

Startup Grind

Ramallah



By Israa Elkhatib

The dream of starting a business is not unique to Palestine. Even in places with a larger support system for entrepreneurs, the task often seems nearly impossible. For Palestinians, the dream is made more difficult and complicated by the political situation. However, there's one international start-up community that has made it its mission to foster entrepreneurship globally. Founded in Silicon Valley six years ago, Startup Grind has helped millions of entrepreneurs find mentorship, connect with partners and potential colleagues, pursue funding, and reach new users. Monthly events feature successful local founders, innovators, educators, and investors who share lessons learned on the road to building great companies. Startup Grind has expanded to over 70 countries with the goal of nurturing start-up ecosystems all around the globe.

Two years ago, Startup Grind launched its local chapter in Ramallah, Palestine. Ramallah has witnessed great momentum in the entrepreneurial world in the past few years, and Startup Grind hosts monthly events to nurture this growing environment. These events take the shape of chats that highlight speakers who stand out in the local entrepreneurial atmosphere. Powered by Google for Entrepreneurs, Startup Grind and the Palestinian community have joined forces to learn from the experienced individuals who have left an imprint in the region. Startup Grind Ramallah even hosted the founder of Startup Grind, Derek Anderson. During this event in Palestine, Derek emphasized that the core of the Startup Grind community is to help others, to give back to your community, and to make friends. Another speaker at Startup Grind Ramallah was Ahmad Shami,

entrepreneur and TedX Fellow. Shami is a graduate of Birzeit University, and he now specializes in MENA social and economic development. Although much of Shami's work focuses on humanitarian programs in conflict zones, Shami and his team were behind the success of CHI products in the West Bank. The event was hosted at a local co-working space, the Work Factory. Shami encouraged Palestinians to join this community in order to benefit from the help that Startup Grind provides to developing entrepreneurs.

Derrar Ghanem, co-director of Startup Grind Ramallah, says that Startup Grind focuses mainly on creating a network of people and entrepreneurs, "educating, connecting, and inspiring people." The monthly events gather CEOs, founders, and other businesspeople who have made an impact on society. The participants gather in cafés, restaurants, or co-working spaces such as the Work Factory, and through these meetings, relationships are established. Part of what inspires young members of Ramallah's business community is having examples of success stories that have emerged from the same point of origin. Although there are plenty of start-up models that have made it, by focusing on Palestinians in this field, Startup Grind gives a relatable entry point for those in the early stages of their careers. The importance of seeing and interacting with Palestinian entrepreneurs as opposed to looking abroad for role models helps build confidence in our community.

Having all these entrepreneurs under the same roof fosters the environment that Startup Grind Ramallah aims to create in Palestine. Startup Grind is not restricted to the Ramallah area. It has already launched in other areas of the West Bank, including Bethlehem. Ghanem and the Startup Grind team are working to encourage the expansion of Startup Grind to every major city in Palestine, uniting Palestinian entrepreneurs and thinkers.

Hosting international entrepreneurs also establishes a gateway for resources. Ghanem explains: "People get the chance to meet each other, possibly pitch their ideas, and benefit from the experiences and knowledge of their peers; and this is what Startup Grind is about."

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