

MARKETING

ISSUE #458 FEBRUARY 2026

WEEKENDER

DREAMS TAKE FLIGHT RESORTS WORLD GENTING IS TAKING CNY TO NEW HEIGHTS

Hi, I'm Tian Ma!



WEEKENDER

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COVER STORY

**NEW YEAR,
NEW HEIGHTS**



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EDITOR'S NOTE

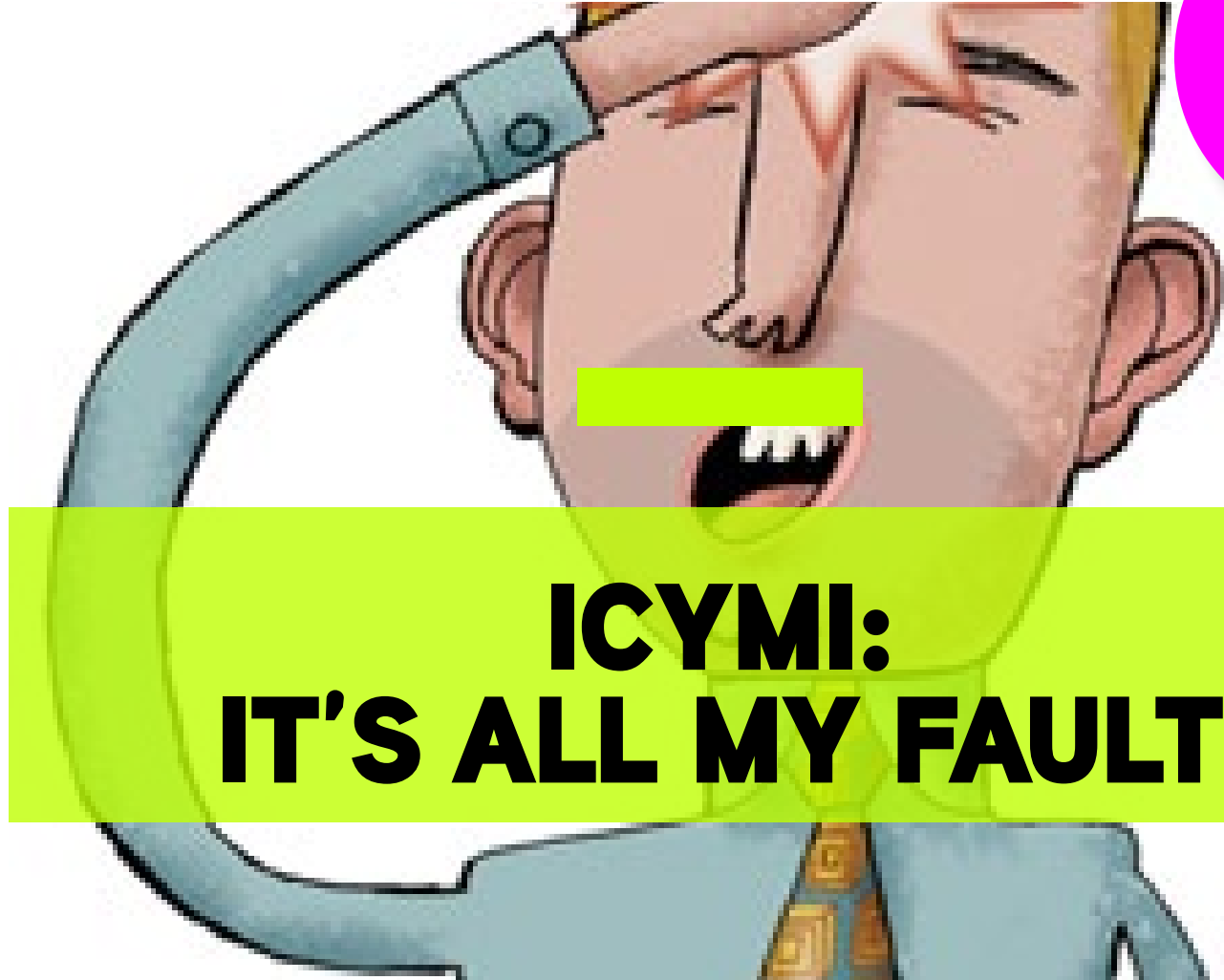


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“The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest minds of past centuries.”

René Descartes



“Burnout is what happens when you try to avoid being human for too long.”

Michael Gungor

“Working too much could turn you gay.”

Religious Affairs Minister Zulkifli Hasan made the claim when asked about a rise of LGBT cases in Malaysia.



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EPISODES AND STAYING AWESOME!



CLICK TO WATCH



Spotify



YouTube

LATEST SUBSCRIBER COUNT: 6,371
(HIGHEST IN CATEGORY).



The
NexGen
Show



TURBAN BRANDING

There is something to be said about the Sikh turban as I live in the world of marketing.

It is conspicuous for a reason and is probably the most prominent case of religion branding.

I won't talk about the religious symbols of other faiths, as you already know what they mean.

In branding terms, the Sikh turban is a masterclass in what strong identity looks like when it is built on purpose, not

promotion.

The turban culture is almost timeless in Northern India.

But as Sikh history hardened through persecution and struggle, it became a deliberate choice to be visibly accountable.

After 1699, when Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa and formalised kesh (uncut hair) as a discipline, the turban evolved into a living "brand signal".

It communicates, instantly

EDITOR'S NOTE

and without words, a set of non-negotiables: dignity, courage, service, restraint and a readiness to stand up for others.

This is not aesthetic branding, it is behavioural branding. The symbol carries weight because it is backed by a code, reinforced daily and historically tested under pressure.

Now, when you think about it, these “brand guidelines” resonate quite closely with how marketing works.

Here are some lessons...

First, the strongest brands do not begin with a logo. They begin with a promise. The turban is not the promise. The turban is the proof. Most brands do the opposite. They start with design and hope behaviour will follow.

Second, identity is strongest when it costs you something. The turban is not always convenient. It can attract curiosity, prejudice and even hostility. Yet that is precisely why it works as a signal. It filters out casual commitment. In branding, when everything is easy, nothing is meaningful. When a brand stands for something so clearly that it can lose people, it can also gain believers.

Third, repetition builds trust. A turban is tied each morning. Not once a year, not when the camera is on, not only during festive seasons. It is daily consistency. Brands chase big launches and loud campaigns, then wonder why trust does not stick.

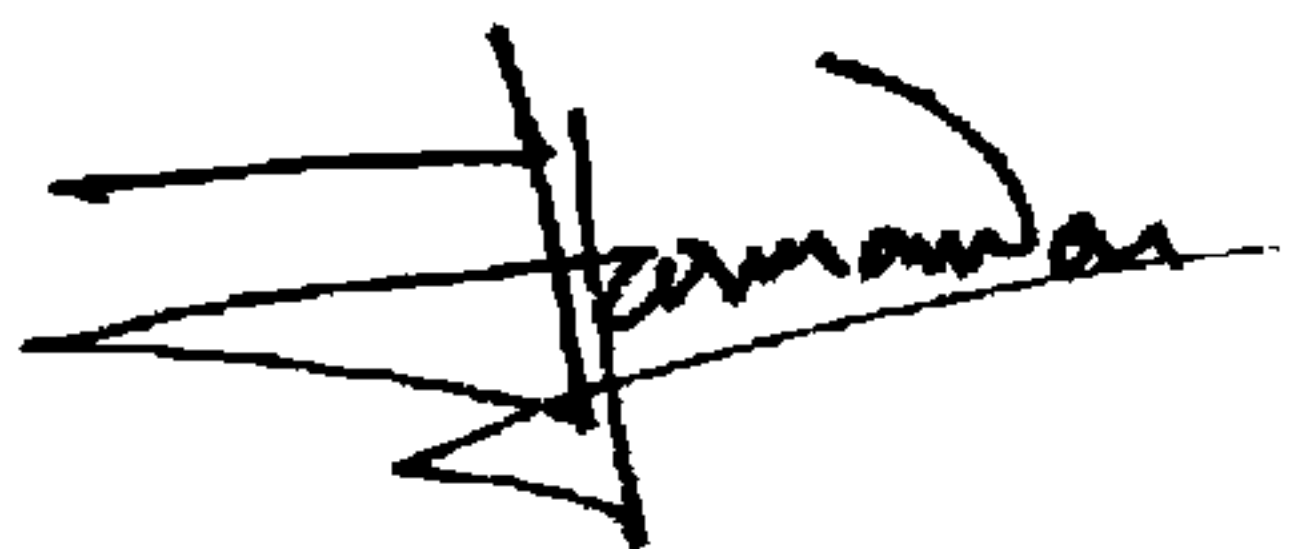
Fourth, the turban teaches the power of visibility with accountability. It is not “look at me”. It is “hold me to a higher standard”. Imagine if brands treated their logos the same way. Not as attention magnets, but as public contracts. Not “notice us”, but “you can count on us”.

Finally, the turban reminds us that symbolism without service is costume. The Sikh symbol is inseparable from Sikh practice.

That is the ultimate lesson for marketers. Your brand is not what you claim. Your brand is what you do, repeatedly, when nobody is clapping.

And that is why the turban endures. It does not sell. It stands.

Sat Sri Akal.



NEW YEAR, NEW HEIGHTS

CNY In The Sky returns with free concerts, RM1.8 million worth of prizes, and a new face in the family.





At Resorts World Genting (RWG), we don't just host celebrations; we craft landmarks in time. This year, as we usher in the Year of the Horse, our annual CNY In The Sky event is back, better than ever.

For the 15 days of CNY, we aren't just decorating our halls; we are pulling out every stop to ensure that the celebration 6,000 feet above sea level is the most vibrant, prosperous, and memorable one for all of our guests.

A NEW ICON FOR A NEW ERA: THE DEBUT OF TIAN MA

To lead our charge into the Year of the Horse, we are proud to introduce **Tian Ma**, our "Heavenly Horse." As the newest member

of the Genting's Highland Heroes family, Tian Ma is more than a mascot; he is a guardian who ushers in fortune.

You will see his golden silhouette across the peak, from the breathtaking **Whirl of Fortune** installation in SkyAvenue to the enchanting **Way of Light**. We've invested in making Tian Ma a central part of the guest experience, offering exclusive limited-edition plush toys and premium collectables for our Genting Rewards members.

Tian Ma is our first attempt at creating an original character for the Chinese New Year and a plushie of our own. To ensure we give our little horse the best start, we've invested heavily in an elaborate rollout that includes a CNY music video, an immersive movie at the

“For us, Tian Ma represents more than just another mascot. It’s our opportunity to make a connection with our customers through storytelling,”

Spencer Lee, EVP of Sales, Marketing, and Public Relations at Genting Malaysia.

newly launched Immersive Studio, collectable merchandise, and lots of media assets for social and advertising.

We believe tradition should be felt, not just seen. That is why we have transformed the **Genting SkyWorlds Immersive Studio**—officially recognised by the *Malaysia Book of Records* as the “Highest Altitude Immersive Attraction”—into a cinematic sanctuary.

Our specially commissioned CNY immersive film isn’t a simple screening; it is a multi-sensory odyssey. Utilising state-of-the-art LED technology, we transport our guests into a celestial realm where the story of the Horse comes to life. It is our way of showing that we’re redefining the future of entertainment with unique storytelling that leaves people with an unforgettable experience.





“Tian Ma is like a reflection of many of our guests who come here to Resorts World Genting, looking to be swept off their feet...”

The CNY music video is also a first for us which includes an original song that serves to introduce Tian Ma’s origin story and an aspirational tale of reaching for your dreams. At the time of writing, the song [*Dreams Take Flight* 天马腾云飞越想象](#) has racked up over 500,000 views on YouTube, and 2.6 million views on Facebook.

“For us, Tian Ma represents more than just another mascot. It’s our opportunity to make a connection with our customers through storytelling,” says Spencer Lee, EVP of Sales, Marketing, and Public Relations at Genting Malaysia.

“In the music video, Tian Ma is seeking new experiences and adventures, through a chance encounter with a young boy, his wish comes true as he spends a magical day at our resort, experiencing it through fresh eyes, as many of us Malaysians have at one point of our lives.

“We want to bring back that same feeling of wonder and excitement to our guests and in the story, Tian Ma is like a reflection of many of our guests who come here to Resorts World Genting, looking to be swept off their feet.

“The best part? Guests can bring home Tian Ma to bring a reminder of the experiences they’ve had back home while they plan their next visit. Expect to see more of Tian Ma this year as we continue to create content with our lucky little horse.”

The music video was ideated by Resorts World Genting’s appointed media agency, Ampersand Advisory, for the debut of Tian Ma. The media agency worked in close collaboration



... **Tian Ma joins Genting's Highland Heroes roster of characters who themselves have storied histories as characters dating back to the 90s...**

with Resorts World Genting on the storyline, talent casting, and the creation of this heartwarming production.

Tian Ma joins Genting's Highland Heroes roster of characters who themselves have storied histories as characters dating back to the 90s. Tabby the Tiger, Allie the Elephant, Joe the Orangutan, Benny the Entertainer, Callie the Dragon, and

Geno the Dinosaur also appear in SkyTap, an original game that allows Genting Rewards members to win discounts on F&B and rooms.

CULINARY OPULENCE WITHOUT COMPROMISE

We know that the heart of CNY lies in the reunion dinner. To honour this, our culinary teams have designed a portfolio of dining experiences that set a new gold standard for the region.

At the **Genting International Convention Centre (GICC)**, we are hosting massive, pork-free banquet reunions. We've curated 8-course menus featuring premium ingredients like abalone and smoked salmon *Yee Sang*, bundled with luxury stays to ensure the celebration is as seamless as it is delicious.



From the legendary Cantonese mastery at **Genting Palace** to the chic, high-energy atmosphere of **FUHU**, we have ensured that every “Lou Sang” moment is a world-class event. Our Yee Sang platters range from vegetarian friendly fare at RM98 to luxurious abalone at RM238.

Finally, our **Flower Market at SkyAvenue** offers our signature Flavours of Genting treats like pineapple and durian tarts, allowing guests to take a piece of our mountain-top hospitality home to





their loved ones. There will also be an outdoor market at the fan-favourite Gohtong Way.

FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS FOR ALL

This year, the mountain will echo with the pulse of prosperity. We have curated a non-stop entertainment schedule designed to dazzle every generation:

Our **Arena of Stars** will host 3 days of free performances to celebrate the new year. Countdown to the new year with the likes of DJ Soda from Korea and DJ Wu Kong from Singapore. On day and day two of CNY there'll be three shows a day featuring Lion Dances, Choy San Yeh appearances, and a dazzling LED Dance show.

The Auspicious Grab & Win campaign returns too with RM1.8 million worth of prizes to be won. The wind chamber is open once again and Genting Rewards

members only need to use 1 GP to enter. Collect as many "Lucky Slips" as you can in the wind chamber to receive more prizes.

For fans of Tian Ma who would like to bring him home, he's available for purchase at RM68 at Studio Emporium (Genting SkyWorlds) or Galaxy Store (Gohtong Way) or redeem him for 60GP at our membership counters. Genting Rewards members may also accumulate a total of 6GP from now till 16 February to exchange it for Tian Ma.

JOIN US AT THE PEAK

At Resorts World Genting, we don't just observe the new year; we elevate it. "CNY in the Sky" is our invitation to you to leave the mundane behind and join us at the summit of celebration.

Book your stay at rwingenting.com and make CNY In The Sky part of your celebration in 2026.



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ICYMI: IT'S ALL MY FAULT

I did a word count. Facebook's terms of service and privacy policies are longer than the U.S. Constitution.

I'm not the brightest star in the galaxy yet I didn't have much trouble understanding the Constitution. But Facebook's terms? I tried to keep track of all the stuff I didn't quite understand and by official count it came to somewhere around everything.

But, you see, that's not Facebook's fault. It's mine. According to some tech ferrets, if I were a responsible citizen I would drop what I'm doing and study Facebook's terms and policies until I understood them completely before I used their platform.

And not just Facebook. I should do that for every website I visit, every app I use, and every update I download. And if there happens to be anything their sneaky-ass lawyers have stuck in there in 8-point type that I don't understand, I should have my crack team of attorneys analyze and advise me on it. Heck, that shouldn't take much time or money.

This is the world according to an absurdly misguided opinion piece in *Ad Age* about the famous Facebook/Cambridge Analytica scandal called "[*What Facebook Data Did They Get And What Did They Do?*](#)" by some Professor of Something Useless. He bills himself as (god help us) "*LinkedIn's No. 1 Voice*

“What you should be configuring is your “Personal Data Sharing Permission Settings” or “API Endpoint Permissions.”

in Technology” and apparently he thinks the correct interpretation of the Facebook/Cambridge Analytica shit storm was to blame the victims. Here’s what “*the #1 voice*” had to say...

“Just because you did not take the time to learn how you were paying for a tech service and you thought it was “free” doesn’t mean it is actually free...”

Well, I’m terribly sorry for my prodigious stupidity. Apparently, in addition to being stupid, I am also inept. All the stealing of my private information is due to my incompetence. Shoulda known.

“What you should be configuring is your “Personal Data Sharing Permission Settings” or “API Endpoint Permissions.”

Dude, how about taking your API Permissions and configuring them in your own personal Endpoint?

“As a society, we have to raise our level of data maturity.”

Now, here he has a point. I do lack maturity. Data or otherwise. To be honest, I’m about the most immature bastard you’ll ever meet (and here’s a lifestyle tip - it’s way more fun!) As an official card-carrying immature dickhead, I’m about up to here with tech and data creeps telling me that the fraud, corruption and despicable horseshit going on in their rancid adtech world is my fault.

It’s not the lying criminal scumbags who collect personal private information about me without my knowledge who are at fault. It’s not the squids who peddle my info to every living sleazeweasel with a bitcoin. Heck no, it’s not their fault, it’s my fault. Because I “*didn’t take the time to learn...*” and I “*should be reconfiguring*”... and I need to “*raise my level...*”

The corrupt adtech industry, the data collection maniacs, and the useful idiot professors who kiss their asses in order to get consulting gigs are *not* the problem.

Nope. I am the problem. And like any self-respecting problem, I have no intention of going away.

This piece was first published in 2018 soon after the Facebook/Cambridge Analytica scandal. It’s so much worse today.



Bob is a writer and speaker. He has written seven books about advertising, each of which has been an Amazon #1 seller.

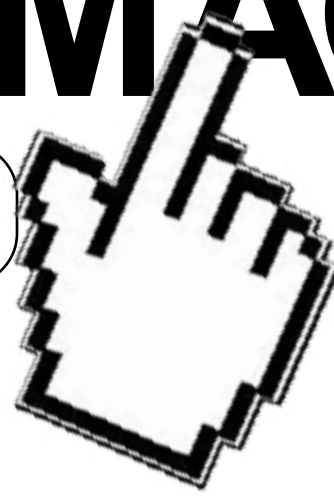
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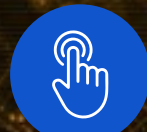
THE INDEPENDENT ADVANTAGE: THE REINVENTION OF INVICTUS BLUE

Pageviews: 3,305



META APPOINTS FORMER L'ORÉAL DIGITAL CHIEF AS MALAYSIA COUNTRY DIRECTOR

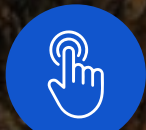
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AUDIENCE2MEDIA: The Reckoning of Metrics

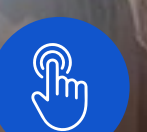
AUDIENCE2MEDIA BETS ON CREDIBILITY AS INFLUENCER MARKETING HITS A RECKONING

Pageviews: 3,011



ICYMI: ADVERTISING IS A WEAK FORCE

Pageviews: 2,975



COMMERCE.ASIA OUTLINES CREATOR-LED BRAND SCALING MODEL FOLLOWING NUMINARA LAUNCH

Pageviews: 2,587



PM pushes to strengthen Malaysian Media Council

by The Malketeer

When Communications Minister Datuk Fahmi Fadzil revealed that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim rang him close to midnight to discuss media freedom, it was more than an anecdote.

Fahmi said the Prime Minister wants the role of the Malaysian Media Council (MMC) to be enhanced as a cornerstone of press freedom - one that balances independence, ethics and public trust as the media industry navigates structural upheaval.

REFORM RHETORIC TO INSTITUTIONAL MUSCLE

Anwar's call follows his public assurance that the government is prepared to create "more open space" for media freedom, including



reviewing existing laws to reflect Malaysia's democratic maturity.

But the emphasis, Fahmi stressed, is not deregulation for its own sake.

Instead, the government sees the MMC as the most credible platform to represent media practitioners, shape standards and articulate the industry's real needs - without direct state control.

Strengthening the council's mandate, capacity and visibility is intended to make self-regulation meaningful rather than symbolic.

Fahmi confirmed efforts to secure a dedicated office for the council, described as a foundational move before it expands its oversight and policy-shaping role.

ETHICS, HEADLINES AND CREDIBILITY GAP

One of the most pointed issues raised in discussions with the MMC is journalistic ethics - specifically, the widening gap between headlines and the substance of reporting.

Fahmi acknowledged a concern many readers quietly share: stories that change tone or emphasis after passing through layers of editorial processing.

In some cases, reports filed on the ground differ materially from how they eventually appear under senior editorial direction.

This is where a strengthened MMC could intervene - not as a censor, but as a referee.



By promoting ethical consistency and accountability, the council can help rebuild trust at a time when audiences are increasingly sceptical of sensational framing and algorithm-driven click incentives.

MEDIA SURVIVAL

Beyond ethics, the government is acutely aware that press freedom cannot exist without economic viability.

Fahmi pointed to the Media Innovation Fund as a response to the financial shockwaves hitting newsrooms: shrinking advertising budgets,

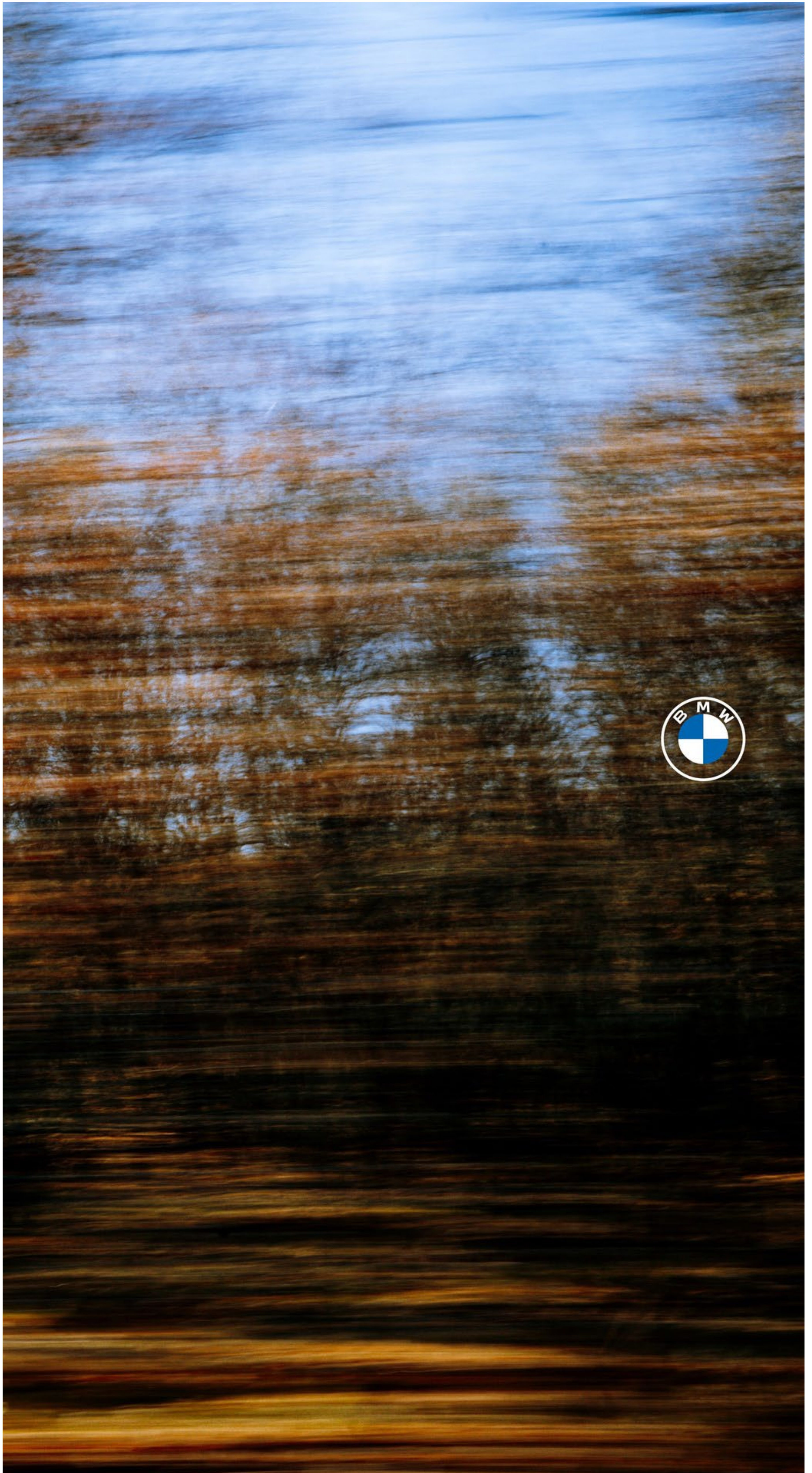
productivity pressures and rapid technological change.

AI, automation and platform dominance are reshaping how news is produced and consumed.

The fund is positioned as a bridge, helping media organisations adapt without compromising independence or resorting to sensationalism as a survival tactic.

The Malaysian Media Council was formally established under legislation that came into force in June 2025, marking a historic shift towards industry-led self-regulation.

The Marketeer writes daily on marketingmagazineasia.com



WHY SIZE REALLY REALLY REALLY DOESN'T MATTER

It's one of the biggest and longest-standing myths in advertising.

by Sandeep Joseph



That size of the agency matters, when it comes to media.

A bigger media agency, the argument goes, gets better rates, because of the bulk of volume in buying. Media owners, apparently, lower their rates for bigger agencies who are buying a great volume of ads from them. The more you spend, the cheaper rate you get, and as an agency, you are then obliged or required to pass those cheaper rates to your clients.

Hence, clients with big budgets go to bigger agencies to get better rates.

So the theory goes.

And it truly amuses me.

Especially today, when


75% of all ad budgets are spent on digital media. And 90% of those media don't sell with a fixed rate card, but with auction-driven biddable media. That means buyers are bidding for reach or actions by consumers, and if they win the bid, they get that deliverable. If they don't win that bid, they lose out.

Don't see your ad top of the pile in Google search?

Or your ad isn't getting views on YouTube? That would be because you bid too low. If you up your bid, you will get seen.

Or if you tweak your targeting, or find a keyword that others are not bidding on, and where the price is lower, you could win that consumer action for cheaper.

So, does a bigger agency



... Digital media truly removes the advantage of scale, by its very nature of being...

do better at performance marketing?

Not necessarily. Why?

Quite simply, because in performance marketing, there is no economy of scale. Everything depends on tools, insights, buying skills and optimization, attention to detail, the buyer's skill, care and concern. And that buyer could just as likely be part of a small three-person start-up working from a trendy café as they are likely to be a large agency owned in France and with 20,000 staff globally. Digital media truly removes the advantage of scale, by its very nature of being.

So if there is no economy of scale for digital media, does it exist for traditional media? In the good old days, pre Covid, it used to. Bigger agencies could negotiate with TV or radio for lower media rates for their agency, and then re-sell to clients at higher rates, making a margin. And they might still offer cheaper rates than smaller agencies. But with the drastic reduction in print and TV advertising, the clients of big agencies are not spending much money on traditional non-auction media. And traditional media owners are offering substantial discounts to just everyone, off their rate cards, because times are so difficult for them.

TV ad spend declined by more than 20% in 2025 in Malaysia. Hence now is a good time to go negotiate with TV companies.

Outdoor media owners are offering more than 50% discount off their rate cards, and yet you can see that digital screens are not fully occupied, and many static billboards give us a gaping, blank metallic stare even on the erstwhile prime Federal Highway. Again, it's a good time to go chat with your friendly neighbourhood Outdoor media owner. Have a teh tarik, lend a sympathetic ear and get yourself a good deal.

The stark truth is that today a smaller agency, with a few staff, and a few clients, may probably get a better rate for a traditional billboard or a TV spot because:

- They will care more about this client, and negotiate harder
- The media owners cannot afford to drop price for big clients, because that can cause a huge hole in revenues. And rates for big clients may already be low, as procurement pushes agencies down every 2 years or so.
- Small agencies sometimes spend more time building relationships with media



... Outdoor media owners are offering more than 50% discount off their rate cards...

... A smaller agency that optimizes faster often outperforms a giant that negotiates hard...



owners, and people buy from people. If a media owner trusts you and you have given steady business over the years, it will stand you in good stead.

Truly, scale has stopped meaning advantage, and in some cases, it may have even become a drag. Even when it comes to digital. Here's why:

1. Technology flattened the playing field

What big agencies used to win with—exclusive tools, data, buying power—is now widely available.

- Self-serve ad platforms (Meta, Google, TikTok, Amazon)
- Off-the-shelf analytics and attribution tools
- AI for planning, optimization, and creative

testing

A sharp 10-person shop can access *the same levers* a 10,000-person network can.

2. “Bulk buying power” matters less than it used to

The old pitch: we're big, so we get better rates.

But, as I mentioned,

- Auctions are algorithmic, not relationship-driven
- Performance beats volume
- Platforms reward relevance and outcomes, not spend size

A smaller agency that optimizes faster often outperforms a giant that negotiates hard.

3. Speed beats bureaucracy

Media today moves in *days or hours*, not quarters.

Big agencies struggle with:

- Layered approvals and processes
- Global playbooks that lag reality

Smaller teams, on the contrary can test faster, kill bad ideas quicker, pivot creatives and budgets in real time.

In performance media, faster reaction time = greater ROI.

4. Importantly, and thankfully, clients don't want "headcount," they want impact.

Marketers themselves are under pressure to prove incrementality, tie media to revenue and justify every dollar. They're less impressed by large top-heavy teams, fancy org charts, or global footprint covering Timbuktu to Tokyo.

They care about who is actually touching the account and how good they are.

5. Talent and people have changed.

Top media talent used to reside in big networks, and move around like an episode of Game of Thrones.

Now they go independent, join boutiques, build specialized shops (e-commerce, CTV, B2B, creator, growth) and strive for more work-life balance.

As Tom Cruise would attest, a few good sharpshooters beats a large team of generalists.

6. Creative + media integration matters more than reach

Winning today is about creative iteration, audience insights, signal interpretation and platform-native execution.

Big agencies often separate these functions. Smaller agencies *blend them*, which produces better performance.

Big agencies aren't dead, but they are increasingly having to compete with independents and smaller, possibly more nimbler competitors. Big agencies have a deep people bench, and potentially the ability to invest more in AI tools. Perhaps they will still prevail. But whoever comes out on top, or if both kinds of players can co-exist, the truth is clear: size really isn't the determinant of success anymore.



Sandeep Joseph is the CEO and co-founder of Ampersand Advisory, an award-winning media, creative, PR and data consultancy that has won over 470 awards in 9 years and was 9x #1 agency of the year/competition in 2025. He can be reached for debates or setting up teh tarik chats at sandeep@ampersand-advisory.com



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