

Inside Media City Qatar's Global Media Ambition

Purminder Gandhu in conversation with Hamad Omar Al Mannai (Media City Qatar) and Saleha Williams (IAMT)

IAMT Studio Visual Podcast Series

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Welcome to the IAMT Visual Podcast. I'm delighted to have the CEO of Media City Qatar with me today, Hamad Omar Al Mannai. Welcome.

Thank you. It's a pleasure to join you on this podcast, with Saleha, of course, and I look forward to sharing more information about Media City Qatar.

We're looking forward to hearing it, and obviously our CEO, Saleha Williams, is also here with us, and this is representative of the relationship between IAMT and Media City. How has that relationship evolved, building a global media hub in a country like Qatar? It's new, it's exciting. What's the ambition?

Media City Qatar was established as a special economic zone and global media hub. Our mission is to contribute to Qatar National Vision 2030 by accelerating economic diversification and developing a knowledge-based economy. Our goal is to advance Qatar's position as a leading destination for media, technology and the creative industries. Our mission has three pillars. First, to develop the media sector by creating the conditions for companies, talent and ideas to thrive. Second, to license and regulate media activities, creating a streamlined and business-friendly environment. Third, to invest in and support the future of the sector and support industry growth. We have four focus areas. One, screen, broadcast and music. Two, technology, digital and social. Three, gaming and interactive. And four, agency and support services. We have achieved 450% growth over the past two years. We have attracted more than 550 licensed companies, including established international companies, emerging businesses and startups. Nearly 70% of these companies are from outside the region. We have created more than eight partnerships to further develop the ecosystem, connecting infrastructure, talent pipeline, capabilities and opportunities. We have facilitated more than 45 international opportunities to connect with partners, audiences and global markets. We have also supported more than 30 projects and initiatives, including film and TV production, gaming and interactive projects, and other creative ventures. We are very excited to build on this momentum in the coming years.

So a real breadth of media technology opportunities there, hence the membership of IAMT. How have you worked together to explore how you can support Media City Qatar with their ambition?

First of all, it is an honour to be working with Media City Qatar. We've been working together for just about a year. We started at the beginning of 2026, and we have the same vision. Media City Qatar's mission is to become a world-class creative and collaboration hub, based in Qatar, for the region. And so, of course, being part of the IAMT ecosystem, we have that same vision in terms of amplifying real innovators and thought leaders, and the help that they are giving to their own licensed companies: the smaller companies, the startups, the more

established companies in the region. So for us, this has been a fantastic partnership of real thought leadership, of how Media City Qatar have really delivered on their promise, their vision, to drive creativity, innovation, business and content across a whole range of platforms. So it's been an incredibly exciting and very dynamic time.

During IBC 2026, you announced new special packages on SLS satellite services. That's a bit of a mouthful, isn't it? Tell us more about that.

Yeah. A few months ago, we signed an MOU with Eutelsat, and the offering we announced is the first product of that partnership. Companies licensed under Media City Qatar can benefit from exclusive, special packages across Eutelsat's portfolio of satellite services and solutions. This will enable them to leverage world-class satellite infrastructure, optimise operational cost and unlock new opportunities across the region and beyond. As I mentioned, we are building and connecting an ecosystem for our licensed companies, and our partnership with Eutelsat is a good example of how we are turning this connection into practical value.

Saleha, there are a lot of similarities with IAMT's ambition, particularly around the talent pipeline. And it's really reassuring to hear that new territories such as Media City Qatar are also considering this a vital thing. What solutions are you working on in a collegiate way to move that forward?

We spent significant time last year in Doha, in Qatar, meeting with a number of the licensed companies as well as the leadership team at Media City Qatar. And it was wonderful to meet and see a lot of the younger talent as well as the licensed companies, many of whom have been very instrumental in providing thought leadership and content into IAMT. So, for example, one of your licensed companies I was talking with asked me to do one of their podcast sessions, and their setup was so good, and the lighting was superb. And I said to one of the young ladies there, "This is really stunning, what you've set up here." And she said, "Yeah, I did my degree in film and understanding lighting for film, and of course I'm now bringing this into a digital podcast environment." It's one of the best-lit podcast studios I've ever been in, and it's —

It's all about the good lighting.

Exactly. And it was a spin-up studio. It wasn't a permanent one.

Right.

So even the younger talent helped advise the IAMT team on lighting for our own studio here, as well as being able to share knowledge, thought leadership, industry insights and the international perspective with those licensed companies, both their leadership teams and the younger talent. So it was a real pleasure to be able to have those conversations and have the executive-level stuff, but also see just how many young people are coming into the region and being supported by Media City Qatar.

It's such a rapid evolution of media technology and content. You have to consider audience behaviour and serving audiences globally. You can't just be focused on your local audiences any more. What kind of trends have you seen that are shaping the way Media City Qatar is going to approach this, and why is international collaboration so important in navigating that?

We are seeing a significant shift across the media landscape, and our focus areas reflect many of these changes. These include the convergence of media, technology and the creative industries. We are also seeing growing demand for personalised and on-demand experiences. Gaming, immersive formats and interactive content have also become more popular, and that plays a bigger role than ever in how content is developed, distributed and personalised for audiences. These are global changes, which make international collaboration and knowledge exchange increasingly important. This is why we continue to engage closely with the international community, like here at IBC and through a network like IAMT.

Are you hoping to move into R&D, research and development, and innovation? Is that part of the remit of Media City Qatar?

Innovation is part of our plan, actually. We are planning to have an innovation lab in Media City, and we are working to bring this project to life.

And are there any particular areas in that innovation space that you're going to be specifically targeting?

That will be specifically for media tech.

Right.

Okay? And let's say one of our licensed companies, or one of our partners, has a solution that we can customise for them. We would do that through our R&D or our innovation lab.

So, Media City Qatar's international representation, IAMT's global membership. Let's talk about how that relationship is enabling somebody like Media City Qatar to see how the future could shape up for them.

IAMT is all about the leaders and innovators across our industry on a global, international scale. And so, working in partnership with Media City Qatar, we have been able to amplify the great work that Media City Qatar is doing, both in the region and to international audiences. That's through editorial in the IAMT Journal, the podcast studio, and all of the visibility across the marketplace page. Media City Qatar's IAMT marketplace page is actually one of the best on the IAMT digital hub, and they are fantastic at providing news, updates, products, people and talent. So all of that is being amplified into the wider ecosystem, to help highlight what Media City Qatar are doing to bring international companies into the region, but also to amplify regional companies to the international audience. That reach has been over a million-plus worldwide. Media City Qatar have been represented in hundreds of meetings we've had all around the world with our members and with our global alliance. And the digital stats across the website and the social channels are just off the chart, because, again, it's about vision, it's about innovation, and really showing what global leadership there is within Media City Qatar, as well as the creativity and innovation hub.

So in terms of attracting those international companies into Media City Qatar, what are some of the things that you highlight to encourage them to come and be part?

An important part of our mission is to develop and support the future of the media landscape in Qatar. Doing that effectively requires us to stay connected with the wider global industry, learn from developments in other markets and create opportunities to exchange. Our

partnership with IAMT has supported us with this, providing us with a platform for knowledge exchange, dialogue and network building with media and technology leaders from different markets. Relationships like this are important for developing the media landscape and building a dynamic media ecosystem.

You talked about the networking opportunities that an organisation like IAMT provides for you, and that helps you reach those international companies that you would like to attract to Media City Qatar. Talk us through some of the reasons why an international company would want to come and be part of Media City Qatar. What are some of the benefits and advantages?

A key strength is our dynamic ecosystem, which connects world-class infrastructure, advanced capabilities, a skilled talent pipeline, partnerships, opportunities and incentives. Other strengths include Qatar's economic resilience and stability, Qatar's strategic location, connecting major global markets, and Qatar's support for business. Together, these factors give companies a strong base for expanding into the MENA region. Companies can also benefit from a business-friendly regulatory framework, a streamlined set-up process, and our support in setting up and connecting with the wider ecosystem. At the same time, the GCC and the wider MENA region present growing opportunities.

And also having somebody like yourself at the helm, who has an extremely long tenure within the industry. You're somebody who really understands what these companies need.

Yeah, we need to understand them, so we need to keep contacting these companies. We need to listen, and they need to listen to us also, so we can encourage them and guide them in this industry.

Yes. I think Hamad is very humble, but as you say, his extensive background and experience, and the wisdom that comes with that, especially in trying to navigate a pretty challenging environment at the moment on a global scale, is incredible. The guidance and knowledge that you can impart to your licensed companies, to your partners, and certainly into our ecosystem, is nothing short of phenomenal. And you need that in the current business and political environment, but keeping creativity and innovation at the core. Those values and that leadership style, as well as the ability to genuinely support and help these companies, both in the region and coming into Doha as part of Media City Qatar, mean there is exceptional leadership and knowledge that they will gain from being part of it. So it's certainly an honour for us, and we very much enjoyed the partnership that we've had working with Media City Qatar.

I'm excited to see what Media City Qatar will unveil as time goes on. I think it's very exciting for the region, very exciting for Qatar, and very exciting for the industry in general. Hamad Omar Al Mannai, thank you so much for coming into the IAMT podcast studio today. It's been a pleasure to speak with you.

Thank you. It was a pleasure having this conversation with you and with Saleha. And thank you for inviting me and hosting me here in your studio.

You're most welcome.

Thank you.

Fantastic. Thank you.

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