

MARKETING

ISSUE #474 SEPTEMBER 2026

WEEKENDERTM



SELAMAT DATANG

Welcome, 欢迎, 歡迎, Bienvenido / Bienvenida, Bienvenue, أهلاً وسهلاً, स्वागत है, স্বাগতম, Bem-vindo / Bem-vinda, Добро пожаловать, خوش آمدید, ਜੀ ਆਇਆਂ ਤੂੰ, Willkommen, ようこそ, 환영합니다, Chào mừng, Hoş geldiniz, Benvenuto / Benvenuta, ยินดีต้อนรับ, நல்வரவு, సవాగతం, स्वागत आहे, સ્વાગત છે, ಸುಸೌವರಾಗತ, സ്വാഗതം, خوش آمدید, Karibu, Maligayang pagdating, Welkom, Witamy, Ласкаво просимо, Bun venit, Καλώς ήρθατε, מיאבה מיכורב, ကိုဆိုပါတယ်

WEEKENDER

Published by **Sledgehammer Communications (M) Sdn Bhd**. 22B, Jalan Tun Mohd Fuad 1, Taman Tun Dr. Ismail, 60000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Tel: 603-7726 2588. ham@adoimagazine.com.
www.marketingmagazineasia.com

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DAMISANISMS

“PUT ON YOUR LIPSTICK AND BE CREATIVE.”

“I THINK THE SUCCESS FACTOR FOR EVERY GENDER IS SETTING GOALS AND COMMITTING TO THEM.”

“THAI LADIES HAVE A DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTIC, WHICH IS SOFT OUTSIDE BUT STRONG INSIDE.”

**DAMISA
ONGSIRIWATTANA
CO-FOUNDER, SOUR
BANGKOK.**

“BEING CREATIVE AND BEING A MANAGER ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT THINGS IN MY VIEW.”

“FOR ME, BEING A WOMAN IN ADVERTISING IS MORE LIKE AN OPPORTUNITY THAN A CHALLENGE.”





WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HEADS ROLL?

When an agency wins an account, the bosses take the stage. When it loses one, everyone checks their calendar for an unexpected meeting.

PepsiCo's move from Omnicom to Publicis puts that anxiety in focus. Its global media business changed hands while Omnicom was integrating IPG and pursuing workforce reductions.

Omnicom expects its headcount to fall by roughly 15,000 during 2026. That includes disposals, outsourcing and offshoring alongside merger cuts. Blaming the entire reduction on PepsiCo would be wrong. WPP, meanwhile, reportedly plans up to 1,000 further job cuts before year-end.

Behind those numbers are careers, mortgages and families. People who worked weekends to protect a relationship can still lose their livelihoods when it ends.

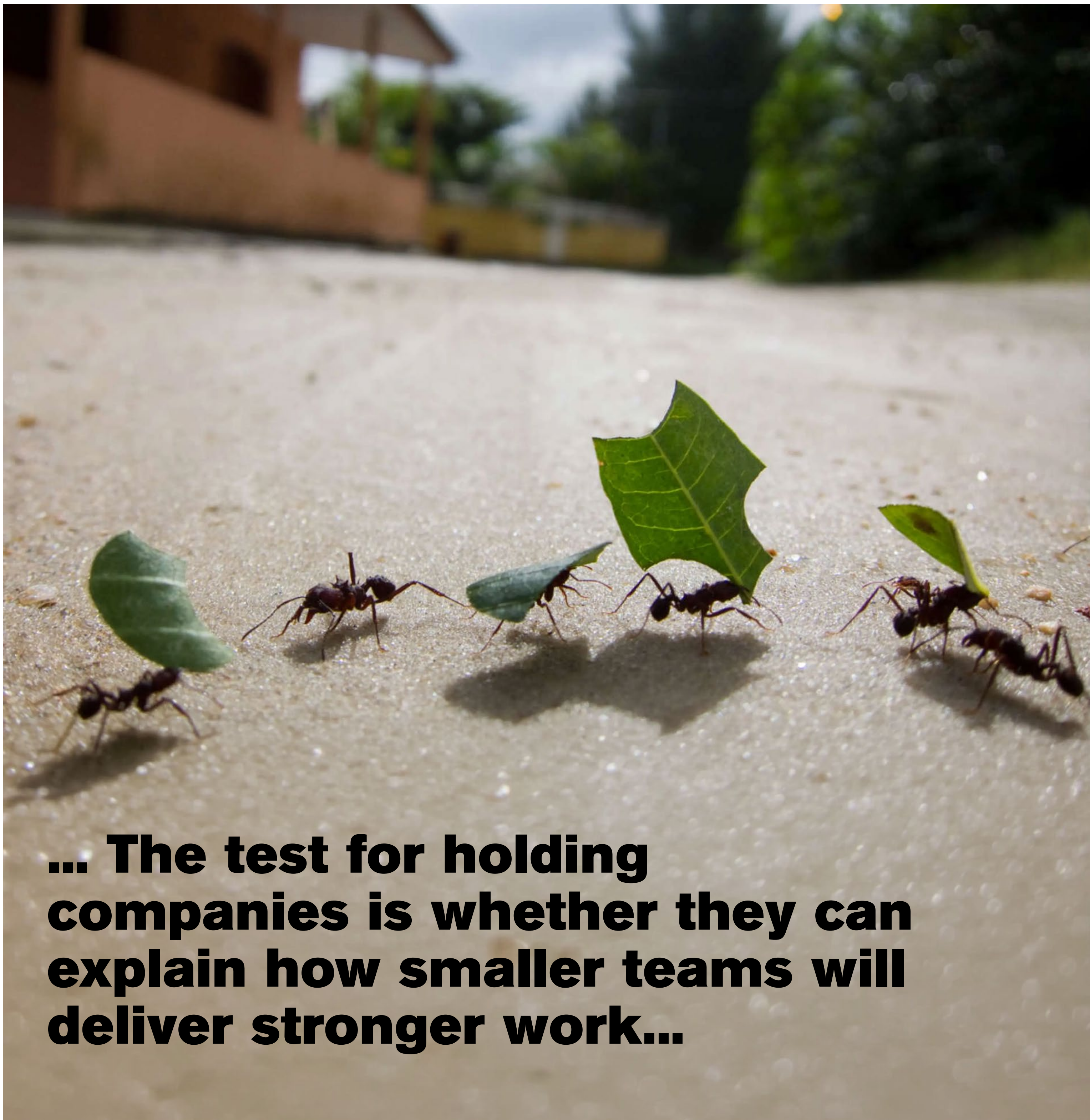
Yes, clients can leave. Yes, overlapping roles need addressing. Every business must manage costs.

But where is the same urgency when it comes to examining leadership?

Who approved the promises? Who decided the staffing? Who listened when the team said something was wrong?

These questions deserve answers before another presentation celebrates the savings.

Advertising sells intelligence, imagination and judgement.



... The test for holding companies is whether they can explain how smaller teams will deliver stronger work...

Experienced people carry those capabilities out of the building when they leave. Their colleagues inherit the workload and a powerful incentive to keep their heads down.

Try building a brave creative culture around that.

The test for holding companies is whether they can explain how smaller teams will deliver stronger work. What gets stopped? What gets simplified? What support actually reaches the people serving clients?

Departing employees deserve fair treatment. Remaining employees deserve manageable workloads and

honest answers. Clients deserve clarity about who will deliver what they bought.

And the executives overseeing all this deserve scrutiny that extends beyond the next quarterly margin.

When heads roll, a spreadsheet records the saving immediately.

When heads roll, counting them is the easy part. Explaining how the next round will be avoided is the real test.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hermanus', with several horizontal lines drawn through it.

270 WINNERS
22 COUNTRIES
1 NIGHT IN KL
OCTOBER 16, 2026.

The 14th Dragons of Malaysia and 26th Dragons of Asia Awards celebrate results-driven marketing across Asia, MENA, North Africa and the Middle East. An international judging panel of clients and agencies spanning 35 countries recognise campaigns combining audience insight, disciplined execution, creativity, measurable effectiveness and commercial impact.

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2026
DRAGONS
OF ASIA



2026
DRAGONS
OF MALAYSIA



2026
DRAGONS
OF PAKISTAN



2026
DRAGONS
OF SRI LANKA



2026
DRAGONS
OF MENA



VMY 2026: THE CAMPAIGN THAT LEARNED TO LISTEN

VISIT MALAYSIA 2026
HAS REACHED ITS
HALFWAY MARK WITH
THE ONE RESULT
EVERY NATIONAL
MARKETING CAMPAIGN
ULTIMATELY NEEDS:
PEOPLE ARE
RESPONDING.

... Approximately 10.65 million international visitors entered the country, representing 5.4% year-on-year growth and Malaysia's highest first-quarter international visitor total on record...



Malaysia welcomed 21.12 million international visitors during the first six months of 2026, an increase of 2.5% from the 20.60 million recorded during the same period last year.

The opening quarter was particularly impressive. Approximately 10.65 million international visitors entered the country, representing 5.4% year-on-year growth and Malaysia's strongest first-quarter tourism performance on record.

Against the campaign's original target of 43 million international visitors for 2026, Malaysia had achieved just over 49% by the end of June.

The numbers provide compelling evidence of momentum. But VMY 2026's more interesting success may be found in how Tourism Malaysia has developed its marketing: preserving proven brand strengths, experimenting with fresh ideas, learning from audience response and confidently refining its approach.

A MARKETER AT THE HELM

Tourism Malaysia Chairman Datuk Manoharan Periasamy brings an unusually relevant combination of institutional knowledge and marketing experience to the campaign.

During more than three decades in tourism, he has served as Tourism Malaysia's director-general, senior director of its Advertising and Digital Division, director of Package Development and director of Corporate Communications. He has also led Tourism Malaysia's offices in Mumbai and New Delhi.

He understands tourism as both a national economic responsibility and a marketing discipline.

Upon his appointment as chairman in December 2025, Manoharan said he was committed to working closely with Tourism Malaysia's management and staff "to strengthen Malaysia's position as a



“Travelport has proven their ability to provide the intelligence to enhance our campaign strategies,”
Datuk Manoharan

leading tourism destination.”

While serving as director-general, Manoharan emphasised the importance of using meaningful data to strengthen campaign strategy and deliver more relevant content to travel retailers.

Through its collaboration with Travelport, Tourism Malaysia previously reported a 50% increase in campaign conversions compared with the 2019 benchmark.

Beautiful images still matter.

Emotion still matters. But reach alone is no longer sufficient. Modern destination marketing must turn curiosity into searches, searches into bookings and bookings into longer stays and higher spending.

BUILDING ON A GREAT MALAYSIAN BRAND

“Malaysia Truly Asia” remains one of the country’s most recognisable and valuable brand properties.

... A traveller in Shanghai may be attracted by experiences that differ from those sought by a family in Chennai, a shopper in Singapore or a nature enthusiast in Frankfurt. Tourism Malaysia's marketing increasingly recognises that Malaysia does not have one tourism proposition. It has hundreds...

VMY 2026 has wisely retained that powerful brand equity while adding a new emotional layer through the promise of "Surreal Experiences."

The campaign's flagship three-minute film brings together Malaysia's scenery, culture, food, music, warmth and multiracial identity. Its soundtrack, performed by Ernie Zakri, uses several Malaysian languages to communicate a sense of national harmony.

In August, "Surreal Experiences" won a *PATA Gold Award 2026 in the Marketing – Travel Video category*, providing valuable international recognition for the campaign's creative work.

Yet the campaign extends far

beyond one hero film.

Tourism Malaysia developed a library of 204 video assets in English, Mandarin and Arabic. These include long and short edits, regional destination films and specialist content covering food, retail, culture, nature, adventure, events and festivals.

VMY 2026 operates more like a content system. Different stories can be presented to different markets across different platforms.

A traveller in Shanghai may be attracted by experiences that differ from those sought by a family in Chennai, a shopper in Singapore or a nature enthusiast in Frankfurt.

Tourism Malaysia's marketing increasingly recognises that Malaysia does not have one tourism proposition. It has hundreds.

MARKETING CLOSER TO THE DECISION

Another strength of VMY 2026 has been its movement beyond conventional advertising.

Tourism Malaysia has collaborated with Tripadvisor on digital discovery, content and traveller data. Mastercard connects the campaign to shopping and visitor spending. Weixin Pay makes Malaysia easier to navigate for Chinese travellers, while partnerships with airlines, hotels, retailers, booking platforms and mobility providers bring the campaign closer to the point of purchase.

Its partnership with Foodie Media



provides access to a regional digital network reportedly reaching more than 50 million followers. This makes strategic sense because Malaysian food is one of the country's most distinctive, persuasive and shareable tourism assets.

Tourism Malaysia has also adapted its message to individual markets.

In India, the organisation has promoted Malaysia across leisure, weddings, MICE and premium tourism, supported by visa-free entry and more than 200 weekly direct flights between India and Malaysia.

"India continues to play a pivotal role in Malaysia's international tourism strategy," Manoharan said during an engagement in New Delhi.

THE CONFIDENCE TO KEEP IMPROVING

Large national campaigns rarely arrive perfectly formed.



They develop through experience, evidence and audience response.

VMY 2026 has demonstrated an ability to refine its creative work along the way.

When an earlier promotional film was considered insufficiently

“India continues to play a pivotal role in Malaysia’s international tourism strategy,”



representative of Malaysia’s individual states and attractions, the content was reviewed and expanded. The promotional video was subsequently scheduled for periodic updates, allowing more destinations and experiences to be incorporated.

A short AI-led promotional execution for Citrawarna 2026 also drew concern over cultural authenticity. Tourism Malaysia removed the video from its social platforms within two days.

The organisation did not publish a detailed explanation for its decision. Nevertheless, its speed of

response prevented one execution from overshadowing the wider campaign.

There is a useful lesson here for every major marketer.

Experimentation will sometimes produce work that connects strongly and sometimes produce work that requires reconsideration. The strength of a marketing organisation lies in recognising the difference quickly.

Tourism Malaysia kept moving.

It continued investing in authentic destination footage, multilingual

...Advertising creates the invitation. The destination must then fulfil its promise through accessible transport, clean surroundings, useful visitor information, seamless payments and warm Malaysian hospitality...

content, local music, real cultural experiences, regional storytelling, creator partnerships and targeted digital distribution.

THE NUMBERS SUPPORT THE STORY

VMY 2026 did not begin from a weak base. Malaysia had already recorded 42.2 million international visitor arrivals in 2025, an increase of 11.2% over 2024.

Generating further growth after such a strong recovery is a considerable achievement.

Domestic tourism has performed especially well. Malaysia recorded 74.7 million domestic visitors during the first quarter of 2026, an increase of 7.2%.

Domestic tourism expenditure grew even faster, rising 15.8% to RM34 billion.

Spending therefore increased at more than twice the rate of visitor volume, indicating that tourism is creating greater economic activity rather than simply greater traffic.

Malaysia Airports handled 51 million passenger movements across its Malaysian network during the first half of 2026. International passenger movements rose 7.7%, while international traffic through KLIA

increased 7.8% to 23.4 million.

This was achieved despite geopolitical tensions in West Asia, reduced airline capacity on some routes and 4,111 scheduled flight cancellations affecting Malaysia.

The performance demonstrates the resilience of Malaysia's tourism proposition and the breadth of the markets supporting it.

FROM ARRIVALS TO ADVOCACY

The next opportunity is to turn strong arrival numbers into even greater value.

Malaysia must encourage visitors to stay longer, spend more, travel beyond established destinations





and eventually return. More of the tourism economy should reach Sabah, Sarawak, the East Coast, smaller towns and local communities.

Advertising creates the invitation. The destination must then fulfil its promise through accessible transport, clean surroundings, useful visitor information, seamless payments and warm Malaysian hospitality.

The “Mesra Malaysia” initiative recognises this by making service and friendliness part of the national tourism effort.

Visitors may forget a billboard. They are less likely to forget the Malaysian who welcomed them, helped them or shared a memorable meal with them.

VMY 2026 has already delivered a successful first half. Arrivals are rising. Domestic expenditure is

accelerating. International airport traffic is growing. The flagship campaign has won regional recognition. Strategic partnerships have extended its reach, while data is playing a greater role in marketing decisions.

The campaign is also demonstrating a valuable form of maturity.

It is building on ideas that connect, adapting content for different audiences, measuring what converts, listening to public response and refining executions when necessary.

That is how a tourism campaign becomes more than a collection of advertisements.

It becomes a living national marketing platform, constantly learning, improving and giving the world more reasons to discover Malaysia.



SPEED WINS IN B2B: WHAT HAPPENED WHEN I ASKED 40 PRINTERS IN FOUR COUNTRIES FOR A QUOTE

By Hando Sinisalu, Marketing Parrot

THE DATA: WHY THE FASTEST REPLY USUALLY GETS THE DEAL

Sales research has been remarkably consistent on one point for almost two decades: whoever answers first, wins. The landmark 2007 MIT / InsideSales.com study of over 15,000 B2B leads found that a company contacting a prospect within five minutes is **21 times more likely to qualify that lead** than one that waits 30 minutes. Harvard Business Review, analysing 2.24 million sales leads, found that firms responding within the first hour are

... Malaysia and Indonesia lagged badly: fewer than half of each list responded at all, and the ones who did often took hours rather than minutes...



roughly **seven times more likely to qualify the lead** than those who wait just one hour longer — and that the odds are effectively zero after 24 hours. The buyer isn't being impatient; they're simply still in the room, still comparing options, and still receptive. Once they've moved on to something else, or signed with a competitor, no amount of quality or price can win back that moment.

THE EXPERIMENT

To test this in the wild, I used Claude to identify ten printing houses in each of four countries — Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia — and sent all 40 an identical request by email: print 10,000 A4, one-sided, full-colour leaflets on 80gsm paper, with a tight but realistic turnaround (artwork by the 10th, delivery by the 14th at 1pm). No company was told it was being tested against competitors; each received the same plain, neutral inquiry.

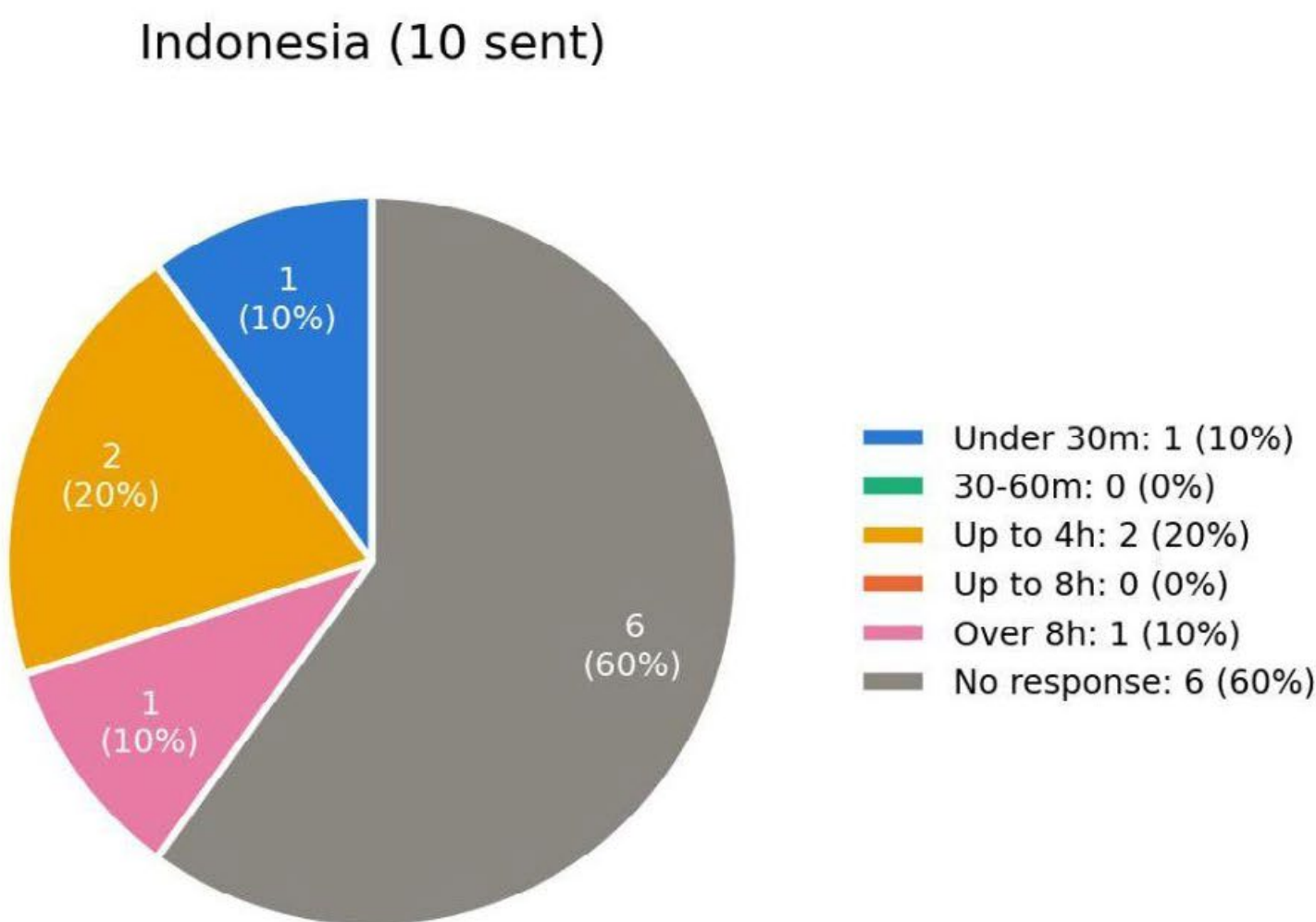
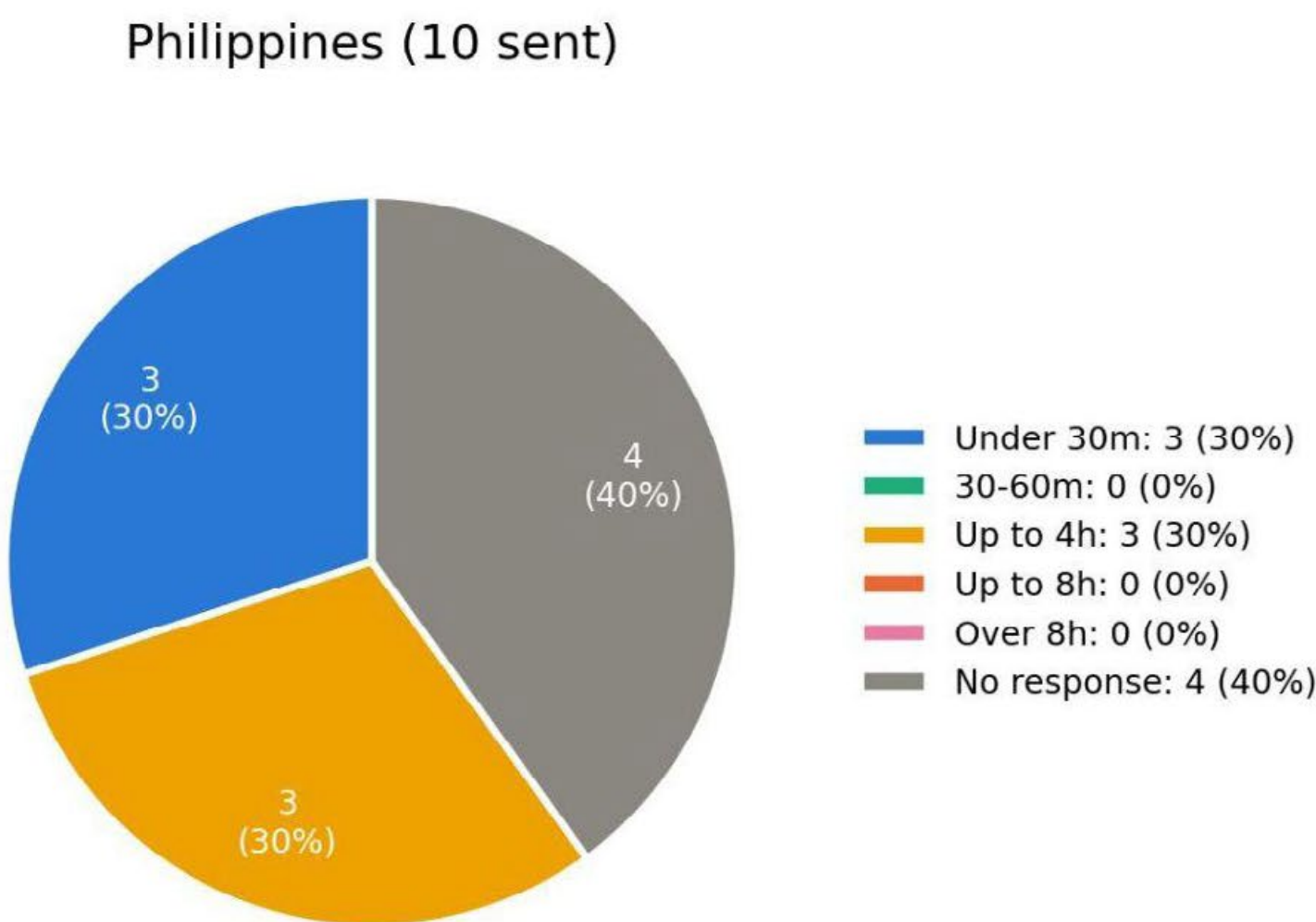
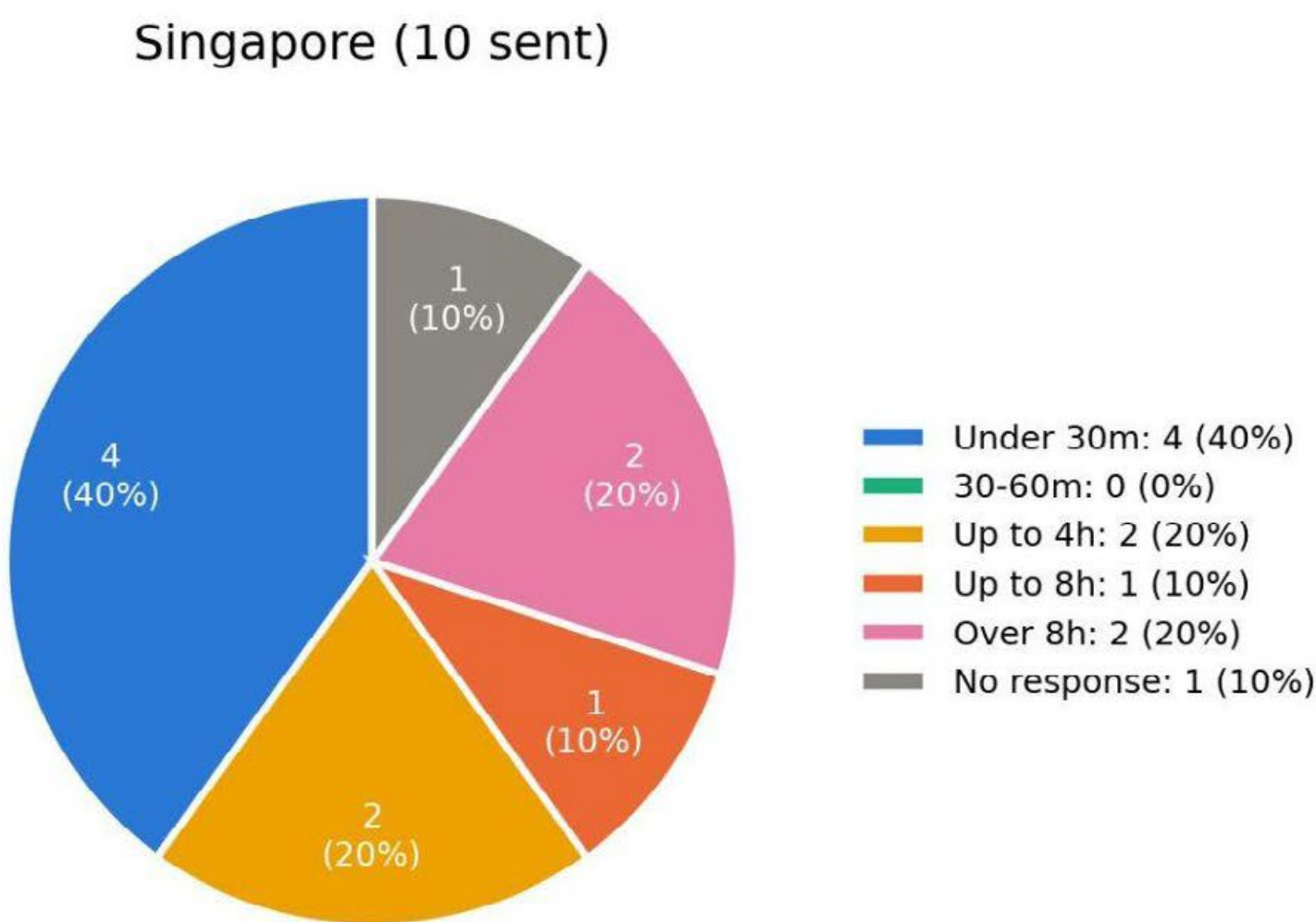
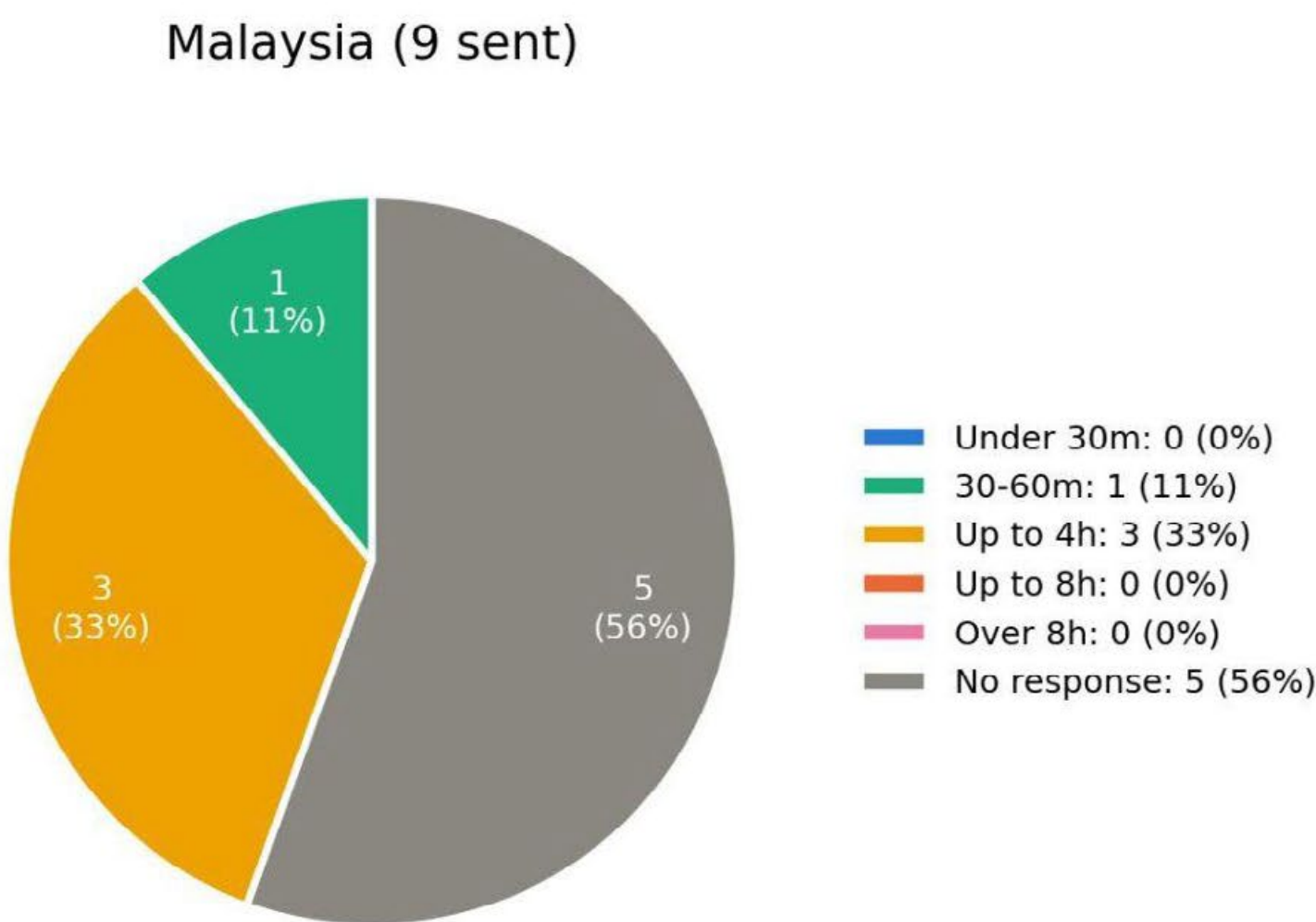
What happened

Singapore was the standout performer: 9 of 10 printers replied, several within minutes, and one even reached out over WhatsApp in under five minutes. The Philippines showed a similarly fast leading pack but a weak tail — six replies, three of them inside ten minutes, alongside four total non-responses. Malaysia and Indonesia lagged badly: fewer than half of each list responded at all, and the ones who did often took hours rather than minutes. A handful of printers (Small Piece of Paper in the Philippines, Print City in Singapore) even followed up two or three times when they hadn't heard back — proactive persistence that the research above says pays off, since most vendors never follow up even once.

The pattern lines up almost exactly with the studies above: the printers who replied within the first ten minutes were, without exception, the ones still actively pushing for

B2B MARKETING

Printing request response times by country



the order days later. The slow responders, even when their prices were competitive, seemed to have already mentally filed the enquiry away.

Conclusion: Malaysian B2B companies need to increase the response speed in order to be competitive

The lesson from 40 printing houses is about a discipline that applies to every B2B relationship, from a leaflet order to a seven-figure enterprise deal. The MIT study, the HBR data, and this small

real-world test all point to the same uncomfortable truth: most companies lose business not because their product or price was wrong, but because they simply weren't fast enough to be in the conversation when it mattered. Speed isn't a soft "nice to have" — it's a measurable, repeatable competitive advantage, and one that costs nothing but attention and process to build.

This is exactly the kind of practical, evidence-based thinking we'll be unpacking at **ELEVATE — The ASEAN B2B Conference 2027**, taking place **12–13 January 2027 at KLGCC Convention**



Centre, Over two days, senior B2B marketing, sales, and CX leaders from across Malaysia, Singapore, and wider Southeast Asia will share the operational playbooks — lead response, account-based marketing, trust-building, and digital transformation — that separate the companies winning deals from the ones losing them in the first five minutes.

The ASEAN B2B Conference 2027 will bring these conversations together, with industry leaders examining how B2B brands can build trust, create stronger content, embrace creative bravery and respond to modern buying realities for marketers.

EARLY BIRD SPECIAL

All registrations confirmed before September 30 will be offered special pricing on group booking! HRDC Claimable.

Registrations are now open. Contact Ruby at +603-7726 2588 or ruby@adoimagazine.com. For sponsorship opportunities, contact Vishnu at vishnu@adoimagazine.com.

Despite the challenges over the past year, ad producers have continued to showcase their jiwa merdeka—the spirit of independence and creativity—through inspiring work for Merdeka. That's why we proudly carried on with our Experts' Choice Awards to help the industry recognize which brands, agencies, and production houses best embodied the jiwa merdeka in their campaigns for this year's celebrations. The rankings are solely based on the voices of our readers—not on how many millions of YouTube views or social media shares. And now, the Top 10 winners, in no particular order, for the 2026 Experts' Choice Awards Merdeka edition are....





Brand Etiqa **Title** Etiqa Hari Kebangsaan 2026 | Kita Saling Jaga
Agency/ Production House Imagineers Film



Brand Mirinda **Title** Rasa Sehati Sejiwa bersama Mirinda
Agency Astro Media Solutions **Production House** Astro Shaw



Brand FedEx Title Every Journey Begins with Someone Agency/Production House Just Another Production



Brand PNB Merdeka Ventures - Merdeka 118 Title Gapai Agency M+C Saatchi KARSA Production House Twentyone seventeen Studio



Brand Syarikat Jaminan Pembiayaan Perniagaan Berhad (SJPP)
Title Kisah “Kepoh Bisnes” **Agency** THE SHOUT GROUP
Production House KDCo



Brand Sting **Title** Kita Terbang Sama-Sama **Agency** Astro Media Solutions
Production House Astro Shaw



CLICK TO FULL VIDEO

Brand Ryt Bank **Title** Kembara Kita | Ryt Bank Merdeka 2026
Agency/Production House Vision Machina



CLICK TO FULL VIDEO

Brand Wonda Coffee **Title** Tarik: A Wonda-pull Story **Agency** Fishermen Integrated **Production House** Layar Lucida



Brand AmBank Group **Title** AmBank Group | Hari Kebangsaan 2026 | Generasi Malaysia **Agency** Skribble Malaysia **Production House** Gary Chong Studios



Brand Telekom Malaysia Berhad **Title** Gema Malaysia **Agency** VML Malaysia **Production House** Mastermind Group



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AN AI WORKSHOP FOR LEADERS

DIFFERENTIATION IN THE



AGE OF AI

BY RAJIV LAL

27TH OCTOBER, 2026
KLGCC CONVENTION
CENTRE
ROOF GARDEN