

## NAYLA AL KHAJA



### **The first female independent film producer in the United Arab Emirates**

Nayla is the first woman film producer in the United Arab Emirates. Al Khaja has helped develop the UAE's film industry and has advocated for the role of women in cinema. She supports and mentors Middle Eastern talents and thus she has become a reference for professionals in the region. She is ranked amongst the Top 50 Most Powerful Personalities in Arab Cinema, and the 100 Most Powerful Arabs Under 40 by Arabian Business magazine.

She graduated from Dubai Women's College with a degree in Mass Communication in 1999 and had a stint with Arabian Radio Network where she hosted her own travel show. It turned out to be a great success, her ratings being first in the station. However, Nayla realized her true calling lay in film Production which prompted her to apply to Ryerson University in Canada, well known for its Film making program. She graduated in 2005 with a Bachelor in Image studies – Film making. On her return to Dubai, Nayla recognized a lack of financial resources would create significant obstacles in realizing her dream of pioneering a film industry in the UAE. Instead of losing hope, she went out and found the resources to direct and produce her first documentary film, "Unveiling Dubai" (2004), which was launched by H.H. Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, the Minister of Higher Education in the UAE. The film was premiered at the Dubai International Film Festival. In 2006, she produced and directed a movie called "Arabana", which deals with the disturbing issue of a child abuse, a subject which is taboo in the Middle East.

In 2007 Nayla was awarded best Emirati filmmaker at DIFF. In 2010 her script for "MALAL" won the Best Script Award in the Gulf International Film Festival 2010 and shortly after that it became the first Emirati & Indian film shot in Kerala and won 1st place in the Muhr Emirati category on the Dubai International Film Festival in December 2010. She has also been awarded Visionary of the Year Award at the Arabian Business Awards, in addition to becoming an ambassador for Canon ME. To date, her films have participated in over 42 festivals world-wide. In 2007, Nayla's passion for film saw her launch Dubai's first film club: The Scene Club, and has been spearheading its growth from a mere 50 members in its first year to over 11,000 members to date. Her exploits has also earned her the Emirates Woman of the Year (2005), and The Youngest Entrepreneur of the Year from Global Businesswomen & Leader's Summit Awards.

Nayla Al Khaja is CEO of D-Seven Motion Pictures, a Dubai based production company specialising in TV commercials, branded entertainment, and narrative filmmaking. Since 2011, Nayla Al Khaja has been a Brand Ambassador for Canon Middle East and is in constant demand as a collaborator for high-profile brands such as Porsche. A regular on social platforms with an engaged following, Al Khaja directs and produces digital content for social media channels and delivers daily live sessions on Instagram. Since October 2017, she has directed and appeared in her own YouTube web-series, #NaylaFlogs, in which she shares her life as a filmmaker with her followers.

Based on her extraordinary true-life story, she has tackled taboo topics such as breaking down the Arab Woman stereotype, how to stand-out in a male dominated industry, the crux of gender balance, or how to combat fear and chase one's dreams. She frequently travels abroad to speak in international keynotes about cinema, entrepreneurship, culture, youth motivation and women's empowerment in the Middle East.

**Topics (Selection):**

- Innovation
- Creativity
- Media
- Storytelling