

Facebook launches Mideast office in Dubai

May 30 2012, by ADAM SCHRECK



From left to right, Joanna Shields, Facebook's Vice president and Managing Director for Europe, Jonathan Labin, Head of Global Marketing Solutions in the Middle East and North Africa, and Christian Hernandez Gallardo Director of Platform Partnership, speak to journalists during the Facebook opening of its first Middle East and North Africa office at the Armani hotel in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Wednesday, May 30, 2012. (AP Photo/Kamran Jebreili)

(AP) - Facebook Inc. launched its first office in the Arab world Wednesday, aiming to drum up new advertising business from Dubai as investors fret over its struggling share price.

The online meet-up site and other social networking tools were instrumental in connecting activists during the wave of protests and revolutions that reverberated across the region last year.

But Joanna Shields, Facebook's vice president and managing director for Europe, the Mideast and Africa, said the decision to lay down roots in

the region was purely commercial.

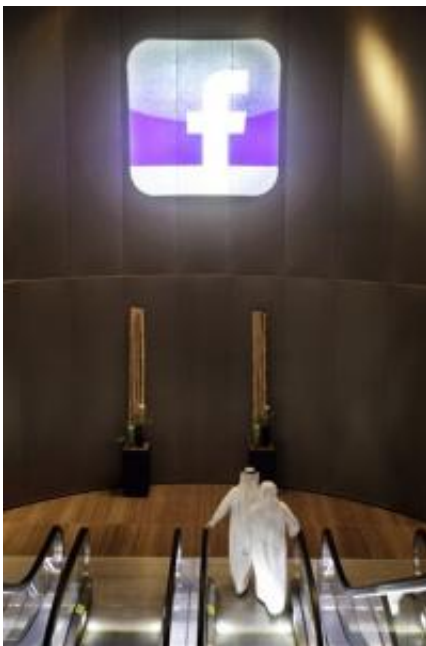
"People on Facebook ... use it to organize rallies for all kinds of elections around the world," she said. "We're humbled by that and we are happy that we can facilitate. But we always downplay the (site's) role because it's really the people there who came together and did what they did."

The office is starting with three employees in Dubai's Internet City, a business park popular with tech firms including Microsoft Corp. and Google Inc.

Facebook's website lists some 30 offices globally.

The aim is to attract more ad sales by targeting the 45 million users that Facebook says it has across the Middle East and North Africa.

Executives declined to say how much revenue the region currently generates or what their goals are for the future.



Emirati men stand on an escalator under the Facebook logo during the Facebook

opening of the first Middle East and North Africa office at the Armani hotel in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Wednesday, May 30, 2012. (AP Photo/Kamran Jebreili)

In 2010, Facebook teamed with Cairo-based advertising company Connect Ads to better reach advertisers in the region.

Jonathan Labin, who will lead the Dubai office, said existing advertisers in the region include Dubai-based Emirates, the region's biggest airline.

The Dubai launch follows Facebook's May 18 initial public offering at \$38 a share, one of the most anticipated stock debuts in history.

The stock had lost 24 percent of its value ahead of the Dubai launch, which was held in the plush Armani Hotel at the base of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest skyscraper.

While the share's gyrations are a hot topic on Wall Street, Shields said Facebook employees are not fixated on reports about the stock's slide.

"I don't even listen to it, to be honest ... because I've got a job to do," she said. "I think we're just getting on with it."

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