

Jordan

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# BUSINESS

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Go The Distance

## BEYOND TRADITIONAL BUSINESS

Jordanian Entrepreneur

Rasha Oudeh



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their neighbors

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Making sense of the Kingdom's flurry of  
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How Israeli Settlements Stifle  
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# A Female Influence In The Pharmaceutical Industry

**CEDEM AG CEO Ms. Rasha Oudeh** - *“Time has come to change the face of the Middle East within the global pharmaceutical business.”*



diploma in computer programming from a local community college, from which she graduated in 1999.

“In many cases, Arab societies set very strict taboos and prohibitions on various life aspects. These parameters often force the female youth to focus their thoughts on what should be avoided rather than on what should be achieved. It’s like they’re continuously walking on a tight rope,” she adds. However, thanks to her determination, self-motivation and eagerness to learn, Oudeh has managed to transform her “tight rope” into an expanse of endless possibilities.

When computers were newly introduced in Jordan, Oudeh seized the opportunity to work as a part time Microsoft Office instructor to new trainees. Her financial earnings and experience helped build her self-confidence and a resume full of internationally relevant positions. Oudeh became well equipped to make her mark in the professional world. “I became determined to adopt the lifestyle of highly successful professionals. I decided to take a “can-do” approach to life.” Ready to take charge of her own future success, she just needed to envision the direction of her professional journey.

“During a casual dinner in January 2007, an Iraqi businessman in the local pharmaceutical industry offered me an employment opportunity at his company. Although I had no experience or background knowledge in the field, he encouraged me by stating that as a quick learner, I can excel at working in any field I choose. It took Oudeh no time to build a very professional self-image, which became key in helping her expand her global reach. “Germany and Switzerland were the first countries I chose to explore professionally. There is an absolute preference for these countries’ pharmaceutical products in the Middle East, North Africa, CIS countries, and other emerging markets.”

## The Sole Expat Jordanian Businesswoman in Germany and Switzerland

In the city of Saarbrücken, which is located in South West Germany, near Switzerland, France and Luxembourg, Oudeh found a German partner with whom she started a company called **MED-PRODUCTS GmbH**. The geographic location of Saarbrücken

Ms. Rasha Oudeh’s journey to success has proven that influence in doing business lies not only in the wallet, but in the mastering of business competencies.

## Building Bridges between The East And The West In The Pharmaceutical Business

Every little girl dreams of growing up into a star, while every woman dreams of her childhood days. At 35 I am still a child who does not dream of growing, but keeps working on growing. The image of a little girl who could not draw her dreams because her family could not

afford the luxury of oil colors or even coloring pencils, shall twinkle before my eyes forever. How could a child draw her colorful dreams without having a chance to own a coloring book and a coloring pack?

All over the world, women are shattering glass ceilings and proving that they have the power to be successful business leaders. While the battle for gender equality in the West has been effective in recent years, it is not easy for women to start up their own business. This issue, in particular, gets under the skin of those who live in the Middle East, where entrepreneurship is still considered a man’s territory exclusively. However, these prejudices are likely to change when

a woman is strong enough to show the world that she is as good as or even better than a man at running her own business.

**Rasha Oudeh**, the Jordanian entrepreneur whose pharmaceutical company has already achieved considerable success in Switzerland and Germany is quite familiar with this rule. This influential, charismatic and business-savvy lady has proven that despite gender stereotypes and societal discrimination, dedication and strength will unequivocally help her pave the way to personal and professional success. “In the East, I have learned that man is put on earth to do what a man has to do. In Europe, I have learned that a woman is put on earth to do all what a man cannot do.”

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Despite being a highly active entrepreneur and one who’s ready to build professional and cultural bridges between the East and West, Oudeh did not expect to achieve this level of success. “Like many girls I knew, I couldn’t leverage any external opportunities to my own advantage. I was surrounded by an environment that did not provide me with sufficient

academic and professional advancement opportunities, and somehow contributed to the reinforcement of existing gender stereotypes. This posed a huge hindrance to my personal and professional goals.” Oudeh was not presented with an opportunity to study abroad or even pursue studies at a Jordanian university. Her only option was to receive a two-year



gave Oudeh prompt access to all major business hubs that are relevant to their business. “My familiarity with the banking world inflated my ambitions. I acted as a broker in order to buy generic medicinal products from Europe and distribute them in Middle Eastern markets.”

Later, Oudeh grew more familiar with the concept of private label and medicine ownership licenses in Europe and decided to apply it in the Middle East. In 2012 in Switzerland, she launched MERA PHARMA that has succeeded in targeting Arabian markets with the Swiss brand labeling business model. In 2014, the financial worth of Ms. Oudeh’s businesses reached more than \$17 million and in 2015, she sold her equity in MED & MERA to a leading distribution company in the Middle East. “In the East, I have learned to draw my dreams on the scale of my financial income. In Europe, I have learned how to draw my income on the scale of my dreams.”

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#### CEDEM AG - Dream Turned into Reality

Doing business in Europe allowed Oudeh to discover means to bridge the gap that separates small and medium size European companies (SMEs) from Arabian pharmaceutical distributors, and she eventually learned how to tackle the regulatory differences and problems of drug and food supplements registration. She found out that her opportunity lies hidden in bridging the gap – both in cultural and professional terms. In 2015, Oudeh bought **CEDEM AG in Zurich**, a Swiss company established in 1991 that specializes in manufacturing and distributing healthcare products. Under her professional watch, the company aimed to become the leading **private label** service supplier to the Middle East,

and the first choice for Arab wholesale and retail chains that seek to manufacture products under their own brand labels.

After 9 years of experience in this field, Oudeh decided to launch a new start to her professional life, based on accumulated knowledge from the East

and West. She is working with Arab retail chains, distributors and producers to collaborate with them on the creation of their own private label brands by using their reputable names. As the legal, logistic, and manufacturing hindrances that retailers and wholesalers are facing when attempting to create a private label

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with their own brand name are huge, she took it upon herself to facilitate this process for them by avoiding all possible mistakes. It is worth mentioning that private labels in Arabian markets comprise only 1% of the total local sales volume - compared to 16.5% globally and 30% in Europe.

The two questions Oudeh asks herself when she evaluates the feasibility of any plan is “who will help me?” and “who could stop me?” Between Zurich, Frankfurt and Amman, I discovered that I could achieve my ambitions to the fullest extent possible.”

In Amman, she has an office comprising 15 employees, most of whom are females. “Being aware of my social responsibilities, I believe that my contribution to Jordan is very essential on both personal and professional levels. I have to transfer the innovative skills, expertise, technologies and methods of manufacturing that I have learned in Europe to my home country. It is well known that the pharmaceutical business is heavily regulated by health authorities in most countries and requires a real understanding of international business..”

Her leadership qualities leave no doubt that she will eventually fulfil all her professional goals. “In both Germany and Switzerland, Oudeh learned to arm herself with her strengths, and also learned to use her weaknesses to her advantage. “

It takes a lot of dedication and persistence to be successful in the business world. This can be especially true for a young woman who might have to overcome certain barriers and biases that others are not faced with. Oudeh may still be at the beginning of her long journey to success, but she has already accomplished a lot. Through willpower, motivation, determination and ambition she is set to make history. **JB**



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