

MARKETING

ISSUE #432 FEBRUARY 2025

WEEKENDER™



XIN RUU
GRAPH STUDIO

VJ ANAND
ballys

NEW CONVERSATIONS ADVOLUTION #2

ADRIAN GAFFOR, ESPORTS
BUSINESS NETWORK. **FARHAN**
HAFETZ, JASMINE FOOD
CORPORATION. **CLAUDIA LOW**,
AMPERSAND ADVISORY.

MARCH 20
ROYAL SELANGOR CLUB,
DATARAN MERDEKA
2.30PM - 8.30PM, FOLLOWED BY BUKA PUASA

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a Monopsonist Is?**



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**One afternoon
in March**



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**Of Peacocks and
Coffee**

What Say



“Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face.”

Mike Tyson



“That isn’t a mistake, it’s intentionally opaque. The ad tech industry weaponizes complexity.”

Arielle Garcia on digital ad networks placing ads on websites that monetise images of child sexual abuse.



“Adalytics has documented ads for Fortune 500 companies running alongside hardcore adult pornography, including MasterCard, Nestlé, Starbucks, Unilever and even the US Government.”

The BBC



“Living is like licking honey off a thorn.”

Louis Adamic, Slovenian-American writer.

Do You Know What a Monopsonist Is?



A monopsonist isn't the seller with all the power; it's the buyer. In markets where a single buyer controls the purchasing decisions a monopsonist can distort competition, stifle innovation, and leave sellers with little room to negotiate.

At first glance, the rise of monopsony power in the media may not seem as pressing as the familiar concerns about monopolies.

But the truth is, it is every bit as dangerous, particularly when it is wielded by the likes of giant tech platforms, media-buying agencies, and even some well-established broadcasters.

Take, for instance, the power of Google and Meta in the digital advertising world.

These behemoths have consolidated their control over nearly every aspect of the ad

supply chain, from gathering vast amounts of consumer data to dictating the rules of engagement for advertisers.

These platforms dominate so thoroughly that they have become the default option for any advertiser trying to reach a broad audience.

But it is not just their sheer size that makes them a monopsonist threat—it is the way they set the rules for everyone else.

Media outlets, particularly smaller players, are forced into submission, often accepting unfavourable rates simply because they have no other choice.

The monopolistic grip of these platforms is mirrored by the media agencies that control the lion's share of advertising spend. Companies like GroupM,

EDITOR'S NOTE

Omnicom and Publicis control billions of dollars in ad budgets, holding media owners hostage to their demands.

They bundle ad placements into bulk deals and wield immense leverage, dictating prices, forcing discounts and securing terms that only benefit the agencies themselves. With few options for recourse, smaller media outlets are left vulnerable, locked into deals that offer little flexibility or profit.

Why should we care?

Monopsonists distort the fundamental dynamics of the media market.

Advertisers no longer get the best possible deal—they get whatever terms the monopsonists offer. Media owners no longer have the freedom to negotiate independently. And ultimately, consumers suffer from a lack of diversity in content, creativity, and quality.

The key is to break free from reliance on these monopsonists by diversifying revenue streams, building direct relationships with advertisers, and, crucially, leveraging the power of first-party data.

The transparency provided

by first-party data shifts the balance of power away from the monopsonist and back to the media owner, who can offer more tailored, bespoke services to advertisers.

Another approach is to embrace niche markets and create premium content that cannot be easily replicated on larger platforms.

This differentiation makes it more difficult for monopsonists to exert control, as advertisers may seek more unique, effective channels for their campaigns.

Still, the challenge of monopsony power goes beyond individual action—it demands broader intervention. Governments and regulators must step in to prevent these powerful players from becoming too entrenched. Anti-trust regulations, aimed at dismantling monopolistic power, must be extended to include monopsony power, ensuring that no buyer can dominate the market to the detriment of fair competition.

The advertising industry, once a diverse and competitive space, is increasingly being shaped by a handful of players who control the flow of information and dictate the terms.

SKYROCKET YOUR B2B SALES WITH AI PROMPT ENGINEERING

BY INDHRA SEG HAR

12th March, 2025

8.30am - 5.30pm

EASTIN HOTEL

FOR ENQUIRIES:

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ruby@adoimagazine.com



APPROVED HRD CORP
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ONE AFTERNOON IN MARCH.

AdVolution#2 kicks off the year with some inspiring people from diverse domains.

March 20 afternoon will be a journey of discovery as you listen to new conversations about our business and industry.

From a global creative head who's just launched a consultancy called *ballsy*, to an amazingly talented young film director.

From a sports marketing and gaming pro whose global-trotting exploits secured the biggest names on the planet, to a game-changing champion of local brands who once created a wedding portal.

And not forgetting one brilliant Creative Director who once edited the biggest Women's magazine in Malaysia.

An afternoon of conversations we never had, with some people you never met.

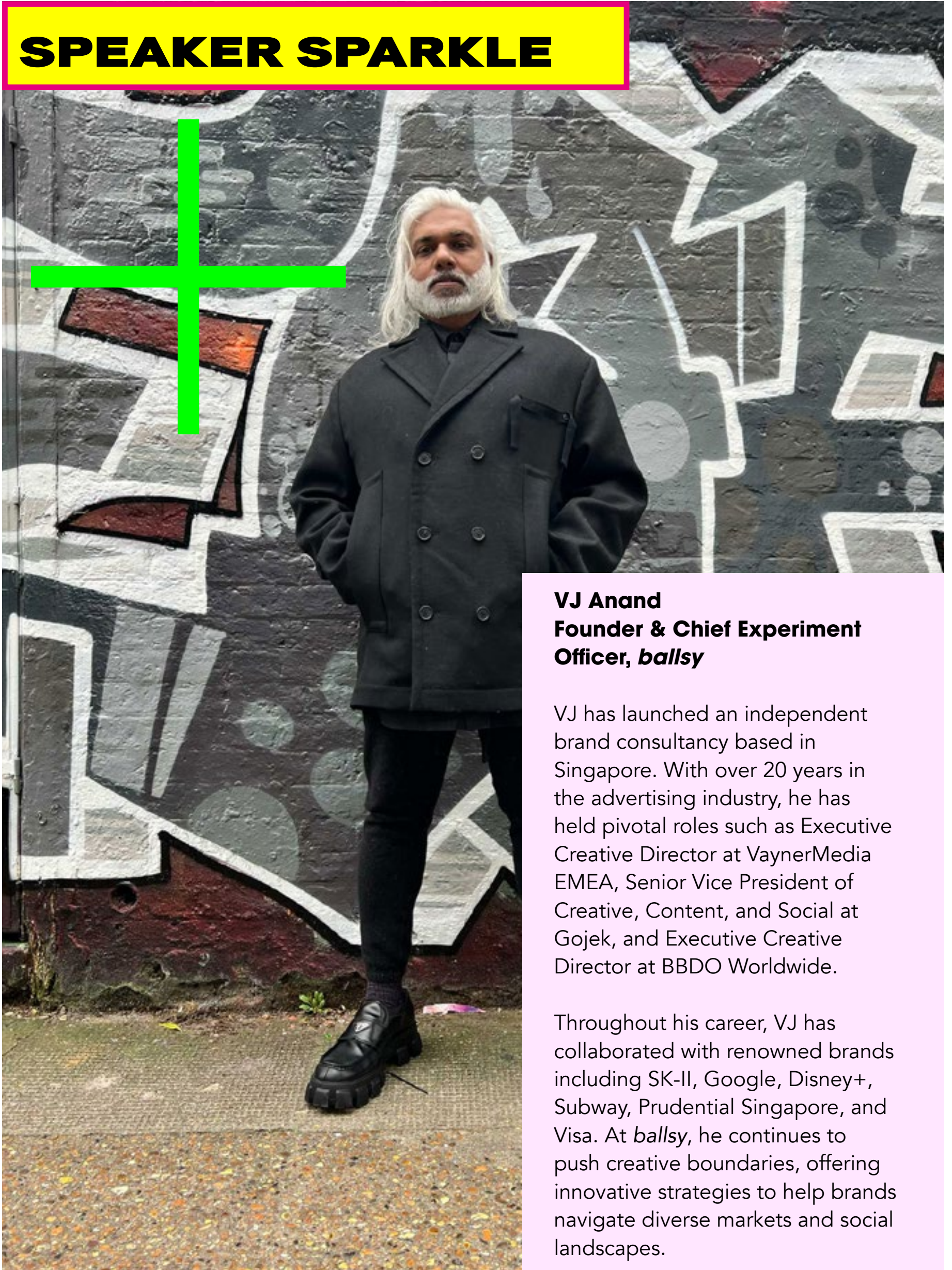
Happening near where KL was founded 168 years ago!

WE INTRODUCE THE
SPEAKER LINE-UP IN THE
FOLLOWING PAGES....



CLICK FOR DETAILS

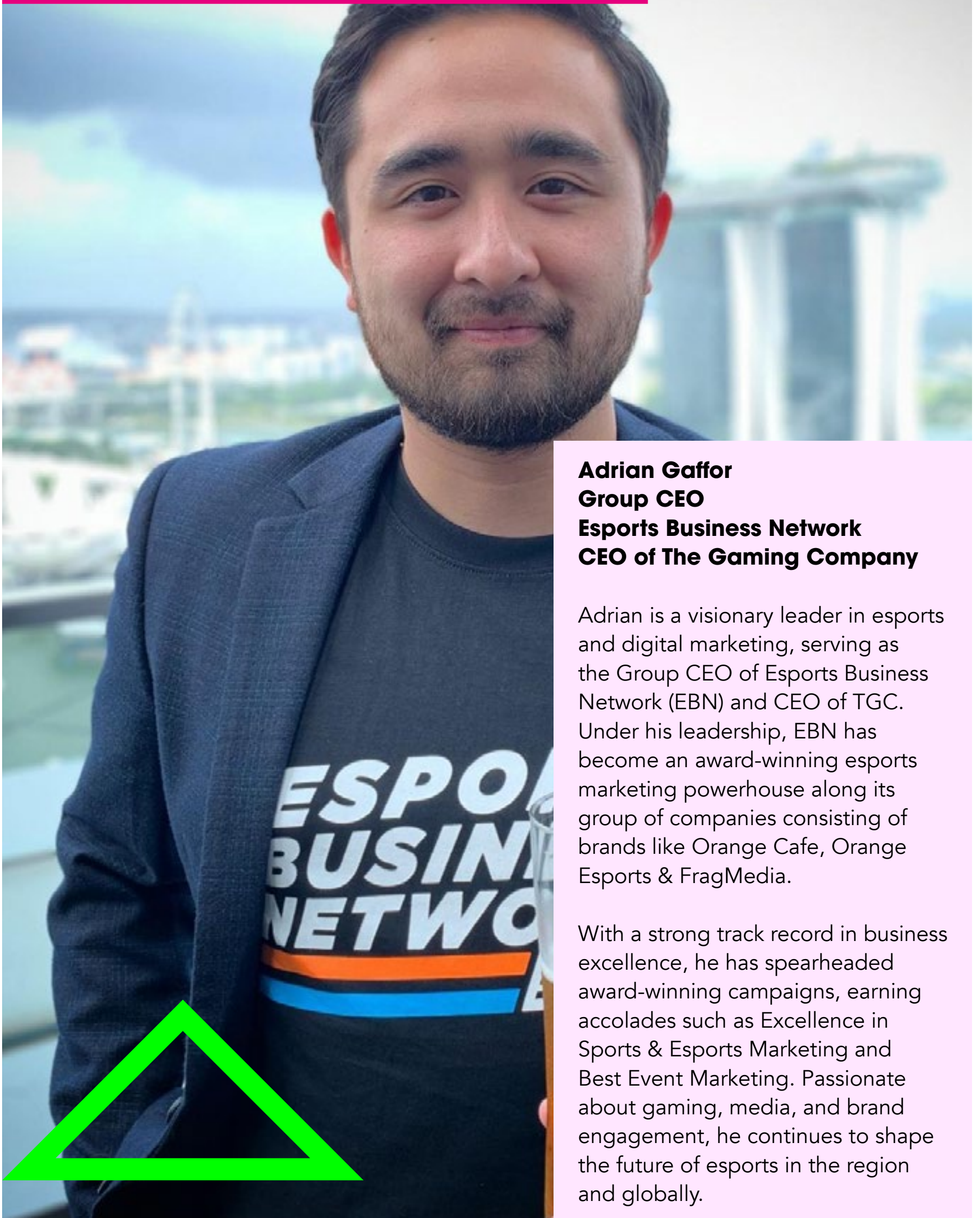
SPEAKER SPARKLE



VJ Anand
Founder & Chief Experiment
Officer, *ballsy*

VJ has launched an independent brand consultancy based in Singapore. With over 20 years in the advertising industry, he has held pivotal roles such as Executive Creative Director at VaynerMedia EMEA, Senior Vice President of Creative, Content, and Social at Gojek, and Executive Creative Director at BBDO Worldwide.

Throughout his career, VJ has collaborated with renowned brands including SK-II, Google, Disney+, Subway, Prudential Singapore, and Visa. At *ballsy*, he continues to push creative boundaries, offering innovative strategies to help brands navigate diverse markets and social landscapes.

SPEAKER SPARKLE

Adrian Gaffor
Group CEO
Esports Business Network
CEO of The Gaming Company

Adrian is a visionary leader in esports and digital marketing, serving as the Group CEO of Esports Business Network (EBN) and CEO of TGC. Under his leadership, EBN has become an award-winning esports marketing powerhouse along its group of companies consisting of brands like Orange Cafe, Orange Esports & FragMedia.

With a strong track record in business excellence, he has spearheaded award-winning campaigns, earning accolades such as Excellence in Sports & Esports Marketing and Best Event Marketing. Passionate about gaming, media, and brand engagement, he continues to shape the future of esports in the region and globally.

SPEAKER SPARKLE**Claudia Low**
Creative Director
Ampersand Advisory

Claudia is heading creative at Malaysia's largest independent media and integrated agency. With over six years at Lion & Lion, she advanced to Regional Creative Content Director, leading award-winning campaigns for brands like Mars Petcare, Guardian, and AIA. Claudia has been instrumental in shaping agency branding and communications strategies, contributing to significant business wins and enhancing the agency's social media presence.

In 2025, she served as a jury member for the d Awards, recognizing excellence in digital marketing. Her leadership and innovative approach continue to influence Malaysia's creative industry.



SPEAKER SPARKLE**Farhan Hafetz
Head of Brand Management &
New Product Development
Jasmine Food Corporation**

Farhan is an award-winning marketer with over 16 years of experience across multiple industries, including brand and digital consultancy, F&B, and FMCG. He currently serves as the Head of Brand Management and New Product Development at BERNAS, overseeing national brands such as Jasmine rice, Era rice, and CSR sugar.

Educated in Melbourne, Australia, Farhan holds a Bachelor of Commerce in Marketing and Finance and a Master of International Business. Throughout his career, he has led market-leading brands like SAJI cooking oil and BABA'S spices and has collaborated with prominent companies including Domino's Pizza, BBC, Maybank, Huawei, Sunway Group, Volkswagen, and Blackmores.

SPEAKER SPARKLE

Xin Ruu
Film Director
Graph Studio

Xin Ruu is a rising Malaysian filmmaker at Graph Studio, recognized for her innovative storytelling and directorial prowess. In 2024, she won the Sick Six: Young Director's Challenge sponsored by Maxis, bringing her film "Papayah" to life under the mentorship of Graph Studio.

This achievement led to her film's entry into prestigious competitions like the AdFest New Director Lotus and Cannes Young Director Awards. Additionally, Xin Ruu directed a commercial for OPPO Malaysia, showcasing her versatility in both narrative and commercial filmmaking. Her work continues to contribute to Malaysia's vibrant film industry.



Advolution made its sparkling debut on December 6.



On the cusp of the new year, Advolution 2024 held its inaugural half-day event at the Royal Selangor Club.

Passion drives purpose

The first speaker Erika Seow, CEO and Co-Founder of JUNO, shared a shocking insight about the youth of today: that some of them aren't able to imagine a future beyond 25 years old.

Her new venture aims to reignite that spark of purpose. HOODLE is a Southeast Asia based student and youth-focused

platform that rewards its users for pursuing their passions.

Emir Shafri, Chief Creative Officer of Publicis Groupe, shared the story behind Leo Burnett KL's Bronze win at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity 2024.

It all began when a junior member of their team decided to question the status quo, transforming their run-of-the-mill festive advert into an extraordinary idea.

Emir credited the support of Heineken Malaysia in bringing the



Emir Shafri, Chief Creative Officer of Publicis Groupe during his session



Prof. Harmandar Singh with Erika Seow, CEO and Co-Founder of JUNO

idea to life, proving that award-winning campaigns are a team effort between agency and client.

A training ground for B2B marketers

Next, Yong Siew Mee gave us a peek behind the curtains as the Country Manager of 2X, the world's largest B2B marketing-as-a-service (MaaS) firm.

She shared that the

outsourcing model perfectly fit the demands of her international client base, who seek out quality and consistency amidst shrinking budgets.

Unintentionally, this has transformed 2X into the biggest training ground for B2B marketing talent in Malaysia. This year alone, the company has transformed hundreds of B2C marketers into rising B2B talents.



Yong Siew Mee, Country Manager of 2X, sharing insights during her session



Prof. Harmandar Singh with Reuben Kang – Writer, Producer, and Director at Imagineers Film

Create impact instead of viral moments

Reuben Kang has worn many hats over the years, but he is currently the writer, producer, and director at Imagineers Film.

The former YouTuber revealed the fleeting nature of manufactured virality, stating that meaningful work will always have a longer lasting impact.

He credited clients like Taylor's University for their willingness to take risks, resulting in their series of festive ads commenting on

important social issues.

Great ideas happen outside the office

Wang Ie Tjer, Executive Creative Director of FCB SHOUT, doesn't do his best work in the office. Instead, his best ideas come to him the moment he's off the clock.

He believes there is a limit to researching references online, and he encourages all his creatives to go outside to find their next stroke of inspiration.



Prof. Harmandar Singh with Wang le Tjer, Executive Creative Director of FCB SHOUT



YuBin Ng, CEO of MantaYay, during his speaker session

With FCB SHOUT's excellent track record of consistently winning top awards at local and regional shows, perhaps this is the secret recipe.

One size doesn't fit all


The final speaker, MantaYay CEO YuBin Ng revealed the secrets behind his one-stop

solution for TikTok marketing.

There's only one golden rule: understand your platform and optimise, optimise, optimise.

When the difference between horizontal and vertical can determine the success of your content, you should never assume that one size fits all.

Things no highly-awarded Creative Director should say out loud



When you become a Creative Director, people expect you to look and act like one.

Dresses only in black? Check.

Late for meetings? Check.

Last minute brilliance? Check.

Occasionally surly/ disarmingly charming? Check and check.

When you become a highly-awarded Creative Director, you're allowed a few more eccentricities. Mileage may vary among creative types.

By then, you're invariably surrounded by all kinds of shiny objects from Cannes, D&AD, One Show and the like.

Amidst all the glitter and glimmer (Glamour is so yesterday), it's easy to lose sight of why you exist.

You use phrases like 'Capture the zeitgeist', 'Shape social norms', 'Start a chain reaction', 'Influence culture', and the crowd loves you for it.

Like Ceasar building an amphitheater for wild beast and gladiator fights, you can do no wrong.

But let's turn that dial back (or forward if you're still wandering around the Colosseum) to the advent of modern advertising.

A bit of advertising history

The first newspaper ads (circa early 1600s) were written by the publication's editorial team.

Presumably by juniors so that the real writers can get on to the more pertinent work of reporting the news.

In 1840 Philadelphia, Volney Palmer started an agency to sell media space. They bought inches in various newspapers and resold them to advertisers. Ads were produced by clients and passed to the agency who passed the artwork to the newspapers.

In the same city in 1869, 21-year-old Francis Ayer set up N. W. Ayer & Son (named after his father) representing several religious newspapers. Like the Volney Palmer Agency, they also sold media space. They grew quickly and expanded into other publications, mainly by acquiring the Volney Palmer Agency. In 1884, Ayer offered clients a new service: Advertising content creation.

The latter were somewhat relieved to say the least. In 1892, Ayer thought of another money-making ~~scheme~~ idea. They brought together artists and writers and got them to work on ads. These pairings were called Creative Teams.

Law of first mention

In theology, there's something

called The Law of First Mention. Essentially, it means that to understand a particular concept, students must find where it is first introduced in scripture, and study that passage.

Reason being, the first mention is the simplest and clearest presentation. Subsequent mentions are simply reiterations of the same thing.

It's no different with advertising. Using our US example, we can work out a few things

1. The first agency was a media buying agency
2. Creative is a subset of media, the creative department created to sell more media space
3. Reaching audiences is a little more important than creative ideas
4. Agencies swallowing smaller competitors is not a 21st century phenomenon

Oops, wrong altar

As Creative Directors, it's easy to get lost in the Big Idea.

Truth is, the Big Idea isn't the main thing.

The Big Idea doesn't make or break a campaign.

The Big Idea isn't God, it's a false deity.

And while some may consider this blasphemy, let's remember that 95% or more of the client's advertising budget goes to media.

As an aside, if you want to measure the health and sustainability of the advertising industry, look at the health of the media industry. Healthy media companies, healthy advertising agencies.

When media grows, we grow. When media fragments, we adapt accordingly. It's already happening before our very eyes. Global mass media has been reduced to segment specific micro channels creating all kinds of channel and audience-specialist agencies.

Let's keep this for another article.

We sell. Or else.

Advertising isn't about 'Capturing the zeitgeist', 'Shaping social norms', 'Starting a chain reaction', or 'Influencing culture'.

Saying these things at advertising festivals might win you applause but try selling that to the client's CEO.

Advertising is about reaching the right audiences to sell more of the client's products.

David Ogilvy said something similar but I can't remember what.

End day, selling isn't something cheap and crude. Selling is fundamentally human.

Author Daniel Pink sums it up best in *To sell is human*: *"The ability to move others to exchange what they have for what we have is central to our survival and happiness. Selling has helped our species evolve, lifted our living standards, enhanced our daily lives.*

The capacity to sell isn't some unnatural adaptation to the merciless world of commerce. From the beginning, selling was always part of our makeup."

Selling pays the bills. Don't be afraid to make your ads work harder.

And by all means, make it win creative awards. Yes, it's hard. That's why not everybody is a highly-awarded Creative Director.

Impress clients, not your peers

Clients will remember how you pushed sales, not how you pulled the heartstrings of award show judges.

If you plan to move forward in the client's boardroom, take a step back.

Understand the basics.

That creativity complements media.

Creativity is a mere vehicle to move products and services.

Creativity has never been the top dog in the kennels.

Keep growling. Keep grinding. Keep making smart witty wonderful brilliant things.

If you're lucky, cultural shift and social change happen as a byproduct. Just be careful not to make it the main objective.

Above all, learn how to sell.

Or learn to how to stay silent during important client meetings.

The world is a noisy place. Don't let your job title add to the cacophony.



Edward Ong is an award-winning Copywriter/ Creative Director. He works with client's inhouse creative teams, and helps agency people level up their game. More at IdeasAreBorderless.com and LevelUpProfessionalTraining.com



Of Peacocks and Coffee

*From WFH to WFO to WFH
and the quest for joy!*

Work.

That thing that takes up most of our time between University and death.

A minimum of eight hours a day for most people reading this article.

And lasting 30 years for most of us who didn't invest wisely or become entrepreneurs. (And the entrepreneurs work crazier hours anyways.)

Until very recently, this act of work was a performance, in starched corporate clothing, in offices, involving arduous commuting and after hours drinking.

COVER STORY



Then Wuhan's most famous global export changed everything. And suddenly work had expanded to fulfill Parkinson's Law, which is the idea that work expands to fill the time allotted for its completion. We were working 12 hours a day as clients sought to pivot and recode and reimagine their businesses.

But we were working from home, something that was unusual for this country. If you recall, many people came to Malaysia more than 100 years ago primarily to work. And work they did: mining tin and tapping rubber and laying railroad and running the clerical aspects of the British empire. Work was

visible and tangible. And within the line of sight of the bosses and overseers. I believe in February 2020 it was similar. And the greatest learning from the Great Pandemic is A. how to wash our hands B. how we can work from home and be productive. Mind you, this is a key learning for Asia. Some of my friends in the UK were working from home 3 days a week back in 2007. And somehow their bosses trusted them.

The biggest agency conglomerate of the last 20 years issued a mandate to get people back to work 4 days a week, and faced a stinging backlash. Other agency groups, many of which only work from office 3 days a

WORK

week, observed this and held back their own plans to be wfo more often.

Malaysian agencies are still having a significant amount of work from home days per week. And Malaysian advertising is going through difficult times. Ad spends have dropped by almost 10%, at least 4 media agency groups have changed heads like a Media Game of Thrones, client creative budgets are tight.

In such a perfect storm of adversity, would working more from office help?

The argument for WFO goes like this:

1. Creative people need to brainstorm together and debate to find solutions
2. Bosses can weed out under performers and reward the productive ones
3. Young people need the guidance of their seniors, to understand the nuances of their company as well as their work
4. People need to see each other face to face to bond and build team spirit
5. People need to play together, not just work together, to foster a sense of



community and belonging

The counter argument, promoting WFH goes something like this:

1. People are more productive from home, they save the hours and distress of commuting.
2. People with young kids can work better in a WFH setting, and can spend valuable time with their kids, while also saving on child care. For working mums, this is a godsend.
3. A better work-life balance makes people more creative and productive, prevents burnout
4. Agencies can save office rental and utilities when there are less WFO days.
5. Clients, post pandemic, are more open to virtual meetings, and require less face to face

WORK

time. Thus meeting clients doesn't need to be a reason to come to office 5 days a week.

Ampersand Advisory is a member of Worldwide Partners, a global network of independent agencies. This group, with over 80 agencies in 40+ countries, with USD 5 billion in billings, recently conducted a survey to see work policies and how they are evolving.

Some key highlights:

73% of agencies had not changed their space after Covid. Some had long term leases that prevented them from downsizing.

79% of partners have a Hybrid

working model, with 2-3 days WFH, while 19% are fully remote. Only 1 agency worked from the office 5 days a week.

And some verbatims:

“Most people seem to struggle to accept more than 3 days in office, and we've had some people leave to take remote jobs.”

“We're in Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday although management tend to be in 4-5 days per week.”

Clearly, there are multiple solutions, but the trend is still hybrid the world over.

Then there is the strange behaviour WFO diktats have created:

One workplace report has found that a whopping 58% of hybrid workers have “coffee badged” in the past — a term used for employees who show up at a physical office in order to make an appearance, swipe their badges, buy a coffee and walk around, being seen, but leave soon afterwards to work the rest of the day remotely.

Another buzz phrase is “office peacocking”—companies trying to lure employees back to the office with fancy decor,

WORK



stocked kitchens and comfortable furniture. The practice has been around for a while, but it's on the rise again in 2024, according to Forbes. "Many employers still haven't yet given up on trying to return to pre-pandemic policies."

So what does this foggy future of work mean for agencies?

My belief is that work is now exposed to employee scrutiny and contrasting opinions. Gen Z grows up assuming they don't need to work 5 days a week: they have never had to, why should they start now?

And here is a brand new thought: what if we could make the work itself fun? What if we challenged ourselves as an industry to be more creative, more bold and more risk-taking, when it comes to clients? What if we could hold our clients' hands and do work that moved the business needle for them and

made us proud of what we have created, irrespective of whether we created it in the office or not?

Work.

It's what we do for most of our time.

Rather than debating which location to work from, it would be amazing and life-changing if we could make work itself more challenging, stimulating and purposeful. We might have our work cut out to achieve that goal, but surely it's worth trying.



Sandeep Joseph is the CEO and co-founder of Ampersand Advisory, Campaign Global Media Independent Agency of the Year and FT Statista 500 High Growth Companies Asia Pacific 2023, 2024. He can be reached at sandeep@ampersand-advisory.com

TRENDING

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(21th February – 28th February 2025)



Dentsu Malaysia to strengthen leadership bench strength with Bala Pomaleh coming onboard as CEO of Media

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dentsu

Can Dentsu's US\$1.38 Billion Reset Revive Its Global Clout – or Is It Too Late?

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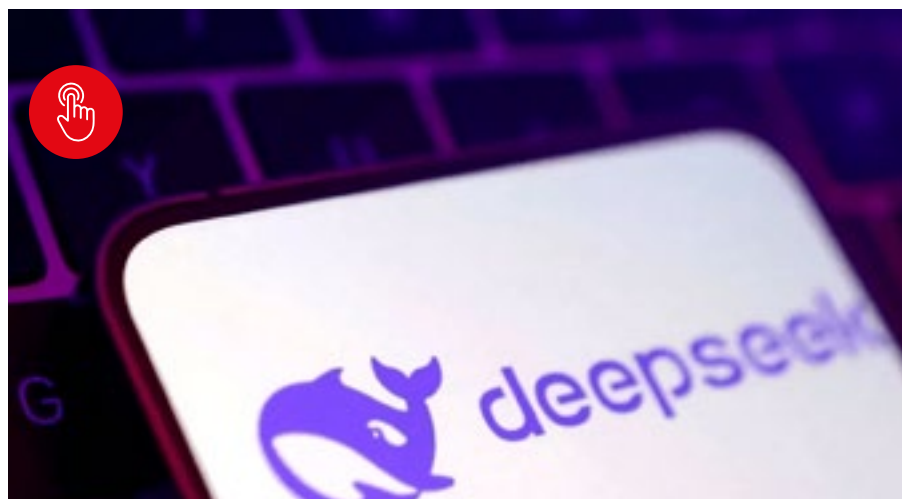
The Clan Upcycles Emotional Trauma Into Art Pieces for Kurnia Insurans & Liberty Insurance

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Dentsu Report: APAC Ad Spend to Surge 5.8% in 2025, Defying Global Slowdown

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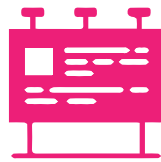
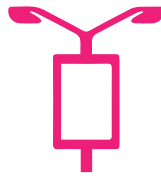


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