

HELLO!

MIDDLE EAST

NO 538 • 19 NOVEMBER 2015 • DHS12

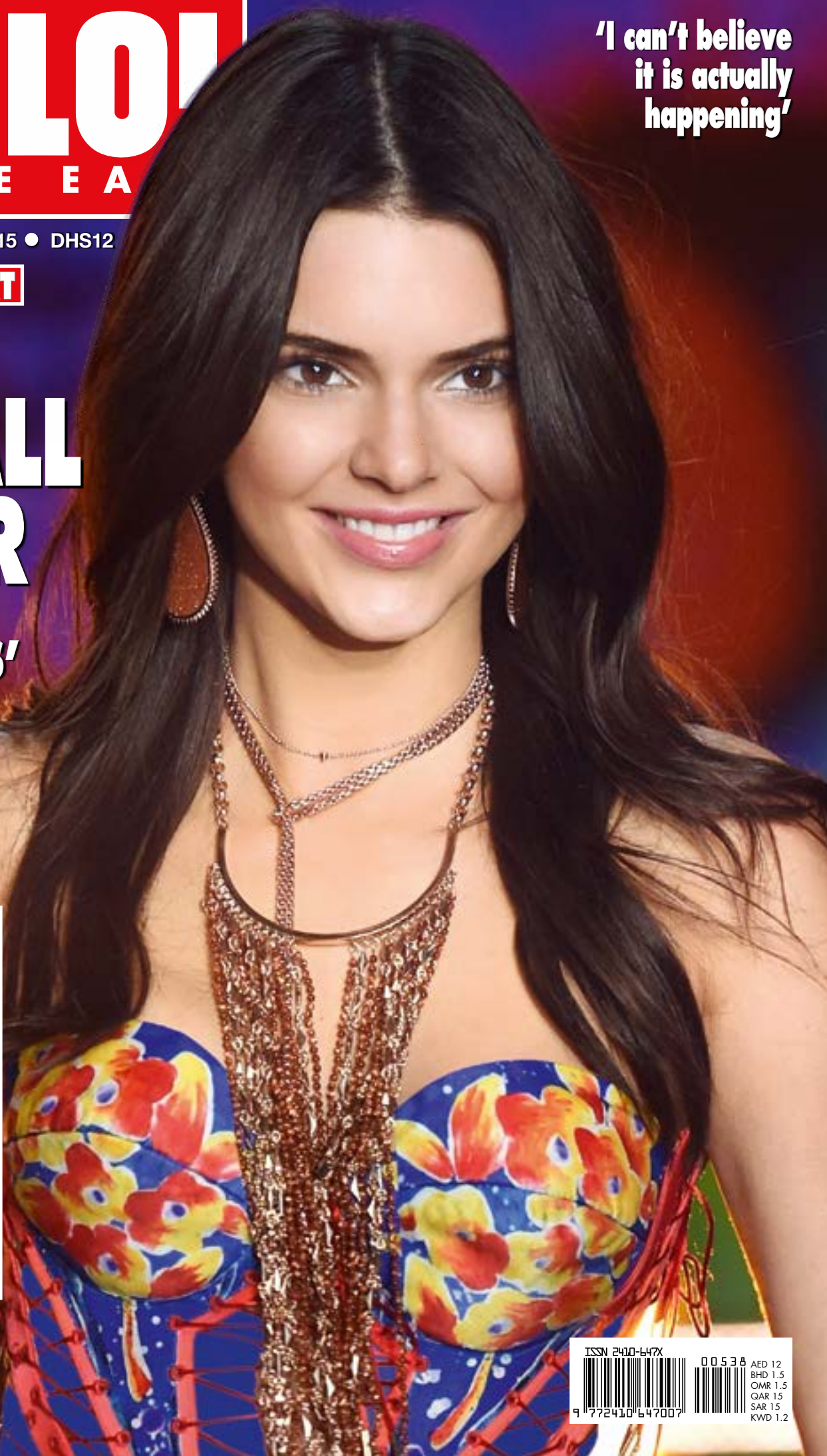
EXCLUSIVE REPORT

THE RISE AND RISE OF KENDALL JENNER HOW THE KARDASHIANS' LITTLE SISTER BECAME THE WORLD'S TOP SUPERMODEL

'I can't believe
it is actually
happening'



**FOOD DIVA
ZAHRA ABDALLA
INVITES HELLO! INTO HER
SPECTACULAR HOME**



ISSN 2410-647X 00538
AED 12 BHD 1.5 OMR 1.5 QAR 15 SAR 15 KWD 1.2
9 772410 647007

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CELEBRITY BOOKER SARAH OMOLEWU

GIVES US THE INSIDE TRACK TO WORKING WITH CELEBRITIES,
CHARTERING PRIVATE JETS AND HOSTING THE SMITHS

'A-listers love low-key spots, and they really enjoy learning about the local culture'

When you think of a star-studded life, you think of Dubai-based celebrity wrangler Sarah Omolewu who is the person everyone has on speed-dial if they need a big name to boost their brand or draw press to their events. From Disney stars to A-list sports personalities, fashion folk to internationally renowned singers, Sarah has all the most important agents and their clients in her contacts book.

We speak to the American-born owner of Maven Marketing and Events to find what it takes to bring instantly recognisable names to the Middle East and juggle 14-hour working days that span continents.

How did you start off in this notoriously tricky field?

I started my career in 2001 working for a top radio station in Atlanta, V-103. It is the go-to station for artists to break records and there was always a slew of celebrities coming by – A-listers like JLo, Mariah Carey, Jay-Z, Usher, even Hollywood and sports stars would stop by on a daily basis to promote their projects and brands. I also worked on music festivals, expos, and other celebrity-focused events the station organised each year. That's where I first started to build my relationships with celebrity management and understand how the business of entertainment marketing works.

What brought you to Dubai?

I met a lady who lived in Dubai during an NBA All Star weekend event in 2007 and was blown away with the event and calibre of celebrities in attendance. She suggested that I organise events like that in Dubai. I brushed her off at first because I couldn't imagine living in the Middle East, but we kept in touch. When the economic crisis hit the states in 2008, I saw it as an opportunity to explore bringing celebrities to the Dubai market for two years while the USA economy recovered. That was six and a half years ago! The rest is history.

Do celebrity endorsements really make a difference to brands?

Definitely. The best way to look at it is that if the brand is the flame, then the celebrity is the petro put on that flame to ignite the brand to the next level.

What exactly does your work entail?

Many people think I simply book talent because I have great relationships with celebrity management, that's just a small part of what I do. I am very ROI[return on investment] driven. My team and I take pride in providing dynamic, creative, turnkey marketing solutions to match our clients' brand objectives and customer profiles. Securing the right celebrity to fit the brand is just one part of a fully integrated campaign strategy, and booking talent is a by-product of that process.

What's the hardest part of your job?

'The most insane request? I once booked a Gulfstream G550 for a celebrity who required a private jet all the way from Los Angeles to Dubai!'

On the client side, a lot of people in this market behave as if they are the decision-makers, when in reality, very few actually are. Going through the process of reaching out to a celebrity, only to find out later that the budget, event or project had not even been approved, is not on. This is why, I now only work on a referral basis or with previous clients. Otherwise, a deposit or MOU signed by the company's CEO needs to accompany an offer, before I reach out.

What is the highlight of your role?

The day after an event is my favourite part because I really love seeing everything come together. Looking at a post report of a full campaign activation with all the campaign reach figures, event pictures, video, getting thank you calls from the client, the celebrity, and their management – it's the best feeling ever looking back at a successful event. I also

really love the relationships and trust I've built over the years – both on the client side and with the celebrities and their management.

Do companies approach you with specific names that they want to bring out, do celebs approach you wanting to come out here or do you find celebs then match them with campaigns?

Clients in Dubai are always looking for celebrities who are willing to engage with their audiences, so it's important we source celebrities who we have a good relationship with their management, and moreover those who will represent our client's brands well. We also have some celebrity management who reach out to us expressing interest in coming to the UAE, and we match them with clients who'd be a good fit.

Can you tell us some of the names you have brought to the UAE?

In the fitness space, we've brought Kobe Bryant, Laila Ali, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. On the fashion side, we brought Nicole Richie, *E!* stalwart Giuliana Rancic, Zendaya, and Disney star Laura Marano. We've also organised events for celebrities who were already coming to Dubai for an event – Michael Schumacher, Hrithik Roshan, Roger Federer. Some musical highlights have been Usher, Akon, Soulja Boy and Marques Houston.

What's been the craziest request you've received?

I once booked a Gulfstream G550 for a celebrity who required a private jet all the way from Los Angeles to Dubai! By far the most insane request I've obliged to and will never do so again...except if Oprah wants one of course! I now know everything about private jets from G550, BBJ, petrol pricing, fuel stops in Europe. **Which celebrity has been a pleasure to host?** The Smith family have definitely been favourites. A couple months ago, I booked Jaden and Willow for a series of DSS events at Dubai Mall. They are extremely respectful, smart, prompt, creative and fun. Their management is one of the most friendly, ▶

JUMPSUIT, BELT AND BRACELET BY PATRIZIA PEPE; RAISSA NECKLACE FROM SYMPHONY



'Clients in Dubai are always looking for celebrities who are willing to engage with their audiences... it's important we source celebrities who will represent our client's brands well'

authentic and professional group of people I've worked with. I also really enjoyed working with Michael Schumacher. He was such a gentleman and very professional, friendly and authentic.

Which big name would you love to work with?
Hands down, without even having to think about it, I'd say Oprah. She recently finished an eight city women's empowerment tour called "the life you want weekend" in the States and is taking it internationally to Australia next month. I'd like to bring a version of that event to the region. There are a number of influential women here occupying senior level positions, and it would be good to dispel some of the myths about women in the region by showcasing the success stories of high achieving female locals and expats here.

Is the Middle East an easy spot to lure names to?

Dubai has become a celeb hotspot in recent years, so most of them already know that it's one of the most luxurious cities in the world. There has also been a shift in recent years in which celebs are interested in long-term, strategic partnerships in the region, particularly those with fashion brands. We are currently working with Giuliana Rancic, Laura Marano, and Jaden Smith's MSFTS brand to bring their clothing lines to the region.

What's the biggest surprise celebs express after coming here?

How relaxed the culture is and how fashion forward everyone is – especially the women. There aren't a lot of places in the world where it is common to see ladies in full face make-up and 160mm Loubiton heels going out for a

casual stroll around town at 11am.

Who have you been star-struck upon meeting?

I got really star-struck both the first and second time I met Oprah. I was barely able to speak and my legs totally froze! I had what I was going to say to her all planned out and for some reason, the words just could not come out of my mouth. It was really embarrassing. She has been a big inspiration to me. My best friend and I grew up calling her our aunt because we would watch her after school and get all the life lessons we needed right there.

Where do you tend to take A-listers when they visit Dubai?

A lot of them love low-key spots, and they really enjoy learning about the local culture. The Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding and desert safaris are always must-dos. Platinum Heritage has the best private desert safaris – Mercedes G Wagon cars, a lady who does an educational falcon hunting demonstration, belly dancers, shisha, seated dinner with steak and lobster – the works!

Do the celebs ever make requests about what they want to see in the UAE?

Celebrities are not as interested in the luxury of Dubai as they are the culture. People usually want to see the inside of a Sheikh's palace, a mosque and other cultural activities. Other than that, I always send them a list of suggestions and they either choose from there or just trust us to guide them in the right direction.

What would people be surprised to learn about your role?

That most of my deals, even the seven figure ones, are done over a 10-15 minute phone call or whatsapp message due to the solid

'Oprah has been a big inspiration to me. I got really star-struck both the first and second time I met her. I was barely able to speak and my legs totally froze!'

relationships and trust I've built with celebrity management. It's letting the lawyers on both sides come to terms on the legal language and details that takes forever.

What has been the highlight of your career?

Winning the award for best special event in the Middle East at the MEES Awards 2014 for our Kobe Bryant health and fitness weekend celebrity basketball game, which included music artists Marques Houston and Soulja Boy, American footballer Kelly Herndon, Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan bin Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Faisal Al Saud, and the entire Real Madrid basketball legends team. It's great to be recognised by your peers in the industry.

Do you travel a lot for work?

I'm in Los Angeles and New York at least once a quarter. I tend to go around award shows because that's when everyone is typically in town, particularly the Grammys and the VMAs.

What's next in the pipeline?

We've just finished hosting Olivia Culpo for a Belle Femme Salon make-up masterclass with celebrity make-up artist Patrick Ta. I can't reveal too much about our 2016 plans because a number of our deals are still under final contract negotiations, but I can disclose that we are planning something huge for international women's day.

We'll also have a major athlete for our annual award-winning health and fitness weekend. Watch this space... **H**

INTERVIEW: NATASHA FARUQUE
PHOTOGRAPHER: AASIYA JAGADEESH
MAKE-UP: YASI SHOAEI FOR BOURJOIS
HAIR: BELLE FEMME



Sarah on a desert safari with members of the band Kaiser Chiefs (above). Sarah with TV legend Oprah (above left) Sarah showcasing her own A-list glamour (right)