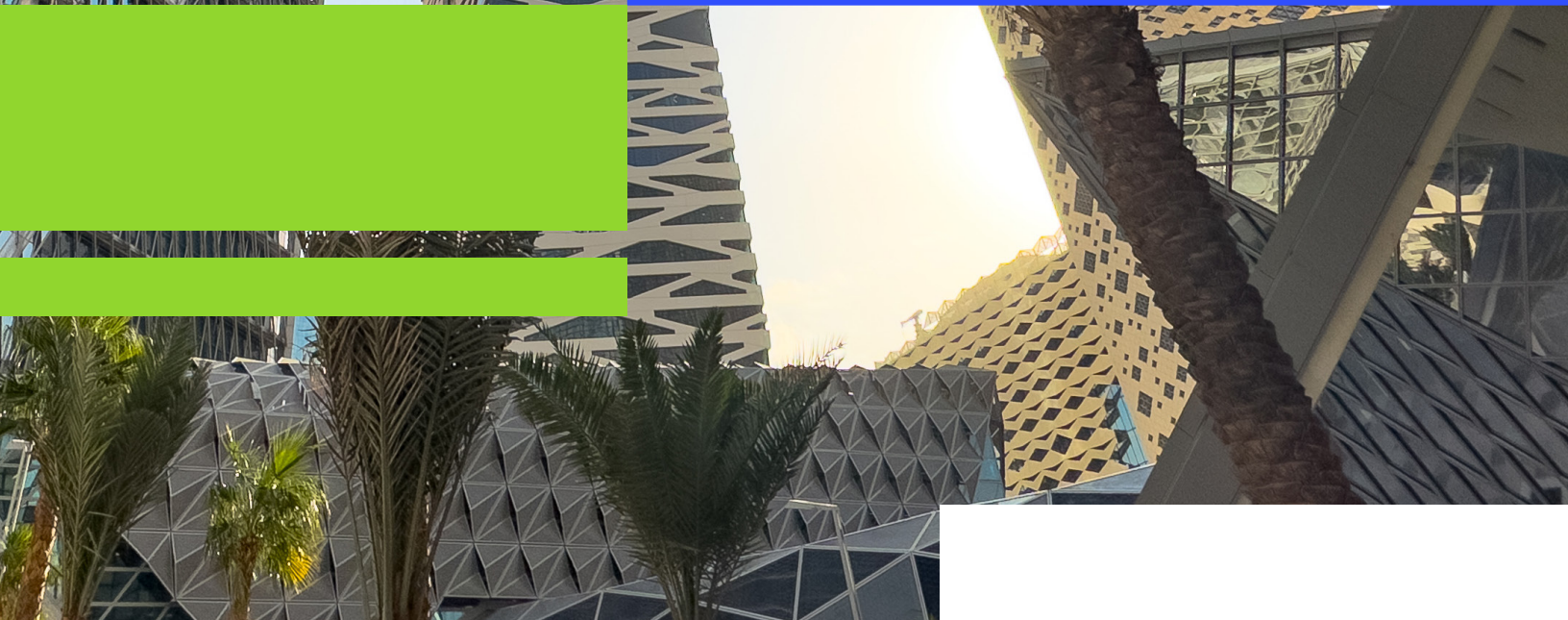




# CALDWELL PERSPECTIVES

*Caldwell Perspectives is a series of conversations with leaders building companies and institutions across the Middle East. In these discussions, executives share insights on leadership, transformation, and the evolving economic landscape of the region.*



## LEADERSHIP AT THE INTERSECTION OF CAPITAL, CULTURE, AND INDUSTRY CREATION: BRIAN WARD ON BUILDING SAVVY GAMES GROUP

How Savvy Games Group is building a global gaming and esports company while helping shape a new technology ecosystem under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 transformation.

The global gaming industry is undergoing rapid structural change, driven by the rise of mobile platforms, new monetization models, and expanding global audiences. At the same time, governments and sovereign investors are increasingly seeking to build technology and entertainment ecosystems as part of broader economic transformation strategies.

Few executives sit at the intersection of these forces as directly as Brian Ward.

As CEO of Savvy Games Group, Ward is leading one of the most ambitious initiatives in the global gaming sector: the creation of a company designed to become the world's largest gaming and esports organization. Backed by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), Savvy forms part of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 strategy to build globally competitive industries beyond oil.

Ward's career has long placed him at the forefront of gaming's evolution. Over nearly three decades, he has held senior leadership roles at Electronic Arts, Microsoft's Xbox division, and Activision Blizzard, overseeing some of the industry's most successful studios and franchises.

Yet the challenge he faces today differs fundamentally from scaling an established company. At Savvy, the task is not only to build a successful enterprise but also to help shape an industry ecosystem within a rapidly transforming national economy.

## RECOGNIZING A ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION OPPORTUNITY

Ward's decision to join Savvy in 2021 was driven less by the gaming sector itself than by the scale of the opportunity presented by Saudi Arabia's broader transformation agenda.

"When I first came to Riyadh and saw the impact of Vision 2030 up close, it became clear this was something different," he explains.

The Kingdom's ambition to build a global gaming and esports hub is supported by substantial long-term capital and policy alignment across government institutions. For Ward, that combination creates an environment where industry creation can occur at a pace rarely seen elsewhere.

In many ways, the task resembles the development of earlier technology clusters, where government support, private capital, and entrepreneurial talent converged to build entirely new sectors.

## LEADING INSIDE A COMPLEX STAKEHOLDER ECOSYSTEM

Operating within that environment, however, requires a leadership approach that differs from the norms of the global technology sector.

The gaming industry traditionally operates with flat organizational structures and extremely rapid development cycles. Decisions are often decentralized, and creative teams require significant autonomy.

Saudi Arabia's broader institutional environment, by contrast, is characterized by a more hierarchical structure and a wider set of stakeholders involved in major decisions.

Ward notes that navigating this dynamic has been one of the most significant leadership adjustments required since arriving in the region.

"You have to recalibrate how you operate," he says, particularly when balancing the speed required in a technology-driven industry with the alignment required within a sovereign-backed investment ecosystem.

For leaders accustomed to Silicon Valley-style operating environments, this balance can represent a substantial shift.

## SCALING THROUGH A FEDERATED MODEL

Savvy's strategy for growth reflects both the structure of the gaming industry and the realities of building a new global organization.

Rather than integrating acquisitions into a centralized structure, the company has adopted a federated operating model in which individual businesses retain a high degree of independence while benefiting from the capital and strategic direction of the parent organization.

Ward first encountered this model during his time at Activision, where it proved particularly effective in creative industries that rely heavily on studio culture and entrepreneurial autonomy.

At Savvy, the model has also served another purpose: enabling the company to acquire and scale mature businesses even while the parent organization itself was still in its early stages.

The result is a structure designed to accommodate a diverse portfolio of gaming and esports assets while maintaining flexibility as the company continues to grow.

## BUILDING INDUSTRIES, NOT JUST COMPANIES

Savvy's mandate extends beyond corporate growth. The company is also expected to contribute to the development of a broader gaming ecosystem within Saudi Arabia.

That includes initiatives such as educational partnerships, talent development programs, and efforts to attract international companies to establish operations in the Kingdom.

Interest among local talent has already proven significant. Ward notes that when one of Savvy's studios posted several open roles, hundreds of applications were received within the first day, including many Saudi professionals working abroad who were eager to return home to participate in the industry's growth.

The challenge now is ensuring that the ecosystem evolves quickly enough to create meaningful career opportunities for the next generation of talent.

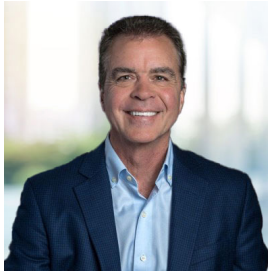
## LESSONS FOR GLOBAL LEADERS

For executives considering opportunities in Saudi Arabia or the broader Gulf region, Ward emphasizes that success depends less on technical expertise than on mindset. The region's business culture places a strong emphasis on long-term relationships, alignment with national priorities, and sustained engagement.

"If you come here thinking it's a place to make money for two years and leave, people will see through that quickly," he says.

For leaders prepared to invest the time to understand the context and build lasting relationships, however, Ward believes the opportunities are extraordinary.

"In our industry, I don't think there are opportunities like this anywhere else in the world right now."



## BRIAN WARD

Chief Executive Officer  
Savvy Games Group

Brian Ward is Chief Executive Officer of Savvy Games Group, a global gaming and esports company backed by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. Since becoming founding CEO in 2021, he has led Savvy's rapid expansion into one of the world's largest esports organizations and a top global games publisher, with nearly 4,000 employees across more than 20 countries.

Ward brings nearly three decades of experience across the gaming and technology industries. Prior to Savvy, he held senior leadership roles at Electronic Arts, Microsoft's Xbox division, and Activision Blizzard, where he served as Senior Vice

President of Worldwide Studios and oversaw a period of significant growth and acquisition-driven expansion.

Earlier in his career, Ward practiced law before transitioning into the games industry. He later founded Lottolnteractive, a developer of mobile games for lottery and gaming operators. Ward holds business and law degrees from the University of Alberta.

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## ABOUT CALDWELL

Caldwell is an elite executive search firm trusted by established and growth-focused companies alike. For more than 50 years we have partnered with clients to design and build extraordinary teams. Our partners don't just place leaders—they challenge assumptions, enable strategy, and prioritize long-term fit. Built through repeat clients and referrals, Caldwell delivers clarity and results without arrogance or shortcuts. For clients seeking substance over scale, we're the confident voice that listens—and leads. At Caldwell, our purpose is your mission.

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