

Redesigning a Community

How I used design thinking to transform a Dubai business network from the inside out. New identity. New model. New momentum.

WHY I CHOSE TO SHARE THIS STORY

I chose this story because it shows a different side of what I do. This was not about ads or revenue. It was about spending time on the ground with founders and members in Dubai, understanding how they actually behave, and using those insights to fundamentally redesign a business. The product here was experiential. I rewrote the brand mechanics, restructured the business model, and set the brand on a long-term vision. This is the kind of deep, human, design-led strategic work that I find most rewarding.

Deep

Brand Redesign

Design

Thinking Led

Dubai

Market Immersion

Long-term

Vision Built

Strategy is not just about numbers.

Sometimes it is about redesigning what a business fundamentally is.

MY APPROACH

How I Approached This

When a business has plateaued, the answer is rarely more marketing. It is usually a deeper question about what the business actually is and whether the model matches the value people receive.

1

Immersed Before Analysing

I spent time on the ground: attending events, talking to members, sitting with the founders. I wanted to understand the business the way its users experienced it, not the way a spreadsheet described it.

2

Found the Identity Gap

The business was positioned as one thing but valued by its members for something entirely different. That disconnect was the root of every other problem.

3

Redesigned From the Inside Out

Used the member insights to rewrite the brand identity, restructure the membership model, and redesign the event experience. Every change flowed from what members actually wanted.

4

Cut What Was Not Working

Consolidated marketing spend that was spread too thin across too many agencies. Redirected resources toward activities with clear, measurable outcomes.

5

Built Retention Into the Model

Created programs and touchpoints that kept members engaged between events. The goal was a community that stayed active, not one that only showed up quarterly.

6

Set the Long-Term Vision

The tactical changes mattered, but the real deliverable was a new strategic direction the founders could sustain and build on over years.

01 The Starting Point

A business network in Dubai had been operating as an online directory for several years. Businesses could list themselves and be discovered by potential partners and collaborators. The founders had built a real community of members, ran events, and maintained a platform that served as the hub.

The model had potential. But when I came on board and spent time understanding the business from the inside, a few things became clear.

Growth had slowed. New members were coming primarily through internal promotions to existing members, with limited outreach pulling people in from the outside. The website had traffic, but the cost of acquiring that traffic was high relative to the conversions it generated. Marketing spend was spread across multiple agencies handling different pieces, but the overall return was not where it needed to be.

The founders were careful and thoughtful operators. But the business had reached a point where continuing to do more of the same was not going to unlock the next stage. Something more fundamental needed to change.

02 The Design Process

I spent significant time on the ground. Not just looking at dashboards and reports, but sitting with the founders, attending events, talking to members, observing how people actually interacted with the brand. I wanted to understand the business the way its users experienced it, not the way a spreadsheet described it.

What I found was a gap between what the business was positioned as and what its members actually valued most. The platform was built around listings and discovery. But the members I spoke to kept coming back for something else: the events, the connections, the sense of belonging. The community was the real product.

This insight became the foundation for everything we redesigned.

WHAT WE REDESIGNED

BRAND IDENTITY

Repositioned from a directory to an entrepreneur community. Listings remained functional, but the brand story shifted to connection, growth, and belonging.

MEMBERSHIP MODEL

Restructured tiers and pricing. Introduced a premium level offering deeper access and higher value.

COST STRUCTURE

Consolidated marketing spend toward activities with clearer, more measurable impact.

EVENT EXPERIENCE

Increased frequency and redesigned formats to be genuinely engaging, not just transactional networking.

RETENTION PROGRAMS

Introduced systems to keep members engaged between events with ongoing reasons to stay connected.

DIGITAL STRATEGY

Unified the online presence. Every dirham of digital spend tied to member acquisition or retention.

03 What Happened

The redesign worked. The community started growing again. Members were more engaged. Events had better attendance and energy. The financial model improved as we cut spending that was not delivering and built revenue lines aligned with what members actually valued.

The founder shared afterward that the process changed how they thought about their own business. Not just the specific changes, but the approach: starting from how members actually experience the brand rather than how the business wants to describe itself.

The engagement eventually came to a natural close. Looking back, the most important lesson from this project is about strategic patience. The redesign set the brand on a genuinely better path. But transformation requires ongoing commitment to the new direction, consistent execution over time, and the discipline to stay the course even when it feels uncomfortable.

04 What This Shows

That sitting with real people and observing real behaviour reveals things no dashboard ever will.

That when a business is stuck, the answer is usually not more features or more spend. It is a clearer understanding of what people actually value, and the discipline to align everything around that.

That design thinking applied to business strategy produces fundamentally different outcomes than starting from a spreadsheet.

That strategic clarity needs to be sustained, not just introduced. The best strategy work changes how founders think, not just what they do.

Strategy is not just about numbers.

Sometimes it is about redesigning what a business fundamentally is.

Want to talk strategy?

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