into a vital pillar for economic development in Saudi Arabia and an enabler for achieving Saudi Vision 2030 and beyond.

### Mission



Support SMEs' growth and competitiveness through building a supportive ecosystem and an entrepreneurial society, by driving cooperation with our strategic partners in the public and private sectors and the non-profit sector, locally and internationally.

Please visit



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