



**Najib Lawand,
Operations Director,
Lawand Trade**

<http://www.lawandtrade.biz>

Sydney-based Lawand Trade exports the largest range of packaged branded food and beverages to the Middle East. The company represents Australian manufacturers, small and large, through its various streams of operation including distributed lines, private label and consolidation lines (dry, chilled and frozen).

The consolidated shipments in particular provide great opportunity for niche products that would not otherwise be accepted into Arab supermarket chains. With a Sales and Marketing office in Dubai, Lawand maintains Regional Offices in Kuwait, Riyadh and Beirut, covering marketing activities for all the six GCC countries, Jordan and Lebanese markets.

Najib Lawand's advice: 'Relationships are important, but Dubai is highly competitive and very price-conscious.'

'Dubai is a different market to most others in the Middle East. It is like a Western city, with people who have brought a Western philosophy. Understanding Arab culture and language is not so important there because the market is very broad in terms of nationalities, and invariably the buyer is not an Emirati. Abu Dhabi, for example, has more of an Arab influence.

'Relationships and trust are still very important, but this does not mean you can put your price at whatever you want. For the sake of a small amount of money, you might find buyers drop you.

'We are exporting brands (like Arnotts, Cadbury and Heinz) that are acceptable to Western tastes. This makes the UAE, and Dubai in particular, attractive for us because there are so many Western expatriates there as well as Arabs who have spent a long time in the West. It means, too, that we don't have to invest heavily into educating the market.

'The expatriate community tends to have a high disposable income and the number of Australians in the UAE, especially, has grown dramatically.

'Our service is useful for smaller exporters and even bigger exporters. Even though there is a large expatriate population, it is still a relatively small market and, if it were not for consolidated shipments, some of these brands would not appear at all in the market.

'Over 95% of products in UAE supermarkets are imported, so it's a challenge for us to compete. We go to supermarkets and they make a selection of the products they want. We then consolidate these different products in a container. We put Arabic stickers on the products and there are strict

labelling rules we must comply with. An advantage of dealing direct with supermarkets in this way is that you avoid listing fees, which can be expensive.

'One of the pitfalls of dealing with the UAE is that "legality" can be a very open-ended concept. If you have an agreement with a local, it might be interpreted to their advantage. So you must have watertight legal agreements.

'It is important to make frequent visits to the market for two reasons. The first is so that you maintain a rapport with your buyer or service provider. The second reason is that the UAE market is so dynamic and changes so quickly in terms of population composition that you need to be on the ground to keep in touch.

'There are many ways to get good market intelligence. There is the Internet, there's going to the market to study it for yourself, and I also recommend Austrade. The Dubai office is very efficient and the staff are on top of what is going on.

'Relationships in Dubai exist at many levels. It is best to have your own local office there. This gives you the ability to communicate with the workers at the bottom end, who will really appreciate it. You need to be able to talk to middle management, which is mainly Indian, Pakistani, Lebanese or Egyptian. They are the gatekeepers. Upper management is nearly always a Westerner or increasingly Lebanese. Very rarely do you come into direct contact with an Emirati.'