

Sweet Sounds of Success

UNIVERSALLY ADMIRERD AND RESPECTED,VIRGIN MEGASTORES IS A BRAND THAT REFUSES TO REST ON ITS LAURELS,AS IT CONTINUES TO INNOVATE AND EXCITE. NISREEN SHOCAIR, PRESIDENT OF VIRGIN MEGASTORE MENA,TALKS TO RLI ABOUT THE COMPANY'S GROWTH THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST AND ITS BELIEF IN THE NEXT GREAT IDEA!

A beloved brand across the globe, Virgin Megastore is the leading entertainment lifestyle retailer in the MENA region. With over 40 stores in nine markets in the Middle East and North Africa, the company set an unbounded target of expanding its regional presence and offering since the first store opening in the UAE back in 2001.

A one-stop shop for all your entertainment needs, its Megastores offer a wide range of lifestyle products across fashion, culture, technology, entertainment, beauty and related services.

Virgin Megastore MENA is part of the

Azadea Group, one of the top five retail groups in the region, operating over 600 stores in 13 markets, 53 brands across Fashion, F&B and Sports.

With its unique shopping experience and an omni-channel presence spanning physical stores, online store, as well as a variety of supporting channels and services, Virgin Megastore has created a new dimension in entertainment retail, catering to the region's cultures through events, activities and support of local artists in each market it enters.

Virgin Megastore MENA currently directly operates 30 stores and another ten through franchise in nine countries across the Middle

East and North Africa, including the UAE, KSA, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco.

"The turnaround of Virgin Megastore from a physical entertainment store into a lifestyle entertainment omni-channel shopping experience was built around constant innovation and staying ahead of trends within retail and technology," says Nisreen Shocair, President of Virgin Megastore MENA. "This past year has been about taking the concept to a whole new level by introducing fashion, beauty and footwear, as well as the introducing Virgin House, which is built around fun trends in food."

The company has opened ten new stores and launched in four new cities, and has also launched its first true omni-channel site, which reflects the style and image of the new Virgin Megastores, virginmegastore.ae.

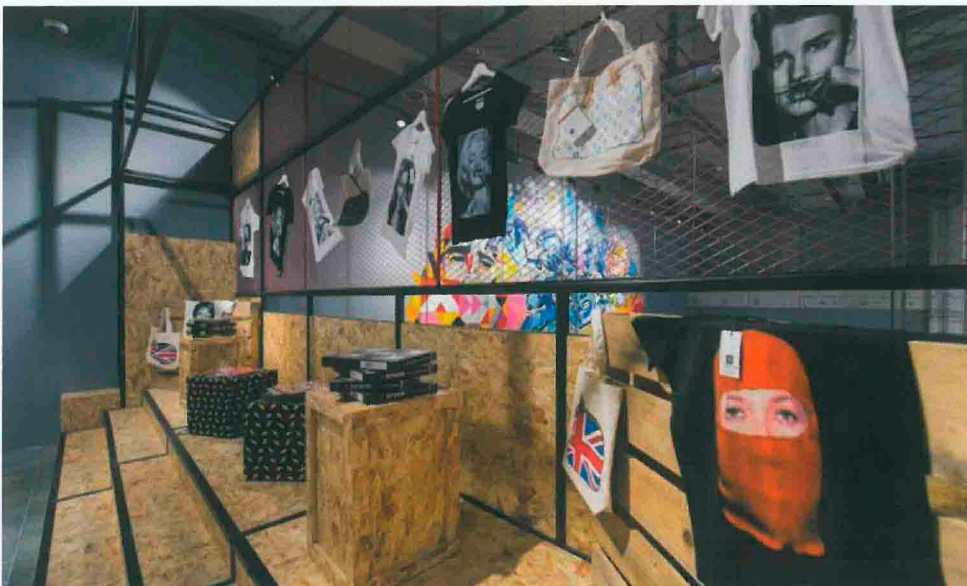
Its most recent openings include stores in Dubai, with Emaar's Arabian Ranches, and Marina Mall in Egypt with Al Futtain's Cairo Festival City; Al Ain, with Aldar's Jimmi Mall; Sharjah with Sahara City Center and Oman, with MAF's City Center.

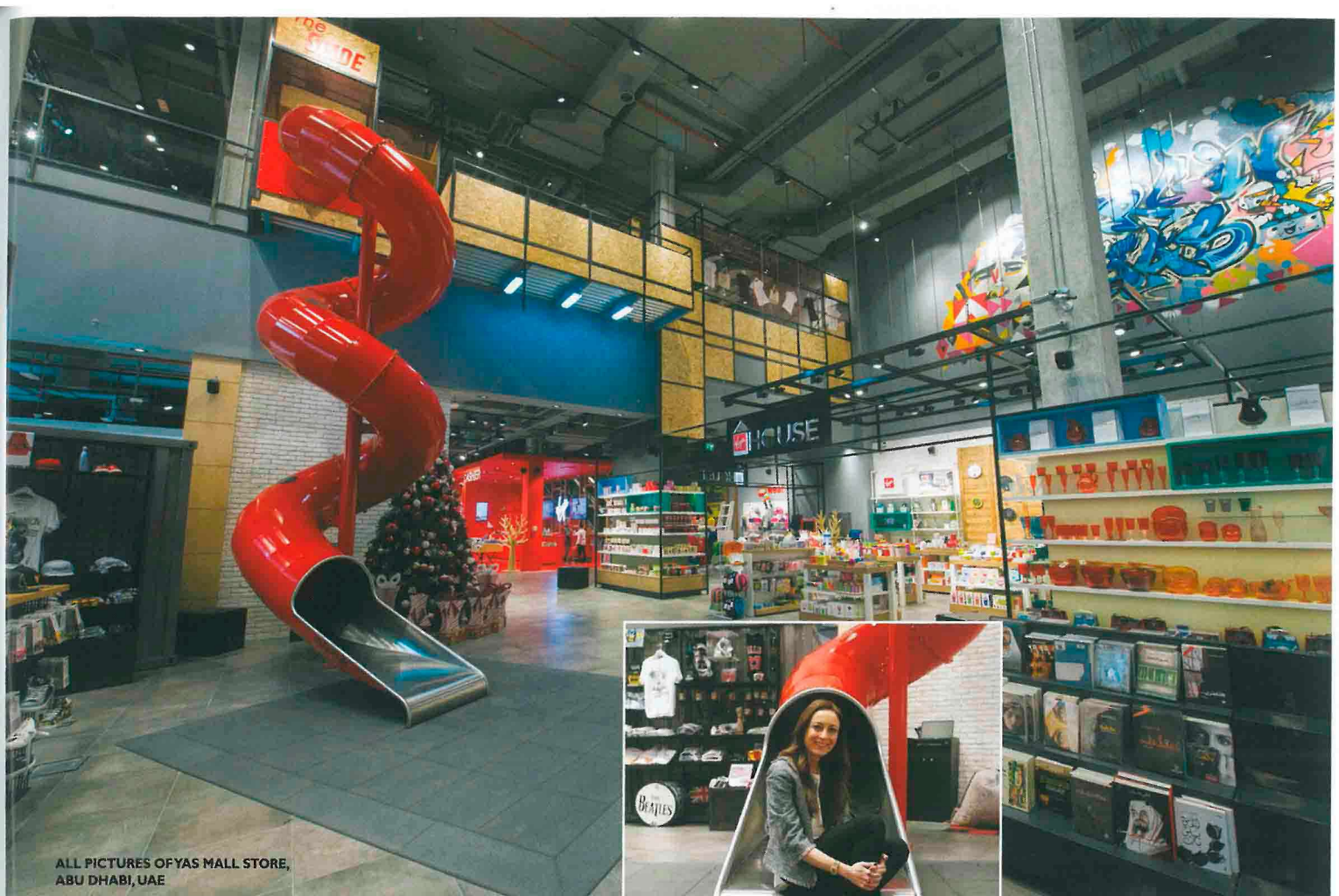
"We have five more store openings planned for this year across the region," says Shocair. "We are targeting five stores a year across the region with different positioning depending on the project."

These range from fully-fledged flagship stores to more edited design and community stores.

"We have received a lot of inquiries and interest from mall developers after the launch of our concept store in Yas Mall last year and winning the RLI awards! The markets best suited for the brand are those with an affinity to technology, entertainment and fashion with a healthy industry built around events," she adds.

Over 60 per cent of the MENA population are





ALL PICTURES OF YAS MALL STORE, ABU DHABI, UAE

under the age of 24; they have a very strong affinity to trends and technology, are active on social media and want to be close to culture and worldwide trends.

"We deliver all of that in the form of edited collections by market across Fashion, Art, Technology and Entertainment. We've also held on to the essence of the brand and its heritage by ensuring the stores, experience and products always relate back to entertainment and youth."

The Virgin Megastore team offers an experience that is unparalleled in the market through product knowledge and incredible ability to make customers feel happy and welcome, whilst its products offer endless delight and surprise, she says.

Its stores are beautiful, happy, productive, well designed and well positioned in the top malls across MENA, and the Virgin Megastore culture is built around innovation, communication and curiosity to learn.

"In our region and for our brand, we see a lot of room for growth and there has been incredible interest in the brand since it has become a lifestyle brand that sits right next to Sephora, H&M and Zara, rather than being viewed as an electronics retailer," explains Shocair. "However, growth will look different and will require us to be more flexible, with the ability to curate and adapt to different customers and projects."

Indeed, the brand's success has been due in small measure to its culture of innovation and building Virgin Megastore as a platform that evolves and personalises depending on time and place. The team is focused on keeping the brand tied to entertainment and targeted products and services that fit the profile of its customer. "We became a platform for up-and-coming artists, designers and innovators," she says. "This has allowed us to experiment with many different store formats, and to appeal to many markets; we are all passionate about the Virgin and the Virgin Megastore brands, and this affinity is shared by our customers and employees."

The challenge now, she smiles, lies in prioritising which great idea the team should work on next! "I like to keep the team excited by challenging them and raising the bar as we go along. I also believe businesses selling the same products but running after valuations rather than value remain the most challenging, that's why it's important to continuously invest in a good team and an exceptional experience."

