

Middle East and North Africa Research Resources

"The countries that make up the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have a combined population of over 300 million, and form an area of great economic opportunity for countries wishing to conduct business overseas."



Part of the FUMSI Regional Research Series

Contents

3	Author Profile
4	Introduction
6	Chapter I: Overview of Issues of Interest Get an overview of key issues of relevance for research on and about the Middle East and North Africa; identify challenges and opportunities for research, plus macro-level strategies for finding official information.
12	Chapter II: Company Information Many vendors offer information on companies in the region, some as part of global offerings and others as niche products.
15	Chapter III: Country and Industry Analysis The political and macroeconomic environments in the Middle East and North Africa are an important factor in any research effort; government, journalist and other resources can provide valuable insight.
19	Chapter IV: News Sources From traditional media to emerging blogs, researchers can find a wide range of news sources.
23	Chapter V: Consumer Markets and Industries This region represents active growth in many consumer markets and industries; vendors provide access to different types of information to aid business strategy and planning.
26	Appendices:
26	Appendix 1: Index to URLs cited in this report
33	Appendix 2: Index to products cited in this report
36	Appendix 3: Collecting company information the D&B way
36	Appendix 4: Individual source coverage on Factiva and LexisNexis compared
36	Appendix 5: Index to free sources
36	Appendix 6: Additional resources of interest
36	Appendix 7: Product review excerpts

Author Profile



Patrice Curtis is the founder of Curtis Research Group, which provides market intelligence to small- and mid-size businesses, global corporations, and national non-profits. The firm supports public relations, sales, marketing, and product development efforts by supplying specific information that organizations need in order to grow.

Ms. Curtis lectures at the San Francisco Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center and is frequently invited to speak at events on social media, new media, and other topics.

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Significant portions of this report were researched and authored by Pam Foster, editor of VIP magazine, for Issue No. 43, June 2007, which focused on the Middle East and Africa.

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Introduction

By Patrice K. Curtis



The countries that make up the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have a combined population of over 300 million, and form an area of great economic opportunity for countries wishing to conduct business overseas. Organizations do not share a single definition of MENA; this table shows, however, countries typically included:

Algeria (N. Africa)	Jordan	Oman
Bahrain	Kuwait	Qatar
Egypt (N. Africa)	Lebanon	Saudi Arabia
Iran	Libya (N. Africa)	Syria
Iraq	Mauritania (N. Africa)	Tunisia (N. Africa)
Israel	Morocco (N. Africa)	Turkey
		Yemen
United Arab Emirates (UAE - a federation of emirates comprised of Abu Dhabi, the capital; Dubai, the free-trade hub; Sharjah; Ajman; Fujayrah; Umm al-Qawayn; and Ras al-Khaymah)		

“Together, the regions of the Middle East and North Africa offer great diversity and it's important that anyone planning to do business acquaints him or herself with local customs and practices.”

“... world-class free trade zones in Dubai and Morocco provide major incentives for foreign companies to base operations in-country.”

“Physical security is another concern, as are the volatility and lack of sophistication in certain capital markets.”

Together, the regions of the Middle East and North Africa offer great diversity and it's important that anyone planning to do business acquaints him or herself with local customs and practices. The region has a very strong culture of enjoying negotiations in all commerce; refined skills in this area are highly desirable.

Islam permeates all levels of society in the MENA region; Muslims may belong to Sunni, Shi'a (or Shiite), Sufi, or one of several other branches of Islam, and the differences between them are significant. Yet the expression of Islamic values, differs from country to country; in Saudi Arabia, for example, women are not allowed to drive, while some resorts in Morocco allow unveiled women and liquor bars.

Foreign companies and banks wishing to do business in the Middle East have traditionally been required by law to operate in a joint venture with a local partner. However, the rules in some countries are starting to be relaxed; for example, world-class free trade zones in Dubai and Morocco provide major incentives for foreign companies to base operations in-country.

There's a belief that company information, in particular, can be difficult to obtain for some MENA countries (as is true for many other countries). A lack of transparency and poor regulatory standards deter many companies and financial institutions from investing in both Africa and the Middle East. For example, Transparency International <http://www.transparency.org> found in 2006 that bribery for access to services is most common in Africa, and that globally the sectors and institutions most affected by corruption (the report did not include the Middle East) were political parties, followed by legislatures/parliaments, and business/private sector. This, along with unfamiliarity with business customs provides at times great challenges in navigating government requirements, but programmes of economic and legislative reform are under way. Physical security is another concern, as are the volatility and lack of sophistication in certain capital markets.

Introduction

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Because of many shared cultural traits, company information workers must include country-specific data in their research, considering each on their own merit. The Heritage Foundation's 2007 Index of Economic Freedom <http://www.heritage.org/index/> illustrates this through its annual ranking:

Country	Ranking	Country	Ranking
Israel	37	Saudi Arabia	85
Bahrain	39	Morocco	96
Jordan	53	Yemen	122
Oman	54	Mauritania	126
Kuwait	57	Egypt	127
Tunisia	69	Algeria	134
Qatar	72	Syria	142
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	74	Iran	150
Lebanon	77	Libya	155
Turkey	83		

* Iraq was not ranked.

An explanation and detailed information for each country can be found through specific country links <http://www.heritage.org/index/countries.cfm>.

The Middle East and North Africa offer many opportunities for companies and this overview considers some of the major products that are currently available for obtaining news, company data, economic and political risk data, and market research and industry data. Chapter I sets out important regional issues to provide context. Chapter II identifies products and services provided by international and local publishers and producers, followed by Chapter III's sources for country and industry analyses. Chapter IV lists news sources. Finally, Chapter V lists sources for information on consumer markets and industries. The report concludes with seven appendices, which index URLs and products; feature D&B's collection methodology; provide a comparison of products; and add resources of interest not mentioned elsewhere.

Use this report

Information Practitioners:

- Extract URLs for saving and further exploration
- Update RSS reader with RSS feeds
- Add podcast feeds to podcatcher
- Add annotations for more customised information
- Post queries on Middle East/Africa resources and research challenges faced to the FreePint Bar (<http://www.freepint.com/bar/>).

Information Centres:

- Post URLs from this report to intranet or internal library of resources
- Add annotations for more customised information
- Query employees for additional annotations based on expertise
- Multisite licensors: Post report to company intranet or internal library
- Multisite licensors: Distribute report to relevant employees.

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Edited and with original material by Patrice Curtis, this report also draws on research conducted by VIP Editor Pam Foster for a special issue of VIP Magazine (<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>) featuring products covering the region. The Middle East and North Africa Research Resources report is a comprehensive introduction to online sources providing valuable information on various elements of the region's economy, population and government.

View a sample from this report, including table of contents, introduction and one tool kit activity:

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