

Business

Kuwait CEOs confident, expect aggressive growth: KPMG survey

CEOs are people-centric and purpose-driven with brand value at the heart of their operations

KUWAIT: The first edition of KPMG 2021 Kuwait CEO Outlook presents thoughts, perspectives, strategies, and concerns from 30+ CEOs in Kuwait. The survey, conducted through August and September this year, provides quantitative and qualitative insights from several market leaders across various sectors in Kuwait.

Overall, our results show that Kuwait's CEOs are starting to feel optimistic and confident, expecting aggressive growth. 96 percent of the CEOs interviewed are confident of their company's growth in the coming 1-3 years, with 88 percent of CEOs stating that they are looking to make acquisitions in the next three years to help grow and transform their businesses. To further drive their organization's growth prospects, about 72 percent of the CEOs are resorting to inorganic measures such as strategic alliances with third parties (16 percent), M&A (32 percent), joint ventures (20 percent), and outsourcing (4 percent).

Speaking about the overall findings from the report, Dr Rasheed Al-Qenae, Managing Partner - KPMG in Kuwait, said, "It's great to see that optimism is finally returning to boardrooms after 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. CEOs are pushing towards growth and want to get back to the pace their organizations were moving 18 months ago. They are people-centric and purpose-driven, with brand value at the heart of their operations."

COVID-19 forced CEOs to think beyond business, and this is reflected in our findings with social issues such as diversity and inclusiveness, climate change, and ESG now part of the boardroom conversation. The Kuwait government's successful vaccination program has boosted the return-to-office for businesses in the country, and our results indicate that nearly 65 percent of the CEOs are ready to bring back their staff to the office."

Key findings

The road to renewal

Despite the continuing uncertainties, our findings reflect the growth expectations and optimism among the CEOs. The research found that 92 percent plan on increasing their headcount over the next three years, with close to 32 percent planning an increase of more than 6 percent.

There is a strong focus on introducing new technologies as 80 percent of CEOs interviewed are prioritizing technology investment when pursuing growth. The research shows that CEOs are also planning what it will take to succeed in the mid-to long term. 52 percent say that they intend to invest in disruption detection and innovation processes, and that this is essential to enable teams to think disruptively. 68 percent of the CEOs said that rather than waiting to be disrupted by competitors, they are actively dis-



Dr Rasheed Al-Qenae

rupting the sector in which they operate.

Changing sentiment

Only 8 percent of the CEOs interviewed intend to reduce their physical footprint or office space. Furthermore, 28 percent of the CEOs said that their organizations would exercise two or more days of remote work flexibility for most of their employees, with 48 percent looking to channel their investment toward a shared workspace. There has also been a noticeable increase in the number of CEOs looking to tap into a wider talent pool, with up to 32 percent looking to hire talent that operates predominantly remotely.

Shifting focus

CEOs are cognizant of the worldwide focus on socio-economic, social, and environmental issues. Our report finds a significant focus on the S in ESG, with 96 percent of the CEOs saying, 'our response to the pandemic has caused our focus to shift toward

- M&A to drive digital innovation and acquisition of technological capabilities; embracing disruption will be critical, say CEOs
- 96% of the CEOs believe that new partnerships will be decisive in continuing the pace of digital transformation
- 76% of CEOs believe that they are personally responsible for driving progress in addressing social issues
- 84% of CEOs say a robust cyber strategy is critical to engender trust with our key stakeholders

the social component of our ESG program.'

Speaking about the ESG agenda, Karen Watts, Risk Partner and Head of Corporate Reporting, KPMG in Kuwait, said, "Over the course of the pandemic, we witnessed an increased focus on sustainability issues and the race to net zero. These issues will require strong collaboration between business and government."

It is good to see that CEOs are looking to devote significant capital to becoming more sustainable, with 72 percent of CEOs planning to invest more than 10 percent of revenues to their efforts to become sustainable. CEOs need to include investment in digital solutions to successfully negotiate sustainability opportunities and



risks and to discover how ESG initiatives can directly drive revenue growth through innovative new products and services."

The findings indicate that 76 percent of the CEOs are seeing a rise in stakeholder demand for greater transparency in ESG-related reports. 80 percent of the CEOs agree that it will be a challenge for businesses to achieve net-zero without government stimulus. Additionally, 72 percent say that COP26 will play a key role in pushing climate change up the list of corporate agendas.

Tax reforms

CEOs are more worried about regulatory and tax risks than they were before the pandemic. The survey

found that 80 percent of the CEOs recognize the vital link between the public's trust in their businesses and their tax approach. 76 percent of the CEOs believe that the pandemic has put pressure on public finances, and there should be an urgency for multilateral cooperation on the global tax system.

As businesses aim to build back better, a majority (60 percent) of the CEOs feel increased pressure to publicly report their tax contributions as part of their broader ESG commitments.

The risks to growth

When looking at risks to growth over three years, CEOs in Kuwait put cyber security as the no. 1 risk and agree that a robust cyber strategy will be critical to foster trust among stakeholders. More than half of the CEOs say they are focused on strengthening governance around operational resilience and enhancing the ability to recover from an incident quickly. ESG and supply chain risk are no.2 and 3 in the list. 68 percent of the CEOs say that their supply chain has been under increased stress during the pandemic. The top 5 risks to growth as selected by the CEOs are listed below.

1. Cyber security risk
2. Environmental/Climate risk
3. Supply chain risk
4. Emerging/Disruptive technology risk
5. Tax and regulatory risk

NBK 'Best Retail Bank in Kuwait, Best Loyalty/ Rewards Program' in ME

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) was recognized by two awards at the 12th "Annual Asian Trailblazer Awards - 2021" namely: Best Retail Banking Services in Kuwait, and Best Loyalty/ Rewards Program in the Middle East.

"Retail Banker International" magazine presents the annual Asian Trailblazer Awards, in cooperation with Middle East Economic Digest "MEED Middle East", a leading provider of news established in 1957, specialized in economic data, and the global data provider "GlobalData" specialized in providing data and research. Its team includes 2,000+ analysts and researchers, 150+ experts in information technology and artificial intelligence, and 50+ consultants with extensive experience in strategic consulting. Moreover, RBI collaborates with the Arena International, a leading global organizer of international conferences.

RBI awards recognize the top global financial institutions in the retail banking sector. The contenders are categorized by their geographical location and grouped into regions: North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia. The jury panel includes a group of consultants and analysts in the retail banking sector, in addition to representatives from world-renowned consulting firms. Retail Banker International Asia Trailblazers Awards recognize and showcase the best in class retail banking and consumer finance companies from across the Asian continent.

This year, NBK has been recognized as the winner of the Best Customer Loyalty/reward Program in the entire Middle East region. NBK Reward program is unique in the region that provides the bank's credit card customers with meaningful and valuable reward points based on their card spends.

This award comes at a time when the whole world is impacted by a health crisis, which is a testament to NBK's excellence in providing top-notch digital services, as well as its commitment to reward its customers with exceptional offers and prizes.

NBK seeks to provide exclusive and distinguished banking services reflecting its leading position in Kuwait and across the region. It is also committed to offer its customers a full-spectrum banking experience that meets their individual needs. NBK's strategy in meeting its customers' needs is focused on constant communication with all segments of society and identifying their needs through various digital channels and advanced analytical methods, based on the latest artificial intelligence (AI) technologies.

It is worth mentioning that NBK Rewards



Program boasts offers and rewards that are all designed to cater to customers' various lifestyles, exceptional campaigns all year round, as well as exclusive offers and prizes that contribute to enrich the banking experience of NBK Credit Card holders.

With returning to normal life, NBK launched a variety of exceptional rewards for its customers, including cashback campaigns, salary acquisition rewards, and other exclusive offers and draws that were well-received and appreciated by customers. From June 2020 to July 2021, NBK continued to offer outstanding banking services and products, making a qualitative leap in digital and modern banking services in the Kuwaiti market, most notably: the launch of several digital payment solutions using smartwatches and mobile phones, launching its new branch at The Avenues, offering exceptional and advanced banking services and solutions, enabling customers to make all their transactions quickly and easily through interactive devices, in addition to providing a mobile branch to serve customers during COVID-19 lockdowns, offering eQMatric Service for getting a queue number digitally, and introducing Bill Splitting through NBK Mobile Banking App. NBK has the largest network of local and international branches with 68+ branches and 338 Automated Teller Machines (ATM), in addition to NBK Rewards Program with 900+ partner outlets.

Gulf Bank keen to provide services to customers with special needs

KUWAIT: As part of its commitment to promoting financial inclusion, and its continuous support for the "Diraya" campaign, Gulf Bank is keen to provide its services to customers with special needs through a number of branches located in all governorates of the country.

Gulf Bank is committed to facilitating banking transactions for customers by providing banking services electronically through the electronic website and application, but it is also keen to prepare its branches to receive customers with special needs, and to provide ATMs that meet their needs. Gulf Bank branches are characterized by their easy access for people using wheelchairs, in addition to their spacious designs that do not hinder the movement of the chair. ATMs are also easy to use by people with special needs, as they have been placed at appropriate heights, and are provided with a Braille keyboard for the visually impaired, and headphones with audio instructions on how to conduct each transaction. These machines are located in special glass rooms to provide privacy for each user.

On this, Assistant General Manager of Consumer Banking - Head of Branch Banking at Gulf Bank at Gulf Bank, Basel Al-Assad, said: "At Gulf Bank, we are always keen on facilitating customers' access to the banking services they need, which is why we have worked to set up branches in all governorates of the country to serve them in an easy and comfortable manner. Our keenness to integrate social sustainability and financial inclusion always pushes us towards providing the best to all of the bank's customers, whether within our branches spread across the country, or through modern digital services."

There are ATMs adapted for the use of people



Basel Al-Assad

with special needs in each of the six governorates, in the bank's branches in: Al-Da'iyah, Bayan, Al-Addan, Al-Ayoun, Hadiya, and Al-Jleeb.

It is worth noting that Gulf Bank is one of the supporters of the "Diraya" campaign, an awareness campaign initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Federation of Kuwait Banks. Through it, the bank highlights the culture of cyber security, and the opportunities available to customers to improve the quality of life. Gulf Bank was recently awarded the Outstanding Awareness and Education Award, by the Central Bank of Kuwait, in recognition of its role in supporting the Diraya campaign.

The Diraya campaign spans several topics, including the borrowing process, bank cards, cybersecurity, security tips, and services for customers with special needs. The campaign also aims to clarify the mechanisms for raising official complaints in an effort to protect customers' rights, and also aims to highlight the banking sector's tasks and roles in stimulating and developing the economy.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Moreover, Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait," working with various parties and stakeholders to achieve it.

• Arnan Edwin Din

The campaign will run through to 24th November 2021, awarding 2 lucky winners each month KD 100 cash. With 'Push Notifications' customers will benefit from the convenience of transaction updates and smooth browsing of saved transaction history. The service is particularly valuable to travellers, who in the absence of a roaming network, can access the service as long as they are connected to a WiFi network. To enable the Push Notifications service on the ABK app, customers should go to 'My Profile', click on 'Notification Settings', and enable Push Notifications to enter the monthly draw and win.

ABK congratulates winners of 'Push Notifications' drive

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the names of the October winners of the 'Push Notifications' campaign 'Want to win KD 100?'. The draw was held on 24th October 2021 under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and the lucky winners were:

• Ahmed Mohamed Sallam