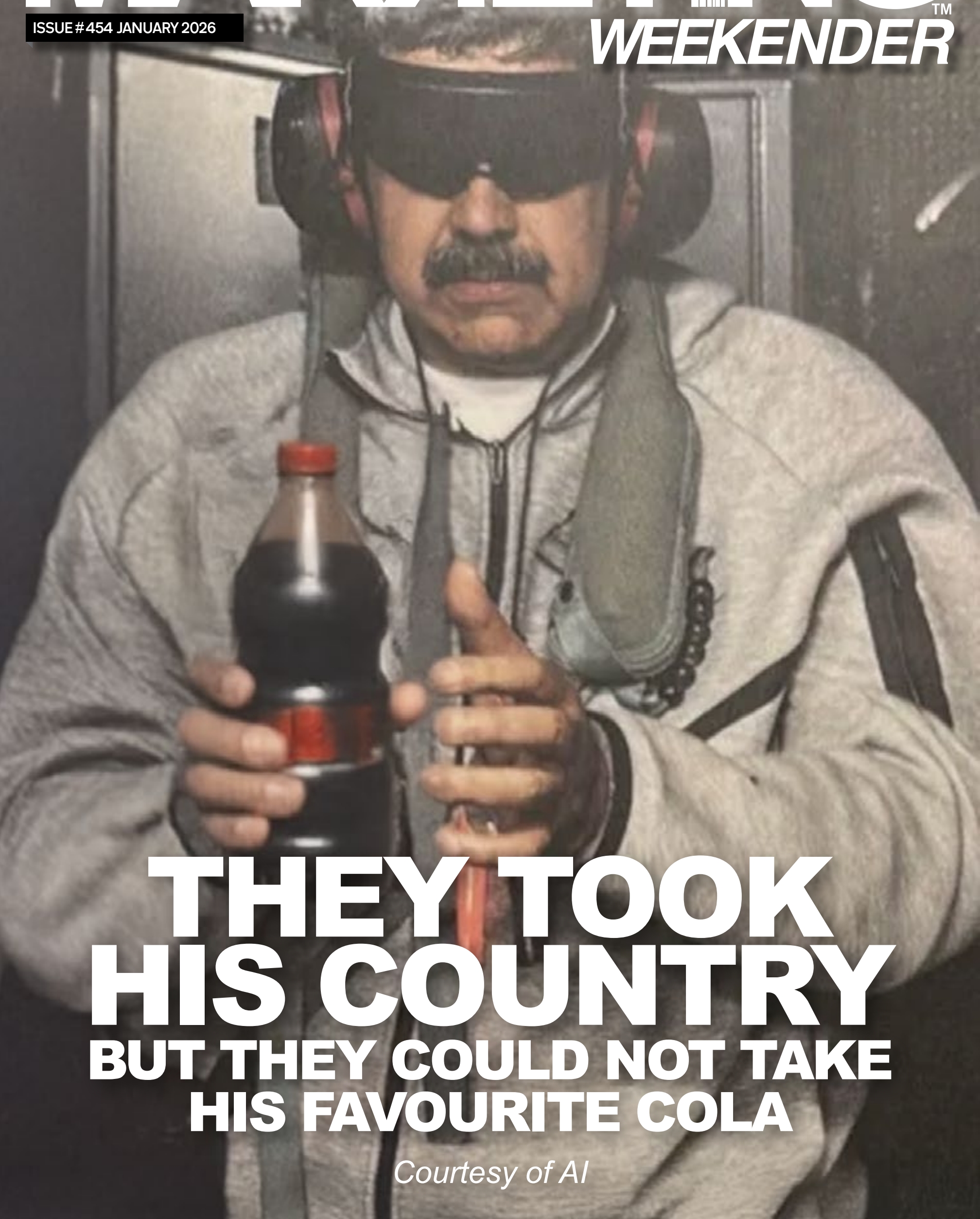


# MARKETING

ISSUE #454 JANUARY 2026

WEEKENDER™



**THEY TOOK  
HIS COUNTRY  
BUT THEY COULD NOT TAKE  
HIS FAVOURITE COLA**

*Courtesy of Al*

**COVER STORY**



**THE NEW MARKETING WEAPON IS BELIEVABILITY**

**08**



**HOW I LEFT ADVERTISING**

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**EDITOR'S NOTE**

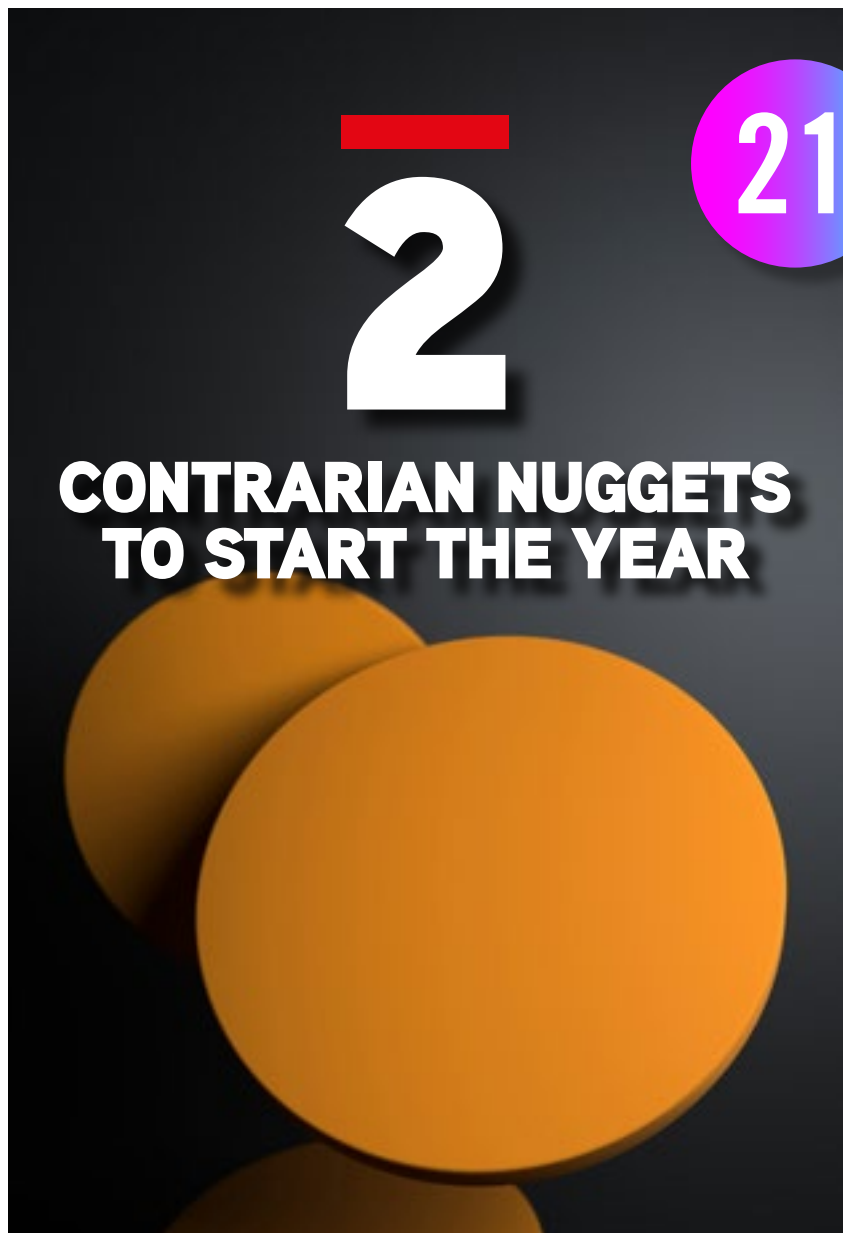


**04**

**2**

**21**

**CONTRARIAN NUGGETS TO START THE YEAR**



# What Say



**“The enemy of nonsense”**

A phrase George Orwell used to describe The Observer newspaper.



**“It’s better to live rich than die rich.”**

Samuel Johnson



**“There is never enough time unless you’re serving it.”**

Malcolm Forbes



**“Most of the time, the stress isn’t the work itself. It’s the unfinished thoughts you carry into the weekend.”**

Aaron Pinto

COO of Media Prima Audio



## EDITOR'S NOTE



# Retail Theatre Is Back

We spent years preaching “frictionless”. Tap, buy, deliver. Then Malaysia did what Malaysia always does.

We went back to the store.

Because retail is not just commerce. It is mood. It is ritual. It is therapy with a trolley.

This is where AEON quietly wins. Families know the route. Parking, groceries, pharmacy, a bit of browsing, maybe sushi or ramen, then home. It is a life pattern.

And Mydin. Mydin is pure Malaysian theatre. Loud, proud, unapologetic value. The aisles feel like a bazaar and people go there for the hunt. The satisfaction of winning today's basket.

That is the point many marketers miss.

Theatre is not marble floors. Theatre is emotion.

Smart brands are now mixing digital with physical properly. Use tech to remove the boring parts. Let the store deliver the feelings.

Here is the new brief.

Make the entrance a trailer.

Make the staff the medium.

Make service the differentiator again.

Make the exit leave a story in the customer's mind.

Retail theatre only works when it ends with trust.

That is the edge in 2026.



# Convert Festive Shoppers

*Click  
Here*

GO ON. TAP IT.



**MYDIN**





[CLICK TO FOLLOW](#)

DECLASSIFIED



## HOW I LEFT ADVERTISING

Once upon a time, after nearly 14 years in a global agency network, working locally and overseas, I'd had enough.

Fourteen years is long enough for deadlines to become your weather. Long enough for "urgent" to sound normal. Long enough to measure your weeks in briefs, edits, client moods, and late nights you pretend you don't mind.

I was at Menara Aik Hua then.

That day, the sun was blazing like punishment and the rain was falling like a slap.

I'd been restless for days. The politics, the clients, the performative tasks, the hierarchy...

And then, without any warning, I stood up.

No announcement. No goodbye tour.

No grand exit line.

I just walked out, blindly, out of the building and straight into that blazing rain.

I kept walking. For about twenty minutes.

Soaked through and through, like the rain was trying to scrub something off me.

Shirt clinging. Shoes filling up. Turban heavy with rain and burden.

And then it hit me. Not thunder. Not lightning.



The realisation.

Ham, what are you doing?

I'd walked out like a man sleepwalking.

So I turned around.

Not because I changed my mind.

Because I wanted to end it properly.

I walked back into the office, dripping, sat down and penned a short resignation note.

No drama. No essays. No speeches. Just a clean piece of paper that said, I'm done.

And I was gone.

Later, my MD called from New York. He tried to talk me out of it. The logic. The persuasion. The "think about it."

But my mind was made up.

In fact, I refused even a farewell party.

No cake. No speeches.

No "we must have lunch sometime" theatre.

I didn't want closure dressed up as celebration.

I wanted exit. Clean and final.

That's how I left advertising.

Not with fireworks.

But soaking wet.



*Harmandar Singh  
aka Ham, follow me  
on LinkedIn for more  
stories*



# The new marketing weapon is Believability

*Malaysian Brands are not ready ....*

BY THE HAMMER



Brand building in Malaysia has always been a trust business. You earn it slowly through consistent service, familiar codes, and years of showing up. Now AI has introduced a shortcut for the enemy. It cannot steal your brand. It can steal belief in it.

Malaysian brands are not ready because most brand building here has been optimised for visibility, not verifiability.

We are excellent at campaigns, endorsements, and fast content,



## COVER STORY

but weak at the unglamorous plumbing that protects truth, governance, provenance, crisis drills, and clear “single source” official channels.

In a WhatsApp-first country, a believable fake can outrun a careful clarification, yet many organisations still respond like it is 2015, with slow approvals, scattered spokespeople, and no pre-agreed protocol to lock accounts, verify reality, and publish proof fast.

Add to that uneven AI literacy across teams, agencies under cost pressure using tools without guardrails, and leadership that treats AI as productivity software rather than a reputational risk surface. The result is simple.

When the first deepfake hits, the brand will waste its first crucial hours arguing internally about whether it is real, while the

public has already decided what to believe.

### **Falsehoods travel faster than facts.**

Picture a Monday morning in Kuala Lumpur. A video is trending. A familiar voice is “confirming” a scandal. A logo is visible in the corner. The clip looks like news, sounds like authority, and spreads faster than your comms team can react. By lunchtime, a newsroom

is chasing verification, an agency is fielding angry calls, and a brand is freezing paid media.

This is the new reality for Malaysian brand building. Your brand is no longer only what you publish. It is also

what can be convincingly forged about you, long enough to travel.

The shift is brutal because





it changes the core question marketers are trained to manage. It is no longer “Where did our ads appear.” It is “What is real anymore.”

And if you build brands in Malaysia, you already know what happens when doubt enters the chat. Once suspicion settles in, every future message becomes harder to land. That is why belief has become an attack surface.

**Deepfakes are no longer “video edits”. They are performance marketing built for fraud.**

The most frightening part is that the mechanics look like marketing. Targeting. Creative. Funnels. Conversion. Only the product is deception.

Malaysia’s Securities Commission warned the public about investment scams using deepfake videos that impersonate prominent personalities and use reputable company names. The SC described how victims are pushed to click through, share details, and get contacted by “agents” who then manipulate them into transferring money or providing more personal information.

Police have also said they were investigating hundreds of fraud cases believed to involve deepfake technology, including voice impersonation, with reported losses in the millions of ringgit.

For Malaysian brand building, this matters because fraud

## COVER STORY

# “Is this a security issue or a comms issue”



borrowing the credibility your category spent decades creating. A scam does not need your permission to wear your face. It only needs your familiarity.

So when marketing teams ask, “Is this a security issue or a comms issue.” The answer is yes. It is a trust issue, and trust is the foundation of Malaysian brand equity.

## **The biggest AI disasters will be self inflicted, not hacker driven.**

Now for the part agencies and brands do not like admitting. Many of the ugliest incidents will not come from attackers. They will come from internal haste.

It starts like any other Tuesday in Kuala Lumpur. The agency WhatsApp groups are already alive. A client wants “ten ideas by

lunch”, another wants “six TikTok scripts in Bahasa and English”, and someone says what everyone is thinking, “Just run it through AI.”

That sentence sounds like speed. It also sounds like safety. It is neither.

In an agency, the risk is confidentiality and invented proof. One pasted brief can become a leak. One AI drafted case study can quietly fabricate numbers.

In a Malaysian market where pitches are won on credibility and relationships, that is brand suicide. You might “win” a deck today, then lose the trust that keeps your retainer alive tomorrow. Brand building is not only what you make for clients. It is also what clients believe about your discipline.

## **When a brand’s voice becomes easy to copy, crisis becomes a subscription.**

AI can create content that looks legitimate enough to pass as evidence. A fake leaked email. A fabricated screenshot of an internal memo. A synthetic video of a founder confessing to something they never did. A voice note allegedly from customer care insulting a customer tribe. The content does not need to



be perfect. It only needs to be believable long enough to travel.

Now place that inside Malaysia's brand building landscape.

Imagine a bank CEO "announcing" a new fee structure in a deepfake clip. The clip triggers outrage, customers forward it to family groups, and your call centre collapses. Imagine an airline "admitting" a safety issue. Imagine a QSR brand "confirming" a halal breach. Imagine a telco leader "mocking" a particular community. None of it needs to be true to cause damage. It only needs to feel true while it spreads.

Scale is the multiplier. AI collapses cost and effort. The new enemy is not a lone troll. It is scale.

This is why "crisis readiness" becomes a brand building capability in Malaysia, not a PR add on. If you are building brand trust, you are also building your ability to defend it at speed.

### **Provenance is the new premium.**

Malaysia's leaders are already pointing to guardrails, including calls for platforms to take responsibility and not allow deepfake content to spread unchecked.



Your own document frames the direction clearly too, with government needing signed official channels and rapid debunk protocols because deepfakes can divide communities before truth catches up.

For Malaysian brand building, the idea to steal is provenance. Build “official reality” signals.

Make it easy for journalists and consumers to verify what actually came from you. Tighten your owned channels. Use pinned “verification posts” that are always current. Build a habit where every major announcement has a single canonical source. In a low trust environment, the brand that can prove authenticity wins attention and keeps credibility.

This is not only about deepfakes. It is also about protecting customer data and internal information because governance is tightening. Malaysia’s PDPA Amendment Act provides that provisions come into operation on dates appointed by ministerial Gazette notification.

Legal briefings and guidance have also highlighted phased commencement and new obligations such as appointing a data protection officer

**... This is not only about deepfakes. It is also about protecting customer data...**

and mandatory data breach notification.

Brand building in Malaysia now includes data discipline. If your team leaks data through prompts or plugins, you do not only have a security problem. You have a trust problem that advertising cannot fix.

**The new crisis plan is operational, not emotional.**

So what should Malaysian marketers and agencies do, practically, before the clip lands.

Write an AI Risk Policy like an insurance plan, internal, enforceable, and boring in the best way.

Define the insured assets: reputation and public communications, confidential information and personal data,

## COVER STORY



**China just sunk the American submarine near Selat Melaka, Putin said he has nothing to do with it!**

**BBC WORLD NEWS**

**IMPACT**

▪ Buenos Aires 10:25 ▪ Paris 15:25 ▪ Karachi 18:25 ▪ Seoul 22:25

operational systems like CMS, ad accounts, finance workflows and service bots, plus people's identities, voices, likeness and credentials.

Define covered events: deepfake or voice clone incidents tied to the organisation, false claims created or amplified by AI, data leaks via prompts or vendor retention, automation misfires like unintended posting or spending,

and bias incidents with harmful outcomes.

State exclusions in plain language: no autonomous publishing or spending without a named human approver, no consumer AI tools for confidential briefs or personal data, no training on client or customer data without consent and legal review, no synthetic spokesperson without clearance and a crisis plan.



## COVER STORY

**... in the new era, the brand that survives is not the loudest. It is the one whose truth can still be proven...**

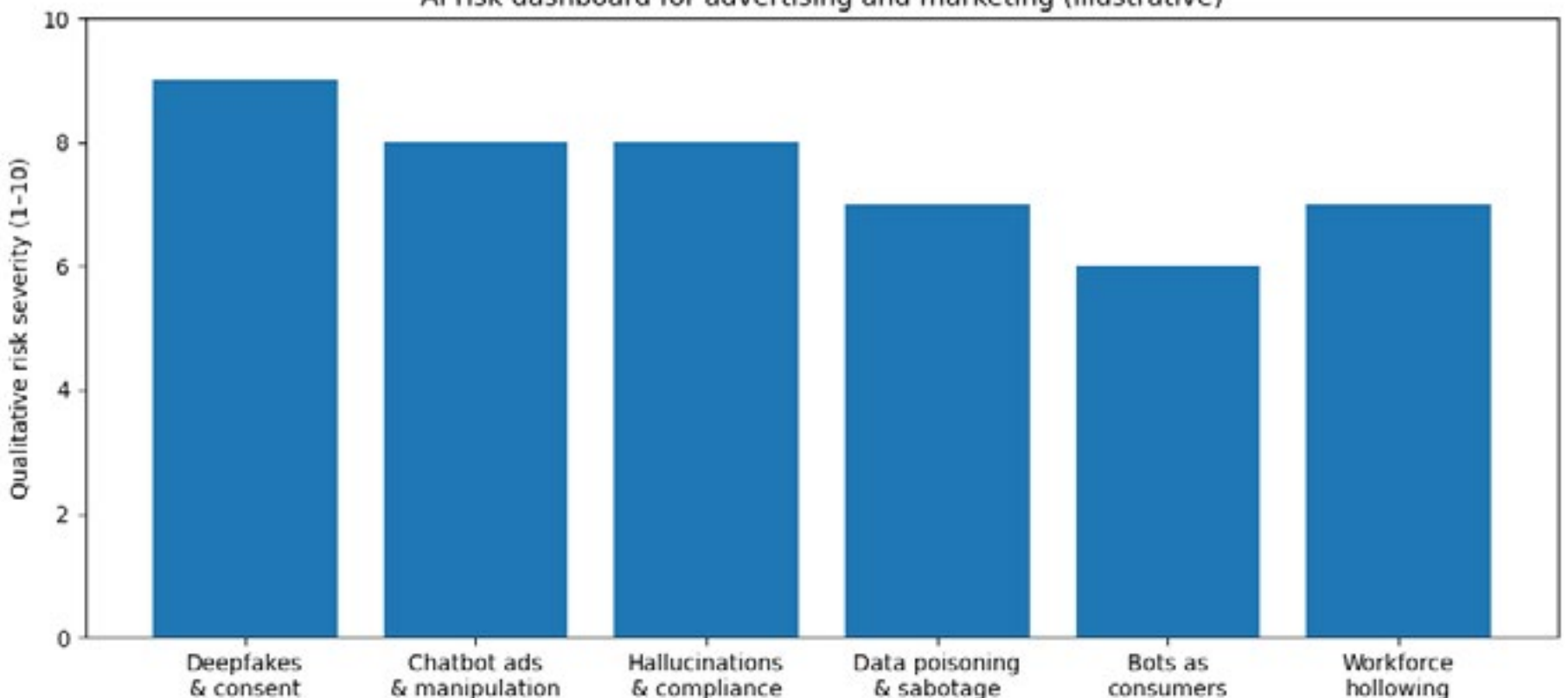
Add deductibles, mandatory friction: provenance notes on every AI assisted output, second reviewer on sensitive topics, out of band verification for payments and access changes.

Then drill the claims process: activate one owner, one channel, one log. Contain by pausing automation and locking accounts. Verify with trusted sources and forensics if needed. Communicate verified updates and corrections with proof. Recover by fixing root cause and retraining teams.

That is what brand building in Malaysia looks like in 2026. Not just big films and big media. It is operational trust. Because in the new era, the brand that survives is not the loudest. It is the one whose truth can still be proven, on an ordinary Monday, inside the WhatsApp group where belief is decided.

Lock accounts, verify reality, then speak.

AI risk dashboard for advertising and marketing (illustrative)



**Source:** Author's analysis. **Graphic:** Generated with ChatGPT. Scores are illustrative.



# Brilliant engineering. Wrong problem.

Omnicom just spent billions connecting everything. But did anyone ask if disconnection was the problem?

Omnicom launched “Omni” this week—2.6 billion verified IDs, \$73.5 billion in media buying, agentic AI. The full orchestra, perfectly synchronised.

For 15 years, advertising has obsessed over connecting data to creative to media to commerce. We’ve built the world’s most sophisticated plumbing.

## COVER STORY

# ... Agencies have spent 15 years selling what's easy to justify in PowerPoint rather than what builds brands...

Meanwhile, market share growth has flatlined across categories.

Perhaps the problem isn't that our systems don't talk to each other. It's that agencies have been selling the wrong solution.

John Lewis didn't dominate Christmas because their creative team had real-time access to 2.6 billion IDs. They made a penguin fall in love.

Dove didn't become a \$5 billion brand through "connected audience insight to sales activation." They said something true nobody else dared say.

Byron Sharp is clear: brands grow by being mentally available to light buyers, not optimising funnels for heavy users.

But agencies keep selling better plumbing because it's easier to sell "measurable precision" to procurement than "unmeasurable fame" to the board.

## The magnificent irony:

Omni promises "unprecedented precision and speed."

Speed to do what? Precisely target the 3% already buying you whilst competitors colonise everyone else's memory?

We've got \$73.5 billion in buying power and autonomous agents coordinating everything.

What agencies haven't sold is what actually works: making something famous that half the country talks about.

Why? Fame doesn't fit on a dashboard. Mental availability can't be measured in real-time. Procurement doesn't have a line item for "make people remember us."

## What actually drives growth:

Mental availability. Physical availability. Distinctive brand assets.

## COVER STORY



Fame (that unmeasurable thing agencies stopped selling because CFOs couldn't track it)

Notice what's missing? Real-time identity resolution. Agentic AI. Connected workflows.

The uncomfortable truth: Agencies have spent 15 years selling what's easy to justify in PowerPoint rather than what builds brands.

"36% improvement in conversion efficiency" gets through procurement. "Make something so interesting millions will remember you" grows businesses.

We chose the first because we were too scared to defend the second.

Omni is the most sophisticated marketing technology ever built.

Agencies will sell it brilliantly to clients wanting measurable, low-risk solutions.

Then we'll wonder why brands still aren't growing.

It's not the clients' fault. They're buying what we're selling. We're just selling efficiency when they need fame.

**The real question:**

When do we admit we stopped selling what works because we couldn't measure it, and started selling what we could measure because it was easier to defend?

We've built a Lamborghini for getting to the wrong destination very efficiently.

By *Gustaf Wick*, Global Brand Strategist



**DON'T  
CLICK  
THIS  
PAGE**

*DOOH AT YOUR OWN RISK.*

# MOST READ ON www.MARKETING.com.my (01<sup>th</sup> January – 09<sup>th</sup> January 2026)



## Malaysia's Ad Market Has Crossed the Digital Point of No Return

Pageviews: 3,305



## Coway Taps Dentsu Malaysia to Drive Creative Excellence Across Key Products Campaigns

Pageviews: 3,102



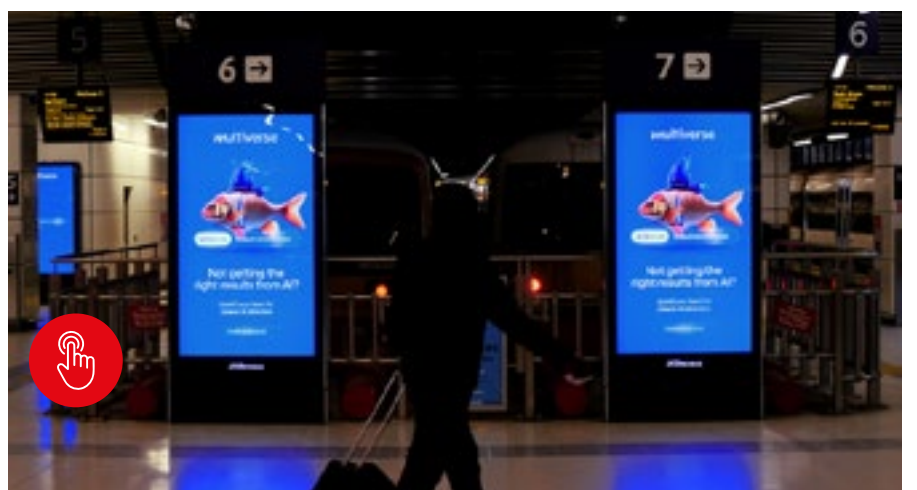
## From Side Hustles to RM1M Powerhouse: How a Gen Z Team Scaled a Digital Agency in Malaysia

Pageviews: 3,011



## MDEC Opens RFP For New Social Media Agency

Pageviews: 2,975



## 7 Lessons from Award-Winning B2B Campaigns in 2025

Pageviews: 2,587

# 2 contrarian nuggets to start the year

By Sandeep Joseph

#1 Outdoor works better when it isn't animated, unless you're at a traffic junction

Digital out-of-home (DOOH) advertising in Malaysia is experiencing **notable growth** as brands increasingly embrace dynamic outdoor formats that combine the reach of traditional out-of-home with the flexibility of digital media. The Malaysian OOH and DOOH market is projected to expand steadily, with the overall market estimated at around USD 210 million in 2025 and anticipated to grow at a compound annual growth rate of about 6 % through 2030 (Mordor Intelligence). In fact, data suggests that Malaysian advertisers now spend more on outdoor ads in aggregate

## OUT OF HOME



compared to what they spend on TV.

Within outdoor, DOOH itself has been a **key growth driver**, delivering double-digit gains thanks to falling LED costs that make digital screens more accessible to advertisers. Other factors helping its growth are programmatic buying, and better audience engagement. Clients like the flexibility of DOOH because they can come in for any duration and exit, and they don't need to produce expensive vinyl prints like they require for the more rigid static outdoor.

This growth reflects broader industry dynamics: post-pandemic footfall rebound in transit and lifestyle spaces, the rise of real-time, contextual content that can be updated based on location, time of day, or audience behaviour. Traditional static billboards cannot match this. Advertisers are deploying

DOOH in high-traffic areas such as malls, airports, and transit hubs to capture attention where audiences are highly present and receptive.

When it comes to memorability, digital ads are remembered more, because the eye is attracted to movement and so on.

However, while investment in DOOH offers strong visibility and creative flexibility, advertisers face a huge risk if they over-allocate to digital outdoor alone, while sacrificing static ads. In the same 10 seconds it take you to pass a billboard, your static outdoor ads have a 100% opportunity to be seen, as opposed to 12.5% for a digital signage (where 8 advertisers are sharing the 2 minute time slot rotation) We have analysed data for various clients, and the probability of being seen can vary by a factor 10 x or more, with static ads 10 x more likely to be seen than a digital ad. Especially on highways and arterial roads, short messages with 3-7 words on static billboards can make an impact. At traffic junctions, where cars are waiting for 2-3 minutes, thus increasing the chances of being spotted, then digital

## OUT OF HOME

**... Many brands in Malaysia are shifting from expensive giant influencers to mid-sized and nano influencers, who are seen as more credible, authentic and crucially, more affordable...**

boards with animated, interesting messages have a better chance to win share of mind.

Malaysia's OOH landscape has shifted from static dominance to demand-led planning. Says Dzylia Damhuri, Managing Partner of Regal Channel, "While static still makes up ~91% of total panels, DOOH now attracts ~57% of total OOH spends, despite representing only ~9% of inventory. (SOURCE: Malaysian OOH Landscape, AIMS Research).

This imbalance reflects rising demand for dynamic formats, while static continues to deliver scale, continuity and 100% share of voice.

The market has not replaced static — it has redefined the role of both formats. As supply grows, effectiveness will come from role clarity — not more screens. It is a supply-and-demand story — and the strongest outcomes come when both formats are planned together."

This mismatch between number of sites (statics) and where the money is going (increasingly to DOOH) will result in media owners struggling to balance their portfolio of assets, and will inevitably lead to falling revenues and business consolidation with all its attendant pains.

But from a client point of view, the thorny question that advertisers should be thinking about more, is whether to do static or digital, or if they can afford it, do both. And our contrarian view is that while DOOH has its virtues, you should not drop statics, which have a higher probability of being seen.

## **#2 Influencers are not influencing**

Influencers are increasingly an immovable part of ad campaigns.

## OUT OF HOME

## ... Or does it mean that some influencers are already not influencers, but serve the function of vague awareness creation?...

They could command anywhere from 5% to 30% or more of the total budget of a campaign, and Unilever's CEO, Fernando Fernandez is a major proponent of influencer marketing. He is shifting to an "influencer-first" strategy to combat consumer skepticism towards traditional ads, aiming to work with 20x more creators, move 50% of media spend to social, and leverage micro/nano-influencers for authentic, hyper-local connections, especially in growth markets like India.

Many brands in Malaysia are shifting from expensive giant influencers to mid-sized and nano influencers, who are seen as more credible, authentic and crucially, more affordable. These folks, with followers typically ranging from a few thousand

to fifty thousand or so, are also more open to tweaking their content to suit the brand, or to receiving feedback, and on the whole might be easier to work with compared to more diva-like mega influencers.

A big challenge remains: how to measure the business impact of influencers? Because they form a part of campaign, it is hard to attribute their impact.

And the situation also begs the question: how influential are these mega influencers, if they cannot be trusted and other influencers are required to do the work of influencing? Or does it mean that some influencers are already not influencers, but serve the function of vague awareness creation? Our contrarian view is large influencers are generally not influencing, but there should be a detailed case by case approach to this new emerging and confusing territory.

*Sandeep Joseph is the CEO and co-founder of Ampersand Advisory, a leading company specialising in media, creative, data and PR. The agency has won over 470 awards, with 200 awards and 9 Agency of the Year titles in 2025 alone. He can be reached at [sandeep@ampersand-advisory.com](mailto:sandeep@ampersand-advisory.com)*



**R/ADVERTISING**

Looking to hear peoples thoughts. Please only comment if you have knowledge about Canada- since I know these Hold-cos exist worldwide but each country has different work cultures, labour laws, etc.

**Upvote15Downvote27**Go to commentsShare

# IPG **vs** DENTSU **vs** PUBLICIS

Current IPG employee (Toronto). Pay is on the lower end, but i got blessed with an amazing team + management. Truly could not have a better line of managers. My team likes to promote fast, and i feel recognized and appreciated for my work consistently.

Now with this omnicom merger I am scared for things changing like PTO, benefits, work culture, etc. I have interviews at Dentsu and Publicis this week just incase. But i havent heard great things about these agencies.

Then again, I never heard great things about IPG but I got extremely lucky...

Looking to hear peoples thoughts. Please only comment

if you have knowledge about Canada- since I know these Hold-cos exist worldwide but each country has different work cultures, labour laws, etc.

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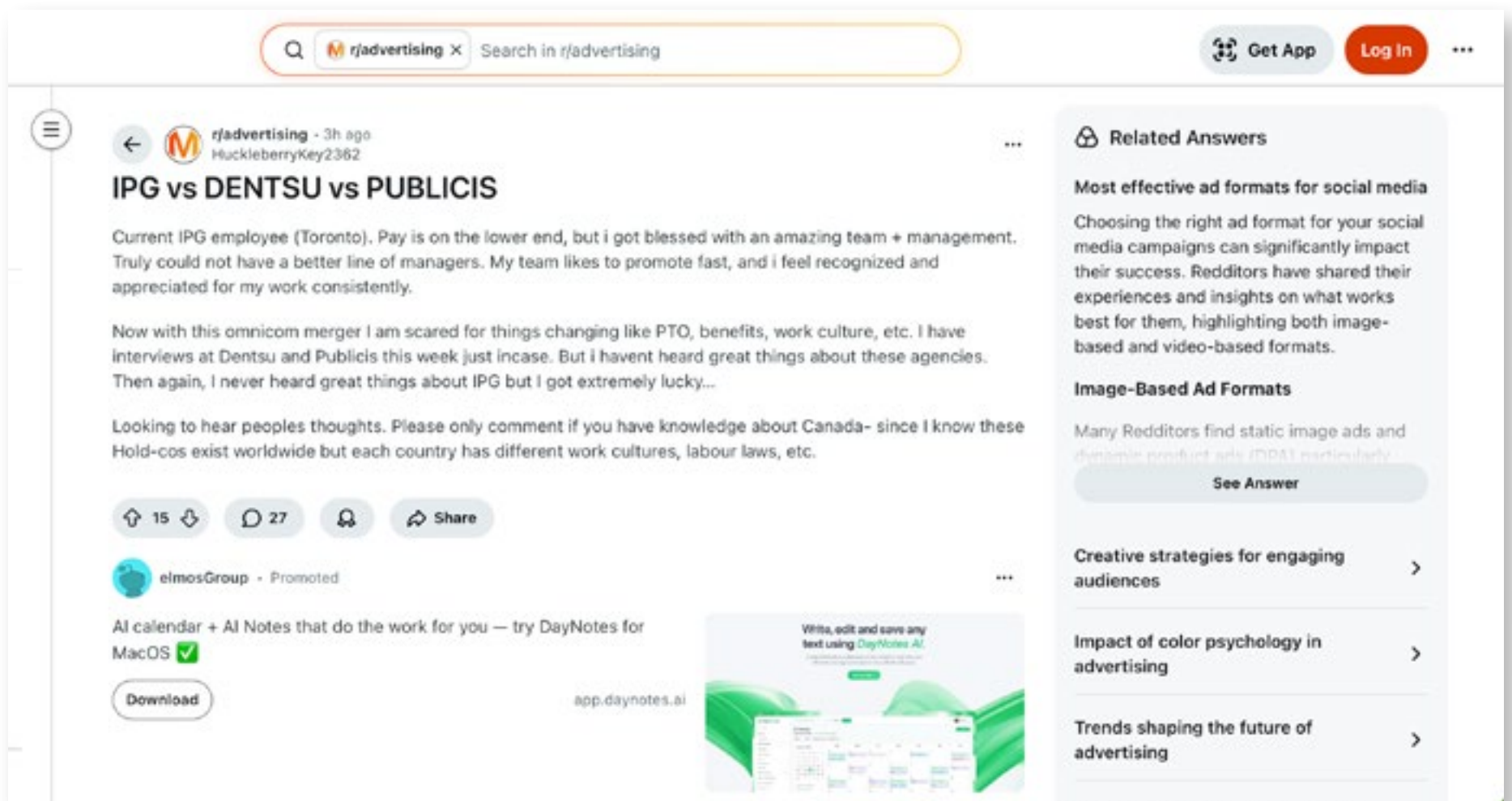
## **bubblegumtaxicab**

I'm going through the same thing. Not sure if I should leave because I'm afraid of OMC despite me having a great gig right now. I've heard Densu is going through layoffs though so not sure why they're actively recruiting.

-----

## **HuckleberryKey2362**

Its bizarre because IPG layed off a bunch of people too but are actively hiring new people. I dont understand



## Hellokitty2025

I can deal with a not so great of team any day but forced RTO and awful benefits is a hard pass!

## OrganicHearing

Eh trust me, a not so great team takes a toll on the mental health. So much so you have to go to therapy for it potentially. What's the point if the money I'm getting from my job is going to therapy because of my job. I'd rather spend that on something nice. No job is worth the mental health in my opinion. But that's just my two cents

## HuckleberryKey2362

I agree. No need to be in office

more than 2/3 days a week. Plus the speculation of awful incoming benefits. But i just wonder at what point is the trade off worth it/not worth it. I also dont want to be stressed and anxious at work/micromanaged. Its a tough call.

## wildlife\_is\_neat

I work at Dentsu Toronto so feel free to DM me if you'd like to ask specific questions about it. Happy to answer any you have.

## ShopToyLife

Been at IPG agency for just under 5 years, no promotion and at most around 3% increase... even with glowing reviews, working so much I'm well over the company average on hourly

## R/ADVERTISING

# ... Publicis wins business by understaffing. Pick your poison!...

billing. Not expecting much with omni

-----

## Yung\_Neil-222

I've been at an Omnicom agency for a little over 3 years now, have been promoted twice, and am really debating leaving. Updated my resume recently and gonna start sending it out. The lack of support we got on our account is unreal

-----

## OrganicHearing

Dentsu is the only agency that I haven't heard horrible things about besides layoffs. But I've heard Publicis is hit or miss depending on your team. So with your publicis interview, screen your team/hiring manager just as hard as they screen you, get a good sense of their vibe to see if you guys could actually get along. From other teams, I've heard from people it can be an absolute sweatshop and I know

a few people working hellish 12 hour days. So may the odds be in your favor

-----

## CopyDan

Do Publicis and Dentsu have better PTO and RTO policies?

-----

## PrettyNeatOutThere

I'm in Publicis. Unlimited PTO, I never take less than 5 weeks off. I'm remote, but RTO is 3 days a week.

-----

## HuckleberryKey2362

so far from what ive seen/read-yes. But will need to confirm in interview because that obviously plays a huge role. Kind of what im getting at here is even if I get a pay increase (depending how much).. would it be worth leaving to one of these agencies and risking loosing a great team and management where i have very little stress?

-----

## CortMuses

Go with Publicis. Great place.

-----

## juststart

Dentsu is about to be sold and most likely to private equity. Publicis wins business by understaffing. Pick your poison!



Spotify



YouTube

**“NEVER DOUBT  
THAT A SMALL  
GROUP OF  
COMMITTED PEOPLE  
CAN CHANGE THE  
WORLD. INDEED,  
IT IS THE ONLY THING  
THAT EVER HAS.”**

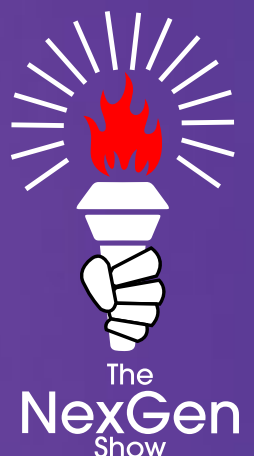
**MARGARET MEAD**

**NATHALIE TAY**

**DAWEEN MAAN**

**HARMANDAR SINGH**

**ONE YOUNG AND AMBITIOUS PERSON AT A TIME...**



The  
**NexGen**  
Show