

MEADFA Day 2: Crafting effective communications strategies key to success



Day two proceedings kicked off with coffee and a Digital 101 session from social media strategist, Andrew Davis

Fresh from a gala evening of Omani culture, global cuisine and industry communing, day two of the 2019 MEADFA Conference Day kicked off with coffee and a digital 101 session from social media strategist, Andrew Davis.

With our average attention span reportedly a mere eight seconds, convenience and immediacy need to be front of mind for the industry according to Davis, who said: “People go to the brand they understand the best, not necessarily the best brand; and whoever can grab attention will be the winner.”

He pressed home the point that the digital native generation decides when they consume content rather than being spoon-fed information. Where duty free and travel retail can gain a competitive advantage is by virtually stalking online target audience activity to identify trends and behaviors.

Plain speaking is also critical when it comes to creating content. “Be clear not cute,” was the message with Davis pinpointing nine key content objectives: sales cycle, campaign awareness, building brand credibility, community building, research, thought leadership, footfall, engaging different audiences and increasing web traffic.

For the Middle East audience he listed WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok as popular platforms, highlighting the stories feed as a powerful tool due to its non-algorithm-constrained reach.

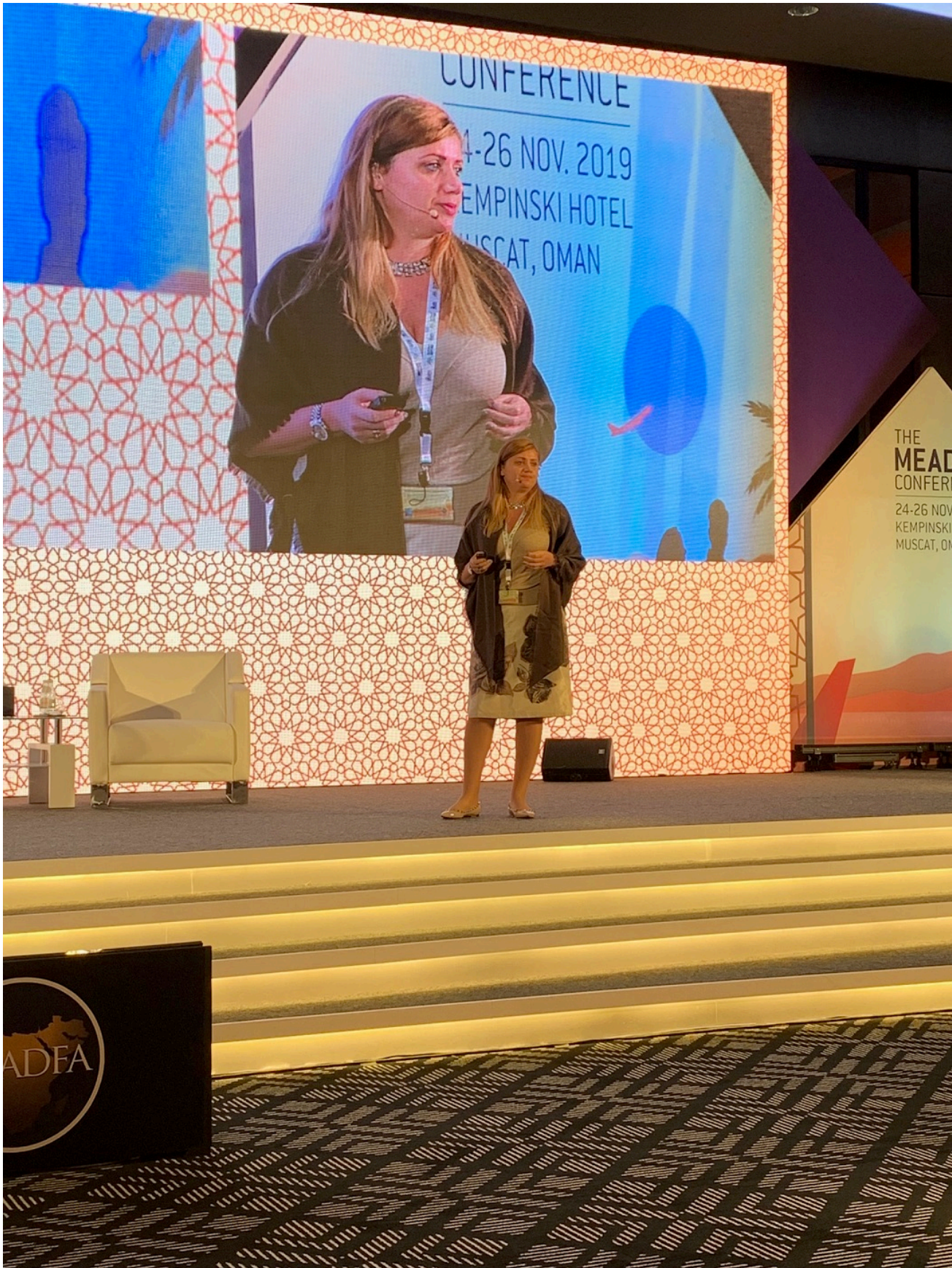


Straight talking John McDonnell, Managing Director International, Tito’s Handmade Vodka, mooted the idea of an all-in industry duty-free app

According to John McDonnell, Managing Director International, Tito’s Handmade Vodka, the brand enjoys strong engagement on Instagram and Pinterest. The straight-talking industry veteran also touched on digital convenience – or rather, the lack of it – during a brand building presentation tag teamed with Karl Marnane, Director of Sales for Butlers Chocolates.

“We are not communicating with customers through their devices, with a call to action. As an industry, we haven’t come up with a duty-free app [and] I know we can do it,” he remarked, mentioning North America’s Drizly and the UAE’s Centaurus International as successful e-commerce and mobile app liquor platforms.

For Butlers Chocolates, Instagram is hugely relevant yet “[we] find Twitter has become quite toxic; it’s more about dealing with issues, but you have to be on it,” reported Marnane.



Rita Chidiac, Board Member, MEADFA, delivered an impassioned presentation on behalf of the new Advocacy Working Group, urging the industry to sign up

Following on from yesterday's Advocacy Working Group (AWG) workshop, Rita Chidiac, Board Member, MEADFA, delivered an impassioned presentation urging representatives from every duty-free category to sign on the dotted line and have their say in safeguarding the future of travel retail. 5

“We have identified three key challenges. The first is that, especially in the Middle East and Africa, there is not enough understanding of duty free by the regulatory authorities,” she explained, adding: “We are moving from zero regulation to excessive regulation with a copy-pasting of European regulations. [The authorities] don’t do an impact assessment and don’t realise that this is a completely different operating environment.”

Chidiac also said that, collectively, the industry is failing to exploit its engagement and networking capacity and reminded MEADFA conference delegates that this is now a cross-category threat and no longer just about tobacco.

“We need a platform where we can engage with regulators face to face and propose alternative solutions,” she confirmed, noting that AWG will hold bi-weekly calls and host four meetings during the year to bring the issues to the table, discuss required initiatives and enable members to take this forward to the regulator in their individual jurisdictions.

“Our industry is controlled and transparent; it is not a platform for illicit trade. It is a valuable contributor to the economy and transport ecosystem,” she concluded.

Quick Look at the



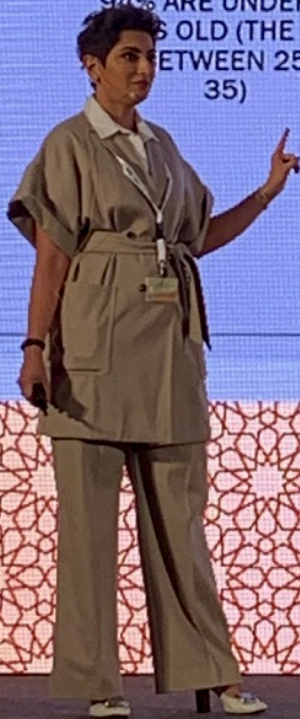
94% ARE UNDER 24
5 OLD (THE REST
BETWEEN 25 AND
35)



70% FEMALES AND 30%
MALES



36% TRAVEL FOR MORE
THAN THREE TIMES IN
YEAR



Kuwait University's Professor Samar Baqer shared insights from a recent student focus group on the Gen Z travel retail wishlist

Wrapping up the 2019 agenda sessions, Professor Samar Baqer, business and branding expert, College of Business Administration, Kuwait University, shared insights from a recent student focus group on travel retail wants and behaviors.

“Shopping is part of the traveling experience and is important to Generation Z. They want something that is not a mall experience. They also want to see small brand names from youth entrepreneurs in each country and more engagement through social media,” she said.

The engagement wish list also includes the full spectrum of end-to-end digital services and mobile applications from purchase research to mobile payment and customer service access.

On the topic of influencers, Professor Baqer was enthusiastic about the potential value to brands and retailers, and confident that the right high-profile regional partnerships paired with exclusive products would drive the purchase decision.

Bringing the packed two-day agenda to an end, MEADFA President Haitham Al Majali thanked official hosts Muscat Duty Free, Oman Air, His Excellency Dr. Ahmed Al Futaisi and attending government dignitaries for their gracious hospitality.

He also gave a thumbs up to the “exceptional audience” for making the journey to Muscat for what he hoped was an informative and thought-provoking 18th edition, with details of the 2020 event to be revealed early next year.



MEADFA Conference delegates were called on stage as the 2019 edition concluded following two days of informative and thought-provoking discussion