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ACCELERATING WOMEN LEADING THE SME ECONOMY

A special report by Gulf News & BeingShe
in line with International Women's Day

VISIBILITY CREATES OPPORTUNITY

BeingShe enables women to
strengthen their personal
brand says Founder,
Aparna Bajpai

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Purpose, integrity and meaningful impact

Aparna Verma, Founder and CEO, Scholars International Group elaborates
the principles driving growth and legacy building for the heritage UAE-based
education institution **PAGE 7**



“A better understanding of your rights leads to fairer choices, aligned with your life goals. Book your Money Date.”

Chloé Belloy

**Attorney at law (France),
Legal Consultant (UAE),
and Founder Cabinet Belloy,
Belloy Legal, Money Date**

Chloé Belloy is a family and criminal law attorney whose work bridges France and the United Arab Emirates, bringing a forward-looking approach to legal advisory at a time when families and couples are navigating increasingly complex financial and personal decisions. As the founder of Cabinet Belloy, Belloy Legal Consulting, and the innovative preventive advisory platform Money Date by Belloy Legal, Belloy has positioned herself at the forefront of a new legal philosophy that prioritises foresight, clarity, and education over reactive litigation.

With more than 13 years of experience in family law, criminal law, and international legal matters, Belloy has built a career supporting clients through some of the most sensitive moments in their lives. Her practice focuses on areas including matrimonial property regimes, succession, international divorces, and family disputes, often involving expatriate families and individuals with cross-border interests. A graduate of the Magistère in Business Law from Paris 2 Panthéon-Assas University and ESSEC Business School, Belloy developed her legal expertise early in her career while working alongside leading French legal figures before establishing Cabinet Belloy in Paris in 2015.

Recognising the increasing demand for international family legal guidance, she expanded her practice to the Middle East by founding Belloy Legal Consulting in the UAE in 2022, enabling her to support international clients, entrepreneurs, and globally mobile families navigating legal frameworks across jurisdictions.

Belloy's work is grounded in a powerful conviction: that law should serve as a tool for prevention rather than merely a mechanism for conflict resolution. "Every day, I see couples and families discovering far too late the legal consequences of decisions they made without proper guidance," she explains. "Most of the time, it's not through negligence, but through lack of legal knowledge or fear of anticipating the worst."

This philosophy led to the launch of Money

Date by Belloy Legal, a pioneering platform dedicated to preventive legal advisory for couples and families. The platform addresses a critical gap in how financial and legal decisions are discussed within relationships. While financial planning conversations often focus on budgets or investments, Belloy's initiative introduces the legal dimension, ensuring individuals understand their rights, responsibilities, and the implications of key life decisions before conflicts arise.

"Today we hear a lot of advice about investing, but at no point is the legal aspect addressed," Belloy notes. "Understanding, at the moment of divorce, that the other party potentially has the right to claim half, if this wasn't understood beforehand, legitimately creates frustration."

Through consultations, masterclasses, and educational initiatives, Money Date by Belloy Legal translates complex legal frameworks into accessible guidance. The platform supports couples and families through major life milestones including union, separation, parenthood, succession, vulnerability, and expatriation. Belloy believes these moments require thoughtful preparation rather than last-minute legal intervention.

"Law should not intervene too late, when conflict is already present," she says. "It can

and should be used upfront, as a tool for clarity, protection, and decision-making."

Her work has earned significant recognition. In June 2025, Belloy received the Gulf News BeingShe Excellence Award for Excellence in Legal Services – Best in Criminal and Family Law, recognising her human-centred and preventive approach to legal counsel. Later that year, she was honoured as a Global Power Leader at the Global Leadership Conclave held at the House of Lords in London, underscoring her growing international influence.

At the core of Belloy's vision is a cultural shift in how law is perceived within personal and family life. Rather than viewing legal counsel as a last resort, she advocates integrating it early into everyday decision-making. "Understanding your rights better means making more just choices better aligned with your life projects," Belloy says. "Establishing a clear framework within the couple or family is not an act of mistrust, but proof of responsibility."

Through her legal practice and pioneering platforms, Chloé Belloy continues to reshape the conversation around family law, championing a preventive model that empowers individuals with knowledge, foresight, and peace of mind. ✨



VALUE REIMAGINED

Across the UAE, women leaders are redefining business success through courage, innovation, and purpose-driven leadership



Yasmin Imam,
Executive Director



Aparna Verma,
Founder & CEO,
Scholars International
Group



Dr Mariam Shaikh,
Founder and CEO,
MS Education
Consultants



Sejal Nagjee,
Founder and Creative
Director, Milestone
Dubai

The rise of women business leaders reflects more than representation; it signals a transformation in how organisations grow, innovate, and create lasting value. And here, in the UAE across boardrooms, entrepreneurial ventures and creative industries, women mirror this transformation mindset, challenging conventional business thinking while introducing ideas that prioritise purpose, systems, and long-term impact.

The UAE has created an environment where bold thinking is not only welcomed but also rewarded. For many women leaders, this culture of ambition has provided the confidence to question established rules that once governed how businesses operated. Instead of simply following industry norms, they are redefining them, demonstrating that unconventional strategies, when executed with conviction, can unlock new growth opportunities and strategic advantage.

From education and exhibitions to property, digital storytelling, and social enterprise, women across sectors are building organisations that prove success can be measured not only through revenue, but also through trust, sustainability, and meaningful impact.

Challenging convention

For Aparna Verma, Founder and CEO of Scholars International Group, leadership meant challenging one of the most dominant assumptions in business: that rapid growth must always come first.

“In a market focused on rapid expansion, I challenged the rule that growth must come first. I put the child at the centre of every decision, even when it meant moving slower or defying conventional norms,” she says. Rather than pursuing scale at any cost, Verma focused on building an institution rooted in trust and values. Her leadership philosophy placed the well-being of students and families at the core of every strategic decision. “That commitment built trust with families, strengthened long-term enrollment, and became a strategic advantage.”

Her values-led approach also shaped the broader vision of The Scholars School. “It also shaped the vision for The Scholars School, ensuring it embodies the same principles of purpose, integrity, and meaningful impact, proving that values-led leadership drives both growth and lasting legacy.”

In the exhibitions sector, Poorvi Dureja, Commercial Director – Exhibitions at Capital 360, part of ADNEC Group, questioned the long-held belief that exhibitions exist purely to generate short-term commercial revenue. “One conventional rule I challenge is that exhibitions are purely commercial platforms measured only by stand sales and short-term revenue,” she explains. Her leadership philosophy reimagines exhibitions as platforms that contribute to national development and industry growth. “In the UAE, I believe our responsibility goes further. I focus on designing exhibitions that create tangible in-country value — supporting national priorities, enabling SME participation, and facilitating knowledge transfer that strengthens local industries.” By aligning exhibition portfolios with broader economic strategies, her work extends far beyond traditional event management. “By aligning our portfolios with economic diversification strategies and encouraging international businesses to invest, partner, and establish presence in the UAE, we move beyond transactions to long-term impact.”

The results of this shift have been both strategic and commercial.

“This approach has unlocked sustainable revenue, deeper government and stakeholder collaboration, and positioned our events as engines of economic development, not just marketplaces,” says Dureja.

In the real estate sector, Aditi Jhunjhunwala, Head of Operations at Banke International Properties, also chose to challenge a conventional mindset that dominates competitive markets.

“I challenged the conventional mindset that growth means following trends or imitating competitors,” she says. Rather than chasing trends, she focused on strengthening organisational systems and empowering people. “By integrating data-driven CRM insights, structured learning, and cross-department accountability, we turned every team member into a growth driver.”

The transformation created measurable results, observes Jhunjhunwala. “This approach unlocked operational efficiency, stronger client trust, and measurable revenue impact — proving that in the UAE’s fast-paced real estate market, disciplined innovation and empowering people can outperform reactive, short-term growth strategies,” she says.

Reinventing value creation

Beyond challenging conventional rules, many women leaders are redefining the very concept of value creation within their industries. For Dr Mariam Shaikh, Founder and CEO of MS Education Consultants, value lies in connecting education with global opportunity and career readiness.

“Most definitely by redefining value creation by integrating global education pathways with personal branding, scholarship access, and career readiness,” she explains. Dr Shaikh’s organisation has introduced innovative models that extend beyond traditional university placement services. “MS Education Consultants has transformed unconventional ideas such as hybrid admissions strategies, cross-border mentorship models, and executive workforce development initiatives, into measurable outcomes, including international university placements and funded scholarships,” she says.

Dr Shaikh’s initiatives also demonstrate how education can be aligned more closely with industry demand. “We have also helped advance professional development through initiatives like Georgian Global, the UAE’s first Canadian training hub licensed by KHDA, offering industry-relevant programmes in AI, cybersecurity, automotive growth, healthcare, hospitality, and sports management, bridging academic excellence with practical business needs.”

Value creation also lies in transforming storytelling into a structured engagement strategy, says UAE-based content creator, Loyal Hamdeh. “In the UAE’s fast-moving business landscape, I’ve used my role as an on-camera content creator to help brands embrace structured, episodic storytelling,” she says. Instead of one-off campaigns, Hamdeh focuses on long-term narrative continuity. “Through performance-led digital series, I bring narrative depth and emotional continuity that keeps audiences returning.”

Her approach has turned storytelling into measurable digital impact. “By transforming cultural stories into engaging micro-series, I help brands drive stronger engagement, repeat viewership and sustained visibility.” She also believes creators now play a strategic role in brand growth. “I position creators as creative partners — turning storytelling into measurable digital growth and lasting brand impact.”

In the luxury design and construction space, Sejal Nagjee, Founder and Creative Director of Milestone Dubai, has redefined value through integration. “In a fast-moving market, I chose structural integration over fragmented execution,” she says. Nagjee’s company built an in-house design-build framework that combines multiple services traditionally handled by separate contractors. “By building a fully in-house design-build model — covering landscaping, interiors, pools, extensions, and bespoke carpentry — we converted what was once unconventional into a measurable competitive

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learn from experience before making important decisions. Another important principle for me is staying true to the original purpose of the work. Growth should never come at the expense of authenticity or quality. Whether in media or entrepreneurship, credibility and professionalism must always remain at the center. Sustainable success comes from balancing ambition with discipline and protecting the values that define the project.

“Today, I see leadership as a continuous journey of learning and growth.”

■ Which personal experiences most shaped your leadership style and resilience as a woman in business?

One of the most defining experiences in my professional journey came when I acquired a business that was facing serious challenges. Managing that situation required patience, resilience, and strategic thinking. Working in both media and entrepreneurship meant that I had to combine communication skills with strong leadership decisions. Through collaboration with the right people, careful planning, and determination, I was able to overcome those challenges successfully. That experience strengthened my leadership style and taught me that challenges are not obstacles but opportunities to grow stronger. It also taught me that resilience is one of the most important qualities a leader can develop.

■ What does meaningful leadership mean to you today, and how can women build lasting impact?

Meaningful leadership means creating an influence that goes beyond personal success. A true leader contributes positively to society and helps empower others. For women especially, confidence and belief in their abilities are essential. As a media personality and entrepreneur who has chosen to remain single, I have been able to dedicate my full focus and energy to building my career and professional vision. Alongside my professional work, I am also involved in several charitable initiatives that support elderly people and abandoned children. Helping others brings me deep happiness and purpose.

In my personal life, I also enjoy playing golf. Golf helps me develop focus, patience, and strategic thinking. It allows me to reflect and approach professional decisions with clarity. My message to women is simple: believe in yourself, stay committed to your vision, and never allow challenges to limit your dreams. 🌟

Feryal Ziyari

Television host and Founder, Guzel Beauty Salon

You assumed leadership early. What mindset shifts helped you evolve into a transformative leader?

My leadership journey began very early in life. Being the only daughter in my family meant that I learned independence and responsibility from a young age. I was encouraged to think confidently, make decisions, and take initiative. These experiences helped shape my personality and leadership mindset.

During my school years, I was naturally drawn to activities that involved responsibility. I enjoyed organizing events, presenting on stage, and communicating with people. Those early experiences helped me develop confidence and strong communication skills.

My academic background also played an important role in shaping my professional journey. I hold a Master's degree in Media, which gave me a deeper understanding of communication, public influence, and the power of media platforms. Through my experiences in media, I learned that leadership is not about titles but about influence and vision. Media allows you to understand people, listen to their stories, and communicate ideas that inspire others.

Over time, my mindset shifted from simply participating in activities to building a professional path that combines media, entrepreneurship, and social impact. Today, I see leadership as a continuous journey of learning, growth, and responsibility. It is about empowering others and creating opportunities for people around you.

■ What guiding principles drive your decisions as you scale institutions while protecting their core purpose?

Throughout my professional journey, I have always relied on three core principles: integrity, determination, and responsibility. When expanding a project or developing a business, I believe that thoughtful decision-making is essential. I take time to analyze situations carefully, listen to different perspectives, and

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Loyal Hamdeh,
UAE-based content
creator



Poorvi Dureja,
Commercial Director
– Exhibitions, Capital
360, part of ADNEC
Group



**Alexandra
Makarovski,**
Founder, Inner Me



Gunjan Gangwani,
Founder, Barkat Meal



Aditi Jhunjhunwala,
Head of Operations,
Banke International
Properties

tive edge.” This integrated model ensures operational discipline and efficiency. “This framework ensures cost transparency, disciplined timelines, authority approvals, and cohesive delivery,” Nagjee believes the meaning of luxury in Dubai is evolving. “Our leadership blends creative vision with operational systems, resulting in increased property value, repeat clients, and sustained referrals. In Dubai’s evolving luxury sector, value is no longer visual alone — it is strategic, performance-driven, and built to endure.”

Purpose and reinvention

For many women leaders in the UAE, the transformation of business leadership also reflects a deeper sense of purpose and personal reinvention. Alexandra Makarovski, Founder of Inner Me, realised early in her entrepreneurial journey that conventional advice did not always reflect real market needs.

“Conventional wisdom says once you define your services, you stay consistent and build credibility over time,” she says. However, feedback from clients revealed new demands. “I realised clients did not just need career clarity and communication support. They needed strategic market navigation, positioning, and structured guidance through career transitions.” Her response was to rethink her entire service model. “I paused, re-designed my service architecture, and shifted from traditional coaching to strategic career support aligned with real market demand.” The shift strengthened her organisation’s positioning. “That repositioning strengthened differentiation and increased client acquisition.”

Her work later gained wider visibility. “My job search perspective was later featured by LinkedIn News, which expanded visibility and directly contributed to further growth.”

Entrepreneur, Gunjan Gangwani, Founder, Barkat Meal, approached leadership from a purpose-driven perspective.

“I have always believed that business should serve a purpose beyond profit,” she says. From the outset, she rejected the notion that higher price automatically reflects greater value.

“When I started Barkat Meal, I chose affordability and dignity over high margins, even when advised otherwise.” This decision created a brand built on trust and impact.

“By challenging the rule that higher price equals higher value, I wanted to prove that value can also be measured in impact, loyalty, and long-term relationships.” Her philosophy has strengthened both growth and partnerships. “In doing so, we sort of unlocked steady growth, repeat corporate and individual partnerships, and a brand identity rooted in trust.” Her conclusion reflects a broader leadership insight. “It proves that when purpose leads, profitability follows naturally.”

Redefining leadership also required challenging one’s own professional path, as experienced by banker and Executive Director, Yasmin Imam. “One conventional business rule I challenged was remaining within a traditional growth path when my ambitions demanded more,” she says. “Rather than waiting for opportunity, I pivoted toward emerging fintech and digital asset clients entering the UAE market.” Understanding the regulatory and financial needs of this evolving industry enabled her to reshape institutional strategy. “By understanding their financial and regulatory needs, I helped reshape our institutional approach to better serve this evolving sector.”

The transformation however was also deeply personal. “The UAE’s culture of bold thinking and rapid execution empowers professionals, especially women to reinvent themselves and lead confidently in new industries. The UAE gave me the courage to reinvent myself — as a banker, as a mother, and as a woman who refuses to choose between ambition and humanity.”



PARTNER

Yasmin Imam

Executive Director

This opportunity comes at a time when UAE is going through unprecedented times and before I say anything I wish to say, my love and loyalty for the UAE run deep. This country has protected and uplifted me as a woman. It continues to protect its citizens and residents alike in times of crisis, and to that I will always be ready to stand in service whenever it calls.

My journey as a woman has been one of resilience, growth, and constant reinvention.

A defining moment in my journey was recognising the shift toward fintech and digital financial ecosystems early and intentionally repositioning my professional focus toward this emerging sector. By understanding the liquidity, payments, and operational needs of fintech companies entering the region, I helped align institutional banking offerings with the requirements of this new generation of financial players. This shift allowed me to grow alongside the transformation of the financial industry while contributing to the UAE’s rapidly expanding fintech landscape. Professionally, the country’s forward-thinking regulatory and innovation landscape enabled me to pivot toward emerging fintech and digital asset sectors, aligning my career with the future of finance.

“The UAE is a gateway to growth, reinvention and purpose.”

Alongside my professional achievements, my personal journey remains equally meaningful. I met my husband who is my best friend, raised my two daughters in the UAE, a country that provided a safe and principled environment that values education, ambition, and respect for women. I am also deeply passionate about

promoting affordable education and actively collaborate with foundations and schools to support access to quality learning for children in both the UAE and my home country.

For me, the UAE is more than a marketplace — it is a gateway to growth, reinvention, and purpose. It rewards ambition while protecting values, and it allows women to rise.

Aparna Verma

Founder and CEO, Scholars International Group

You assumed leadership early. What mindset shifts helped you evolve into a transformative education leader?

When I stepped into leadership at the age of 17, I learned one defining lesson: leadership is not about authority, it is about responsibility. At first, I believed leadership meant that I had to prove myself not only to others, but also to myself. But very quickly, I understood that in education, you are entrusted with something far greater than performance metrics; you are entrusted with people's lives and their futures. Parents place their children's futures in your hands. That changes how you lead.

The most important mindset shift was moving from ambition to purpose. Instead of asking, How do we grow? I began asking, How do we transform lives? That change of thought was the core of every decision I made.

■ What guiding principles drive your decisions as you scale institutions while protecting their core purpose?

Growth without integrity is simply expansion. Growth with integrity is impact.

As we scale, three principles guide every decision: values, transparency, and purpose. In education, trust is everything. Families do not simply enrol their children; they entrust us with their hopes, their aspirations, and their future. That responsibility demands consistency, accountability, and honesty in every action.

Before taking any major step forward, I ask one simple question: Does this strengthen our ability to serve students? If the answer is not a clear yes, we do not proceed.

Our mission remains unchanged: to make a positive difference in the world through education, one student at a time. If growth ever compromises that, it is not growth worth pursuing.

■ Which personal experiences most shaped your leadership style and resilience as a woman in business?

Resilience is rarely ever built in comfort; it is built in challenge.

In the initial years, my journey was one where credibility had to be earned repeatedly. Moments when being a woman in leadership

“Growth without integrity is simply expansion. Growth with integrity is impact.”

meant navigating additional scrutiny. But those experiences strengthened my conviction rather than weakening it.

I learned never to take no as the final answer. Sometimes no means not yet. Sometimes it means find another way. And sometimes it simply means stand firmer in your belief. No still does not exist in my dictionary.

Equally transformative were the conversations I had with students, parents, and educators. Listening to their stories reminded me that leadership is not about being above others; it is about understanding their journeys and helping them move forward.

■ How are you redefining education to prepare students for an uncertain, fast-changing future?

The future will not reward those who are only academically inclined, it will reward those who adapt the fastest.

Academic excellence remains essential, but it is no longer sufficient. Our responsibility is to develop confident, resilient, and ethical individuals who can thrive in uncertainty and adapt quickly.

We are intentionally building environ-

ments that nurture critical thinking, emotional intelligence, global awareness, and adaptability. Students must learn how to collaborate, problem-solve, persevere and lead with integrity. They must be prepared not only for careers, but for contribution and making a difference.

Education must prepare students for change, but it must also prepare them to shape it.

■ What does meaningful leadership mean to you today, and how can women build lasting impact?

Meaningful leadership is measured by legacy, and not by position.

It is not about how many titles you hold, but about how many lives you elevate. The true impact of leadership is seen in the confidence of a student who discovers their voice, in the growth of a teacher who feels empowered, and in the trust of a community that feels supported.

For women, lasting impact begins with self-belief. Too often, women wait for validation before stepping forward. My message is simple: do not wait. Lead with integrity. Stand firm in your values. Persist when challenges arise. 🌟



Dr Mariam Shaikh

Founder & CEO, MS Education Consultants

Dr Mariam Shaikh, Founder and CEO of MS Education Consultants, represents a generation of education leaders who have helped shape the UAE's transformation into a globally connected knowledge economy. With over three decades of experience in international education, her leadership has consistently focused on aligning academic opportunity with employability, global mobility, and long-term value creation.

Long before internationalisation became central to higher education strategy in the region, Dr Mariam was actively contributing to the UAE's academic infrastructure. She played a pivotal role in bringing one of the earliest international branch campuses into Dubai — the University of New Brunswick, Canada — supporting the emirate's vision to position itself as a regional hub for world-class higher education. Her work in strengthening cross-border academic pathways has also included collaboration with institutions such as the University of Guelph and Toronto Metropolitan University, helping create meaningful access points for students seeking globally rec-

Dr Mariam's broader influence extends into policy-level dialogue and bilateral engagement.

ognised qualifications.

Beyond institutional leadership roles at Heriot-Watt University, Canadian University of Dubai, and Amity University, Dr Mariam's broader influence has extended into policy-level dialogue and bilateral engagement. As the first Ambassador for the Canadian Business Council and Head of the Education Connect Group under the EduConnect initiative, she has actively facilitated academic partnerships between Canada and the UAE — supporting collaboration across universities, industry, and innovation-led training platforms.

A testament to this commitment is her recent involvement in the official launch of Georgian Global, a subsidiary of Georgian College of Applied Arts and Technology, Ontario, Canada. This landmark initiative, which debuted its flagship Automotive Dealer Academy in Dubai, positions the city as a regional hub for executive-level professional development. The launch underscores a



shared vision of combining Canadian academic excellence with deep regional industry insight. Dr Mariam's support for such initiatives reflects her belief that value creation in education must extend into highly specialised, industry-aligned workforce training.

Through MS Education Consultants, she has introduced an integrated approach to student advisory by combining international admissions strategy with personal branding and career readiness. This leadership also supports unconventional yet impactful initiatives, such as hybrid mentorship models and scholarship-led admission strategies.

At the heart of her work lies a sustained commitment to inclusion. Dr Mariam works closely with UNHCR to support scholarship

opportunities for refugee students and continues to uphold her late mother's legacy through an orphanage in Mumbai dedicated to educating underprivileged girls. These initiatives reflect her view that education must remain accessible, equitable, and responsive to real-world challenges.

As the UAE continues to evolve as a destination for global talent, Dr Mariam's leadership underscores the importance of connecting education with opportunity. By fostering institutional collaboration, enabling access to international pathways, and championing inclusive learning models, she continues to transform unconventional ideas into measurable outcomes that deliver lasting impact across borders. ✨

Sejal Nagjee

Founder & Creative Director, Milestone Dubai

Dubai rewards ambition. However, in a market shaped by rapid development and visual spectacle, real value creation requires more than aesthetics — it demands integration, discipline, and strategic clarity.

As Founder and Creative Director of Milestone Dubai, I built the company around a conviction: luxury should perform as beautifully as it looks. Our fully integrated design-build model — encompassing landscaping, interiors, swimming pools, structural extensions, and bespoke carpentry — was once unconventional in the UAE. Today, it is our competitive advantage.

By consolidating design, execution, fabrication, and project management under one structure, we eliminate fragmentation — the single greatest risk in residential construction. Clients benefit from tighter cost control, reduced delays, cohesive material selection, and accountability at every stage.

In an industry where multiple contractors often create budget overruns and design inconsistencies, in-



tegration becomes both a financial safeguard and a quality accelerator. For us, value creation begins with behavioural insight. How does the family move through space? Where do they gather? How often do they host? Do they travel frequently? These answers influence zoning, automation, lighting strategy, circulation flow, and long-term maintenance planning.

“For us at Milestone Dubai, value creation begins with behavioural insight.”

The result is not just a visual transformation — it is lifestyle optimisation.

Many of our projects begin as strategic recoveries. Clients approach us after facing delays, budget escalation, or execution gaps. Through spatial reconfiguration, landscape rezoning, material refinement, and structured project control, we restore clarity — often elevating both daily experience and property value. Innovation at Milestone is deliberate rather than decorative. Fireline water features integrated into social seating. Pergolas that dissolve the boundary between indoor and outdoor living. Custom wardrobes engineered in our Al Quoz carpentry facility. Layered lighting strategies that shift ambiance without visual clutter.

Dubai's luxury market is maturing. Clients now demand sustainability, longevity, operational precision, and emotional intelligence — not excess for its own sake. Leadership in this space requires creative instinct balanced with measurable systems. As a former national-level table tennis athlete, discipline and performance metrics have shaped my business philosophy. Projects must meet timelines, respect budgets, and exceed design intent. We are not simply building villas. We are engineering environments that enhance daily rituals, strengthen family interaction, and preserve capital value.

In today's Dubai, luxury is no longer defined by scale. It is defined by how intelligently a space performs. And that is what we design for. ✨



The Milestone Dubai Show Villa in Jumeirah Park is a fully functional design-build showcase, demonstrating integrated landscaping, interiors, bespoke carpentry, and lighting under one roof. It serves as an immersive client experience space where design concepts are experienced in real life — not just on drawings — before execution begins

Layal Hamdeh

UAE-based content creator

The UAE's creator economy is entering a new phase where content moves beyond standalone posts and traditional influencer campaigns. Increasingly, brands are investing in structured, episodic storytelling that mirrors television's narrative depth while living natively on social platforms.

For Dubai-based content creator Layal Hamdeh, this shift represents more than a format trend. It signals a structural change in how UAE brands build cultural relevance through narrative, not advertising.

"Content creators are no longer just distribution channels," Layal says. "We're becoming creative partners shaping narrative direction, character arcs and serialised concepts designed specifically for digital environments."

Layal is currently starring in a 30-episode scripted micro-series titled "Stories After Sunset" in collaboration with UAE fashion brand Numi & Co., produced by Green Frame Production Agency. Each episode runs under one minute and follows stories rooted in Middle Eastern folklore, history and culture — narratives that coincidentally echo the heritage and symbolism behind the brand's luxury silk scarves, woven into the storytelling in a subtle, non-promotional way.

Designed as a structured digital narrative, the project blends performance and cultural storytelling into a serialised format rolling out across social platforms. Rather than centering product placement, the series builds on stories, allowing audiences to return daily for evolving chapters.

While short-form video has dominated the region's digital landscape for years, serialised micro-content represents a strategic next step. Instead of one-off branded posts, brands are experimenting with recurring characters, thematic arcs and episodic releases.

"This format creates emotional continuity," Layal explains. "When viewers return for Episode 10 or Episode 20, they're not just consuming content — they're following a narrative."

Globally, agencies and brands are exploring micro-dramas and short-form series to deepen engagement. In the UAE, where digital engagement is among the highest in the world, the appetite for serialised storytelling is particularly strong. Social platforms have become primary viewing environments, making

episodic digital narratives both accessible and scalable.

"Historically, large international brands led narrative experimentation," Layal says. "What's exciting now is seeing UAE-born brands invest in story-led formats and trust creators to help build that vision authentically."

With a background spanning filmmaking and social media, Layal sees micro-series formats as a bridge between traditional cinema and the creator economy. The structure allows for narrative depth while maintaining the immediacy of digital platforms. Serialised digital storytelling does not replace film or

"It's exciting seeing UAE brands trusting creators to help build their vision authentically."

television — it complements them.

Beyond format experimentation, this evolution reflects broader leadership within the region's creative industries. Women-led collaborations and UAE-based talent are increasingly shaping how brand narratives are developed and distributed. As content creators step into roles as directors, producers and narrative strategists, the line between brand marketing and entertainment continues to blur.

The UAE has become a hub for innovation across sectors, and storytelling is no exception. As competition for attention intensifies, brands are beginning to think more like studios than advertisers — investing in structured, serialised micro-dramas that blend entertainment, cultural nuance and authenticity.

For the UAE's creator economy, the future is increasingly episodic and proudly home-grown. 🌟



Poorvi Dureja

Commercial Director – Exhibitions | Capital 360, Part of ADNEC Group

Over the past decade, Poorvi Dureja has formed an inspiring path within the UAE's dynamic exhibitions industry, rising to become Commercial Director for Exhibitions at Capital 360, part of the ADNEC Group. Her journey has been one of resilience, ambition, and heartfelt purpose — shaped not only by commercial success but also by a deep commitment to people. With more than ten years of experience in the UAE, Poorvi has witnessed the transformation of the region's events landscape into a global powerhouse. Through strategic vision and an instinct for building meaningful partnerships, she has played an important role in driving growth, expanding international reach, and elevating the standards of exhibition excellence. Her leadership at Capital 360 reflects

both commercial acumen and a firm belief that exhibitions are more than platforms for trade — they are catalysts for connection, innovation, and progress.

Yet what truly defines Poorvi's career is her dedication to women's empowerment in the country she now calls home. She has consistently championed opportunities for women within the industry, mentoring young profes-

sionals, advocating for inclusive leadership, and fostering environments where women feel confident to lead. For Poorvi, success is not measured solely in revenue or scale, but in the doors opened for others and the confidence inspired in the next generation of female leaders across the UAE.

For Poorvi, balance has never meant dividing time equally — it has meant being fully present wherever she stands. Whether leading commercial strategy in the boardroom or creating meaningful moments at home, she approaches each role with intention and gratitude. She credits her adaptability to a strong support system, thoughtful boundaries, and the courage to ask for help when needed — something she encourages other women to embrace without hesitation.

Her experience has shaped her leadership philosophy: success should not come at the expense of well-being. Instead, she advocates for workplaces that recognise humanity alongside performance, flexibility alongside ambition. Through vulnerability and strength combined, she demonstrates that it is possible to build a thriving career while remaining anchored in personal values. Her journey is not about flawless execution, but about commitment, growth, and the quiet determination to show that women can lead powerfully without losing themselves along the way. ✨



Alexandra Makarovski

Founder, Inner Me LLC

Inner Me did not begin with a business plan.

It began with a question at the height of what looked like a successful corporate career. I had stability, progression, and financial security. From the outside, it made perfect sense. Inside, I felt disconnected from my work.

There was no dramatic turning point. Just a persistent question: If this is success, why doesn't it feel fulfilling?

As I reflected and spoke openly with others, a pattern emerged. Many capable professionals were not lacking ambition or talent. They were lacking clarity. On paper, their careers looked stable and well-constructed. In reality, many felt stuck and professionally unfulfilled. Some wanted change but could not define it. Others hesitated, unsure how to move forward without risking the stability they had built.



That insight became the foundation of Inner Me.

I chose to leave a well-paying role and invest my savings in a business focused on clarity and purposeful career transitions. Launching the company meant learning entrepreneurship in real time, establishing brand visibility from zero, and earning trust in a mature professional services sector.

Building the company required trial, error, and risky choices. Those missteps shaped the principles that still guide the business today: focus on one problem you solve exceptionally well, build visibility intentionally, and surround yourself with the right support. Built from scratch, Inner Me stands on one belief: professional success should not only make sense on paper. It should make sense for the life you want to live. ✨

“I left a well-paying role to invest my savings in a business focused on purposeful career transitions.”

Gunjan Gangwani

**Founder, Barkat Meal /
KRMA Solutions**

For Gunjan Gangwani, “Success is not just about growth — it’s about giving back.” Originally, from Delhi, India, and a resident of Dubai for over 18 years, mother to two beautiful kids Gunjan embodies the evolving spirit of the modern Indian woman entrepreneur — resilient, purpose-driven, and socially conscious. With 12 years of experience in compliance and corporate governance, she is a qualified Company Secretary and Anti-Money Laundering Specialist who built her professional journey on ethics, discipline, and leadership with her husband Raman Gangwani.

Chartered Accountants by profession the couple founded their first company KRMA Solutions. Yet, beyond regulations and boardrooms, Gunjan’s heart was drawn toward a deeper mission — community



“Success in business is not just about growth — it’s about giving back.”

impact. Today, as the Founder of Barkat Meal, an initiative dedicated to providing wholesome, home-style meals at affordable prices for the blue-collar workforce, Gunjan aims to ensure that every hardworking individual receives wholesome, homely food with dignity — without placing financial pressure on corporates or donors.

Inspired by the UAE’s culture of generosity and inclusivity, she transformed compassion into action. For her, Barkat is not merely a venture and a business; it is a reflection of her belief that food is a basic human need and that entrepreneurship must carry responsibility.

Her journey is a testament to the power of women who lead with empathy while maintaining professional excellence. She continues to build with intention — combining structure, sustainability, and social impact — proving that true leadership is measured not only in success, but also in service. ✨

Aditi Jhunjhunwala

Head of Operations, Banke International Properties

In an industry often defined by transactions and targets, Aditi Jhunjhunwala is redefining leadership through culture, capability, and conviction.

At Banke International Properties, women don’t just participate - they lead. Every core department, from Finance and Sales to Marketing and Operations, is helmed by women. “Empowerment must sit at the decision-making table,” she says. Under her leadership, women professionals have dominated industry recognitions, from SuperAgents and TruBrokers to Excellence Ambassadors, with several featured on major property portals’ billboards purely on performance merit.

However, representation is only the beginning. Aditi institutionalised growth through Banke Academy, transforming learning into a continuous performance engine. Structured onboarding, leadership labs, cross-market training, and expert-led masterclasses ensure that both fresh graduates and seasoned professionals remain future-ready. Her visionary Future Leaders Internship Program brings over 20 students



annually into a high-intensity, mentor-driven ecosystem - delivering 75+ hours of real-time business exposure and leadership interaction. “We don’t offer internships. We build industry readiness,” she explains.

Culture remains her strongest differentiator. With over 30 nationalities represented, Banke has earned Great Place to Work recognition by embedding inclusion, accountability, and shared purpose into daily operations.

Beyond the workplace, Aditi drives CSR initiatives spanning sustainability, health awareness, community outreach, and employee-led social impact programs — ensuring growth is matched by responsibility. From operational innovation, including the development of Banke’s in-house CRM system, to elevating brand performance across major property portals, Aditi’s leadership is strategic, systems-driven, and people-centric.

Her philosophy is simple: build leaders, build culture, and the numbers will follow. ✨

“We don’t offer internships. We build industry readiness.”

READY FOR BUSINESS

A selection of UAE businesses servicing a range of dynamic sectors, led by UAE businesswomen who inspire

Banke International Properties

Banke International Properties is a leading global real estate firm offering residential and commercial sales and leasing, off-plan projects and property management. With a 600+ strong multicultural team, the company operates in the UAE, UK, India, Qatar, and South Africa, delivering seamless, end-to-end property solutions.

Banke connects clients to premium real estate worldwide - from luxury homes in Dubai and Abu Dhabi to investment opportunities in London, Mumbai, or Doha. Beyond transactions, Banke provides strategic advisory, market insights, and personalised service, ensuring every property journey is efficient, transparent, and results-driven across borders.

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Barkat Meal FZCO and KRMA Solutions FZC

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Branding By Riddhi

Founded by Riddhi Roy, Branding By Riddhi is a brand intelligence company focused on helping professionals transform their expertise, experience, and reputation into structured brand assets.

Brandverse, its hallmark ecosystem offers consulting, workshops, and intelligent tools that help leaders clarify their positioning, strengthen credibility, and unlock new avenues of visibility and monetisation.

Designed for senior professionals and industry experts, Brandverse enables individuals to build enduring brand capital that enhances both professional influence and marketplace value.

Additionally it offers a host of products for business branding - from social media management, to ghostwriting and several other specialised services.

■ Awards & recognition

Business Excellence Award 2024, Gulf News X BeingShe

■ Contact details

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Emerald Advisory LLC

Founded by Audrey Fages, Emerald Advisory enables SMEs and mid-market turn sustainability requirements into opportunities. Its value-generating, economical, pragmatic solutions combine advisory and digital tools to measure carbon and ESG performance, strengthen supply-chain positioning, unlock new revenues, and capture opportunities in the fast-growing green economy.

■ Awards & recognition

Sustainability Excellence Award 2025 - Best Upcoming Sustainable Consultancy

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P: +971 58 530 8370
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Guzel Beauty Salon

Guzel Beauty Salon is a premium beauty destination offering advanced hair styling, beauty treatments, and personalised aesthetic services. Known for luxury service and modern techniques, the salon focuses on enhancing natural beauty while delivering exceptional client experience.

■ Awards & recognition

Recipient of several beauty industry recognitions, Founder, Feryal Ziyari has also received multiple media awards.

■ Contact details

@feryalziyariofficial

Milestone Dubai

Milestone Dubai is a fully integrated luxury design-build firm specializing in high-end villa transformations across Dubai. With in-house landscaping, interiors, pools, structural extensions, and bespoke carpentry, the company delivers cohesive, performance-driven environments that enhance lifestyle experience while preserving and elevating property value.

■ Awards & recognition

- Legends 50: Top Business Leaders & Professionals from India in the Middle East & Africa (UAE Focus) - Gray Matter in association with Gulf News
- TOP 100 Interior Designers of the World 2025 - Luxury Lifestyle Awards

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Money Date by Belloy Legal

Money Date by Belloy Legal is the only platform addressing money matters within couples and families through the lens of

law. Where coaches discuss budgets and emotions, Money Date by Belloy Legal addresses rights, responsibilities, and prevention.

■ Services

- Personalised Upstream Legal Consultations
- Consultation format: videoconference and in-person
- Duration: minimum one hour, then customised

■ Appointments

On the Money Date by Belloy Legal website. Visit www.moneydate-cabinetbelloy.com

■ Price

Dh2,000 (ex. VAT) for the first consultation - 1 hour

■ Accessibility

Money Date by Belloy Legal serves everyone, with particular attention to:

- Couples (married, in civil partnerships, cohabiting)
 - Families in transition (separation, blended families, transmission)
 - Expatriates or internationally mobile individuals
 - Entrepreneurs and professionals with complex assets
- ### ■ Geographic coverage
- France (Cabinet Belloy - Paris and nationwide)
 - The UAE (Belloy Legal Consulting)
 - International (expertise in international family law)

MS Education Consultants

MS Education Consultants provides end-to-end global education advisory, scholarship facilitation, and personal branding support for students and professionals. Its USP lies in integrating academic planning with career readiness strategies, enabling clients to secure international university placements with financial aid while enhancing long-term employability.

■ Awards & recognition

- Pioneer in Education Award - Hayat Arts Mirage Awards (2025)
- Top 50 Global Inspirational Entrepreneurs Award - Khatoun Entrepreneur Summit (2025)

■ Affiliations

- Canadian Business Council - Chair for EduConnect
- G100 Global Advisory Council - Advisory Member for Higher Education
- Indian Women in Dubai Network - Senior Advisor
- Student Safety UK
- Commonwealth Entrepreneurs Club

■ CSR initiatives

Dr Mariam Shaikh, Founder, MS Education Consultants, works closely with UNHCR to facilitate scholarships for student refugees, advocating strongly for access to education for displaced youth. She believes education empowers refugee children to overcome adversity, rebuild their futures, and realize their full potential despite challenges arising from conflict, displacement, or persecution.

■ Contact details

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Owolite LLC-FZ

Founded by Shital Bariya, Owolite LLC-FZ is a Dubai-based luxury jewelry brand specializing in lab-grown diamonds. Crafted with precision and modern design, our collections feature a wide variety of fine jewelry in gold and platinum - timeless pieces made to celebrate brilliance and last for generations.

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Scholars International Group (SIG)

Established in 1976, Scholars International Group is a distinguished provider of British curriculum education in the UAE, shaping generations of learners for nearly 50 years. Through Dubai Scholars Private School, Scholars International Academy, and The Scholars School, the Group continues to build on strong values, fostering curiosity, grit and community rooted in a deep commitment to nurturing confident, well-rounded individuals.

■ Awards & recognition

- Masala awards Businesswoman of the Year
- Arabian Business CEO of the Year
- Nominated for Emirates Woman of the Year
- Excellence in Education - Lifetime Achievement Award, Gulf News & BeingShe Awards 2025

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<https://scholarsschool.com/>

APARNA BAJPAI *and the inspiring* BeingShe story

BeingShe is a Dubai-based women empowerment and business visibility platform created to elevate, position, and connect ambitious women entrepreneurs and leaders. Built on the belief that visibility creates opportunity, BeingShe enables women to strengthen their personal brand, enhance business credibility, and access meaningful growth networks within the UAE's dynamic economic landscape.

Our purpose

BeingShe exists to solve one of the most overlooked challenges women entrepreneurs face — not a lack of talent or ambition, but a lack of structured visibility and strategic positioning.

Many women-led businesses operate with excellence yet remain under-recognized, under-promoted, and under-leveraged. BeingShe bridges this gap by creating platforms where women are seen, heard, and valued.

Our purpose is rooted in three pillars:

- 1. Visibility** – Elevating women entrepreneurs through curated media features, recognition platforms, stage opportunities, and brand showcases.
- 2. Credibility** – Strengthening personal and business positioning through structured storytelling, thought leadership exposure, and association with respected partners.
- 3. Community Growth** – Building a reciprocal ecosystem where women actively support, collaborate with, and promote one another.

BeingShe transforms participation into presence — and presence into progress.

Our vision

Our vision is to become the UAE's most trusted women-focused visibility and business growth ecosystem — a platform where women do not just network, but build influence, authority, and commercial momentum.

We envision:

- A powerful regional community where women-led brands are amplified across media, events, and strategic collaborations.
- A membership-driven ecosystem that delivers measurable value, not just symbolic affiliation.
- A culture where women intentionally support women, creating a cycle of shared

growth and opportunity.

- A commercially sustainable platform that balances purpose with profitability.

BeingShe stands for collaborative leadership in an era where personal branding and credibility are key business assets.

What we do

BeingShe delivers impact through curated experiences and structured membership value:



Media & visibility platforms

Through strategic media collaborations, award platforms, panel discussions, and curated forums, we provide women entrepreneurs with exposure that strengthens their authority and public positioning. We spotlight founders, professionals, and leaders in ways that enhance trust and brand equity.

Recognition & thought leadership

From sustainable business awards to industry-specific showcases, BeingShe creates credible stages where women can share expertise, gain recognition, and build influence.

Membership growth ecosystem

Our tiered membership model is designed around real value — strategic networking, curated introductions, collaborative opportunities, preferential partner access, and business amplification.

BeingShe is a reciprocal platform. Members are not passive participants; they are active

“She Means Business was born from a simple belief that when women are given visibility, support, and opportunity, they create extraordinary impact. This collaboration with Gulf News celebrates the resilience of the UAE’s women entrepreneurs and shines a powerful spotlight on the SME leaders shaping industries, inspiring communities, and redefining success.”

— Aparna Bajpai, Founder, BeingShe

contributors. Women within the ecosystem support each other's ventures, refer business, attend launches, collaborate on projects, and amplify one another's achievements.

This culture of mutual upliftment creates commercial opportunity while reinforcing collective success.

Our impact

The impact of BeingShe is measurable in visibility gained, partnerships formed, collaborations sparked, and brands strengthened.

We help women:

- Position themselves as credible industry voices.
- Expand their business network with intention.
- Increase brand recognition through curated exposure.
- Build confidence through association with a powerful community.

Our platform transforms individual ambition into collective momentum.

Our commitment

BeingShe is committed to integrity, inclusivity, and authentic growth. We align with the UAE's forward-thinking vision of gender balance and entrepreneurship, contributing by building platforms that elevate women into leadership, influence, and sustainable business success.

BeingShe®

See Her Empowered

Network • Grow • Empower

www.BeingShe.com

**Instagram - BeingSheOfficial /
BeingSheClub**

EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2026

Celebrating Women of Excellence

BIGGER & BETTER

Saturday, June 12, 2026
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SCAN TO NOMINATE

GULF NEWS 

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*Curated
beauty
solutions*

Founded by Feryal Ziyari,
Guzel Beauty Salon sets the standard
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