NETCORE AND THE RISE OF AGENTIC MARKETING

MARKETING *popculture*
WEEKENDER

Contents

WISE WORDS

"When the heart is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves."

Rabia al-Basri
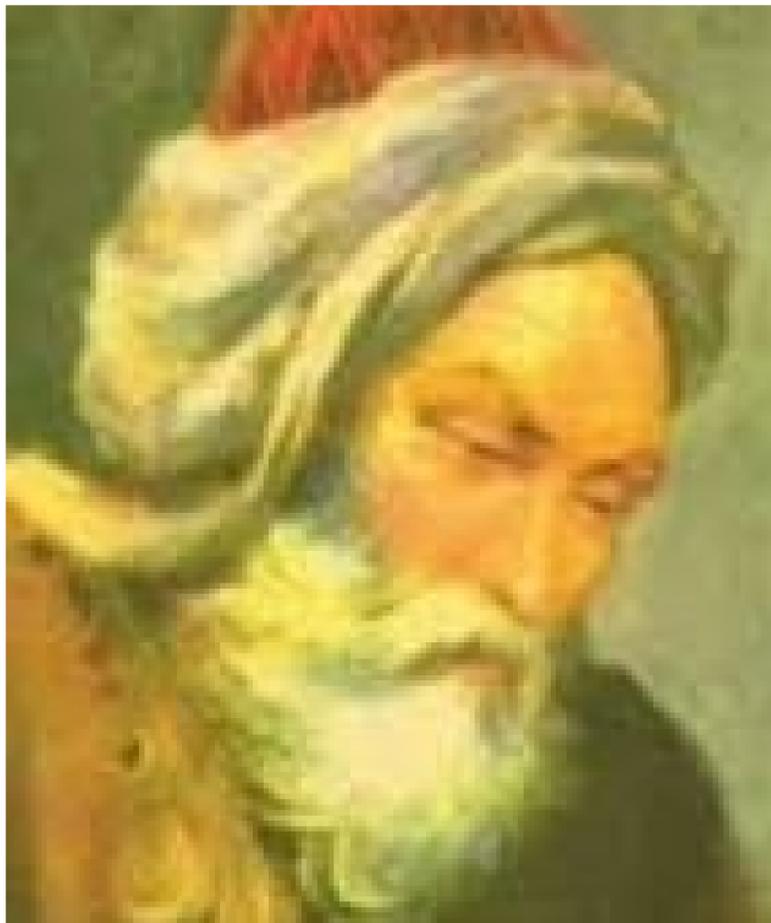
"I searched for God and found only myself. I searched for myself and found only God."

Bayazid Bastami

"The fasting of the common people is from food and drink. The fasting of the elect is from sin. The fasting of the elect of the elect is from all that distracts from God."

Al-Ghazali
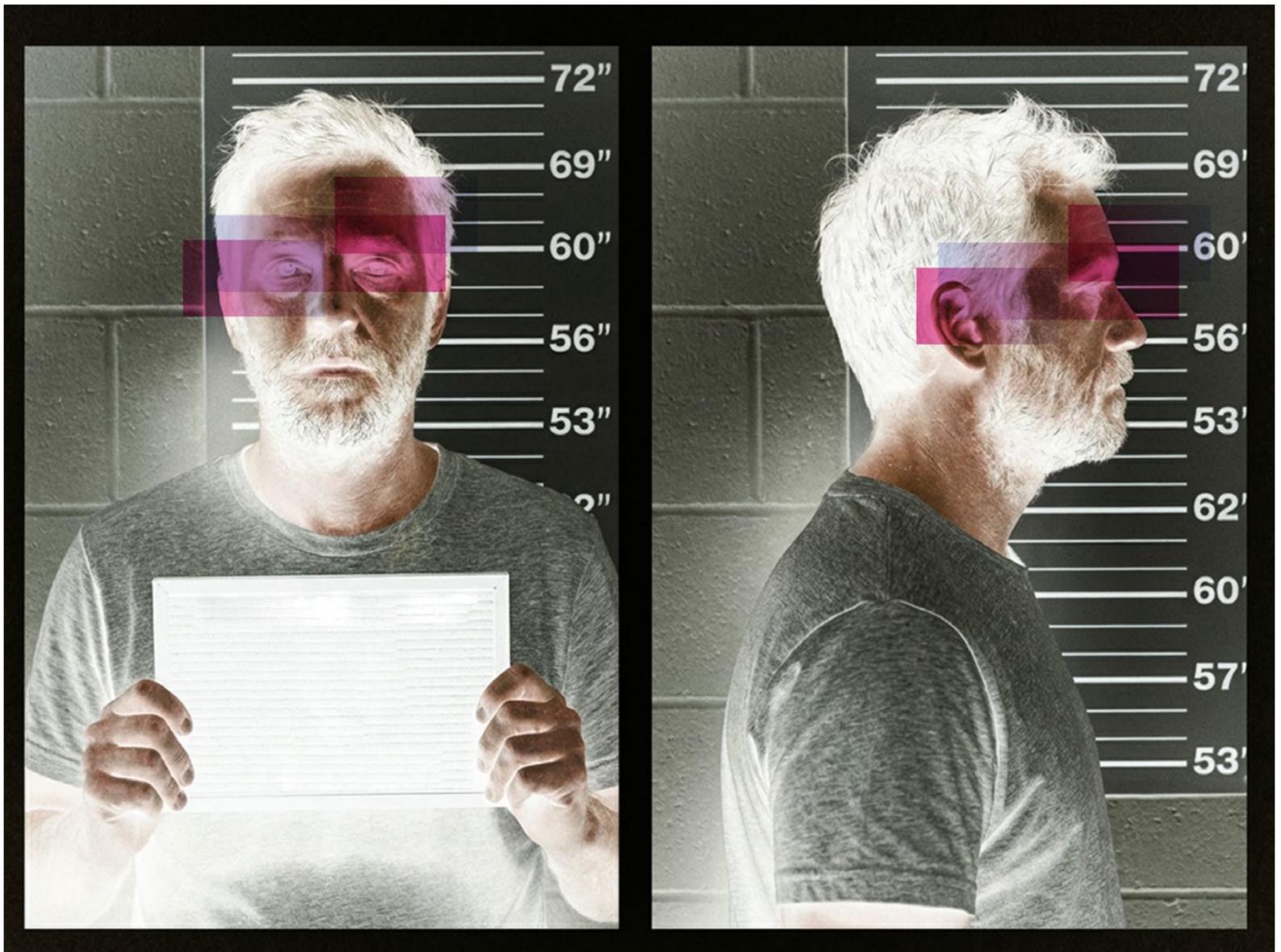
FUGITIVE MARKETING REFUSES TO STAND STILL

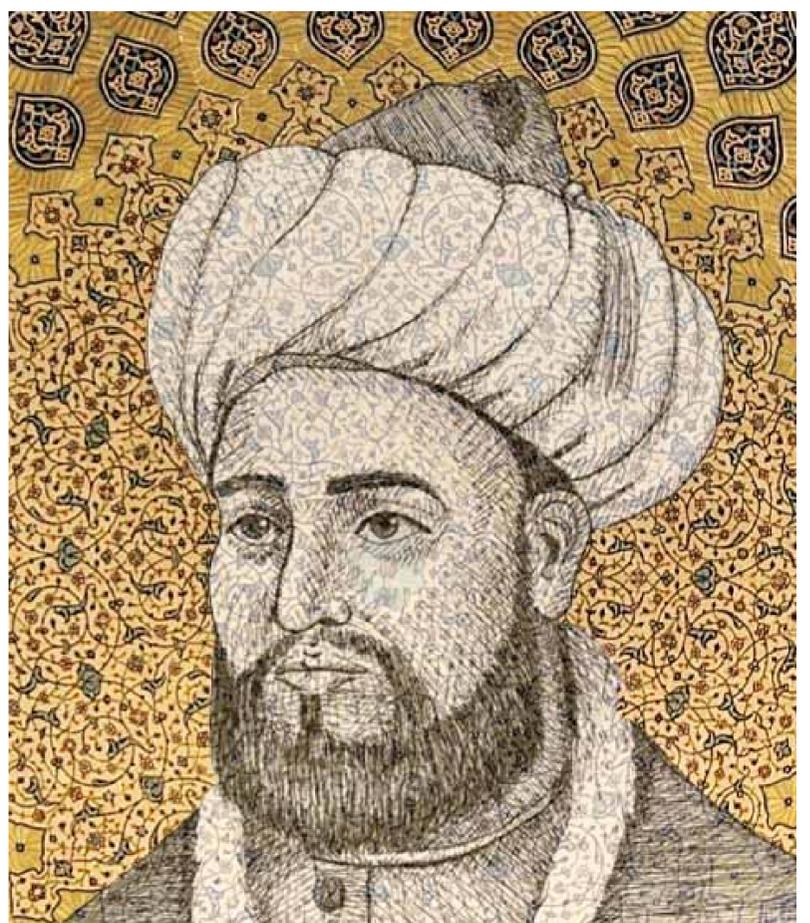Marketing used to be a well-behaved guest. It wore a tie, waited for approval, and spoke only when spoken to. Today, the guest has climbed out the window and is running through the streets.

WELCOME TO FUGITIVE MARKETING.

This is marketing that refuses to sit in boardrooms and PowerPoint decks. It moves fast, shows up uninvited, and disappears before anyone can ask for three rounds of approval. It lives in the wild. On your feed. On your street. In your conversations.

In Malaysia, you see it more often than you think.

When a nasi lemak brand jumps onto a trending political meme within minutes and racks up thousands of shares before lunch, that is fugitive marketing.

When a local bubble tea chain cheekily references a rival's promotion without naming them and sparks a comment war, that is fugitive marketing.

When a roadside durian seller paints a sign overnight that riffs

EDITOR'S NOTE

off a viral slogan and suddenly becomes a selfie spot, that is fugitive marketing.

It is fast. It is reactive. It is slightly rebellious.

Look at how brands here respond during festive seasons. During Hari Raya, you will see smaller brands outmanoeuvre bigger ones by reacting to real-time conversations.

A witty TikTok using kampung humour can outperform a million-ringgit film if it lands at the right moment.

During the last general election buzz, several SMEs slipped into the national conversation with wordplay, parody, and just enough ambiguity to stay out of trouble while staying in the spotlight.

Grab Malaysia's social team often jumps onto daily cultural moments with speed that traditional campaigns cannot match.

Mr DIY has built a reputation for playful, reactive content that feels closer to street banter than corporate copy.

AirAsia, never shy of a headline, has long flirted with this style, turning announcements into cultural moments rather than press releases.

Why does this work?

Because the audience has changed. People scroll fast and trust little. Polished campaigns feel distant. Fugitive marketing feels like it belongs to the moment. It does not ask for attention. It steals it.

But let's not romanticise it too much.

Fugitive marketing is risky. It can cross lines. In a country as culturally layered as Malaysia, a joke can misfire across languages, beliefs, and sensitivities.

What feels witty in one circle can feel offensive in another. There is also the legal grey zone.

Ambush tactics around major events or cheeky references to competitors can invite more than just applause.

So where does that leave us?

Fugitive marketing is not a replacement for strategy. It is a test of it. You cannot improvise well if you do not know your brand's boundaries.

The best executions look spontaneous, but they are powered by teams who understand tone, timing, and cultural nuance.

In simple terms, fugitive marketing is what happens when brands stop waiting for permission and start participating in culture as it unfolds.

No brand has ever mastered this from the sidelines.
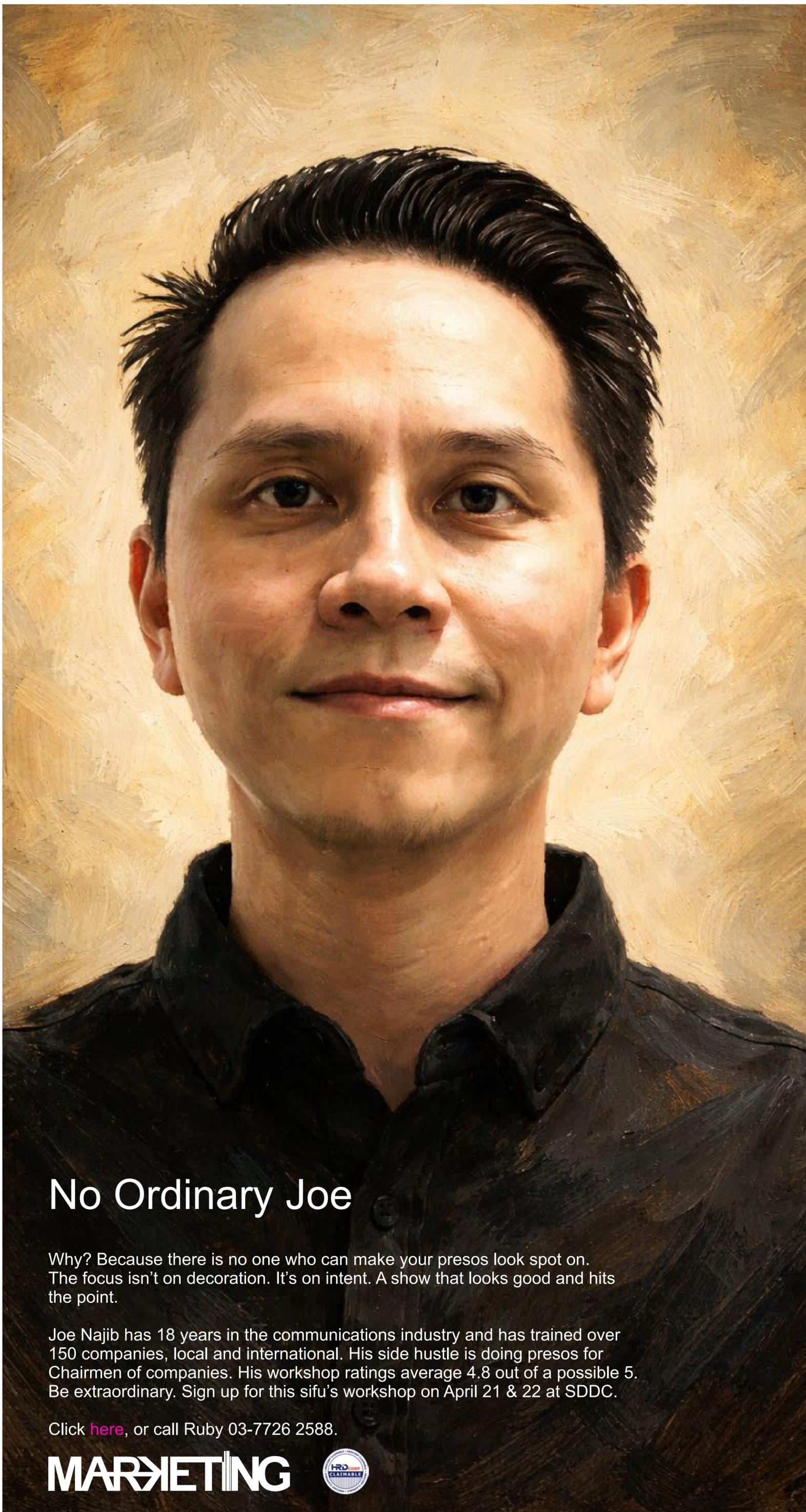
You cannot workshop spontaneity to death. You cannot committee your way into cultural relevance.

At some point, you have to step out, take the shot, and risk getting it wrong.

Because in this game, hesitation is invisible. Participation is everything.

And if you don't show up, you have already lost the moment.
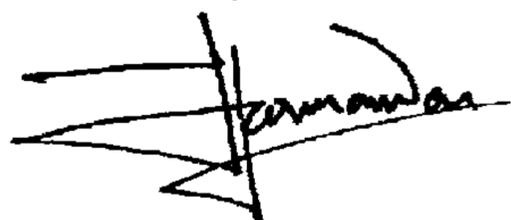
Agentic Marketing

THE MARTECH PROBLEM ISN'T TOOLS.

IT'S DECISIONS.

AGENTIC MARKETING

Kalpit Jain, Group CEO, Netcore

Why Malaysia's most advanced marketing teams are shifting from automation to Agentic Intelligence.

It's 9:07am in Kuala Lumpur. Your WhatsApp promotion is queued. Shopee flash sale numbers are under review. App push engagement dipped overnight. Retail wants attribution clarity before noon. Meanwhile, the CRM data that explains it all sits in another dashboard.

For many Malaysian marketing teams, the challenge is no longer reach. It is decision complexity.

While channels multiply and data expands, the ability to translate those signals into timely action has not kept pace. Netcore's work with leading brands suggests the next evolution of marketing lies in closing that gap.

"We are moving from a world where marketers spend 80% of their time configuring tools, to a future where they spend 100% of their time architecting outcomes. Agentic Marketing doesn't just automate tasks; it returns the 'strategic oxygen' teams need to innovate."

Kalpit Jain, Group CEO at Netcore.

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In one of Southeast Asia's most digitally connected markets, Malaysian marketers are no longer just managing brand channels. They are navigating complex customer ecosystems.

Consumers move fluidly between marketplaces like Shopee and Lazada, juggling loyalty apps, brand websites and physical stores. A customer might browse an offer on a marketplace, check a promotion on WhatsApp, compare options through an app and complete the purchase in-store.

Behind the scenes, however, marketing still feels intensely manual. More campaigns are launched. More segments are created. More dashboards appear across the Martech stack.

The automation that helps brands scale communication across channels, still waits for instructions. It cannot determine what the next action should be.

As brands expand across channels, the operational load compounds. Who should receive a particular message? Has this customer been over-communicated? Which channel currently offers the highest probability of conversion? What should be prioritised in the next step of the journey?

Triton Dsouza, Chief Business Officer, SEA at Netcore

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Shashankh Bhatt, Country Manager - Malaysia at Netcore

Individually these decisions seem small, but collectively they slow down responsiveness. For many organisations, the tipping point appears only at scale.

THE TIPPING POINT FOR MODERN MARKETING

Over the past decade, Netcore's work with brands navigating digital acceleration reveals a consistent challenge: turning execution into actionable insights.

Take Telekom Malaysia's Unifi business, where rapid digital adoption introduced new complexity. Customer data was spread across systems, product lines carried different eligibility rules, and engagement relied on static segmentation. At that scale, relevance became unsustainable, even as more campaigns were launched.

The limitation was not communication volume, but the decision model. Segmentation grouped customers into cohorts, but could not reflect real-time intent.

By shifting to behaviour-led, always-on journeys powered by Agentic Intelligence, Unifi responded dynamically to customer intent. Add-on subscriptions increased by 33 percent, with digital contributing over 57 percent of overall revenue.

A different inflection point

AGENTIC MARKETING

emerged at Boost Bank. As it evolved from a homegrown e-wallet into a digital bank, their challenge was visibility. Fragmented tagging and incomplete data made it difficult to understand customer journeys, keeping engagement reactive.

The shift to a unified engagement platform utilising Agentic Marketing enabled faster onboarding and reliable data capture, establishing end-to-end tracking. With clearer signals, Boost Bank translated behaviour into action across push, WhatsApp and in-app messaging, delivering 100 percent push notification delivery rates and measurable gains in retention.

For Nando's Malaysia, the opportunity lay in orchestration, where improved segmentation and lifecycle automation drove a 19 percent increase in member sales.

Together, these examples reflect a broader shift in marketing. Transformation is rarely about sending more messages, but about improving the decisions behind them.

AGENTIC MARKETING FOR REAL-TIME GROWTH

"Our vision for 2026 is simple: We win only when our customers do. By deploying Agentic systems that obsess over the customer journey in real-time, we remove the human bottleneck from digital growth. We aren't just refreshing a tech stack, we are installing a revenue engine that

"Our vision for 2026 is simple: We win only when our customers do. By deploying Agentic systems that obsess over the customer journey in real-time, we remove the human bottleneck from digital growth. We aren't just refreshing a tech stack, we are installing a revenue engine that adapts to the Malaysian consumer faster than any human team ever could."
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Rather than relying solely on predefined workflows, Agentic systems continuously analyse behaviour, evaluate possible actions and determine the next best engagement in real time. Segments adjust dynamically as behaviour

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In the frame (from left to right) - Mayank Gupta (Senior account Manager), Vincent Chan (Client Growth Consultant), Stallon Rego (Customer Success Manager MY & SG), Triton Dsouza (Chief Business Officer, SEA), Shashankh Bhatt (Country Manager, Malaysia), Deependra Kale (AVP Customer Success)

changes. Messaging adapts based on affinity signals. Channel selection and timing are informed by probability models that consider context, intent and historical response patterns.

Optimisation becomes continuous rather than episodic.

This approach has guided Netcore's own evolution. Having built its early reputation on high-performance email delivery, the company now focuses on Agentic engagement systems that help brands interpret customer intent and respond in the moment.

By embedding specialised AI agents directly into the engagement layer itself, purchase signals are identified before they surface in traditional reports. Hesitation is recognised before abandonment

occurs, and engagement can be adjusted before fatigue turns into churn.

Instead of configuring static campaigns, marketers define outcomes while the system continuously evaluates which actions are most likely to achieve those goals.

Autonomy, however, cannot exist without accountability. Every Agentic system must operate within clearly defined guardrails, including brand tone, consent frameworks, compliance requirements and communication frequency limits.

For marketing leaders, the implication is clear. When micro-decisions such as send-time optimisation, fatigue management and next-best-channel selection are handled intelligently, teams regain

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the capacity to focus on strategy rather than orchestration.

In Malaysia's rapidly evolving digital economy, the real competitive advantage will not come from launching more campaigns. It will come from building marketing systems capable of learning, adapting and acting in real time.

The future belongs to Agentic Marketing systems that can interpret signals and act at the moment it matters.

The brands winning in the next decade won't just automate, they'll orchestrate. Explore what Agentic Marketing looks like in practice.

Drive Growth with Netcore's Agentic Marketing Platform. <u>Try Now</u>

BRAND BUILDING OR BALONEY?

This article is adapted from a piece in my book "Advertising For Skeptics"

In recent years it has become a generally accepted truth in the marketing industry that we are too focused on short term results and not focused enough on brand building.

Field and Binet have done excellent work to demonstrate this. Everyone from Byron Sharp to Martin Sorrell has commented on it. Despite our recognition of this issue, we continue down the destructive path of short-termism.

An article by Mark Ritson bemoaned this. Ritson included some data showing that short-termism is not just continuing, it's accelerating. *"It's incredibly depressing to see that this trend of short termism is not just going to continue, it's getting worse."*

If we know that continued investment in short-term tactics at the expense of long-term brand building is counter-productive, why do we continue to do it?

Some of the reasons are obvious:

. *The brief shelf-life of a CMO*: When your life expectancy is measured in months, there is little incentive for you to think in years. Short-term activities show instant results. And there's nothing that C-Suite meatballs and restless toddlers like better than instant results.

"I'm sorry but generic pretty pictures and a nice track are not enough."

- *Brand building efforts yield soft measures*: Even if you're doing a great job of brand building, how do you prove it to accountants? A survey by MarketingWeek, Kantar, and Google last year showed that only 11% of marketing execs believe they can demonstrate the value of investment in brand.

- *The web:* Online advertising has become the dominant form of advertising. But it has been used primarily as a short-term or direct response sales medium.

- There is another reason for our discomfort with so-called brand building activities, and no one in adland wants to talk about it. To many, 'brand' advertising has become synonymous with baloney. And, sadly, in too many cases it's true.

- Our industry has frittered away substantial credibility by allowing anything that doesn't have a cogent sales message to be excused as 'brand' advertising. Much of what we call brand advertising has become generic, squishy, heavy on 'lifestyle' (*i.e.*anything at all) and free of discipline. Our 'brand' advertising has become too flabby and self-indulgent.

- In some circles brand advertising is defined as pretty much anything we can put a logo on. There is almost no frivolous marketing activity that can't be excused as 'branding.' Put your logo on a pair of socks? Branding!

- In reality, there are two kinds of things we call brand ads – 1) those that are recognizably attributable to a specific brand and 2) those that are someone's generic hobby horse with a logo pasted on. The unfortunate part is that our vocabulary defines them both as the same thing – 'brand' advertising. They are not.

- Successful brand building is difficult work and requires advertising that is distinctive and creates fame for the brand. I'm sorry but generic pretty pictures and a nice track are not enough. Pounding your chest for world peace is not enough. Buying a pop tune and having people jump around is not enough.

- Just because an ad is image heavy and free of a sales message doesn't mean it's building a brand.

Not selling is not enough.

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

CREATIVE SHOWCASE

Magnum is once again challenging the ice cream category's winter slowdown with the launch of the latest evolution of its 'Find Your Summer', created by LOLA Madrid, part of Omnicom Advertising Group. This winter, the brand goes further, introducing 'Schedule the Sun' a simple way for people to capture sunny moments: by booking them directly into their calendars. Through a discount, the campaign tempts consumers to allow calendar events every time the sun is forecast to be out in their areas, turning a fleeting winter craving into a scheduled indulgence.

AXXONAI LAUNCHES MALAYSIA'S FIRST LLM-BASED SYNTHETIC DATA INTELLIGENCE PLATFORM WITH HEALTHCARE PARTNER SANCY

Athenatech AI Sdn Bhd has unveiled AxxonAI, a new synthetic data intelligence platform built to help enterprises develop AI solutions without compromising privacy, compliance or local relevance.

Athenatech AI Sdn Bhd, one of Malaysia's AI start-ups to watch, has announced the launch of its subsidiary, AxxonAI, a Large Language Model-based synthetic data intelligence platform designed to help enterprises solve one of AI's biggest constraints: the shortage of high-quality, privacy-safe and locally relevant data. With this launch, AxxonAI positions itself as the first Malaysian company to offer a synthetic data platform of this kind for the ASEAN region and beyond.

The launch comes as businesses face growing pressure to innovate with AI while dealing with stricter privacy requirements, limited access to usable training data and the rising cost of building region-specific models. AxxonAI has been developed to tackle these challenges directly by enabling organisations to train, test and refine AI systems using synthetic datasets that reflect real-world patterns without exposing personal or sensitive information.

Sonny (Soumitra) Dey, Founder & Chief Executive Officer of Athenatech.ai and AxxonAI

SUPPORTING MALAYSIA'S AI AMBITION

This ambition aligns with Malaysia's broader push to strengthen national AI capability. As the country works towards becoming an AI Nation by 2030, Athenatech AI and AxxonAI are aligning their platform and delivery capabilities with that direction. The company is also establishing a Global Delivery Centre focused on AI training, synthetic data and generative AI insights. The centre is expected to support projects across multiple sectors while helping Malaysia strengthen its position as a trusted and competitive AI hub within ASEAN.

At the technology level, AxxonAI combines Generative Adversarial Networks, Retrieval-Augmented Generation and LLM capabilities to create privacy-safe, statistically equivalent datasets for enterprise use. Rather than relying on generic global datasets that may not reflect local conditions, the platform is built to generate synthetic data tailored to regional languages, consumer behaviours, regulations and business objectives. This localisation is a key differentiator for companies that need more accurate local outputs.

BUILT FOR LOCAL REALITIES

The platform also includes data decoupling and fine-tuning capabilities, giving enterprises greater control over how synthetic data is generated, structured and applied. This is especially useful for businesses looking to improve segmentation, hyper-personalisation and predictive modelling in volatile consumer environments. By refining different parts of the data-generation process, AxxonAI aims to improve both model quality and business relevance.

Sonny (Soumitra) Dey, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Athenatech AI and AxxonAI, said the platform was built on the belief that enterprises should not have to choose between innovation and privacy. He said AxxonAI is designed specifically for Asia and ASEAN, with strong localisation and a commitment to principled AI. In the months ahead, the company plans to work with multiple partners on expanded versions of the platform, including solutions integrated with agentic functions.

DATA SCARCITY

"AxxonAI is designed specifically for Asia and ASEAN..."
Sonny

HEALTHCARE PARTNERSHIP WITH SANCY BHD

A major early validation of the platform comes through its partnership with Sancy Berhad, one of Malaysia's leading digital healthcare solution providers. In healthcare, the tension between data usefulness and patient confidentiality is especially acute. Through this collaboration, AxxonAI's synthetic data and intelligence capabilities will be integrated into Sancy's healthcare ecosystem, enabling clinicians and administrators to derive actionable insights from patient data while maintaining compliance with privacy regulations and eliminating the risk of personal identification.

The partnership will initially focus on two flagship initiatives. The first, Connected Care, is a data-driven healthcare tourism solution intended to attract international patients while remaining compliant with local requirements. The second, Ring, is a patient-centric care model designed to improve outcomes, reduce costs and streamline hospital-to-home care journeys through predictive intelligence and synthetic data. Together, these initiatives point towards a more cost-efficient, patient-focused healthcare system.

Prabuddha Chakravertty, Group Managing Director of Sancy Berhad, said the platform would help transform how the company approaches patient care, resource allocation and clinical decision-making. By generating statistically accurate, regulatory-compliant synthetic patient profiles that reflect real-world populations, he said healthcare teams would be better equipped to optimise treatment pathways, predict critical care demands and improve outcomes without compromising privacy.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Looking ahead, AxxonAI is developing multiple versions of the platform, including implementations based on Small Language Models and domain-specific integrations aimed at making adoption more practical and affordable for SMEs. The company is testing sector-specific applications for agriculture, automotive, BFSI, telecommunications, property, logistics, supply chain, media and entertainment, with launches planned from early 2026. Backed by Malaysian and international AI specialists and advisers, AxxonAI is positioning itself as a regional intelligence engine for the next phase of enterprise AI growth.

POSSIBLE CONTENDERS FOR EXPERT'S CHOICE RAYA TVC AWARDS 2026

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LittleJoys of Ramadan | Petronas

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Seikhlas Pemberian, Seindah Lebaran | Guardian Malaysia

Di Samping Ayah | OCBC Bank

Baju Raya Lama Baharu 2.0 | Sun Life Malaysia

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Bila Bersama, Lagi Jadi | Astro

Tak Sabar Nak Raya | Brands
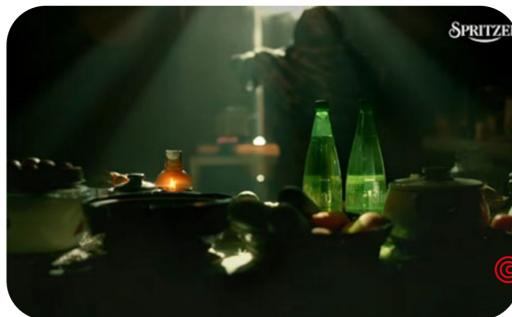

Fenomena Ramadan | SJPP

Santapan Ramadan | Marrybrown

Serikan Raya, Sparkling-kan Suasana | Spritzer

Marketing
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