
“Go where your customers are.”

Ahmed Ragab, CEO of the Baraka Retail Group (BRG), has always loved keeping on the move.
GROWING UP IN HIS HOMETOWN OF CAIRO, EGYPT, HE RECALLS SEEING LARGE, BUSTLING CROWDS ON THE STREET.

And as the pedestrians wove their way through street-traders hawking their wares from carts, stands, tables and bikes, the young Ahmed savored a sight that he found liberating, creative, and exciting.

That early spectacle continues to help him think differently about his business. A key characteristic of the traders, Ahmed noticed, was their ability to adapt – to keep moving with their customers and stay relevant, even as the environment changed.

Ahmed still believes in constantly trying new ventures and keeping on the move. And as interviewers find out, this isn’t just a manner of speaking. If you want to talk business with Ahmed today, you’ll have to interview him as he paces his office. “It helps me to walk around while talking”, he explains.

That’s because dynamic energy brings out his personal strengths of improvising, thinking on his feet, and innovating. Don’t just talk the talk, it seems to say. Walk the walk.
STAYING AGILE ENABLED AHMED TO SPOT AN OPPORTUNITY

Back in 1979, BRG started as an Egypt-based fashion optics business that provided high-end sunglasses, ophthalmic frames and ophthalmic lenses. It quickly established itself as a regional leader, offering luxury brands like Chopard, Bvlgari, Chanel and Givenchy.

Today it operates across the fashion, jewelry, furniture and construction industries, with 13 brands and over 100 stores in Egypt, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and East Africa.

But to see BRG’s adaptive vision in action, it’s worth taking a look at how it thrived during the events of 2010–11, when Egypt was rocked by political upheaval.

Ahmed’s belief in staying agile enabled him to spot an opportunity, even as investment and the retail environment became precarious. He argued for shedding the company’s wholesale business completely, and concentrating on retail.

Once again, his childhood memory of Cairene street-traders’ adaptability – and the way they’d freely relocate to find potential customers – proved an inspiration. With fresh energy, Baraka launched innovative pop-up shops known as C & Co. Express, shrewdly placing them in environments where their target audiences congregated. If sales in one location started leveling out, the pop-ups would simply move elsewhere.

It was a strategy for tough times that proved successful.

HOW MERAKI PROMISES TO HELP BARAKA MAKE SENSE OF CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR

When customer trade falls off on the streets of Cairo, street-traders adapt by following the money. But how do you track customer behavior across multiple locations?

Baraka chose Cisco Meraki for the job. As a guest Wi-Fi solution, it’s super-easy to set up and use. It allows multiple networks – including Baraka’s ultra-secure virtual private network – to be managed centrally through the cloud, instantly simplifying IT management.

Meraki’s detailed reporting also promises new insights into customer behavior. For example, it gives Baraka the option to track users through malls and see what is and isn’t working, or check which websites visitors are using while shopping. Baraka can even use shopper sign-on events to trigger personal rewards and send promotional messages.

It all helps make the company ‘reliably different.’ And Ahmed’s vision of constant adaptation continues to produce results: In 2018, Baraka won Best Retailer across the Majid Al Futtaim (MAF) malls in Egypt, City Centre Alexandria and City Centre Maadi.

Company:
Baraka Retail Group
Sector:
Optics retail
Country:
Egypt
Employees:
<200
Company website:
baraka-group.com