

# Chicago in Arabic

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CASE STUDY | JANUARY TO MAY 2025

CHICAGO  
بالكرابي

Northwestern | MEDILL  
Local News Accelerator

## Background

Chicago in Arabic is a media platform that brings Chicago local news into focus in Arabic and aims to be an inclusive platform to all Arabs in North America regardless of their religious, political, ideological or ethnic backgrounds. Their stories cover culture, lifestyle, social events, history, business and architecture.

It was founded by two Syrian businessmen: Anwar Jebran and Malek Abdulsamad. Chicago in Arabic came into the Medill School of Journalism's Local News Accelerator (LNA) to build a platform called Daleel, designed to connect Arab professionals with individuals in need of their services in Chicago.

During their time in the Accelerator, Chicago in Arabic also revamped their website into *US in Arabic* which covers large cities across North America with dense Arab populations. The centralized platform disseminates news from Chicago, New York, Montreal and Los Angeles.



“From/To/To” statement guiding the team’s work:

| From   | To  | To (future)   |
|--|---|---|
| Chicagoland residents of Arab descent — primarily immigrants — who don’t have deep connections to the community beyond their personal network AND want to invest in their community but do not know where to find skilled professionals. | Developed the minimum viable product (MVP) of Daleel, a platform of cultural and commercial exchange on a local level. Created a marketing campaign and updated their media kit to feature new advertising spots to fund the new product. | Reaching 1,000 sign-ups to Daleel to sell to sponsors, utilizing Daleel to grow their younger audience seeking employment, expanding Daleel beyond the Chicago market to NY, LA and Montreal. |
| A website focused solely on Chicago  | Revamped their website into US in Arabic which disseminates news from Chicago, New York, Montreal and Los Angeles – all large cities with dense Arab populations  | A publication that more comprehensively provides access to news and information relevant to Arab populations across North America   |
| A robust but not profound social media presence  | A reach of nearly 1.8 million views in 90 days on Instagram reels   | A more established suite of social media content  |

**Highlights**

Chicago in Arabic had to pivot, shifting the core of their project from defining it as a job board (i.e., “People seeking employment or job opportunities”), to a space that connects professionals within Chicago’s Arab community.

Since the start of the Local News Accelerator, Chicago in Arabic significantly improved its social media presence. The organization recently reached 1,773,650 views in 90 days on Instagram reels. That number almost quadrupled since the start of the program.

The Local News Accelerator provided the team with a robust framework for the development of Daleel, a project that would not have come to life if it weren’t for the guidance and mentorship of the experts brought to us by the LNA team.

## The process

The team's initial goal of starting the LNA program was to set up a minimum viable product (MVP) for Daleel. Although the goal stayed the same, the process of getting to our goal underwent multiple pivots.

### **Research insights**

Given the lack of centralized sources for Arab-identifying service providers in the Chicago area, Chicago in Arabic focused its efforts on building a comprehensive database for a community directory. This database includes a wide range of categories — such as contractors, doctors, lawyers and small businesses — each divided into subcategories by specialization. For each entry, the team compiled contact information (email, phone number, business location) and, where available, a short description of their services. To build this directory, Chicago in Arabic conducted extensive manual searches across various platforms including hospital and legal directories, professional associations, business rating platforms, LinkedIn, Instagram (posts, stories, and tags), Facebook community pages, personal blogs and more.

Through the LNA, Chicago in Arabic conducted a survey on Qualtrics to help the team understand who the potential audience for Chicago in Arabic is beyond anecdotes. The survey also allowed the team to gauge interest for the Daleel platform.

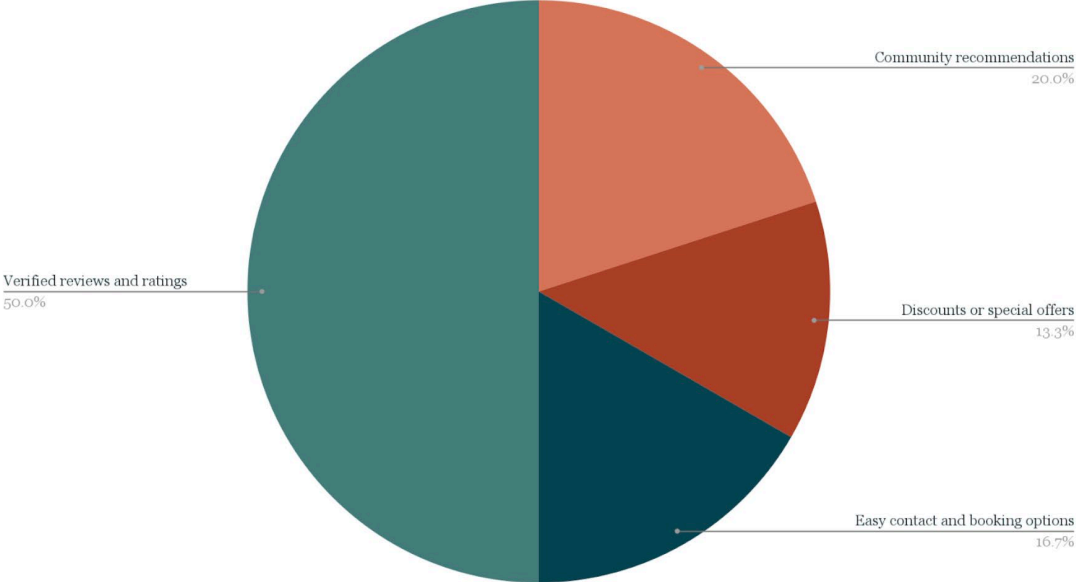
The survey received 34 overall responses, and while a small sample, it showed that half of respondents are very interested while the other half is somewhat interested. All of the respondents said they consume local news and are below the age of 44.

The survey also asked respondents what features they would like to see on Daleel — answers that would allow the team to adjust their MVP beyond the duration of the LNA project.

Finally, the organization also conducted brief research on the competition. The main question that needed to be answered was: Which other entities in North America offer a service similar to Daleel? This would allow the team to strategize their process by highlighting their differentiators.

The research highlighted five online databases that are delivering similar services. But, most of these competitors lack quantity in some categories and have a primitive interface. In addition, none of the competitors have a premium paid feature, which is the ultimate vision for Daleel.

If a platform like Daleel existed, what features would be most valuable to you?



**Business strategies and tools**

Several tools provided through the LNA helped guide Chicago in Arabic’s project to develop Daleel.

The team’s North Star, which guided its three-part project statement was as follows:

North Star:

DALEEL will be a platform designed to connect Arab professionals in Chicago who offer a wide range of services to individuals seeking trusted, community-rooted support. In addition, DALEEL also serves as a central hub to discover cultural and social events within the Arab community in Chicago, celebrating heritage, fostering community ties and amplifying local engagement.

Chicago in Arabic also valued the Value Proposition builder in helping frame the project:

## Value Proposition Worksheet

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Who is the audience you are serving?</b>  | Arab Americans and Arab immigrants throughout the United States, especially in the Chicagoland area.   |
| <b>How is the audience segmented?</b>  | Arab Americans professionals, small to large business owners, and trade and service workers.   |
| <b>What problem(s) do they have?</b>   | The Chicagoland area faces a significant challenge in finding, connecting with, and hiring Arab and Arab American professionals due to a lack of centralized resources tailored to this vibrant and growing community.   |
| <b>How are you helping to solve the problem(s)?</b>  | We aim to democratize access to professional opportunities and connections for Arab Americans, Arab immigrants and newcomers.  |
| <b>Are you offering different products and services to different segments of your audience?</b>                              | Yes, we offer access and connections products to our Arab American and Arab immigrant professionals and promotional services to business owners.   |
| <b>How are you different from the other choices your audience(s) have to address their problems? Why do they choose you?</b> | Currently, there is no dedicated platform that bridges the gap between Arab professional and those seeking to hire or support them. As a result, many job seekers remain underutilized or underemployed, while businesses miss out on accessing a rich pool of talent. |

## Mind Map



## The results

At the end of the four months, the Chicago in Arabic team had:

- Gathered at least 200 potential vendors to list on Daleel within four main categories
- Created a low cost/no cost marketing campaign with targeted personae for their new product (vendor, customer, host and attendees)
- Updated their media kit to call on new sponsors and advertisers for Daleel with new information and consultancy that they obtained through Medill support
- Revamped their website and centralized all of their platforms under one domain name
- Launched their MVP on the final day of the LNA

Moving forward, the team will start reaching out to potential sponsors and advertisers once they reach a 'critical mass' of 1,000 listed community vendors and dozens of events with satisfying website traffic. Achieving this will also allow them to launch a premium feature, which is their main differentiator between their competitors.

**DALEEL MVP**

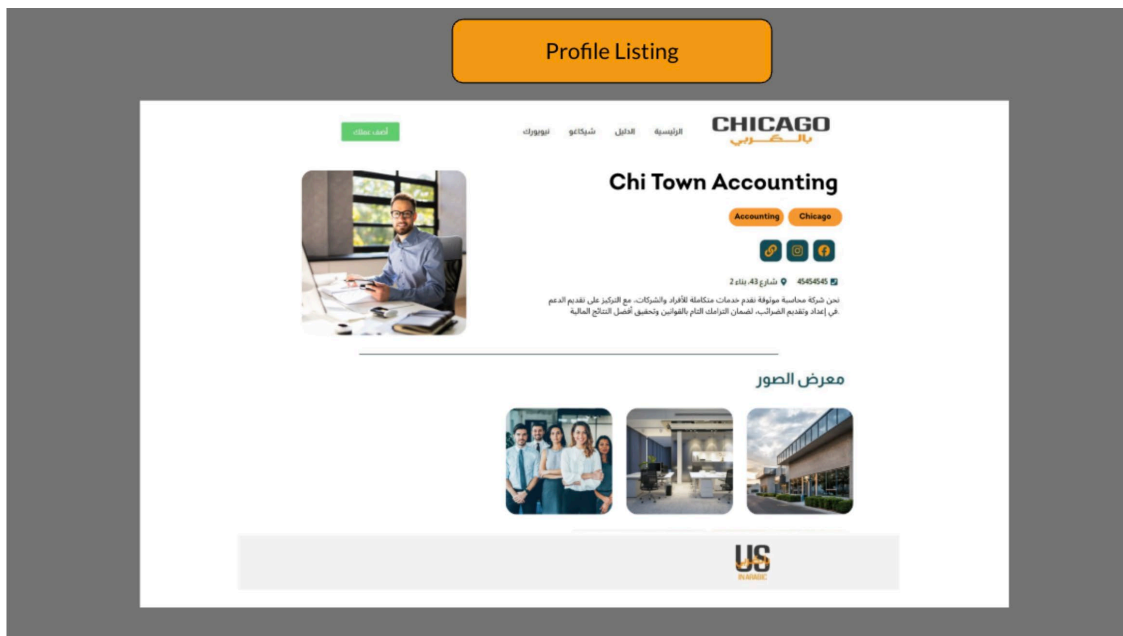
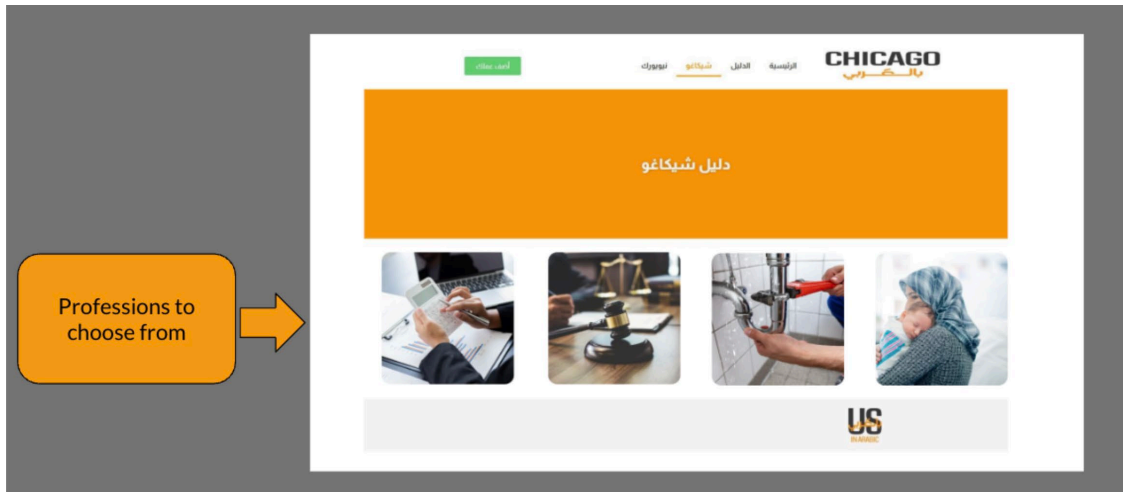
Chicago & NYC pages remained the top options to explore

We have unified our existing websites under U.S in Arabic

أكتشف أمريكا بالعربي

البحث | اختر الفئة | اختر المدينة

When clicking on Daleel → Landing page with a search bar in the middle to choose the profession your are looking for.



## A Q&A



**Audrey Azzo:**

**How did the Local News Accelerator help Chicago in Arabic achieve your goal, and what part was most helpful to you and your team?**



**Malek Abdulsamad:**

I think it's two things. Number one: having a schedule was really helpful. This is an idea that we had in mind for many years, and now it's materialized because of the Accelerator. Otherwise we would have kept dragging our feet on it because we're busy with so many other things. The other thing that's been helpful is all the worksheets that we had to organize our thoughts around the idea like the "From/To" and the Business Model Canvas. We had something a little bit different when we started, then it kind of crystallized more, so I think this was super helpful.



**Azzo:**

**Where is Chicago in Arabic heading from there and what are the biggest lessons you learned?**



**Abdulsamad:**

It takes a lot of work to build small and simple ideas. In our mind, this was supposed to be something super simple that we can just grab a template online and do it. The LNA taught us that it is a lot more complicated than that, but now we're there. I think the path forward, now that we have the centralized platform that we've always wanted, is just to push it, grow it and bring more traffic to it.