

MARKETING

ISSUE #449 OCTOBER 2025

WEEKENDER™



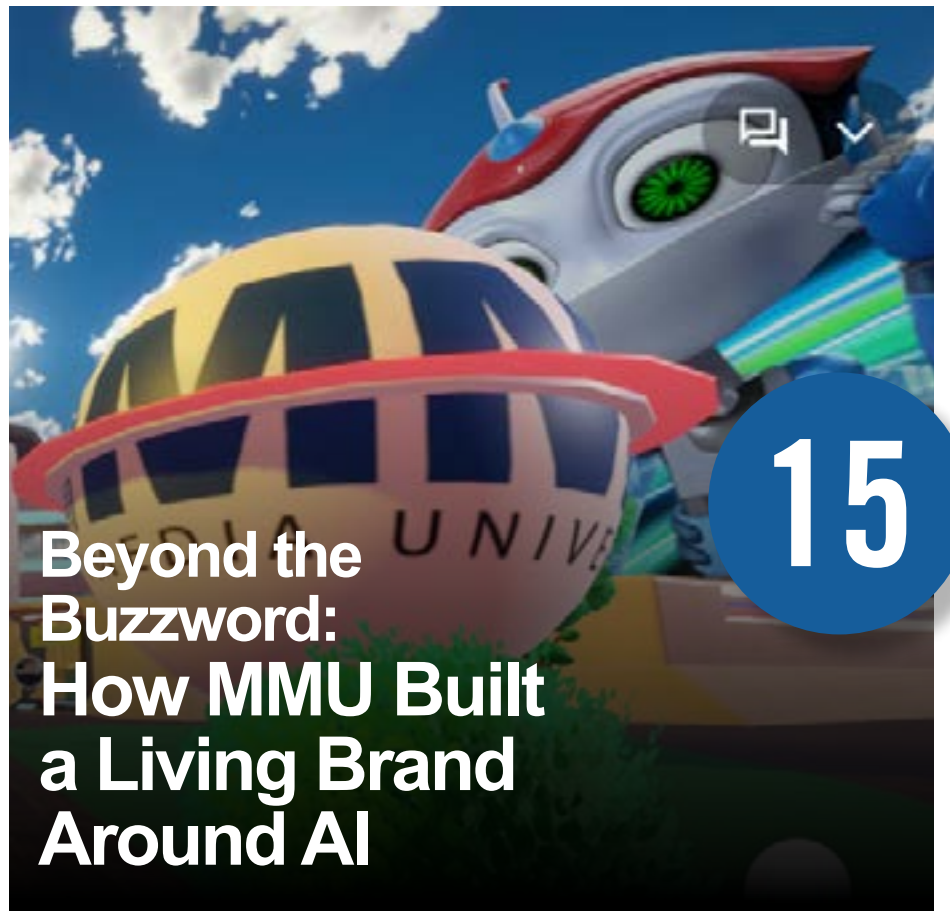
MORE THAN JUST A HOT SHOP...

WALAO WEH

EDITOR'S NOTE

04

**THE PUREST AD
IS A MEME**



15

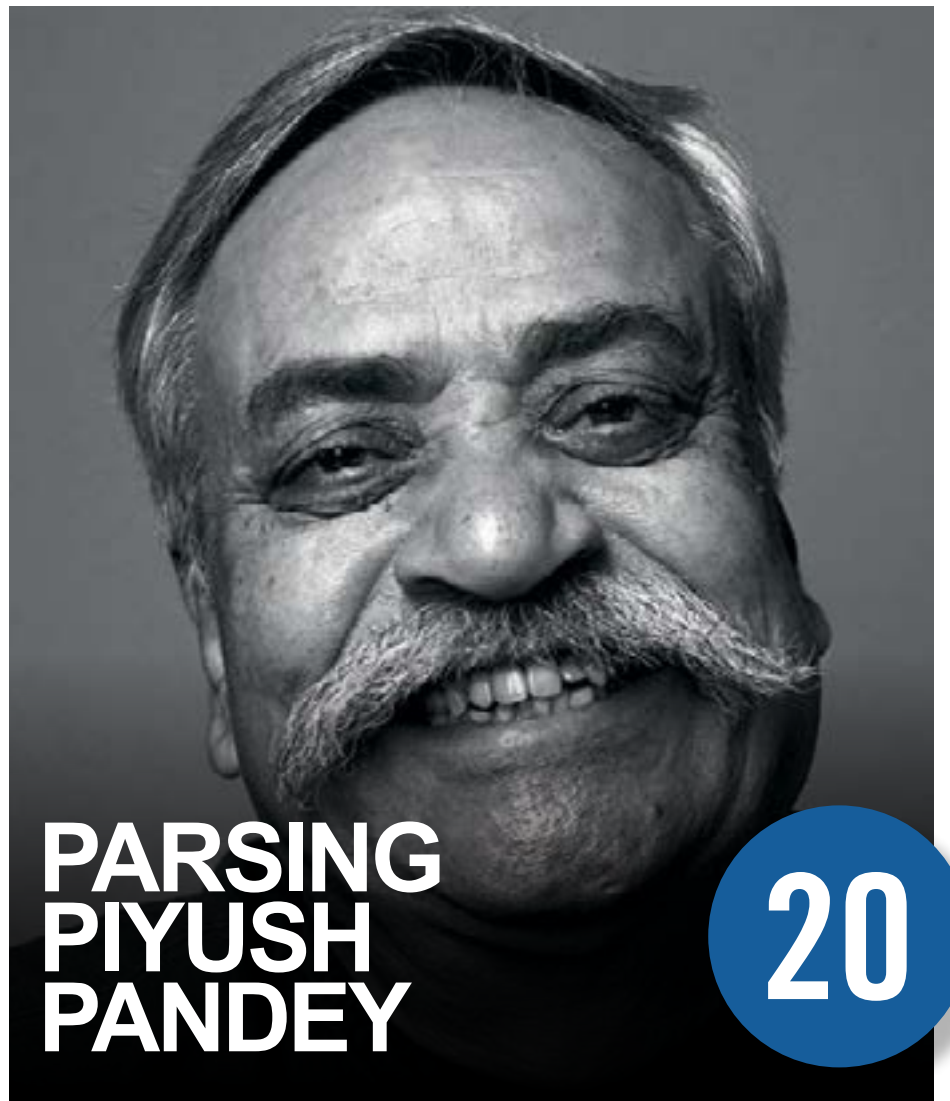
**Beyond the
Buzzword:
How MMU Built
a Living Brand
Around AI**

07



COVER STORY

**The uncomfortable
truth about success.**
What does it really take to
win?



20

**PARSING
PIYUSH
PANDEY**

Say What



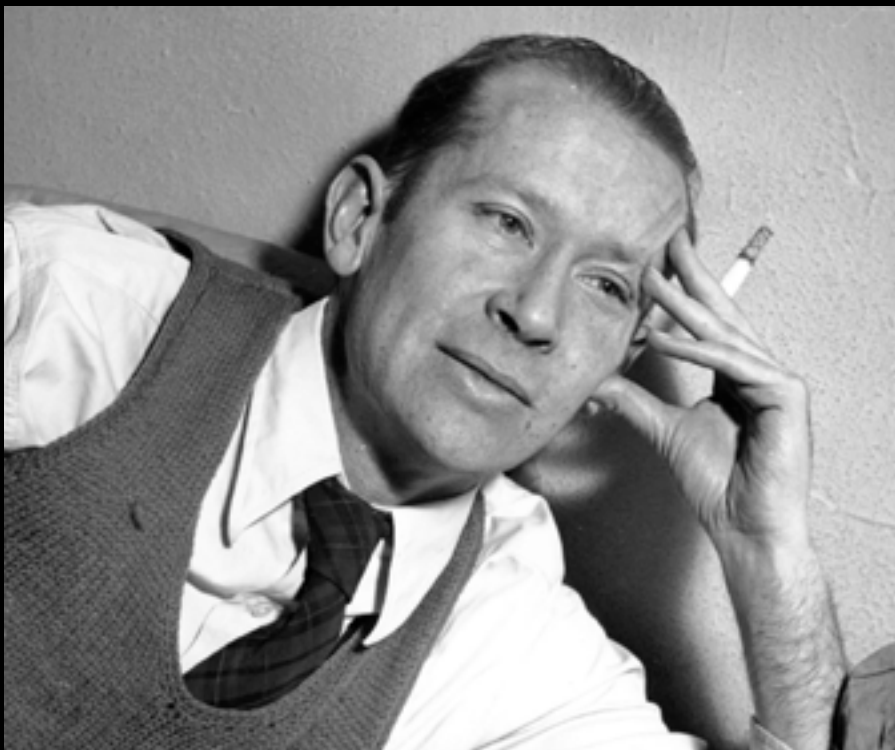
“Vision without execution is hallucination”

Thomas Edison



“Creativity is over when everyone gets involved”

Rodd Chant



“It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.”

E. E. Cummings



“Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.”

Plato

THE PUREST AD IS A MEME.

A Key Visual is for those who need to justify an idea.

A Meme is for those who want the idea instantly.

No strategy decks. No storyboards. No 12-slide rationale on “brand essence”.

Just one image, one emotion, that hits harder than a media buy.

A meme is idea, copy and visual in a single burst.

It doesn't wait for approval; it demands attention.

It doesn't buy reach; it earns it. Look around, the most viral Malaysian “ads” weren't even ads.

They were memes.

When Roti Canai went up in price, people didn't rant: they posted “RM2.50? Got gold flakes inside ah?” with a photo.

When Anwar or Najib coughed in Parliament, the memes had better engagement than any press release.

When GSC ran out of popcorn, the memes wrote the crisis comms for them.

Even brands have learned the language...

Maxis replying in meme format, myBurgerLab owning TikTok humour, and Mamak memes doing more for tourism than brochures ever did.

EDITOR'S NOTE



That's the new media landscape, where virality gets a trophy.

Because when your idea becomes a meme, it is no longer an ad.

It is culture.

Oops, I just heard someone say, "There's no money in doing memes lah".

#SledgehammerSays



The uncomfortable truth about success.

What does it really take to win?



We ask Stanley Clement, CEO of MBCS & Ensemble Malaysia, whose team just pulled off a rare triple crown this year - The APPIES, YouTube Works and Effie Agency of the Year.

But behind all the applause lies something less glamorous... discomfort.



COVER STORY



The kind that keeps you awake, questions your worth, and pushes you harder than you'd like. Stanley calls it the uncomfortable push.

At MBCS, we move fast. Aim high. Every team member has 90 days to deliver one piece of work that stands out. If performance slips, a PIP to reset and realign. Yes, a Performance Improvement Plan.

The result? A culture where 'good' isn't safe, and comfort is the enemy. Because the uncomfortable truth about success is... it never comes from comfort.

MBCS pulled off huge wins this year, what's the real secret here?

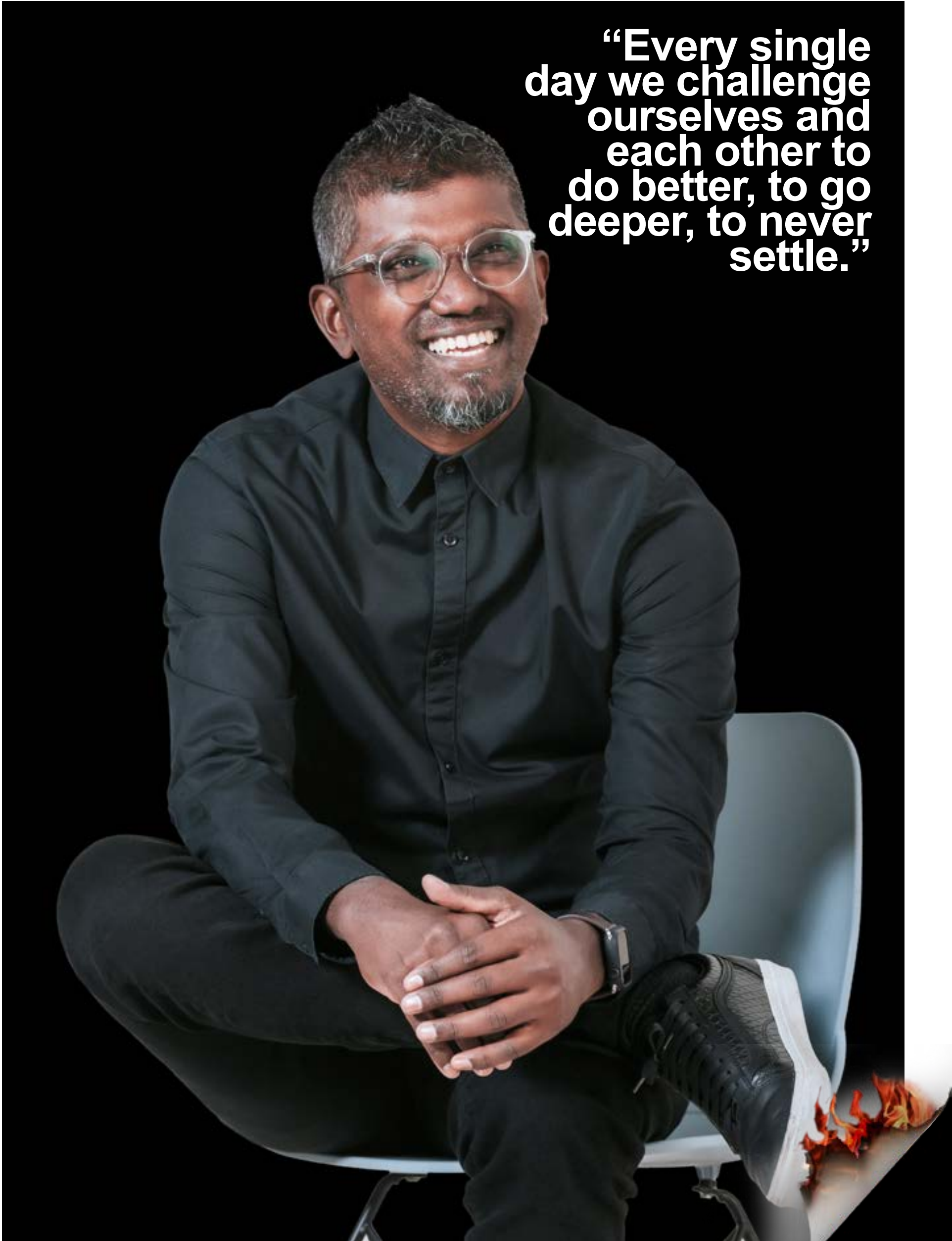
Honestly, some of these wins caught us by surprise. It's been years of grinding, so when it finally happened, it was like, damn, we actually did it.

But the secret? It's push.

Constant, relentless push. Every single day we challenge ourselves and each other to do better, to go deeper, to never settle.

COVER STORY

“Every single day we challenge ourselves and each other to do better, to go deeper, to never settle.”



COVER STORY

And here's the uncomfortable part: we made people uneasy on purpose. Everyone at MBCS knew they had 90 days to deliver at least one strong piece of work. But it went deeper than that. It was about us putting our actions exactly where intent was set. To keep the fire burning.

This wasn't fear-driven. It was pride-driven. That feeling of discomfort became our fuel. And it was all born from **Creative Fridays**.

How did that start?

It started organically. We wanted a space to celebrate monthly highlights - everyone had to present one great piece of work their client had bought into.

That evolved into something bigger: Creative Fridays.

We added *One Mic Stand*, where anyone could grab the mic and share something inspiring, not tell a joke. "Sh*t, I wish I'd done that" kind of work.

Then came *Creative Games* - the whole agency breaks into groups and solves random briefs. It's not just fun; it trains your creative reflexes. Creativity is a muscle; you've got to keep it flexed.

... Everyone at MBCS knew they had 90 days to deliver at least one strong piece of work. But it went deeper than that. It was about us putting our actions exactly where intent was set...

Finally, we added *Think Like a Client* sessions, where clients come in to share what they really look for in agencies. That's pure gold for the team.

It became more than a ritual - it became our culture of constant improvement.

How do you make people feel safe enough to throw out wild ideas, or even bad ones?

Creative Fridays help with that. It's the one day everyone's encouraged to go wild. Think big, think weird. We can always scale it down later. The point is... don't play small. Leadership's job is to give you the space to fail creatively. Because that's where the breakthroughs hide.

... Leadership's job is to give you the space to fail creatively. Because that's where the breakthroughs hide...



You've said, "We're not here to churn work. We're here to make work that moves people." How do you keep that belief alive when deadlines start to crush you?

At a basic level, we know there's bread-and-butter work and then there's fame. Both matter. Clients deserve our best no matter what. Even when

COVER STORY

deadlines pile up, we don't compromise on the standard. The mindset is simple: if your name's on it, it has to be your best. Every single time.

Once you live by that, the work naturally stays strong. Whether it's a small job or a massive campaign, the heart stays the same.

Two years ago, did you think this win was possible?

I've been chasing this for 10 years. Ever since my predecessors won it three years in a row. I was envious, not of the trophies, but of the consistency, the culture, the way their people performed at that level.

It's been a long climb. Seeing our partner agencies hit that standard motivated me.

So now that we're finally here: yeah, it's sweet. But it took a decade of obsession to get here.

You've said scaling an agency without losing its soul is tough. How do you make sure MBCS stays real despite commercial pressure?

There's no magic potion. One of my old mentors told me: don't look at commercial pressure in totality. Break it down. Make

it attainable. The other part is having the right people who understand why the pressure exists.

If you have people who believe in the same purpose - building revenue, fame and name in the right way - the business grows authentically.

Everything's connected: the work, the people, the fame. You can't prioritise one over the others. Balance is survival. And we don't let intent remain an illusion by delayed action or inaction.

How has your way of leading changed over the years?

Situations change, and I've changed with them.

The 'push' I talked about earlier? It tested people, and it tested me. Not everyone liked it. And that's fine. Leadership isn't a popularity contest. It's about getting people to be accountable for their success

One thing has stayed constant - clarity. Everyone knew we had two big goals this year: build our fame and sustain our revenue. If we failed either, the entire agency failed its KPI. Including me. So no complex dashboards,



COVER STORY



no corporate fluff - just one mission we all owned together. That we approached with honesty and accountability

You talk a lot about leading with heart. What does that look like day to day...

For me, leadership isn't a pedestal. I don't believe there should be a wall between me and the team. The title doesn't make me better, if anything, it makes me responsible for making *them* better.

A lot of my team can do things far better than I can: that's the beauty of it. My job is to pull all



... we had two big goals this year: build our fame and sustain our revenue. If we failed either, the entire agency failed its KPI. Including me...

COVER STORY

... You could call it a comeback. Or a culture reset. Or just an agency that decided 'safe' was the real risk. Either way, MBCS Malaysia didn't just win trophies this year...

that talent together so we shine collectively.

I sit with my leadership team every day. I get my hands dirty. Sometimes I'm a disruption, but hopefully, a welcome one.

Describe MBCS in one word.

Passionate.

This team doesn't give up. We live by one mantra: fight like there's no tomorrow.

What's something people outside the agency don't know, but should?

That we are made up of genuinely good people. Everyone here has a clear intent to help our clients' business grow - creatively, strategically, tactically. And we do this as part of the wider IPG Mediabrands family, which has helped to amplify the

passion and success we've seen.

We're obsessed with intent. Sometimes that gets overlooked, but that's our superpower.

After a year like this, what's next? How do you top it?

I said this the night we won Effie AOY, "We have to win it again next year."

Winning once is luck. Winning twice means you deserve to be here.

How did it feel in that exact moment when the announcement came?

Relief. Pure relief.

We had one goal - win Agency of the Year. If we didn't, everyone failed their KPI. Including me.

So when they called our name, all I could think was: Thank God I don't fail my team tonight.

You could call it a comeback. Or a culture reset. Or just an agency that decided 'safe' was the real risk.

Either way, MBCS Malaysia didn't just win trophies this year.

They proved that the uncomfortable truth about success is that it only happens when you make comfort impossible.



LAST CALL!



XXI.MMC

21ST MALAYSIAN MEDIA CONFERENCE

RISE OF THE TRIBES

NOVEMBER 4, 2025



Real brand fandom thrives in cult clusters and culture wins



Beyond the Buzzword: How MMU Built a Living Brand Around AI

“We don’t just prepare students for the future, we empower them to create it.”

When most universities talk about AI, they speak in terms of tools, courses or labs. Multimedia University (MMU) took a different path. It made AI part of its DNA.

“AI isn’t a department, it’s not a lab, and it’s not just a course,” says Professor Dato’ Dr. Mazliham Mohd Su’ud, President of MMU. “It’s our ecosystem. From the way we teach to the way we run our campus, AI is everywhere.”

“MMU is not teaching AI in silos; we are living it.”

That philosophy of turning AI from a concept into a culture has transformed MMU from

Majlis Pertukaran MEMORANDUM PERSEFAHAMAN

antara

SURUHANJAYA KOMUNIKASI DAN MULTIMEDIA MALAYSIA (MCMC)
&
MULTIMEDIA UNIVERSITY (MMU)

untuk pembukaan
AI TRANSFORMATION CENTRE (AIX)

Disaksikan oleh
YAB Dato' Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim
Perdana Menteri Malaysia



Malaysia's digital pioneer into one of its most progressive AI-driven universities.

It's living proof of a bold idea: MMU is AI, and AI is MMU.

Not a slogan, but a declaration that the future of learning isn't about adapting to technology, but becoming it.

The Living Lab for Malaysia's AI Future

Since the 1990s, Multimedia University has played a pioneering role in shaping Malaysia's digital economy. Its graduates helped build the nation's first e-commerce platforms, game studios, cybersecurity firms and fintech start-ups that formed the backbone of our new digital generation.

Now, MMU is evolving once again as Malaysia's AI hub university. A place where research, education and real-world application converge.

At the heart of this transformation is a mindset shift. "Transformation is our tradition," says Professor Dato' Mazliham. "We don't see our legacy as something to preserve; we see it as a foundation to build on."

"AI is not a subject at MMU. It's the language that connects all our disciplines."

Professor Dato' Dr. Mazliham Mohd Su'ud, President of MMU

Where AI Meets Everyday Learning

This integration isn't theoretical. MMU has embedded AI into the very fabric of its

AI: THE ECOSYSTEM

academic, research and operational systems from data-driven insights that help lecturers support students more effectively, to tools that personalise learning experiences and improve campus efficiency.

Beyond the classroom, MMU is home to 13 AI research labs in collaboration with the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). These labs serve as innovation nodes connecting academia, industry and government to develop solutions in areas such as smart cities, robotics, data analytics and digital media.

One of MMU's boldest initiatives is the MMUverse, a metaverse platform that seamlessly integrates virtual learning and campus life. Designed as an immersive digital twin, it lets students attend classes, collaborate or join co-curricular activities. All enhanced by built-in analytics that track and improve engagement.

It's not just a classroom of the future, it is the future: immersive, interactive and insight-driven.

AI with a Human Heart

For all its technological ambition, MMU remains

grounded in one guiding principle: technology must serve humanity, not replace it.

"We remind our students that the master is human, not AI," says Professor Dato' Mazliham. "AI can enhance decision-making, creativity, and efficiency, but it should never take away our values, ethics or empathy."

This belief shapes MMU's curriculum and culture. Courses in AI ethics, digital responsibility and human-AI collaboration ensure graduates understand not just how to use AI, but why they should.

Collaboration as the New Currency

MMU's AI ecosystem thrives on collaboration. Its partnerships with global and local industry players from tech startups to multinational corporations, ensure that what's taught in classrooms is directly connected to what's needed in the real world.

Through joint projects, internships, and innovation labs, students gain real-world experience solving business problems; turning theoretical knowledge into practical capability. These collaborations

AI: THE ECOSYSTEM

“We remind our students that the master is human, not AI,”

- Professor Dato' Mazliham.

keep MMU's AI initiatives grounded in industry relevance.

As the good professor puts it, “Employability is not a promise; it is engineered into the education process.”

While many institutions position themselves as future-ready, MMU's leadership prefers a different phrase: future-shaping. That philosophy extends to the university's internal culture.

Branding, Professor Dato' Mazliham notes, is everyone's job — from lecturers who embed AI into their teaching to students who turn ideas into innovation. “When our people live the brand, we don't need to sell it,” he adds. “Credibility is our currency.”

Making AI Human, Ethical, and Impactful

Looking ahead to 2030, MMU's vision is clear: to be remembered as the university that made AI human, ethical and impactful for Malaysia. One that didn't just keep up with change but created it.

It's a bold goal, but then again, MMU has never been afraid to lead the way.

As Malaysia continues its march towards becoming a digital-first nation, MMU stands as a living laboratory. A place where innovation is tested, refined and humanised. Because for MMU, AI isn't just technology.

It's transformation. It's identity. MMU is AI. AI is MMU.



mynd

**THIS ISN'T JUST A CHAT BETWEEN FRIENDS.
THERE'S A PAEDOPHILE YOU DON'T SEE.**

Did you know that children spend an average of two months a year on their smartphones?
Every time they do, they're exposed to invisible – but very real – dangers:
cyberbullying, identity theft, sextortion, grooming, child abuse material, online scams.
Protecting your child means helping them navigate the digital world safely,
recognize the risks, and avoid virtual traps.

TOGETHER, WE CAN PROTECT WHAT REALLY MATTERS.



13 INSIGHTS FROM THE LIFE OF THE PHENOMENON PIYUSH

PARSING PIYUSH PANDEY



In 2013, we did a special cover story on Piyush Pandey. Some years earlier, he judged the Malaysian Creative Circle (MC2) Awards and the subsequent year became the first Asian to be Jury President at the Cannes Advertising Festival. That was the same year Malaysia won a Cannes Lions Grand Prix!

Kunal Sinha and Sandeep Joseph both worked in Ogilvy India with the late, great Piyush Pandey. Kunal was in the strategic planning team and worked closely with Piyush on multiple campaigns. Sandeep's company was acquired by Ogilvy and he headed OgilvyInteractive after the dotcom crash, from 2001 till 2004.

Any advertising professional could benefit from these 13 insights from the life of the phenomenon that was Piyush. Six from Kunal and seven from Sandeep. (though this isn't a 6-7 situation!)

13 INSIGHTS FROM THE LIFE OF THE PHENOMENON PIYUSH

What we can learn from Piyush, even if we aren't creative directors, as per Sandeep

1. Smaller towns have more authentic voices: a key lesson from the man who came from Jaipur, in Rajasthan, which in pre-liberalized India of the 1970s and 1980s was a relative backwater, much smaller than Delhi or the megacity of advertising, Mumbai. Piyush retained the voice of the people, and its authenticity, and later advocated for hiring ad professionals from outside the big cities, to find talent with more authentic local voices, as well as more hunger to prove themselves compared to those accustomed to big city luxuries.
2. Be confident, with basis: confidence is something that many Creative Directors do exude, some without justification! In Piyush's case, he attended the premier College of the country, St Stephen's, and he played cricket very well for its team. There is an old saying, "An Oxford man walks into a room as if he owns the world, and a Cambridge man walks in as if

“Never say die” fighting spirit: personally I have been involved in pitches where Piyush saw the work very close to the deadline, changed it the very night before...

- he doesn't give a damn who owns the world.” St Stephen's name had some of this aura in India. Piyush was naturally confident about his abilities, and the seeds of self-belief were sown even before he started working. But Piyush's confidence wasn't blind bluster: he understood the need to connect with consumers and was confident of his ability to do so, based on razor-keen observation and listening to the common people.
3. “Never say die” fighting spirit: personally I have been involved in pitches where Piyush saw the work very close to the deadline, changed it the very night before the pitch, and the strat team and media personnel then adjusted the deck to the new direction. And the pitch was won. It was never too late to do what he believed

13 INSIGHTS FROM THE LIFE OF THE PHENOMENON PIYUSH

- in, and to me it's akin to football managers like Sir Alex Ferguson who pushed hard right at the end of the game, to secure a win, not being happy with a draw or a good effort.
4. Engage with senior client stakeholders: Piyush took advertising personally. He personally sold campaigns to client C-suite, and they grew to trust him. He was in the trenches, a general leading from the frontlines, not depending on servicing to get the work sold. He made time for clients and he leveraged his growing fame and credibility to push stuff he believed in, across the line.
 5. Human connect with staff: Piyush was a people's person. He would send personal thank you notes to creative folks who had done award-winning work, when Ogilvy Mumbai had more than a thousand staff. He may not have had time to meet everyone personally, as he grew to global creative head honcho at Ogilvy, but he did reach out and he remained accessible.
 6. Advertising as sport: Like many great managers today, consciously or subconsciously

because of his cricket background, Piyush regarded the business of advertising as a sport. One mustn't let defeat break one down, one had to play on the front foot (aggressively, taking the bull by the horns and not being cowed). One had to play for the team, not the individual accolades.

7. He beat Ageism: Piyush matured like a fine wine, some of his best work happened after he turned forty. He remained fired up to burnish his agency's reputation on the global stage, and he empowered whole generations of younger creative whizkids to be confident and shoot their shots.

6 Ps of PP, as per Kunal

1. Partner: For Piyush, everyone was a partner. Colleagues in every function, at every level. Clients. No great work could be created unless the client was a partner who could make the work sharper and smarter. The craftspersons: from the film maker and sound editor to the hoarding contractor who took an outdoor ad and turned it into a talking point. And when he

13 INSIGHTS FROM THE LIFE OF THE PHENOMENON PIYUSH



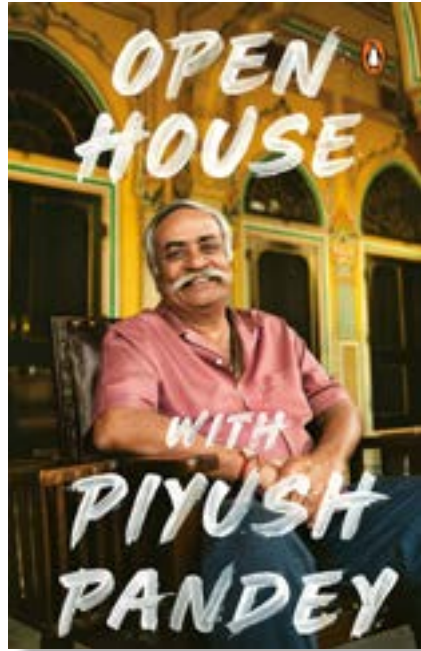
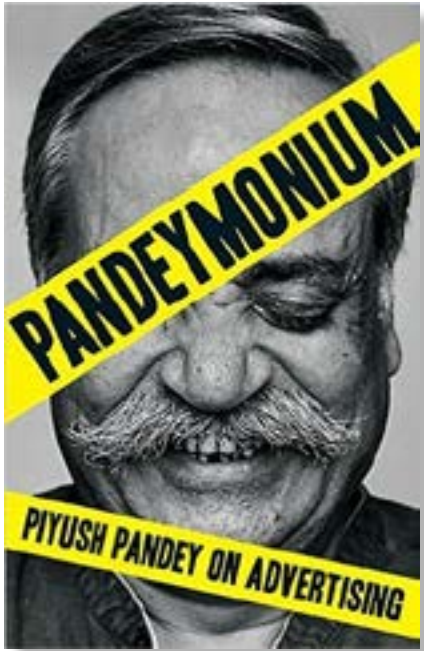
CLICK TO WATCH FULL COMMERCIAL

summoned us to sharpen the brand proposition and make it more rooted, 'Oye planner, idhar aa', ("hey, planner, come here!") it was in the spirit of that partnership.

2. Point of view: Piyush believed that every ad that left the agency's doors must have a point of view. Unfettered celebrations, challenging societal norms – Cadbury. Mobility is emancipating – Chal Meri Luna. Homes are expressions of the family – Asian Paints. That point of view made a brand part of people's lexicon because it connected so deeply.

3. Popular: Many have pointed out how Piyush changed the paradigm of Indian advertising, from a burra-saheb tone to reflecting the popular, grassroots emotion, and it bears emphasis. This was cultural branding at its finest, and it stemmed from a deep understanding of and appreciation for the masses. In the process, he helped brands access much larger markets: Cadbury, from gift to everyday celebration, Fevicol – from a carpenter's adhesive to being in every home closet.
4. Pride: He made every Ogilvy person take pride in their

13 INSIGHTS FROM THE LIFE OF THE PHENOMENON PIYUSH



work, just as he exuded pride at every international festival. It compelled global creatives and marketers to understand the Indian idiom. It made every Indian advertising person hold their heads high when they stepped on to the podium, to pick up awards. It opened up the floodgates for other Indian advertising leaders to shine, and carry that pride forward. What a trailblazer!

5. Pet Pooja (literally “stomach worship”): In a kind of opposing stand to ‘stay hungry, stay foolish’, Piyush believed that sustenance was the fuel and the reward to great performance. Every good meeting would be followed up with a hearty lunch or dinner; no one who kept long hours

went hungry (or thirsty). He himself sought out simple home food in cities where former Ogilvy India people now lived.

6. Prayer: No matter how wonderful the ideas were crafted, how well prepared the team was, a little prayer before the performance was an essential step in getting divinity on his side for Piyush. Maybe that turned the tide in Ogilvy’s favour, maybe that elevated the pitch or new campaign. It certainly was an admission of humility.

Om Shanti.



Sandeep Joseph is the CEO and co-founder of Ampersand Advisory, a leading agency with over 450 awards and 8 x #1 in 2025.



Kunal Sinha is the Chief Knowledge Officer of Ampersand Advisory, and is a strategic authority, who has written multiple books, spoken and lectured widely, and has worked across Asia.



The most difficult ad of our lives.

How do you talk about Piyush Pandey in one page?

It's like trying to capture the sun in a sewing box.

So, instead of describing his entire life and singing his praises, we will write as Piyush taught us to - keep it simple and say only what matters.

What mattered to Piyush?

Waking up early and writing.

Waking up his team and his production partners the minute he had an idea.

Looking into his team's eyes before walking into a meeting, to say, "Front foot pe khelo". (Play on the front foot.)

Stepping out of a meeting and always taking a minute to say, "Well played, partner".

Bringing cricket into all the wisdom he imparted. Even if you didn't love cricket, you love the man so much, you make the effort to pick up his references.

Love brings us to family. Family mattered to Piyush. While universities are launching studies on work-life balance, this man managed to be there 100% for his work, and 100% for his family. A math only Piyush could pull off.

Laughter was another one of his great loves. Once he thought of a joke, he had to say it. Even if it was in a client meeting. Even if he was meeting that client for the first time. It was a combination of his genius mind and his child-like heart that made his clients fall in love with him for life.

The client's business meant a lot to Piyush and that's why when he said, "Trust me", clients trusted him. When he said, "Give my team a day more", the clients gave us a day more. When he said, "Yeh badhiya banega", (This will be great), there was no question of questioning it.

Ogilvy was his second family. Come to think of it, on some days, it might even have been his first. Every storm we faced, Piyush was standing in front of us. Like a shield? No. Shields can be cracked. He stood in front of us like a dad.

He scolded us like a dad too. A few hours later he would call with a joke. His way of saying, 'I scold you, but I love you'.

Relationships mattered to him. He saw the human in all the people in his life. There were days when you were sitting with him in his home, and he would say, "You will have to wait for tea, because my help has gone to play volleyball". He would share ad films with his staff and ask them if they liked it. This was his research. No modules. No big or small data. Just one human to another. You must know at this point that his staff felt comfortable to say 'no' if they didn't like it.

Piyush's creativity was for every person. The common person was special to him. If his work won an award but his neighbours didn't like it, he wouldn't care for such an award. 'People must love it first', he believed.

India mattered to him, and this showed up in many ways. In his work for sure, but also in his passion for Indian food. Aloo, dal, chole, roti, chawal, and he was a happy man in any corner of the world.

We cannot talk about this man and not talk about his moustache. His moustache entered rooms before he did. When he was in deep thought, his fingers automatically caressed his moustache. A few seconds later, he would say, "Ek kaam karo...". (Do this...). What would follow would be an ingenious solution to a twisted brief or an office issue.

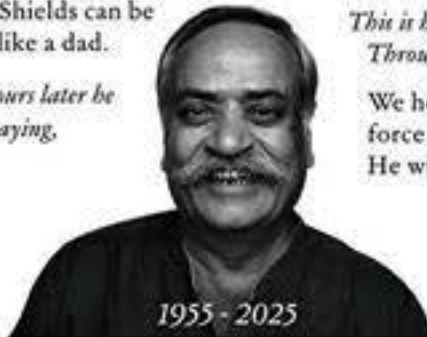
In June 2018, he was the first Asian to win the Lion of St Mark at Cannes Lions, along with his brother, Prasoon Pandey. It was a very important day because it was one of the very few days, Piyush was not wearing his simple shirt! He was dressed in a very formal attire. This must have taken some real convincing because Piyush loved his shirts. He wore them everywhere.

Indian languages and Hindi in particular, were very dear to him. After all, he rose from the 'language department' and won over the world. If he read this, he would be likely to say, "Isko Hindi mein bhi likho. Aur achcha hoga". (Write this in Hindi too. It will be even better.)

Ideas. Laughter. Songs. Writing. Family. Team. Moustache. Hindi. People. Ogilvy.

This is how we want to remember him. Through things that mattered to him.

We hope the heavens are ready for the force that is Piyush Pandey. He will walk in and lead with a joke.



1955 - 2025

The Ogilvy family stands with Piyush's entire family in this time of grief.

Ogilvy

MOST READ ON www.MARKETING.com.my (25th October – 31st October 2025)



Bharat Avalani accoladed with AFAA Honorary Life Member Award at AdAsia 2025 in Beijing
Pageviews: 3,305



Omnicom + IPG

What the Omnicom-IPG Merger Really Means for the Future of Advertising
Pageviews: 3,102



nagaddb
tribal

astro



Astro Appoints Naga DDB Tribal and Publicis Malaysia as Agencies-on-Record
Pageviews: 3,011



Online Safety IRL: Scam Edition

The Scam Stops Here: How CelcomDigi and Meta Are Training Malaysia's New Digital Guardians
Pageviews: 2,975



A 1957



B 1963



C 1969



D 1978



E 1987



F 2004

Misname Shame: Human Faux Pas or Tech Glitch?
Pageviews: 2,587



SPIKES ASIA

Set the benchmark
for creativity in APAC

Awards are now open.

www.spikes.asia