

MARKETING

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WEEKENDER™



**11.11
SUPER
SALE**

WEEKENDER

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**"AT THE END
OF THE DAY,
WE'RE TALKING
TO HUMANS. SO,
TALK LIKE ONE."**

**"DON'T TAKE LIFE
SO SERIOUSLY.
NOBODY EVER
GOT OUT OF IT
ALIVE."**

**"CREATIVITY JUST FOR
CREATIVITY'S SAKE IS
NOT AN EASY SELL"**

**"EMBRACE PLAY
AT WORK. FUN IS
WHAT MAKES THE
WORK SING."**

**"WHEN WAS
THE LAST TIME
YOU TRIED
SOMETHING
FOR THE FIRST
TIME?"**

**"RESILIENCE
IS A GREAT
CREATIVE
MUSCLE"**

**RUCHI SHARMA
FOUNDER/CCO
HUMANSENSE**

IS ADVERTISING A HALF TRUTH?



Let's admit something advertising people don't like admitting.

We have been stretching the truth for years.

For the good of the brand.

Not necessarily by lying.

Something far more sophisticated.

By deciding which part of the truth you get to see.

The burger is juicy. The car means freedom. The bank understands your dreams. The shampoo changes your life. The holiday is an infinity pool overlooking the ocean.

All true, perhaps.

Just not the whole truth.

Advertising can dramatise a little truth into a big one.

We learned that repetition could turn familiarity into preference.

We learned that emotion could sometimes overpower reason.

We learned that perception could become reality.

And for years, advertising operated within fairly obvious boundaries.

People knew when they were

looking at an ad.

Today, those boundaries have almost disappeared.

Now AI takes this somewhere else entirely.

And produce a perfectly convincing explanation to support it.

The great danger may therefore not be the lie.

Lies can be checked. They can be disproved. They can eventually collapse.

Half truths are much more resilient.

Because the best half truth contains enough truth to survive scrutiny.

Advertising people should understand this better than most.

We have spent decades learning how to frame reality.

Perhaps that gives us a new responsibility.

To help people recognise when reality is being framed for them.

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11.11: WHEN CHEAP BECOMES THE COMPETITION

A vibrant bouquet of pink, white, and purple flowers against a blue sky background. The flowers are arranged in a dense, vertical cluster, with pink daisies and smaller pink blossoms interspersed with white daisies and purple flowers. The background is a clear, bright blue sky with some soft, out-of-focus clouds. The overall image is bright and colorful, with a focus on the flowers.

I have been wondering what 11.11 actually means anymore. There was a time when I thought of it as an online shopping festival. Another clever piece of marketing that turned an otherwise ordinary date into an excuse to buy things.

COVER STORY



But look at what is happening now and I think there is a much bigger story staring Malaysian retailers in the face.

The problem isn't simply that consumers are waiting for discounts.

We have always loved a bargain. What has changed is the definition of a bargain, and the sheer scale of what Malaysian businesses are now competing against.

I sometimes scroll through the shopping platforms and find myself asking the same question. How can this thing possibly be so cheap?

A household item for RM6. A shirt for RM12. Some strange little gadget for RM9 that I had absolutely no intention of buying until an algorithm put it in front of me.

Somebody had to make it. Somebody packed it. Somebody shipped it across borders. The platform has to make something. The logistics company has to make something. And it still lands on my screen at RM9.

How does a Malaysian retailer compete with that? That, to me, is the real 11.11 story.

China has spent years building an extraordinary manufacturing and e-commerce ecosystem. Its factories, logistics networks, digital platforms, payment systems, algorithms and enormous domestic market have created efficiencies that few countries can replicate.

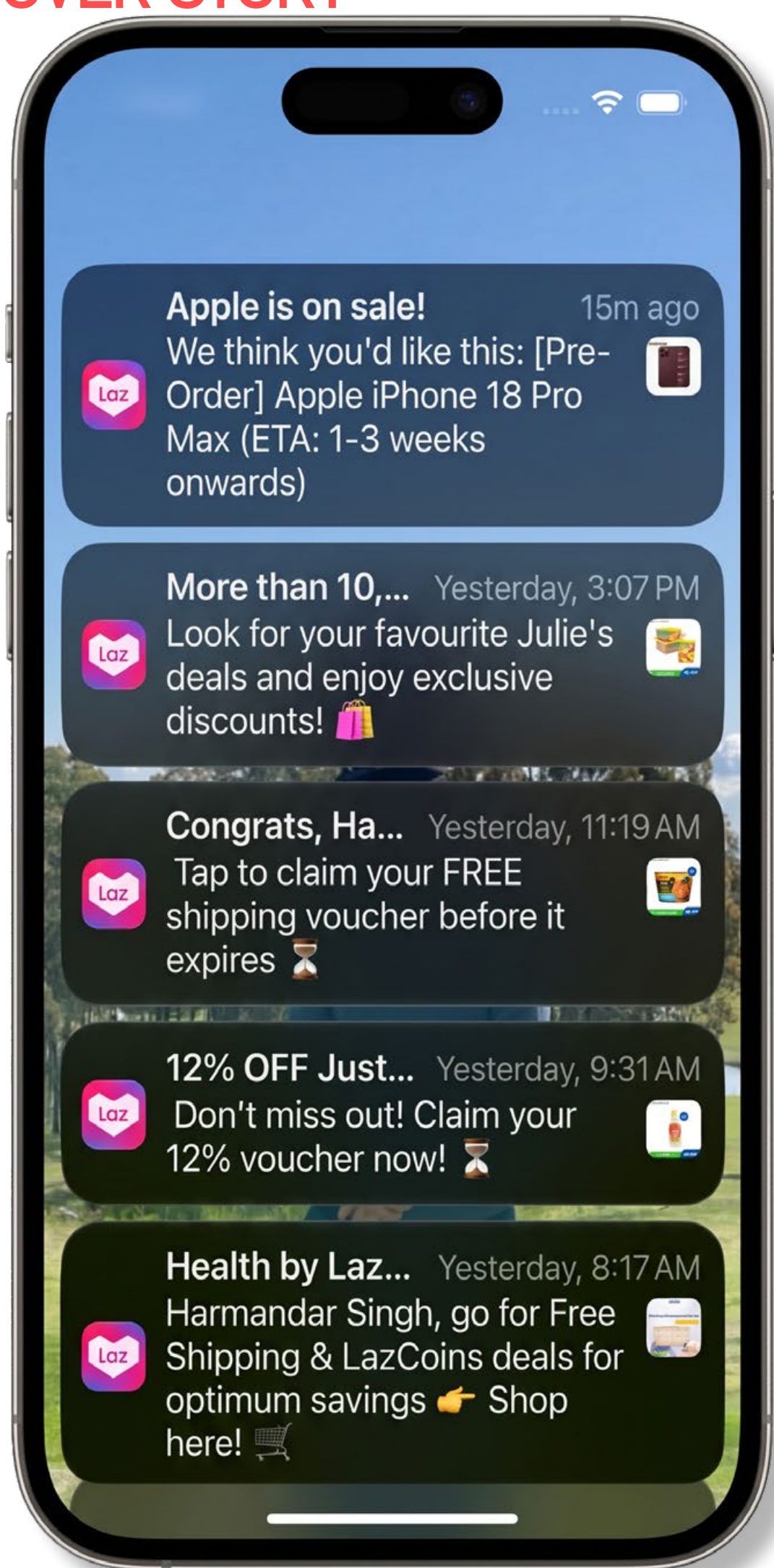
Now many of those businesses are looking beyond China. Malaysia is sitting right in their path.

I don't think it is useful to turn China into the villain here. Chinese companies are doing exactly what ambitious businesses are supposed to do. They are finding markets, lowering costs, improving logistics and giving consumers what they want.

And judging from the parcels arriving at Malaysian homes every day, we clearly want it.

You cannot lecture somebody earning RM3,500 a month about

COVER STORY



economic patriotism when the same-looking household item is RM8 online and RM25 somewhere else.

I wouldn't. People have bills to pay. If someone offers comparable utility at a substantially lower price, buying the cheaper product is a perfectly rational decision.

Which means the problem belongs to Malaysian business.

I DON'T THINK WE CAN WIN A PRICE WAR

This is the part I keep coming back to.

If your entire business model is buying something, marking it up and selling it to another Malaysian, the ground underneath you is shifting very quickly.

Not that long ago, a retailer competed with the shop down the road, another store in the mall or perhaps a big chain opening nearby.

Today that same retailer could be

competing with thousands of sellers and factories he will never see.

The shelf has become infinite. And I can compare prices while sitting on my sofa.

That matters because information itself used to have value. The retailer knew where to source something. I didn't. He imported it, put it on a shelf and charged me a margin for providing access to it.

Today, I can sometimes find his supplier. Once that happens, the relationship changes completely.

THEN I STARTED THINKING ABOUT DROPSHIPPING

Dropshipping makes this even more interesting.

For years, we were told it was the great democratisation of entrepreneurship. You didn't need a warehouse. You didn't need much capital. You didn't necessarily even need inventory.

Find a supplier, build a storefront, advertise the product and somebody else fulfils the order.

It sounded brilliant. And it can be. But what happens when everybody can do it?

If ten Malaysian online sellers are sourcing essentially the same product from the same overseas supplier, I have to ask: what exactly is the business?

Often it becomes advertising plus markup.

There is nothing inherently wrong with that. Plenty of legitimate businesses have been built this way.



But the model becomes fragile the moment I discover I can search for the same product myself.

Which makes me think whether the next stage of Malaysian e-commerce has to be about something more than becoming increasingly efficient at importing other people's products.

Maybe we need to become much better at creating things people actually want to look for.

WE KNOW SOMETHING THEY DON'T

This is where I become more optimistic.

Malaysian retailers have one advantage that a foreign platform or factory cannot automatically acquire.

We live here. We know Malaysians. We know how we eat, celebrate, complain, travel, dress, entertain and shop. We understand Ramadan, Chinese New Year, Deepavali and Christmas. We know

what happens to Kuala Lumpur traffic when it rains at 5.30pm.

There are things about this market you don't learn from a spreadsheet. Surely that knowledge has value.

Look around and you can see Malaysian businesses that have found ways to turn local understanding into commercial advantage. MR D.I.Y., Padini, Secret Recipe, ZUS Coffee and Inside Scoop are very different businesses, but they remind me of something important.

Malaysians are perfectly willing to support brands that give us a compelling reason to do so.

Yes, price matters. But I don't buy everything purely on price, and I suspect neither do you.

Sometimes I buy convenience. Sometimes familiarity. Sometimes service. Sometimes confidence. Sometimes I simply like a brand and what it represents.

... We don't need China's manufacturing scale to learn from China's commercial mentality. Test faster. Listen to customers. Use the data...

That is territory a faceless RM7 product listing finds much harder to occupy. Whenever this discussion comes up, somebody inevitably says we should “Buy Malaysian”.

I understand the sentiment. But I think that can become a lazy answer.

I should not have to pay more for an inferior product simply because somebody printed a Jalur Gemilang on the packaging Like Tuju?

Malaysian consumers have travelled. We have TikTok, Shopee, Lazada and the rest of the world sitting in our pockets. We know what is available elsewhere.

Being Malaysian by itself is not enough. Understanding Malaysians might be.

What I want from Malaysian retailers is a reason to choose them. Give me a genuinely good idea. Show me an insight into what I actually need. Improve the product.

Give me service that makes my life easier. Build a brand I can trust.

Give me something that makes me search for your name instead of automatically searching for the cheapest version of whatever you happen to sell.

That, I think, is where Malaysian retail needs to go.

MAYBE WE SHOULD STOP COMPLAINING AND START STUDYING

There is another thought that has been bothering me.

We complain about Chinese e-commerce, but how much time do we spend studying why it works so well?

Look at the speed at which products are tested. Look at the relationship between factories and consumer data. Look at livestream commerce. Look at how quickly merchants respond to trends and how relentlessly they remove friction between discovery, payment and delivery.

There are lessons there. We don't need China's manufacturing scale to learn from China's commercial mentality. Test faster. Listen to customers. Use the data. Shorten the distance between what people are telling you and what you put on the shelf.

And perhaps we should stop congratulating ourselves for having a website. A website means you have a website. It doesn't necessarily mean you have transformed your business.



I NOW SEE 11.11 AS A STRESS TEST

The more I think about it, the less I see 11.11 as a sale.

I see it as an annual stress test for Malaysian retail.

For a short period, almost every force changing commerce becomes impossible to ignore. Price transparency, cross-border trade, logistics, algorithms, social commerce, livestreaming, digital payments and increasingly impatient consumers all collide.

Somebody will announce another sales record. Consumers will fill their carts, delivery riders will fill our streets and warehouses will work through the night.

And somewhere in Malaysia, a perfectly decent local business owner will stare at a competing product being sold for less than his wholesale cost and wonder what on earth he is supposed to do.

I have been thinking about that question because telling retailers simply to “be more innovative” isn’t particularly helpful.

If I were running a Malaysian retail business today, these are the five things I would do.

1. Find out where you are vulnerable

I would go through everything I sell and ask a very simple question: which of these products can my customer easily find somewhere else

... You can sell thousands of products through a marketplace and still have almost no relationship with the people buying them...

for less? Those are the products I would worry about.

If somebody can take a photograph of your product, do an image search and find 20 versions of essentially the same thing at half the price, you don't have much of a moat. You are selling a commodity, whether you like the word or not.

Before you can defend the business, you need to know exactly where it is exposed.

2. Give me something I can't easily compare

Once you know where you are vulnerable, decide where you can be different.

That might mean developing your own products instead of endlessly sourcing somebody else's. It could mean exclusive designs, better packaging, clever bundles

or products adapted for Malaysian homes, weather, food, habits and lifestyles.

You don't necessarily need to invent something revolutionary.

Sometimes a small insight into how Malaysians actually use something is enough to make it better.

The goal is simple. Make it harder for me to put your product next to 20 identical products and choose whichever one is cheapest.

3. Compete where the overseas seller can't

If somebody thousands of kilometres away can beat you on price, ask what you can do that they cannot.

Can I get the product today? Can I speak to a human being when something goes wrong? Can I return it easily? Can you install it, customise it, repair it or show me how to use it?

Those things have value.

Local retailers sometimes talk about proximity as though simply being nearby is an advantage. It isn't, unless you do something with it. Turn being local into better service.

4. Own the relationship with your customer

This may be one of the biggest weaknesses in modern retail.

You can sell thousands of products through a marketplace and still have almost no relationship with the people buying them.



The platform remembers the customer. You don't.

That should worry retailers.

Give people a reason to follow you, join your membership programme, visit your store, subscribe to your messages or come directly to you next time. Learn what your best customers buy, what they complain about and why they come back.

And stop training them to return only when there is a discount.

11.11 has taught all of us to expect vouchers, free shipping and another 20 per cent off if we wait long enough. Retailers helped create that behaviour.

Discounts have their place. But if the only reason I buy from you is because you gave me RM20 off, somebody else can give me RM25 off tomorrow.

Use the promotion to acquire the customer. Then give me a reason to return when there isn't a sale.

5. Use the same platforms to sell outwards

This is perhaps the opportunity we don't talk about enough.

The same digital infrastructure bringing foreign products into Malaysia can take Malaysian products in the other direction.

If a factory in China can find a customer in Petaling Jaya, why can't a Malaysian business find a customer in Jakarta, Bangkok or Manila?

That requires a different mindset. Instead of asking only what Malaysians might buy from the rest of the world, start asking what the rest of the world might want from us.

Malaysian food, beauty, fashion, design, halal products and products created for tropical lifestyles all have potential markets beyond our borders.

So if I had to reduce my action plan to five lines, it would be this:

- Know what can be undercut.

- Create what can't easily be compared.
- Use being local to serve better.
- Own your customer relationship.
- Then take what works here to the world. None of this is easy.

But competing with a RM9 product by selling yours for RM8.50 seems considerably harder.

BUT WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

To LHDN. Joking, joking! I digress.

When Malaysians spend billions online, how much of the economic value created by all that consumption remains in Malaysia?

I don't think the answer is as simple as saying the money is leaving the country.

Cross-border commerce creates value here too. Malaysians work for the platforms. Logistics companies make money. Delivery networks grow. Advertising is purchased. Payment providers earn fees. Local merchants gain access to infrastructure they could never afford to build themselves.

And Malaysian households get cheaper goods. That matters too.

So I am not arguing that we should somehow close the door. Apart from being unrealistic, I suspect it would hurt the very consumers we claim to be protecting.

The question I find more interesting is whether Malaysian businesses are capturing enough value from this enormous digital economy growing around us.

Are we manufacturing enough? Are we creating enough brands? Are we building enough intellectual property?

Are Malaysian entrepreneurs using these platforms mainly to bring products into Malaysia, or are we using the same platforms to take Malaysian products out to the world?

That distinction matters.

I WOULD RATHER WE STOP SAYING "BUY MALAYSIAN"

Maybe we have been setting the bar too low.

For years, we have talked about buying Malaysian.

I would rather Malaysians searched for Malaysian brands.

There is a huge difference between the two.

One asks for support. The other has earned preference.

I would love to see Malaysian food products that people in Jakarta deliberately search for. Malaysian beauty brands with loyal customers in Bangkok. Malaysian fashion labels being ordered from Manila. Malaysian-designed household products travelling in the opposite direction to all those parcels currently arriving here.

The very infrastructure that threatens Malaysian retailers can also carry Malaysian businesses to the world.

The pipes run both ways. Do we have enough distinctive products and brands to send through them?



... And what are we creating here that somebody thousands of kilometres away might actually want to buy?...

WHAT HAPPENS ON 12 NOVEMBER?

11.11 will come and go.

There will be countdown clocks, vouchers, free shipping, flash deals and probably another record announced somewhere the next morning.

But I think 12 November is the more interesting day for Malaysian retailers.

Because by then, the discount is over.

The question is whether I remember your name.

If I were a retailer, that is the question I would take back to the office on 12 November.

What do we sell that nobody else can sell quite like us?

Why would somebody come directly to us instead of searching for the cheapest alternative?

What do we know about our customers that a factory thousands of kilometres away doesn't?

And what are we creating here that somebody thousands of kilometres away might actually want to buy?

I don't like our chances if Malaysian retail decides to fight the world's largest manufacturing ecosystem purely on price.

But I like our chances considerably more if we compete with understanding, ideas, products, service, creativity, trust and the peculiar advantage of actually knowing this country and the people who live here.

China's e-commerce machine isn't going away.

Neither is 11.11.



INTERVIEW WITH SHAUN LEE WEI RONG, LEAD CLIENT SOLUTIONS MANAGER AT LINKEDIN MARKETING SOLUTIONS IN SINGAPORE

For B2B marketers trying to understand LinkedIn, one question comes up again and again: how do you beat the algorithm?

For Shaun Lee Wei Rong, the answer is simple — stop trying.

“From a strategy standpoint, chasing the algorithm is never a good idea,” Shaun says. “It’s built on big data and changes constantly, even faster now with AI.”

Instead of trying to reverse-engineer every platform shift, Shaun believes marketers should focus on what LinkedIn is fundamentally built for: strong professional networks, valuable content and meaningful engagement.

“The platform exists to build a strong network and add value to it,” he explains. “Once you understand that, you reverse-engineer your approach from there rather than from the algorithm itself.”

STOP CHASING HACKS, START BUILDING VALUE

That does not mean the algorithm is irrelevant. LinkedIn still looks at signals such as engagement rate, dwell time, saves and previous interactions.



“The better approach is just to think about what your audience actually values”

If someone watches an entire video, repeatedly engages with your posts or saves your content, that behaviour signals genuine interest.

But Shaun argues these metrics should be treated as indicators, not tricks to exploit.

“The better approach is just to think about what your audience actually values,” he says.

Format matters too. Shaun personally leans towards infographics because much of his work is technical and data-driven, while video consumption is also

growing strongly on LinkedIn.

Trending topics can help, but only when the content remains relevant and professional.

WHY ONE POST FLIES AND ANOTHER FAILS

One of the most frustrating realities of LinkedIn is that similar posts can perform completely differently.

A creator with thousands of followers might see one post achieve thousands of views, only for the next to barely move.

Shaun says this is partly the nature of machine learning and big-data systems.

“There’s natural variance even within the same network,” he says. “A post flops initially, then something similar takes off three months later, maybe because the timing or relevance shifted.”

His recommendation is consistency.

LinkedIn generally recommends

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posting around three to five times a week, although daily posting can work too. Posting several times a day is more uncertain, and results can vary.

The bigger issue is not simply frequency, but the strength of the network surrounding the content.

A large following with weak engagement is not necessarily more valuable than a smaller, highly relevant professional audience.

“It’s a balance between audience size and content quality,” Shaun says.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IS NOT A POPULARITY CONTEST

The same principle applies when comparing niche B2B creators with high-profile personalities who attract huge engagement on broader content.

“Who you are often matters as much as what you say,” Shaun explains.

Well-known thought leaders may have spent years building their profiles, sometimes with dedicated teams helping with content development.

But B2B marketers should be careful not to compare niche professional content with mass-appeal lifestyle or motivational posts.

Broad content can generate volume. Specialist B2B content should be judged by relevance and quality of engagement.

That distinction matters because B2B success is often less visible.

A post might not generate

thousands of reactions, but it could influence a deal weeks or months later.

THE POWER OF “QUIET INFLUENCE”

Shaun refers to this as the “dark funnel”.

A prospect might see a LinkedIn post, hear a podcast, encounter the same person at an event, read another piece of content and eventually visit a website directly.

Analytics may record only the final step.

“These offline signals — someone mentioning at an event that they saw your podcast or LinkedIn post — never make it into a CRM or any analytics dashboard,” Shaun says.

That means marketers often underestimate the role reputation plays.

A piece of content can be commercially valuable even when the data does not clearly show it.

On the business side, LinkedIn is trying to improve attribution through tools such as Conversions API, which helps connect more of those interactions across the customer journey.

COLLABORATIVE CONTENT IS GAINING GROUND

One of the newer developments Shaun highlights is LinkedIn’s growing focus on creators and collaborative content.

A feature called Collaborative Posts is being rolled out, allowing multiple people to co-author a post

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so that it reaches more than one network.

Shaun has tested this himself.

“My colleague and I co-created a post, and reach lifted noticeably,” he says.

The lesson is broader than the feature itself.

Co-creation between clients, partners, brands and thought leaders can help expand reach, build social proof and introduce content to audiences that might otherwise be difficult to access.

For B2B marketers, that makes partnerships more valuable than simply posting alone.

TARGETING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

For paid campaigns, LinkedIn’s Matched Audiences feature allows marketers to upload contact or company lists for targeting and retargeting.

Match rates can vary because users may register with personal rather than business email addresses, but LinkedIn can use additional fields to improve matching.

The platform is particularly relevant for companies whose target audiences are professionals.

That includes technology, professional services, financial services, education, consultancies and increasingly SMEs.

Shaun notes that SMBs are among the fastest-growing groups on the platform.

The better question is not necessarily which industry belongs on LinkedIn, but whether

the company needs to reach professional decision-makers.

INMAIL ONLY WORKS IF YOU LEAD WITH VALUE

The same audience-first thinking applies to personal outreach.

For Shaun, the effectiveness of InMail depends much more on the value of the message than the tool itself.

Before joining LinkedIn, he worked in sales development and saw first-hand how poorly generic outreach performs.

“‘Book a call with me’ performs far worse than ‘here’s a useful checklist, let’s connect,’” he says.

In saturated markets, buyers receive constant outreach. The only way to stand out is to offer something useful before asking for attention.

Company-level Message Ads can also work well at scale, especially for lead generation around whitepapers, ebooks or other useful assets.

AI should improve quality, not multiply noise

Shaun also uses AI heavily in his own workflow, but not as a substitute for strategy.

Before creating content, he first focuses on building his network.

“Every week I make sure I’m connecting with 10 to 20 new professionals,” he says.

Only after understanding who is joining his network and what they are engaging with does he shape content around those interests.

AI then supports the process.

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Shaun uses it for deep research, copywriting, infographic creation and increasingly video editing.

But the principle remains the same: AI should make content better, not simply produce more of it.

That is ultimately the biggest lesson from Shaun's approach.

Stop obsessing over the algorithm.

Build a stronger network. Understand what your audience values. Create useful content consistently. Collaborate with others. Lead with value. And use AI to sharpen the work, not flood the feed.

As Shaun puts it, the direction is clear: **focus less on the algorithm and more on your audience, your network and collaborative content.**

LinkedIn will be a key focus at **The Elevate B2B Conference 2027 on 12–13 January in Kuala Lumpur**, with Sue Lin Lim, Senior Account Director at LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, and Ray Lopez, a regional business leader at LinkedIn covering Asia, speaking at the event.

For B2B marketers looking to build stronger professional networks, sharpen thought leadership and understand how LinkedIn can support real business growth, the message is simple: stop trying to hack the platform — and start creating more value within it.

Shaun Lee Wei Rong, Lead Client Solutions Manager at LinkedIn Marketing Solutions in Singapore, will be featured as part

of the wider LinkedIn conversation around the Elevate B2B Conference 2027, sharing insights on how B2B marketers can build stronger networks, create more valuable content and use LinkedIn more effectively.

Join leading B2B voices for two days of strategy, creativity, case studies and practical learning at KLGCC Convention Centre, Kuala Lumpur, on 12 & 13 January 2027.

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Visit the **ASEAN B2B Conference 2027** website for more information:

<https://marketingmagazine.com.my/b2b/>







BUILDING EXCLUSIVITY AROUND INCLUSIVITY



New Malaysian Advertisers Association (MAA) President Hassan Alsagolf and Vice President Diana Boo want to grow membership, broaden participation and turn the association into a more powerful community for Malaysian marketers.

Speaking to Hassan and Diana Boo did not feel very association-like.

And that may be the most refreshing thing about the new leadership.

Hassan, Regional Head of Loyalty & Marketing at Grab, is the new President of MAA. Diana, Chief Marketing Officer of Boost, is Vice President.

Both are active marketers with day jobs in businesses operating at the sharp end of digital change.

Perhaps that explains the tone of the conversation.

There was little of the institutional language one normally expects when talking to people taking the reins of an established industry body.

Instead, they talked about growth.

Opening up. Younger marketers. Local brands. AI. Experimentation. Peer-to-peer learning. Moving faster. And giving more people a voice.

Their thoughts were a refreshing take on what an industry association could be.

GROWING THE TENT

Hassan believes any association has to be representative of the industry it serves.

For MAA, that means widening the net across business categories and bringing in companies that may never previously have considered themselves part of the traditional advertisers' club.

Then he drops the line that probably best captures the thinking behind this new MAA, "We need to build exclusivity around inclusivity."

It sounds contradictory at first.

But the idea is interesting.

MAA does not become less valuable by bringing more of the industry inside. Its value could actually increase because of the diversity of experience, knowledge and perspectives sitting around the table.

Malaysia's marketing economy has changed.

Alongside the Unilevers and P&Gs are homegrown companies, challenger brands, digital businesses and an emerging generation of

Malaysian brands doing increasingly sophisticated marketing.

Hassan points to Siti Khadijah as one example.

"They are the exciting side of the industry that should be under the same collective," he says.

Hassan and Diana want to make membership worth more by increasing access to knowledge, people, technology, training and industry conversations.

Diana sees peer-to-peer learning as particularly important.

A CMO or head of marketing can be surprisingly isolated inside a company.

They may report to a CEO, CFO or board whose expertise lies outside marketing.

So where does a marketer go to discover how another company solved the same problem?

Where do they exchange experiences with somebody confronting similar challenges?

"As brands, Hassan and I compete," Diana shares. "But when we come together as an association, we are one because we are advertisers."

That may be where MAA has an opportunity to create something more valuable than another calendar of industry events.

A community.

GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION

The growth plan also extends to younger marketers.

MAA is developing programmes

aimed at people with fewer than five to seven years of industry experience, allowing member companies to put their talent forward to compete, showcase their capabilities and learn from their peers.

There is also a push to strengthen the bridge between academia and industry through institutions including IACT, Sunway and Taylor's.

The objective is practical: make what young people learn more relevant to what they will encounter when they enter the workplace.

For an industry constantly discussing its talent problem, developing the next generation may be as important as recruiting the current one.

THEN THERE IS AI

No conversation about marketing growth today gets very far without AI.

But Hassan and Diana approach it less as a technology story and more as an access story.

How does MAA make sure its members understand what is changing and can actually use it?

The association has already been running knowledge sessions around data and AI-led marketing.

A recent session focused on Generative Engine Optimisation, exploring how brands can improve discovery in an AI-search world.

Members received personalised audits of their brands and coaching on what to do next.

That last part matters.

The ambition is not simply to

have somebody stand on stage and explain the future.

It is to help members do something with it.

Diana knows how quickly the gap can grow.

Her own team has been using AI for more than a year and reporting internally on outcomes including time saved, costs and output.

The improvement between the AI work they produced a year ago and what they can produce today, she says, is "massive".

But companies are moving at dramatically different speeds.

Some organisations embrace AI. Others restrict access. Diana has even encountered people wanting to leave large organisations because they fear being unable to use AI will eventually leave them behind professionally.

INNOVATING AT THE SPEED OF JUDGMENT

Hassan offers one of the most interesting observations of the conversation.

AI, he argues, has dramatically shortened the distance between an idea and the ability to demonstrate it.

A marketer who cannot articulate an idea perfectly can show it.

A BIGGER VOICE

Growth for MAA ultimately means something beyond membership numbers.

It means influence.

Diana points to the association's advocacy role with government,



regulators and industry bodies.

Guidelines around communications, technology, advertising and AI will increasingly affect marketers.

The more representative MAA becomes, the stronger its mandate to speak for advertisers.

Her question to those outside is simple:

DON'T YOU WANT TO HAVE A VOICE?"

Because decisions will be made.

The question is whether you are part of the conversation when they are.

There is a growth loop emerging from Hassan and Diana's thinking.

More value attracts more members. More members bring more knowledge and perspectives. That creates a stronger community. A stronger community gives MAA a bigger voice. And a bigger voice

creates more value for its members.

The target may be 20% membership growth.

But the more interesting ambition is what sits behind that number.

A larger tent.

A younger community.

More Malaysian brands.

More shared knowledge.

And an association that behaves a little less like an association.

Hassan has another simple way of putting it.

FOMO is real.

Change is already happening.

MAA's proposition is that Malaysian marketers might be better off navigating it together.

Hassan Alsagoff and Diana Boo have stood on the Malaysian CMO Awards stage as top winners. Hassan was named CMO of the Year, Best of the Best, for his work at Grab, while Diana went on to also win CMO of the Year, Best of the Best for her leadership at Boost!

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A campaign report can tell you how many people saw an advertisement.

The harder question is what changed because they saw it.

Did the business gain customers?

Did those customers become more valuable?

Did the investment strengthen demand beyond the next promotion?

These questions connect three speakers ahead of the Malaysian Media Conference 2026.

Bala Pomaleh, CEO, Media at dentsu Malaysia; Eileen Ooi, President of PHD Asia Pacific; and Darren Yuen, CEO of Omnicom Media Malaysia, approach the industry's challenges from different directions.

Together, their perspectives offer a useful sequence: establish the outcome, find a better route to it, and organise people to deliver.



START WITH THE BUSINESS QUESTION.

For Bala, familiar measures such as reach and engagement remain useful signals, but the conversation must extend to sales, retention, profitability and future demand.



DARREN YUEN
CEO - OMNICOM MEDIA
MALAYSIA

His argument also changes the purpose of technology. Connecting customer, commerce and media information should help organisations decide what to do next. A more elaborate reporting system has limited value if it leaves the underlying business questions unanswered.

“The objective should always be better decisions, not simply more dashboards,” Bala says.

Darren adds a commercial test. An apparently efficient campaign may reach customers who were already going to buy. An attractive advertising return may look different once the costs of fulfilling the sale are considered.

The implication is straightforward: agree on what success means before allocating the budget. Otherwise, teams risk celebrating improvements that have little bearing on the company’s priorities.

GROWTH ALSO REQUIRES IMAGINATION.

Measurement can establish whether a decision worked. Finding the next opportunity requires a willingness to question the decisions being made in the first place.

That is where Eileen’s challenger mindset enters the discussion.

Her emphasis is on identifying opportunities beyond the familiar answer and giving teams the confidence to pursue them. Agencies need to contribute a view on where growth could come from, alongside the capabilities to execute it.

For regional organisations, this requires judgement about what can travel across markets. Common technology and shared expertise can create advantages, while local teams need room to respond to their customers and commercial circumstances.



EILEEN OOI
PRESIDENT,
PHD ASIA PACIFIC

“The objective should always be better decisions, not simply more dashboards,”

- Bala Pomaleh

Eileen describes the approach as “connected, not copied”.

It is a useful principle for a conference examining a media landscape shaped by many overlapping platforms, cultures and behaviours. A consistent ambition can still require different decisions in different markets.

THE ORGANISATION MUST BE READY TO ACT.

Bala’s practical warning is that sophisticated tools cannot repair poor data, disconnected teams or objectives that pull people in different directions. Those foundations determine whether technology produces useful action.

Eileen approaches the same challenge through leadership. Teams need clear priorities, permission to experiment and leaders who acknowledge uncertainty without abandoning direction.

Darren brings accountability into sharper focus. Collaboration requires explicit decision-making responsibilities and incentives that support the client’s overall interests, even when the best recommendation moves investment away from an agency’s own discipline.

Across the three conversations, a common theme emerges: the people, information and decisions surrounding a campaign need to work together.

DELIVER NOW, STRENGTHEN WHAT COMES NEXT.

Darren also argues for meeting immediate commercial demands while deliberately funding future brand strength. Both need objectives and appropriate evaluation periods.

Eileen’s emphasis on enduring growth supports that ambition, while Bala’s focus on business outcomes provides the measurement discipline.

The combined challenge for media leaders is therefore bigger than choosing the next platform or adopting another tool. It is to make better choices, explain their commercial purpose and build an organisation capable of carrying them through.

Join the Malaysian Media Conference 2026 on November 19 with industry leaders for conversations on everything about media. Find out here <https://marketingmagazineasia.com/mmc/events/2026>



When Everyone Has AI, What Makes You Different?



As the cost of producing answers falls, Rajiv's workshop examined the growing value of knowing what to ask, what to check and what to change.

A petrol station wants more motorists to turn in from the highway. For a marketing team, the assignment sounds familiar: create a more compelling message, improve the offer and make the advertising work harder.

Rajiv Lal's workshop introduced a question that changes the brief. What if this is an optimisation problem?

Before deciding what to say, consider how many vehicles pass, how many stop and how long they occupy a pump. A truck buying more fuel might look like the ideal customer. But if it occupies a pump for much longer during a busy period, the commercial calculation becomes more complicated.

Suddenly, the advertising brief reaches into operations. The useful answer depends on understanding the business.

THE ADVANTAGE EVERYONE HAS

That example captures the thinking behind *Differentiation in the Age of AI*, Rajiv's workshop held on 27 October 2026 at the KLGCC Convention Centre's Roof Garden.

Its central proposition carries an uncomfortable implication for anyone treating access to AI as a competitive advantage: competitors have access too.

... There is a lesson here for how organisations divide work. Marketing may own the message...

Rajiv, whose background includes chief executive roles at Zenith Media and Havas in Malaysia, approaches AI through the practical concerns of building businesses. His premise is that AI establishes a common floor of capability. Differentiation depends on what an organisation builds above it.

For marketers accustomed to being valued for their answers, this requires adjustment. When analysis and recommendations become easier to produce, greater responsibility falls on the person deciding which question deserves attention.

WHEN THE BRIEF CHANGES, THE POSSIBILITIES CHANGE

The petrol-station exercise combines passing traffic, CCTV observations, billing records and outdoor advertising schedules. Each contributes a different piece of the commercial picture.

Using illustrative data, it identifies a level of pump utilisation beyond which queues begin to discourage customers. Messages can then

respond to capacity, encouraging longer truck visits during quieter periods and appealing to motorists seeking a quick fill when demand is stronger. These are teaching examples, rather than reported campaign results. Their value lies in the reasoning. A message becomes more useful when the business can deliver the experience it promises. Advertising a fast, queue-free stop requires some knowledge of the queue.

CONTRARIAN THINKING TAKES COMMITMENT

Rajiv's ICE framework describes the behaviour this demands: Intensity, Curiosity and Empathy.

Intensity means staying with a problem long enough for a solution to emerge. Curiosity creates room for an unfamiliar approach. Empathy keeps the work connected to the person whose experience should improve.

These qualities give substance to the workshop's emphasis on contrarian thinking. Questioning the original brief earns its value through a better understanding of the customer or the business.

A VAGUE IDEA BECOMES SOMETHING USEFUL

A second example brought the discipline down to an everyday ambition: acquiring a desirable item with credit-card reward points.

WORKSHOP

The starting idea was a Montblanc pen. Checking reward catalogues and terms redirected the example towards a Samsung Galaxy Z Fold7. Evidence changed the goal before the tool took shape.

Rajiv's presentation describes building the resulting Points Goal Planner with Claude in two hours, without personally writing code. It guides users through spending, card selection and a reward target, then presents a route towards that goal.

CONFIDENCE NEEDS CHECKING

The human contribution remains substantial even when the machine handles the code. Someone must recognise questionable assumptions and decide whether the output serves its purpose.

The workshop's introductory material reinforces this with a darkly comic illustration of AI confidently declaring a mushroom safe, then apologising after the consequences. The humour targets a serious weakness: a plausible answer can invite confidence before anyone establishes whether it is correct.

In business, that confidence travels quickly. An assumption enters a model, the model becomes a presentation, and the presentation acquires authority through repetition.

The planner example suggests a manageable response. Review the proposal before building. Correct the brief. Try the result. Change an input and see whether the behaviour makes sense.

... The human contribution remains substantial even when the machine handles the code. Someone must recognise questionable assumptions and decide whether the output serves its purpose...

WHAT LEADERS CHOOSE TO REWARD

Perhaps the most useful implication of Rajiv's workshop concerns what leaders reward. If recognition goes mainly to confident answers and smooth delivery, people have little incentive to expose uncertainty or challenge a faulty brief. Yet those interventions may prevent expensive mistakes.

An organisation seeking differentiation needs people who remain curious after the first convincing answer. It needs room for someone to ask whether a campaign overlooks an operational constraint, or whether a working tool rests on an unreliable assumption.

HALLOWEEN TROPES, **FAILED MARKETING** AND THE FINAL GIRL

By Sandeep Joseph



It's Halloween, and the time for thrillers, chillers and spillers.

So I thought we should take a look at marketing campaigns that are poorly planned or strategically weak. These rarely fade away: instead, they often morph into a growing and very public communications disaster, leaving executives horrified and audiences cringing. Others, like a serial killer undiscovered, keep preying on media budgets and terroring CMOs and CFOs.

When we examine the most catastrophic strategic errors being committed in Malaysia today, a chilling pattern emerges: **bad marketing strategy perfectly mirrors the worst clichés of classic horror films.**

If you want to keep your brand from becoming the next casualty, you must learn to recognize—and avoid—these marketing horror tropes.

... The equivalent of this in a marketing context is when a company fails to maintain a unified brand voice, and lack a concerted approach between their sales and marketing teams...

1. “SPLITTING UP THE GROUP” (THE FRAGMENTED BRAND)

We all know the scene: a group of bubbly teenagers are enjoying themselves, when they hear a strange noise in a dark, haunted basement. Then, very unwisely, they decide to split up to investigate. It never ends well. The survivors start to bicker and, one by one, the evil One picks them off.

The equivalent of this in a marketing context is when a company fails to maintain a unified brand voice, and lack a concerted approach between their sales and marketing teams. Instead of executing a cohesive strategy, different departments—sales, social media, public relations, and product marketing—silo themselves and head in completely different directions.

. **The Result:** The brand identity gets butchered. The effectiveness of the campaign gets challenged.





. **The Horror:** Consumers face a confusing, disjointed experience that shatters brand trust. When your Instagram page reads like a Gen-Z meme account but your corporate website reads like a dry 1990s legal brief, you have effectively split up the group and become a case study of ineptitude.

2. “IGNORING THE LOCAL LEGEND” (THE TONE-DEAF APPROACH)

Every haunted house movie begins with a creepy local warning the protagonists to turn back. “*Don’t go up to Crystal Lake,*” they say. The arrogant city slickers laugh it off, only to face the consequences later.

In advertising, “the local legend” is audience research and cultural context. When brands ignore data, focus groups, or societal nuances because a high-level executive has a “gut feeling,” or wants to “challenge

the accepted wisdom,” they could just be driving straight into a trap.

- . **The Result:** A tone-deaf campaign that sparks massive public backlash.
- . **The Horror:** We have seen global giants launch ads that trivialize social movements or completely misinterpret cultural symbols in foreign markets. They ignored the warnings, walked right into the graveyard, and woke up to a PR nightmare. Or it could just be a company that fails to make its menu trilingual, like others might do as normal Malaysian custom. Lo and behold, that particular company in Malaysia faced sudden boycotts and drop in sales.

3. “THE OVERCONFIDENT SKEPTIC” (“MR KNOW IT ALL”)

You have seen them in a million movies: The character who laughs



... Sometimes this character is the token Asian, and is the scientific skeptic or unbeliever...

at the idea of ghosts or monsters, refuses to take the threat seriously, and confidently walks into danger alone, usually becoming the first casualty. Sometimes this character is the token Asian, and is the scientific skeptic or unbeliever.

- **The Marketing Mistake: Ignoring a rising competitor or a massive shift in consumer technology.**
- **The Horror:** Arrogance leading to bankruptcy. This happens when legacy brands mock emerging digital trends, new platforms, or agile startups (think Blockbuster dismissing Netflix). By the time the skeptic realizes the monster is real, the market share has already been devoured.



4. “THE FALSE VICTORY” (POOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT)

The survivor finally defeats the killer, drops their weapon, and sighs with relief. Many films use this trope of a seeming win that isn’t. As soon as the protagonist assumes the killer is dead, and turns away, the killer’s eyes snap open, and a hand reaches up from the shadows for one final scare.

In corporate communications, this is the botched apology or a problem that is seemingly solved. When a campaign goes awry, or just plain wrong, companies often issue a half-hearted, defensive statement or simply delete the offending content, assuming the crisis is over.

- **The Result:** The internet captures everything, and the backlash intensifies.
- **The Horror:** Deleting a tweet does not kill the monster. A poor response only breathes new life



... When a brand faces a catastrophic marketing failure, it has two choices: succumb to the crisis or become the Final Girl of business...

into the controversy, dragging the brand back into the headlines for a painful sequel.

HOW TO BE “THE FINAL GIRL” (WINNING IN DIFFICULT TIMES)

In horror cinema, one of the most revered tropes is the “**Final Girl**”—the smart, resilient character who outlasts the monster by adapting, finding the killer’s weakness, and refusing to make the fatal mistakes of her doomed friends or colleagues. Clarice Starling aka Jodie Foster in

The Silence of the Lambs is a Final Girl for the ages: she defeats evil in a basement all on her own, and won an Oscar for it.

When a brand faces a catastrophic marketing failure, it has two choices: succumb to the crisis or become the Final Girl of business.

Here are 4 ways in which the Final Girl translates into surviving a marketing disaster:

1. RESOURCEFULNESS VS. THE DOOMED BUDGET

- **The Trope:** While other characters rely on useless weapons or panic, the Final Girl looks around her environment, grabs a fire poker or a kitchen knife, and turns ordinary tools into survival gear. Think Clarice with a pistol searching for Jame Gumb in a dark basement and her ears catching the sound of a gun being cocked.
- **The Marketing Equivalent:** **Pivoting during a budget freeze or crisis.** When a campaign bombs

... Cowardly brands try to hide by deleting tweets, disabling comments, or issuing defensive, corporate statements. A Final Girl brand owns the mistake completely, addresses the public directly...

and leadership pulls the ad spend, a resilient marketer doesn't give up. They look at what they already have—organic social media, loyal community advocates or just one billboard that counters another—and weaponize their existing assets to rebuild brand trust without spending millions. Think Wonda's real M Nasir vs Zus, or M&S Food vs Kara. Both our campaigns, by the way!

2. SITUATIONAL AWARENESS VS. ECHO CHAMBERS

- **The Trope:** The Final Girl survives because she notices the small details: a door left slightly ajar, a shadow where it shouldn't be, or a strange sound. She doesn't pretend everything is fine. Clarice sees threads on a table and realizes the

man was into sewing dresses made from skins.

- **The Marketing Equivalent:** **Listening to real-time data instead of internal hype.** A doomed marketing team stays in an executive echo chamber, insisting "the ad is great, the audience just doesn't get it." A Final Girl brand actively monitors social listening data, notices early negative sentiment, and pulls a tone-deaf ad before it turns into a viral massacre. Or tweaks an ad to make it win.

3. FACING THE MONSTER VS. DELETING THE EVIDENCE

- **The Trope:** Running away only works for so long. Eventually, the Final Girl stops running, turns around, and faces the killer head-on in a brutal final showdown.
- **The Marketing Equivalent:** **Radical transparency in crisis communications.** Cowardly brands try to hide by deleting tweets, disabling comments, or issuing defensive, corporate statements. A Final Girl brand owns the mistake completely, addresses the public directly, and outlines the exact steps they are taking to fix the issue. They kill the crisis with honesty.

4. LEARNING THE KILLER'S RULES VS. REPEATING MISTAKES

- **The Trope:** The Final Girl figures out the "rules" of the horror movie.



She learns that the killer is slow but relentless, or that he always attacks from behind, and she uses that knowledge to outsmart him.

- **The Marketing Equivalent: The Post-Mortem Audit.** Surviving a marketing failure is pointless if you don't learn from it. Final Girl brands run deep analytical autopsies on both successful and failed campaigns to understand *why* the audience recoiled, ensuring that the same strategic error never creeps into the sequel.

And unlike the movies, in real life there is always a sequel: a new year comes with new targets and challenges and there is literally no rest for the Final Girl.

Hence, to keep your marketing strategy relevant, you must rewrite the script. **Listen to your audience data, keep your teams unified, stay authentic to your voice, don't be overconfident, and face crises with transparency.**

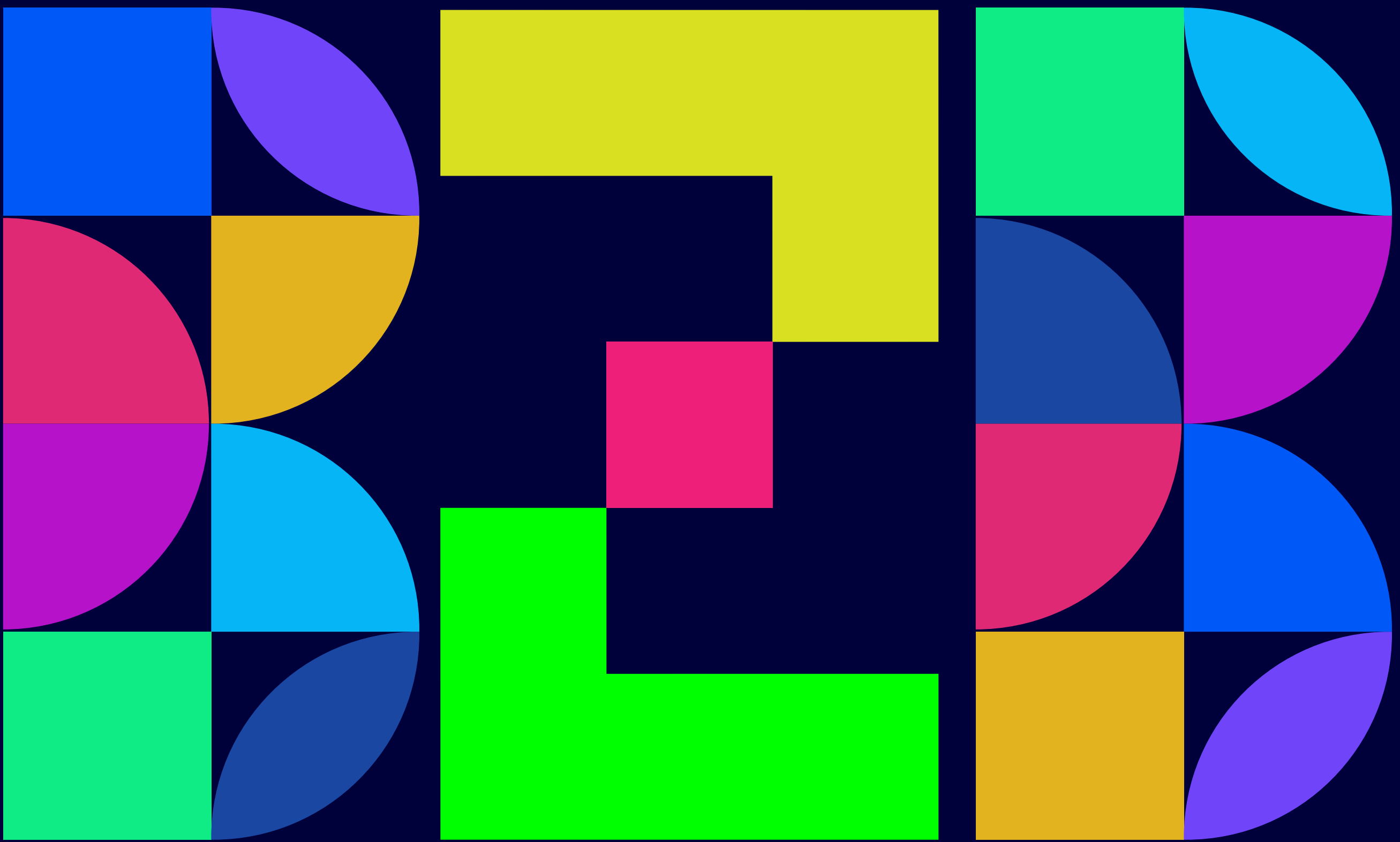
In the box office of business, ensuring your brand survives to see the sequel requires one simple rule: stop acting like the doomed characters in a horror flick. Be more like the Final Girl, who walks out of the haunted house, while the credits roll.



Sandeep Joseph is the CEO and co-founder of Ampersand Advisory, an integrated agency that has won over 650 awards. Ampersand Advisory was the APPIES Media Agency of the Decade 2016-2025, the Advertising Agency of the Year 2026 and overall #1 agency at the Dragons of Asia for 2024-2026. The agency was founded with Tan Sri Vincent Lee as Chairman, and offers media, creative, PR, data and sports services.



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