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Racing for convenience

by ArabianBusiness.com staff writer on Wednesday, 20 August 2008

The accelerated roll out of small stores has turned up the heat in the battle for fast cash. *RNME* investigates the future strategies.



WHYTE: In contrast to the UK where there are newsagents on every corner, there are a dearth of c-stores in the UAE.

The growth of the Middle East's convenience store channel in recent years has been vastly overshadowed by hypermarket and supermarket choices, typically ensconced in the larger cities. However, RAK Holding's pronouncement of its plans last month catapulted speedy business opportunities into the limelight.

His Highness Sheikh Tariq Al Qassimi, chairman and head of the group, says it push to revive the small grocer market will involve opening up to 500 stores by next year, driven hugely by franchising, "in some cases creating partnerships with existing grocery stores that may be in need of financial assistance."

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The man behind the Ras Al Khaimah-based behemoth says its Near Buy chain will focus on establishing shops within 500m of almost every home within the UAE, with an estimated 2000 stores required to reach into every neighbourhood in the country. The company's website will provide a facility for ordering from home, whilst a toll-free hotline and SMS service for shopping and deliveries.

“Up to 20% of the marketplace [convenience stores] is operating at a standard well below acceptability.”

Margaret Whyte, retail manager for Dubai-based National Trading & Developing Est. (NTDE) has witnessed the phenomenal success

From **Retail News**

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of its News Centre concept, fuelling its ambition to secure locations across the emirates' major developments, including the Dubai Mall, Mall of Arabia, Jumeirah Beach Residence and Qamaradeen in Dubai, Safer Mall in Ras Al Khaimah and Bawadi Mall in Al Ain.

The chain was first launched at Deira City Centre in September 2003, designed as mini supermarkets for people on the move.

"We noticed this big gap in the market. In the UK, there are newsagents on every corner yet there are none here. News Centre started out in 2003 as an alternative for shoppers to go to instead of hypermarkets to buy their newspaper, a bar or chocolate or a newspaper.

When you go to supermarkets, even if you have 10 or less you still have to queue up," she explains.

"We are located at Deira City Centre close to the taxi queues. People who come to us don't have time to wait in big queues to buy one item, they're on the move."

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