Daniyal Umer

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I joined the Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi in 2014, on a four month festival contract. It was founded in 1955 and is the oldest arts institution in the country. When I arrived it had no social media, no website and no online ticketing, and its records were on paper. The channels, the marketing and the systems it runs on today I built from zero, and most of them I still run myself.

NOW

September 2022 to present

Creative & Executive Director, Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi

Around 12,000 members, 267 staff, an academy of seven departments and more than 500 events a year. I report to a President and a Governing Body.

creative direction since 2014

- Creative direction for the festivals: stages, titles, campaigns, the look of the whole thing. In 2026 I wrote and directed the institution’s documentary on its seventy years.
- The Aalmi Urdu Conference sat in one hall with no design at all. In 2016 I gave it a designed stage and put all four days, more than fifty sessions, out live. Nobody thought it would work.
- Took the Pakistan Literature Festival out of Karachi and established it in Lahore, Kashmir, Sukkur and Quetta. More than 50,000 people through the gates.
- I programme the World Culture Festival, with artists from more than a hundred countries.
- IFACCA membership in 2025, a United States federal registration, and the national philanthropy certification renewed. I did those on the institution’s behalf.

MARKETING AND AUDIENCES

All of it in house. We do not use agencies.

2014 onward

Every channel the institution has

Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X, LinkedIn and TikTok, each started from nothing in 2014. Together they now pass a million followers. Facebook alone is above 430,000, YouTube close to 200,000.

paid media, run myself

Performance marketing

Meta campaigns for reach, registrations and ticket sales, retargeting before each event, and search through the Google Ad Grant. Underneath, the pixel with server side events, Google Analytics and tag management, so a campaign is judged by who registered and who paid.

In the last three years alone, which is as far back as Meta keeps the data: more than 200 million ad impressions, 34 million different people reached, 65 million video plays and over 80,000 registrations from ads.

built in house

The audience platform

One record for every person the institution knows (members, students, ticket buyers, anyone who has ever sent us a WhatsApp) with no duplicates, and WhatsApp, email, calling and field visits built on top. Comments and messages on our pages get a first reply automatically; anything hostile goes to a person.

2026

A marketing report that writes itself

Ads, website, ticket sales, every social platform, WhatsApp and email on one page, in plain words for people who are not marketers. It rebuilds every afternoon without anyone touching it.

SYSTEMS I BUILT

2014 to now

- The first website and online ticketing, in 2014, when the counter was the only way in.
- The first enterprise system: finance, procurement and HR, carrying around 600 million rupees a year.
- A biometric membership system that retired the paper files.
- The IT department, the network and the move to the cloud. More recently, AI in the daily work, again before anyone asked for it.

BEFORE THAT, SAME INSTITUTION

2019 to August 2022

Director of Operations

Festivals, venues, the academy, facilities and staff. Digital, marketing, media and IT stayed with me throughout.

2014 to 2019

Project manager, later head of projects

- The Pakistan Youth Festival was 300 to 400 people doing acting, singing and painting. By 2018 it had 64,000 registrations across twelve creative fields. That came from going into schools, colleges and universities and teaching classes there, not from advertising.
- Set up the Media and Communications Department in 2016: production, design, video, broadcast. I do the work myself first, then turn it into a department and hand it over.

before 2011

Computer retail and corporate IT sales

Muscat Computers in Saddar, then Hi Tech Enterprises. Where I learned to sell.

WHAT I WORK IN

Strongest	Performance marketing and analytics. Social media and content. Audience data, CRM and messaging. Creative direction. Festival production. Taking an institution from paper to digital.
Also	Sponsorship and CSR cases, nonprofit compliance, cloud and network infrastructure, AI in day to day operations.
Not yet	I have never worked at an agency or run marketing for a commercial brand. Everything here was done for one institution.

RECOGNITION

2024	International Refurbishment Project of the Year, SFE Façade Awards, London. For the redevelopment of our building. The award belongs to the President and the architects; getting it built was my end of it.
2021	Letter of thanks from the US Consulate General, Karachi, for the creative direction of its Independence Day broadcast.

LANGUAGES AND EDUCATION

Languages	Urdu is my first language. I work in English every day. I read Hindi and understand Punjabi and Sindhi.
Education	Matriculation, Sindh Board. Short courses since then in artificial intelligence at the Wharton School and in colour grading. Everything else I learned by doing it badly first.