

We met with Dr. Ahmed Al-Kabbany to talk to us about his startup, VRapeutic, the first virtual reality software for therapeutic purposes in Egypt.

**Q) First can you please introduce yourself.**

A) I am Ahmad Al-Kabbany, an impassioned researcher with 10 years of experience in engineering research. I got my Ph.D. in electrical and computer engineering from the University of Ottawa in July 2016. I co-founded VRapeutic a few months later, and currently, I serve as its CEO.

**Q) Can you briefly describe the services you provide at VRapeutic.**

A) We develop virtual reality software for therapeutic purposes, with a focus on learning disabilities and developmental disorders. Particularly, we design virtual environments specially tailored to instill essential life skills in children including social and cognitive skills.

**Q) Can you tell us when and how did you start VRapeutic, and with whom?**

A) We started VRapeutic in 2017, 3 months after I earned my Ph.D. degree. My research during the Ph.D. focused on enhancing the user visual experience in virtual environments. Hence, I wanted to apply this expertise in something with large-scale social impact. It was the Eureka! Moment when I came across the healthcare applications of virtual reality. We could have worked on other sub-field within healthcare, but the rising numbers of children diagnosed with autism and learning difficulties, in my extended family and the community at large, inspired me to dedicate VRapeutic for this message.

**Q) How did you raise funds to start up?**

A) Mainly, in addition to my personal savings, I had to secure another job so that I can keep the lights on with the monthly salary from that job. Afterwards, particularly after starting to generate revenues, we joined Flat6Labs, THE leading accelerator in MENA, who has represented a significant milestone in our journey. After graduating from Flat6Labs, we have been nominated for another grant based on our social impact. As you know, fund raising is a journey, and we have enjoyed it so far.

**Q) Can you briefly describe in what way Acumen Consulting supported VRapeutic.**

A) I was privileged to get connected with Inji Amr of Acumen when VRapeutic joined Flat6Labs in March 2019. Since then, Acumen has provided a huge amount of support in terms of mentoring, networking, and business development for VRapeutic. Acumen has been creating opportunities for us, help us get over many challenges, and further develop our vision.

**Q) What do you expect of VRapeutic one year from now?**

- To be serving 200 centers in 3 countries in MENA and GCC.
- To have started piloting in two therapy centers in Canada
- To have provided the first tool for VR-based initial screening for dyslexia online, to serve children in disadvantaged areas
- To have published 2 publications in renowned scientific conferences highlighting the validation results of our products.
- To have completed the registration of the first 2 patents of VRapeutic.

**Q) What does it take to be a successful entrepreneur?**

Informed risk-taking, passion that drives mastery, conscious empathy that drives purpose, continuous development, sustained innovation, and resourcefulness.

**Q) What advice do you give for those who want to become entrepreneurs?**

- Minimize your expectations.
- Maximize your grit.
- Don't stop learning, and throw yourself in new challenges on purpose.
- Fall in love with the market need, not with the idea. You can create that need as well.
- Your story is not mine, so don't rely completely on advices and mentoring. You are the one who knows the most about your business.
- Clichés aren't a shame, so yes, I have to re-mention it: Ever failed. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.
- "As big as your dream, the earth will be"; said Mahmoud Darwish, the renowned Palestinian poet.

**Q) What do you think of the startup ecosystem in Egypt and how to improve it?**

One of the fastest growing ecosystems in the region, with a lot of potential, indeed.

We still hope for better conditions, though; better infra-structure, less talent migration, less bureaucracy, less taxes (at least in the first 3 years), more support for high-tech and research-based startups, more Flat6Labs-like accelerators, more Start Egypt-like incubators, and more Acumen-like mentors.

**Q) Do you have any comments you would like to add?**

I would like to thank Acumen for this opportunity, the opportunity to reflect, articulate, and share our experience. This is not new. As I said, Acumen has always been creating opportunities for us. And we are always grateful for this. We are just one example of the impact Acumen has been making in the startups and SMEs ecosystem in Egypt.