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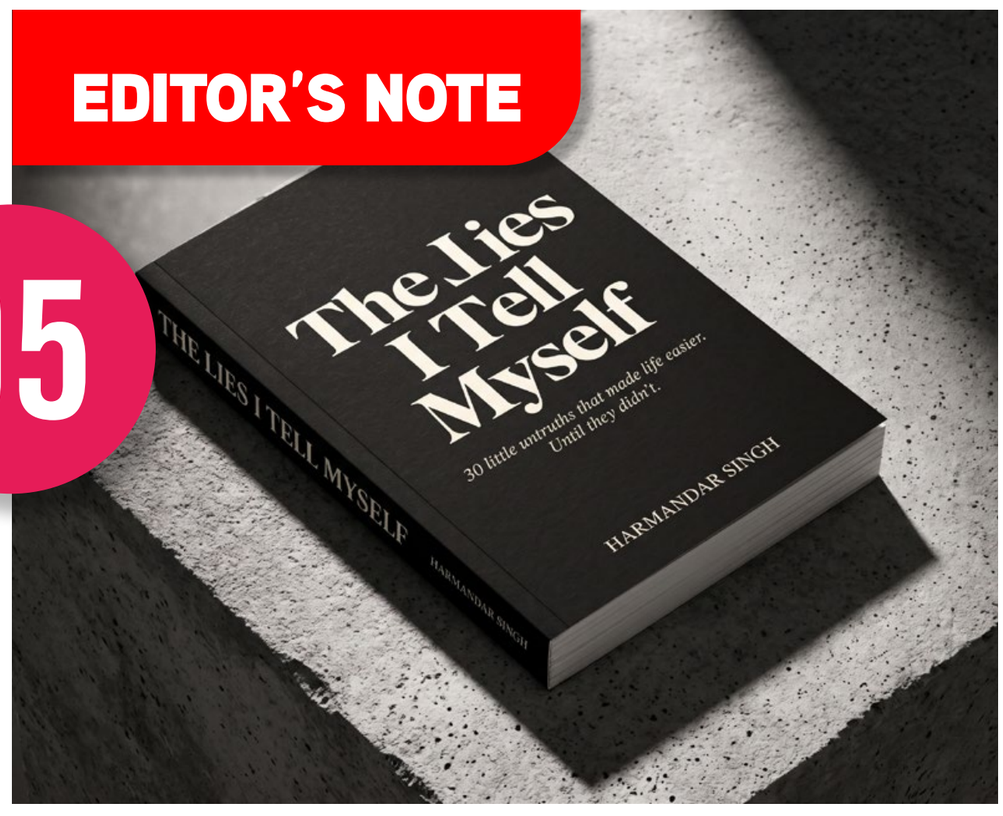
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MALAYSIAN MEDIA CONFERENCE 2026

MACAM-MACAM



“Playing it safe is the most artificial thing we can do.”

Christopher Greenough
GM, Malaysia Campus & Regional Head of Creative Services, GrowthOps Asia



“AI isn’t waiting for us to be ready.”

Nicholas Sagau
Chief Operating Officer
REV Media Group



“Recommend what works, not what a holding company, platform or trading deal needs to sell.”

Sandeep Joseph
CEO & Co-founder, Ampersand Advisory



“We grew up here, so we assume we already know. That’s usually when we stop asking.”

Stanley Clement
Chief Executive Officer, Mediabrands Content Studio (MBCS) Malaysia

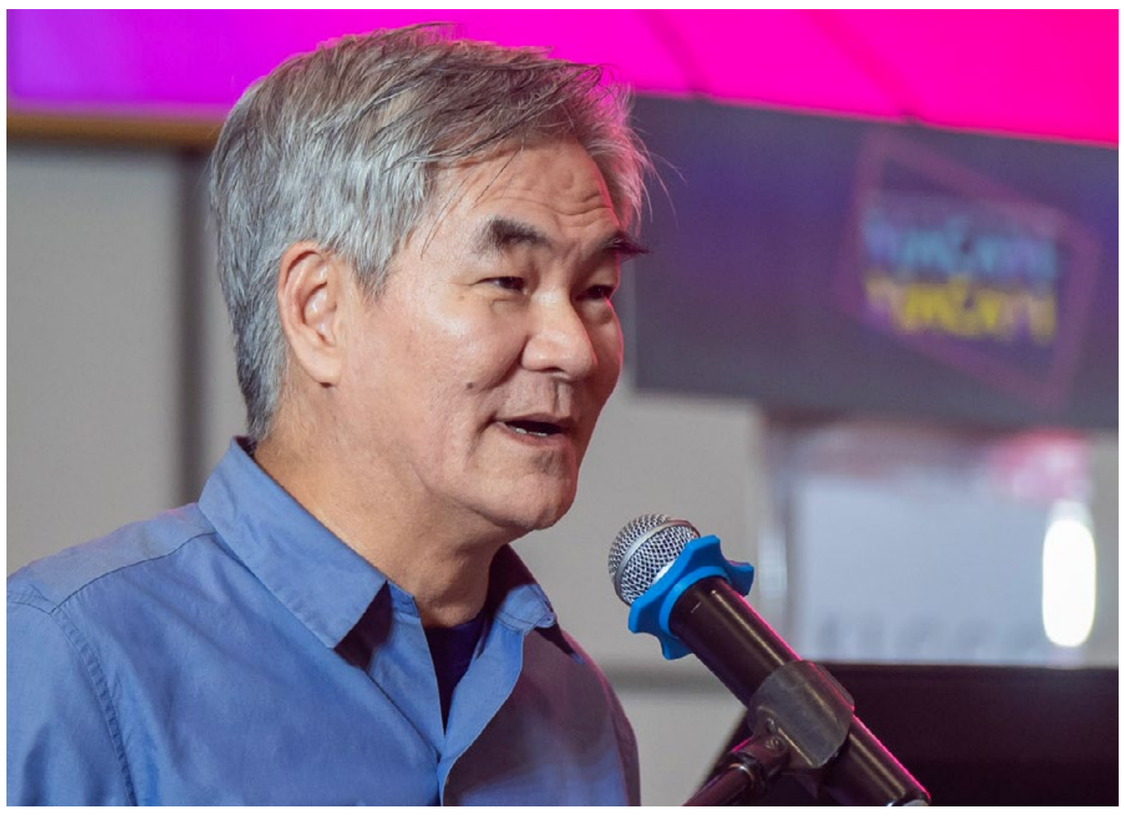


“We know who they are. But do we know what matters to them?”

Syamil Fahim Mohamed Fahim
Chief Executive Officer, seeNI

MALAYSIAN MEDIA CONFERENCE 2026

MACAM-MACAM



“Cultural trust isn’t bought. It’s earned.”

Henry Tan
Interim Group CEO, Astro



“Your CFO doesn’t care about your CTR.”

Darren Yuen
Chief Executive Officer, Omnicom Media Malaysia



“No single method is the truth. Together they are credible.”

Bala Pomaleh
CEO, Media, dentsu Malaysia.



“Every channel is winning. So why isn’t the brand?”

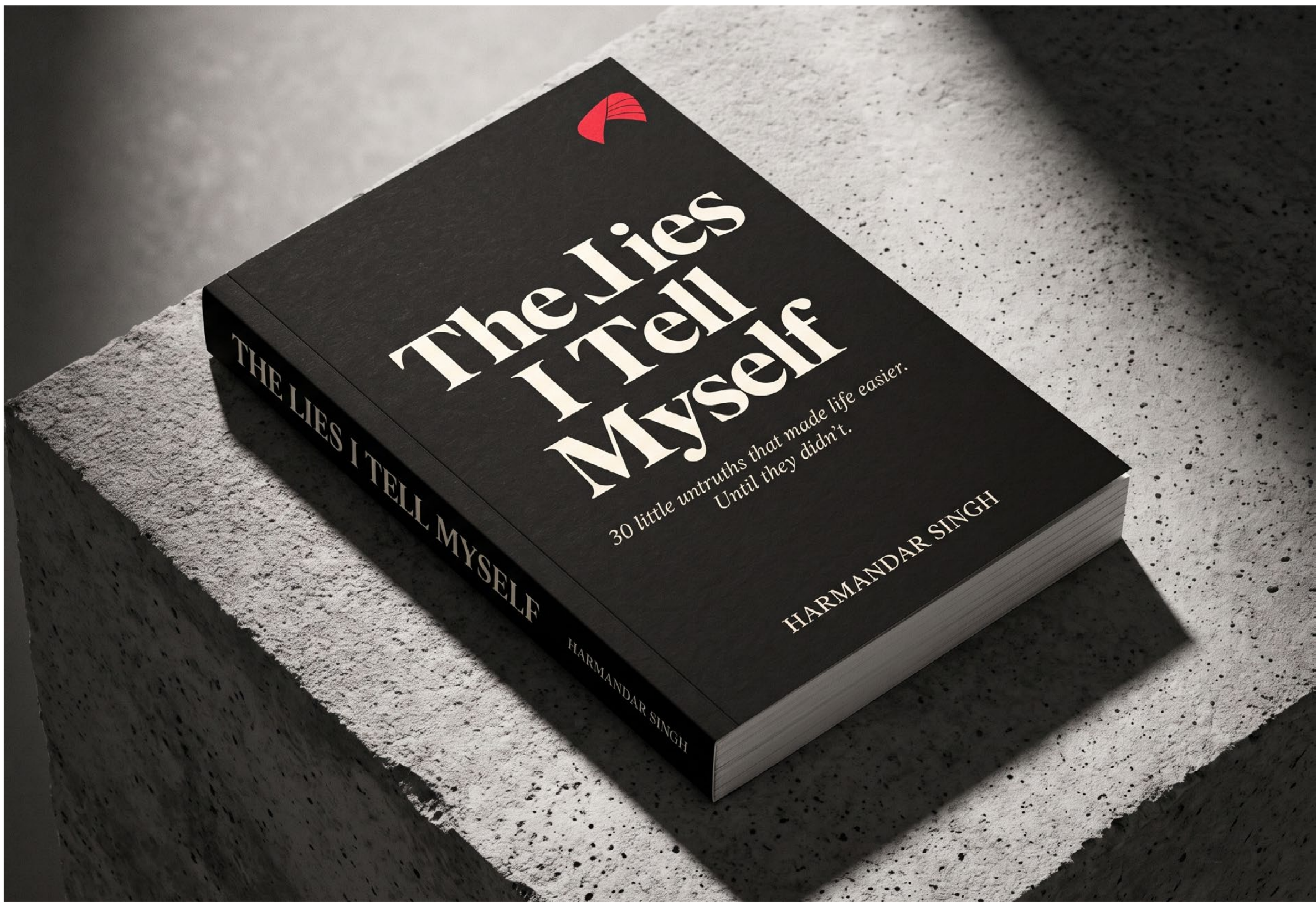
Eldon D’Cruz
Head of Strategy, WPP Media



“The new battleground is not attention. It’s delegation.”

Eileen Ooi
President, PHD Asia Pacific

EDITOR'S NOTE



LIVING WITH LIES

I have spent most of my life in the business of persuasion.
I have sold things.
Ideas. Dreams. Brands. Ambitions.
Possibilities.
I spent decades in advertising learning how to make people look at something differently.
We never called it lying.
We called it positioning.
You persuade people to believe.
I became quite good at it.
It took me this long to realise that the person I may have persuaded most successfully was myself.
We all have excellent copywriters inside us.
We position our lives.
We edit the inconvenient bits.
We exaggerate some achievements and quietly bury some failures.

We find excellent explanations for bad decisions.
We turn fear into practicality.
We rename ego as principle.
We call avoidance patience.
We call habit loyalty.
We call being overworked important.
We call ambition responsibility.
And occasionally we call unhappiness success.
The remarkable thing is that we often believe the story.
That is what makes these lies so interesting.
They don't feel like lies.
They feel like us.
Lies are not always bad
This surprised me.
Some of the lies in this book have been useful.
Perhaps even necessary.

To book your copy/copies, email Ruby on ruby@adoimagazine.com

Cover Story

THE MOVIE DOESN'T END AT THE CREDITS

By Prof Harmandar Singh



As cinema takes on a bigger role in the media landscape, I see a new opportunity for brands: to become part of the stories audiences carry with them. From fandom to the shop shelf, how entertainment IP is changing the way brands build relationships.

WHEN THE SCREEN IS THE STARTING POINT

I have watched media change. Cinema is now making its own move.

I have spent much of my working life watching one medium after another claim the future of advertising.

First came print, radio and television. Then cable, the internet, social media, influencers and platforms built around the next new technology.

Each arrived with the promise of reaching people more efficiently. Each changed the habits of audiences, and the language advertisers used to reach them.

But attention is not the same as affection. A person may see an advertisement and forget it a moment later. A story can stay with them for years.

That is why I believe cinema is beginning to matter in a different way in recent years. A film can be more than a screen experience and a marketing window. It can give an audience characters to care about, a world to revisit and something to talk about together.

Once that happens, the story can travel beyond the cinema into conversations, products, events and everyday life.

The growth of the Astro Shaw Cinematic Universe, or ASCU, reflects this wider shift. It opens a possibility for brands to do more than appear beside a film. They can find a way to belong to the experience around it.

The question I find most interesting is not how many people a brand can reach through a movie. It is what the movie can make people feel, remember or want to take part in.

FROM PLACEMENT TO PARTICIPATION

A logo can be placed in a scene. A good idea can live in the audience's world.

Movie marketing has long relied on familiar tools: sponsorship, product placement and promotional visibility. These can be useful, but I have seen enough campaigns come and go to know that visibility alone rarely creates a lasting relationship.

The more compelling possibility is participation.

A brand can develop a product inspired by a film, create merchandise fans want to own, collaborate on food or drinks, host fan events or build content around a character. The film becomes the beginning of a broader platform, rather than a short promotional burst around opening weekend.

This is possible because fans do more than watch. They return to characters and stories. They share theories, quote lines, collect things and ask what comes next. Their interest can continue when the campaign has ended and the cinema screen has gone dark.

For a brand, that creates a more



meaningful role. It can offer an audience something to try, share, wear, collect or experience. But the fit has to feel right. Fans are quick to recognise when a brand has entered a story simply to borrow its attention.

I believe the strongest partnerships begin with a simple question: what could the brand contribute that an audience would actually welcome?

WHEN A STORY FINDS ITS WAY ONTO THE SHELF

Keluang Man and WONDA Coffee show how a film can give a product a story of its own.

Astro Shaw's collaboration with WONDA Coffee around Keluang Man is an example I find especially revealing.

Ahead of the film's theatrical release in 2025, WONDA introduced a coffee inspired by Keluang Man and the heritage of Kluang, Johor. It brought together a Malaysian cultural icon, a local reference and a consumer brand with a product people could buy and enjoy.

The reported sales figures suggest that the product continued to find an audience after its launch. It reportedly passed two million cans by May 2025.

Subsequent campaign reporting by Astro Media Solutions said sales value reached RM5m within eight months. What interests me is the connection between the product and the place. Kluang's coffee heritage was not an arbitrary detail.

It gave the collaboration a reason to exist. The film brought cultural



attention to the product, while the product gave people a way to carry part of the story into their everyday lives.

I have seen brands spend heavily to manufacture relevance. Here, the collaboration drew on a connection that already had meaning for Malaysian audiences.

The campaign also extended into merchandise, experiences, content and media activations. That matters because a film does not have to be the end of a campaign.

It can give a product its beginning, then provide a reason for people to keep engaging with it.

FANDOM IS AN AUDIENCE THAT CHOOSES TO RETURN

A continuing story can create a deeper relationship than a single release.

The ASCU shows how a story can build a relationship with its audience over time.

Projek: High Council introduced viewers to a boarding-school world and characters whose stories continued in Kahar: Kapla High Council and later Kudrat 1968: High Council. With Kudrat 1968, Astro Shaw extended the experience through a series-first, cinema-finale format. Four Astro Originals episodes developed the story before audiences came together in cinemas for its conclusion.



I think this kind of storytelling reflects a change in how people experience entertainment.

Audiences move between platforms, but they still want to follow a story that gives them a reason to care.

COVER STORY



The series reached No. 1 on Astro and sooka, drew 3.5 million unique viewers across Astro platforms and spent six consecutive weeks at No. 1 on Netflix Malaysia. Before the cinema finale opened, it had generated RM3 million in advance ticket sales. Its reported gross reached RM21 million in three weeks.

The audience response went beyond viewing.

The campaign generated more than one billion social media views and reported reach exceeding 141 million. Mega Fan Screenings and other events gave people the chance to gather around the property.

For me, this is the important distinction: a viewer may be counted, but a fan chooses to return. That choice creates an opening for brands to be part of a community, rather than simply buying access to an audience.

THE BRAND ENTERS THE WORLD OF THE FAN

A partnership becomes real when it gives people something to do with their enthusiasm.

The collaborations around Kudrat 1968 show how a film can create possibilities across very different categories.

Christy Ng developed a collection connected to the movie, reportedly selling out online within 24 hours. Limited-edition merchandise gave fans something tangible to own beyond their cinema experience.

myBurgerLab created a limited-edition burger inspired by the movie, while Grab also participated in the campaign.

... A film can open the door. A universe can keep the conversation going. What makes a cinematic universe particularly interesting to advertisers is the possibility of continuity...

I have always believed that people show their enthusiasm in more than one way. They talk about the things they love, but they also wear them, collect them, share them and bring friends into the experience.

That gives brands a chance to offer more than a logo or a product cameo. They can create something exclusive to the property and give fans a reason to take part.

The best collaborations do not ask only, “How can we get seen?” They ask, “What would a fan be happy to find?”

The answer will differ from one story to another. It might be a fashion collection, a limited-edition meal or an event that lets fans feel closer to the characters and world they care about.

In a crowded media environment, that is valuable. Audiences are not short of messages. They are short of things that feel worth their time. A partnership connected to a story they already love can earn that time, if it gives something back.

A CINEMATIC UNIVERSE CREATES TIME

A film can open the door. A universe can keep the conversation going.

What makes a cinematic universe particularly interesting to advertisers is the possibility of continuity.

ASCU connects properties including Projek: High Council, Kahar: Kapla High Council, Keluang Man and Polis Evo, while introducing new stories and characters. A brand may be able to enter at different stages and develop a relationship with audiences across several releases.

I have watched many campaigns burn brightly for a few weeks, then disappear. A continuing entertainment property offers something different: the chance to remain part of a conversation as it develops.

Digital shorts, social content, character crossovers, fan theories and behind-the-scenes material can keep people engaged between major releases.

Since ASCU launched, posts tracked under #ASCU and #AstroShawCinematicUniverse have generated more than 100 million video views.

COVER STORY



Spill the Beans recorded nearly 26 million more, bringing the combined total to 126 million video views.

Together, the two hashtags and the campaign generated 11.7 million engagements.

These numbers point to more than a successful launch. They show how a property can keep finding audiences across different moments and platforms.

For brands, the opportunity is to think in chapters too. A partnership can begin with a film, then grow through additional content, events or products. That requires patience and a good understanding of the audience. But when the relationship is right, the story can keep creating reasons to return.

LOCAL STORIES, SHARED MEANING

A cultural connection can make a partnership feel rooted, rather than borrowed.

The opportunity for Malaysian entertainment is supported by the growing appetite for local cinema. FINAS figures cited in Astro Shaw's industry update recorded 7.55 million admissions for Malaysian films in the first seven months of 2026, ahead of

Hollywood films at 6.94 million.

I have long felt that local stories possess a particular strength: they can draw on places, humour, language and experiences that audiences recognise as their own. That familiarity can create a closeness that is difficult to manufacture through media buying alone.

The WONDA collaboration is a good example. Kluang's coffee heritage gave the product a meaningful local connection. It was not simply a global brand placing its name beside a popular film. The collaboration drew on something that belonged to the story and to the place.

The wider commercial opportunity includes consumer products, merchandise, food collaborations, retail promotions, experiences, digital campaigns and content partnerships. Cinema can act as a meeting point for these activities, connecting a story with the different ways people spend their time and money.

For advertisers, local entertainment IP offers cultural relevance and commercial possibilities. But relevance has to be earned. A brand must understand what the story means to its audience before it can decide how to participate.

THE STORY IS THE PLATFORM

Global examples show how entertainment can turn into products, experiences and lasting brand activity.

... For advertisers, local entertainment IP offers cultural relevance and commercial possibilities. But relevance has to be earned. A brand must understand what the story means to its audience before it can decide how to participate...

This idea is not new. Some of the world's biggest entertainment properties have shown how a movie partnership can move well beyond advertising.

For Transformers: Age of Extinction, Oreo and Paramount developed a partnership spanning more than 35 countries. It included themed packaging and cookies, a television campaign directed by Michael Bay, retail activity, and digital and social promotions.

In China, Coca-Cola supported Transformers: The Last Knight with new can designs featuring the film's characters. More than 280 million cans were produced, with displays placed across more than 71,000 retail locations.

COVER STORY



Marvel's partnership with Coca-Cola offered 38 character designs and scannable packaging that unlocked augmented-reality experiences. Its collaboration with Samsung brought exclusive content to consumers. Warner Bros. and DC Studios have also worked with Amazon to extend film campaigns into shopping and member experiences.

I see a common idea across these examples. The movie is not simply a backdrop for advertising. It becomes the creative source for products, experiences, content and consumer engagement.

Cinema is making a significant shift in the media scene because it can now bring together attention, emotion, community and commerce. That does not mean every film



should become a merchandising opportunity, or that every brand should attach itself to a popular property. The partnership must respect the story and give the audience a reason to care.

The question I would put to any brand considering this territory is simple: what would a fan be excited to find on a shelf, wear to a screening or come back to watch between releases?

For WONDA, the answer was coffee rooted in Johor. For Christy Ng, it was a collection fans snapped up in a day. As ASCU introduces new stories and revisits familiar characters, that question remains open.

I have watched media trends arrive with grand promises and leave behind little more than a new vocabulary.

Stories are different. When people care about them, they keep finding ways to bring them into their lives. That is why the movie may be the beginning, rather than the end. The screen can start the relationship. What happens after the credits is where brands have to prove they belong.



RAY LOPEZ: STOP LETTING AI DO THE THINKING FOR YOUR LINKEDIN CONTENT

Ahead of the ASEAN B2B Conference 2027, Ray Lopez shares why authenticity still matters on LinkedIn, how marketers should use AI without surrendering their ideas, and why external links may be better placed in the comments.

For B2B marketers, artificial intelligence has quickly become part of the everyday content workflow.

A marketer drafts an idea, puts it into ChatGPT or Claude, asks the tool to improve the grammar and structure, and then posts the polished version on LinkedIn.

But where does useful assistance end and over-reliance begin?

That was one of the questions **Hando Sinisalu** put to **Ray Lopez** in a recent conversation about AI, LinkedIn and the changing rules of professional content.

For Lopez, the distinction is relatively simple: AI can help improve the content, but the thinking itself should still come from the person publishing it.

“Basically, what we always advise clients is to use your own authentic thoughts and content to create content,” Lopez said.

“You can use AI to help with spelling, grammar and maybe the modification of the body of the content. However, on LinkedIn, where we find the algorithm works



“If you use AI to perhaps write the whole content for you in terms of the ideas and whatnot, that could ultimately be spotted from the platform itself,”

is that you use more of your own content from an idea perspective.”

The message is particularly relevant for B2B marketers at a time when generative AI has made content production dramatically easier.

The challenge is no longer whether companies can produce enough content.

It is whether the content still sounds like it came from somebody with an actual point of view.

AI Can Polish the Message, But It Shouldn’t Replace the Idea

Sinisalu raised a workflow that has become increasingly common among marketers: write the content yourself, send it through Claude or ChatGPT for language and grammar corrections, then publish the improved version on LinkedIn.

Would Lopez recommend it?

“That’s fine. That’s totally fine,” he said.

The problem begins when AI is asked to create the entire thought process.

“If you use AI to perhaps write the whole content for you in terms of the ideas and whatnot, that could ultimately be spotted from the platform itself,” Lopez explained.

For B2B marketers, this introduces an important distinction.

Using AI as an editor is very different from using AI as a replacement for expertise.

The strongest B2B content usually comes from experience:



conversations with customers, lessons from failed projects, market observations, data, industry frustrations or opinions formed through years of working in a category.

AI can improve the expression of those ideas.

It cannot manufacture the experience behind them.

That is especially important on LinkedIn, where much of the value of thought leadership comes from the credibility of the person sharing the perspective.

Lopez argues that excessive dependence on AI also works against the authenticity LinkedIn is trying to build on the platform.

“We don’t recommend that because that doesn’t help with the authenticity of the platform, which is something we are trying to improve over a course of time,” he said.

He also suggested that greater transparency around AI-generated content could become part of the platform’s future.

“In future, you will see that even ads on LinkedIn, you will have the opportunity to cite if it is an AI ad or an AI post.”

For marketers, the direction is clear.

AI is not disappearing from content creation.

But the value may increasingly come from knowing where not to use it.

B2B Thought Leadership Still Needs a Human Behind It

The issue becomes even more important in B2B marketing because professional audiences are rarely looking for generic information.

Decision-makers already have access to enormous amounts of information.

They can search Google, ask an AI assistant, read industry reports or watch hundreds of videos explaining

almost any business topic.

What is harder to find is a genuinely useful perspective from somebody who has actually encountered the problem.

That is where professional content can still create differentiation.

A CEO explaining what went wrong during a transformation project has something an AI-generated “five tips for digital transformation” post does not.

A sales leader sharing why a major deal collapsed can offer insights that generic content cannot replicate.

A marketer discussing what actually changed after testing a campaign can contribute experience rather than simply information.

Lopez’s advice therefore points towards a broader principle for B2B content: **use AI to sharpen expertise, not manufacture it.**

The technology can improve grammar, tighten sentences, restructure ideas and accelerate production.

But the original thought still needs to belong to someone.

What About External Links?

The conversation also moved to another long-running LinkedIn question: what should marketers do with external links?

Many LinkedIn users believe posts containing links to external websites receive weaker organic distribution because they encourage users to leave the platform.

Sinisalu asked Lopez directly whether an external link to an article or another source should be included in the post.

Lopez acknowledged that links can have some impact from an organic standpoint.

His suggestion was simple: consider placing the link in the comments.

“It does help a little bit from an organic standpoint, so you can put it on your caption,” he said.

“But ultimately what we try to actually advise, and this is across platform and just not on LinkedIn, you can actually put it into the comment as a way to start engagement for your own post.”

The approach gives users a reason to interact with the post before leaving the platform.

“If they want to look for the link, it’s in the comments, so we’ll start from there to engage with your post. That ultimately invites more clicks actually onto your post.”

For B2B marketers constantly trying to balance reach, engagement and traffic generation, the advice highlights the importance of thinking beyond simply publishing a link and hoping people click.

The post itself still needs to offer value.

The link should be the next step, not the entire reason the post exists.

The Bigger B2B Content Question

Both parts of the conversation — AI-generated content and external links — ultimately lead back to the same issue.

What value are you giving the audience before asking them to do something?

AI has made it possible for organisations to produce content faster than ever.

But easier production has also created more competition for attention.

In that environment, simply publishing more posts is unlikely to be enough.

Marketers need ideas worth reading.

They need perspectives that sound human.

And they need to understand how people actually behave on the platforms they are using.

For B2B marketers, the lesson from Lopez is not to reject AI.

It is to put it in the right place.

Let AI fix the spelling.

Let it improve the grammar.

Let it help restructure the copy.

But don't outsource the point of view.

Because as professional feeds become increasingly filled with machine-assisted content, original thinking may become more valuable rather than less.

Hear More from Ray Lopez at ASEAN B2B Conference 2027

Ray Lopez will be among the speakers at the **ASEAN B2B Conference 2027**, taking place on **12 & 13 January 2027 at KLGCC Convention Centre, Kuala Lumpur**.

The two-day conference will bring together B2B marketers, business leaders and industry practitioners to explore how companies can strengthen marketing, creativity, technology, thought leadership and commercial growth in an increasingly complex business environment.

For marketers trying to understand how LinkedIn, AI and professional content are evolving, Lopez's message offers a useful starting point.

Use the technology.

Understand the platform.

But keep the thinking human.

Registrations are now open.

For enquiries and group registrations, contact **Ruby at +603-7726 2588** or **ruby@adoimagazine.com**.

For sponsorship opportunities, contact **Vishnu at vishnu@adoimagazine.com** or **SY at sy@marketingmagazineasia.com**.



Commercial Intelligence

WHAT IF AI DOESN'T RECOMMEND YOUR BRAND?

THE NEW BATTLE FOR MALAYSIA'S CONSUMERS HAS ALREADY BEGUN.



VISIBILITY IS NO LONGER ENOUGH

For decades, marketers fought for visibility. We bought shelf space, search rankings, prime-time slots and the occasional spectacular billboard. Being seen was the first battle. Being chosen came next. Artificial intelligence is quietly changing that order. Increasingly, the customer does not browse a dozen brands. They ask a machine to recommend one. The shortlist may be written before a single brand website is visited. That creates an uncomfortable question for anyone who has spent years building brand awareness. What happens when the gatekeeper is not a human being but a system that interprets reviews, relevance, availability and accumulated signals? It is tempting to treat the problem as another optimisation exercise. Add a few keywords, rewrite the website, improve the structured data and hope for the best. Those things matter, but they are not the whole answer. The strongest brands will be the ones that are genuinely useful, easy to understand and consistently credible wherever information about

... The strongest brands will be the ones that are genuinely useful, easy to understand and consistently credible wherever information about them appears...

them appears. A machine may summarise the evidence.

TRUST LEAVES A TRAIL

It cannot manufacture years of customer trust. Consider how a Malaysian family might choose a bank account, a mobile plan or a weekend destination. Once, the search might have begun with advertising, a friend's suggestion or a collection of browser tabs. Increasingly, it can begin with a single question that contains the family's budget, preferences and circumstances. The assistant's response becomes a starting shortlist. That is useful for the family, but consequential for every brand left outside it. It means the competition is no longer only for attention. It is also for inclusion in the answer. An unfamiliar business with clear information and consistently positive experiences may gain ground. A famous name with vague claims may discover that familiarity is not the same as relevance. The challenge is not to persuade machines to like a brand. It is to ensure that when someone asks a sensible question, there is enough reliable evidence for the brand to deserve consideration.

WHY SOME BRANDS SHOW UP AND OTHERS DON'T

THE ALGORITHM'S SHORTLIST

Why some brands show up and others don't that creates an uncomfortable question for anyone who has spent years building brand awareness. What happens when the gatekeeper is not a human being but a system that interprets reviews, relevance, availability and accumulated signals? It is tempting to treat the problem as another optimisation exercise. Add a few keywords, rewrite the website, improve the structured data and hope for the best. Those things matter, but they are not the whole answer. The strongest brands will be the ones that are genuinely useful, easy to understand and consistently credible wherever information about them appears. A machine may summarise the evidence. It cannot manufacture years of customer trust. It is tempting to treat the problem as another optimisation exercise. Add a few keywords, rewrite the website, improve the structured data and hope for the best. Those things

matter, but they are not the whole answer. the old fundamentals still matter. Know the customer. Deliver what you promise. Make the product distinctive. Be present when people need you. The distribution system may change, but disappointment travels remarkably well through every system. For Malaysian marketers, this is an opportunity as much as a warning.

SMALL BRANDS, BIG OPPORTUNITIES

Smaller businesses can compete when they answer a specific need more convincingly than a giant competitor. But being merely familiar may no longer be enough. This is where the distinction between being discoverable and being desirable becomes important. A technically polished website can explain a product beautifully, but it cannot compensate for a poor product. Likewise, a strong product can remain overlooked if nobody can establish what it offers, where it is available or how it compares. Malaysian businesses need both disciplines. They need accurate, accessible descriptions and genuine reasons for customers to recommend them. Reviews, third-party coverage, knowledgeable staff and consistent product information are not isolated marketing assets. Together they form a public record. That record can be incomplete, contradictory or out of date. It can also be strengthened through ordinary good business practice.

The smartest response is therefore cross-functional. Marketing should sit with customer service, sales, technology and operations, and ask what a prospective buyer would actually learn about the company from sources beyond its own advertising. The gaps may be more revealing than the rankings.

WHEN THE MACHINE CHOOSES THE FUNDAMENTALS STILL MATTER

The strongest brands will be the ones that are genuinely useful, easy to understand and consistently credible wherever information about them appears. A machine may summarise the evidence. It cannot manufacture years of customer trust. And that is why the old fundamentals still matter. Know the customer. Deliver what you promise. Make the product distinctive. Be present when people need you. The distribution system may change, but disappointment travels remarkably well through every system. For Malaysian marketers, this is an opportunity as much as a warning. Smaller businesses can compete when they answer a specific need more convincingly than a giant competitor. But being merely familiar may no longer be enough. And that is why the old fundamentals still matter. Know the customer. Deliver what you promise. Make the product distinctive. Be present when people need you. The distribution system may change, but disappointment

... A machine may summarise the evidence. It cannot manufacture years of customer trust. And that is why the old fundamentals still matter...

travels remarkably well through every system. Imagine the consumer asking for a dependable family car, an affordable insurance policy or a café suitable for a difficult conversation. The answer could be one name, three names or a comparison assembled without visiting any of the brands involved.

WHO GETS LEFT OUT?

Who wrote that answer? What information shaped it? And who was absent from the list? Those questions will become as commercially important as media reach and share of voice. There is also a danger in assuming that every automated answer is neutral or definitive. Systems can make mistakes. They can rely on old information, miss local nuance or present a confident summary of a complicated choice. A customer choosing insurance, education or a healthcare provider deserves more than a neat list of names. They deserve clear distinctions, limitations and the opportunity to verify important claims. Brands should make those distinctions easy to find. Explain who the product is for, what it costs, what it does not cover and where support can be obtained. Avoid the temptation to bury essential conditions beneath fashionable slogans. A machine may be able to assemble a comparison in seconds, but the customer's experience will still unfold in the real world. Delivery, service, fairness and trust will decide whether the recommendation was justified.

THE NEW BATTLE FOR PREFERENCE

FROM AWARENESS TO PREFERENCE

For Malaysian marketers, this is an opportunity as much as a warning. Smaller businesses can compete when they answer a specific need more convincingly than a giant competitor. But being merely familiar may no longer be enough. Imagine the consumer asking for a dependable family car, an affordable insurance policy or a café suitable for a difficult conversation. The answer could be one name, three names or a comparison assembled without visiting any of Who wrote that answer? What information shaped it? And who was absent from the list? Those questions will become as commercially important



... Conversation is not a campaign format. It is a behaviour...

as media reach and share of voice. Brands should test the questions real customers ask, check the quality of information available about their products and examine the promises made by every channel. The exercise is not to trick a model. It is to discover whether the brand is genuinely recommendable. questions real customers ask, check the quality of information available about their products and examine the promises made by every channel. The exercise is not to trick a model. It is to discover whether the brand is genuinely recommendable.

THE CUSTOMER IS THE PROOF

Perhaps the most useful discipline is simple: ask what a customer would say after actually buying from you. If the answer is disappointing, no amount of technical optimisation will rescue the relationship for long. A practical starting point is to collect the questions customers actually ask before buying. Not the questions a marketing department wishes they would ask, but the awkward, detailed ones that arrive through sales teams, WhatsApp messages and customer service desks. Then answer them plainly, on pages that are maintained and easy to locate. Compare the answers customers receive across different assistants, search engines and review platforms. Record inaccuracies and correct

the underlying information wherever possible. Repeat the exercise after product changes, new launches or shifts in customer sentiment. Do not mistake a single favourable response for a permanent victory. The information environment changes constantly. Above all, resist treating this as a trick to win an artificial popularity contest. The enduring advantage belongs to a business that makes a good promise, explains it clearly and keeps it consistently.

IS THE ART OF CONVERSATION LOST ON CUSTOMERS?

CONNECTED BUT NOT HEARD

IS THE ART OF CONVERSATION LOST ON CUSTOMERS? We have never had more ways to talk to customers. So why does so much marketing sound like nobody is listening? Brands have never had more ways to communicate. Chatbots, WhatsApp, social media, email, video and automated messages promise constant connection. Yet customers frequently describe an experience of being processed rather than heard. A genuine conversation contains the possibility that the other person might change your mind. Much of modern customer communication is designed to do the opposite. It routes, Efficiency matters, of course. Nobody enjoys waiting for an answer. But speed without understanding can turn a small problem into a lasting grievance. Perhaps the next competitive advantage is not another channel. It is a brand willing to listen, respond honestly and admit when it has got something wrong. Conversation is not a campaign format. It is a behaviour. Customers notice the difference. Think about the last time you contacted a company with a genuine problem.

LISTENING IS THE ADVANTAGE

Perhaps a delivery failed, a bill looked wrong or a promise was not honoured. You probably did not want another cheerful automated greeting. You wanted somebody to understand the situation and take responsibility. Too often, brands measure the speed of the first reply while ignoring the quality of the final resolution. A conversation is not successful merely because a system has closed the ticket. It is successful when the customer feels that the problem has been heard and fairly addressed. That requires staff who are empowered to act, systems that preserve context and managers willing to learn from recurring complaints. AI can help by retrieving information and removing repetitive tasks. But it should make the human exchange more useful, not turn every customer into a case number. The brands that listen carefully will discover ideas for better products, clearer promises and stronger relationships. Listening is not a soft skill. It is commercial intelligence.

MALAYSIAN MEDIA CONFERENCE PUTS AI, CULTURE & BUSINESS RESULTS TO THE TEST

THEMED MACAM-MACAM, THE INDUSTRY HAD PLENTY TO SAY ABOUT ITS FUTURE. THE SHARPER QUESTION WAS WHAT IT WOULD ACTUALLY CHANGE ON MONDAY MORNING.

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A robot joined the panel. AI agents threatened to take over the shopping. And somewhere between the dashboards, the microdramas and a car carrying its own rain cloud, Malaysian media confronted a human problem: we are very good at being busy. Are we equally good at making a difference?

That question gave the 22nd Malaysian Media Conference its bite. Held on November 19 at KLGCC Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur, MACAM-MACAM brought agency leaders, publishers, broadcasters and technology specialists into the same conversation.

The programme's curry noodle analogy was appropriate. You can assemble excellent ingredients and still produce an unremarkable bowl. The magic depends on proportion, preparation and knowing what belongs together. Media has its own version: more platforms, more content and more technology do not automatically produce a better business result.

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Professor Harmandar Singh, founder and CEO of MARKETING magazine, opened proceedings. Across the presentations that followed, a demanding proposition emerged. Give people the freedom to think. Give audiences something worth their time. Give the business evidence that its money did more than keep the industry occupied. Fair enough, surely?



THE HUMAN IN THE LOOP NEEDS A SAY

Christopher Greenough, GrowthOps' General Manager for Malaysia and Regional Head of Creative Services, challenged five comfortable assumptions about AI. Among them: consumers necessarily want a human touch, personalisation automatically creates relevance, and having a human in the loop protects creativity.

Chris' argument was grounded in the way work gets organised. Machines can handle repetitive analysis, resizing, renaming, variations and initial checks. People should originate ideas, refine the work and take responsibility for the final decision. Keeping someone nearby to approve an output is a thin interpretation of human involvement if that person lacks the authority to challenge it.

The question extends beyond who presses the final approval button. Can that person reject the premise, request a different direction or insist that a piece of work needs more thought? If the only acceptable answer is yes, the human contribution becomes ceremonial. Creative judgement needs room to affect the result, especially when technology makes producing another version so temptingly easy.

Then came the uncomfortable economics of saved time. If a task shrinks from days to hours, does the team gain thinking space, or simply receive a larger order? Chris illustrated the familiar client appetite for more. Efficiency can finance experimentation, but somebody has to protect that investment before it disappears into another deadline.

"Playing it safe is the most artificial thing we can do,"



declared one slide. The practical invitation was to fund small, considered experiments and give people genuine autonomy. Buying the technology is relatively straightforward. Allowing an unfamiliar idea to survive a meeting takes a different kind of leadership.

FROM PROMPTING TO GETTING THINGS DONE

Nicholas Sagau, REV Media Group's chief operating officer, moved the conversation from asking AI questions to delegating work. His sequence was simple: prompt, converse, delegate. The attraction is not merely a faster answer. It is removing the waiting between a business question, its follow-up questions and a decision someone can use.

Nic urged the industry to experiment responsibly, learn quickly and scale what works. His public presentation challenged the habit of waiting until every uncertainty has disappeared before trying anything. The alternative is practical learning: choose a task, understand its risks and assess what changes. Curiosity becomes useful when it leads to something a team can examine, question and improve.

For media businesses, the purpose remains clear. Faster production must serve better reporting, stronger editorial judgement and audience trust. A tool that helps create more material still leaves somebody responsible for its accuracy and relevance. The interesting question is what people can do better with the assistance, and what they must continue to own themselves.

The panel brought in Dr Ian Tan Wei Lun, founder and CEO of LINEARK and Shadow Combat

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League, and Jeany Tan, cofounder and chief strategy officer of Shieldbase AI. The accompanying slides posed future possibilities around robotics and agents. Ian's scenarios explored extending physical presence; Jeany's prompts asked how much one person might accomplish with agents. These were questions for exploration, not guaranteed delivery dates.

YOUR NEXT CUSTOMER MAY SEND AN AGENT

Eileen Ooi, President of PHD Asia Pacific, tackled the other side of delegation: what happens when consumers hand decisions to machines? Her starting point was abundance. Content and choice keep expanding, while the human day stubbornly refuses to grow beyond 24 hours. Apparently, nobody has found a subscription upgrade for that.

Consider the difference between asking for a recommendation and asking somebody else to make a purchase. In the first case, the customer still weighs the answer. In the second, they have handed over part of the decision. Brands need to understand that handover, including the information and reassurance a customer would expect any assistant to use.

The public conference photograph of Eileen's presentation captured a useful distinction: low-involvement choices built around price and functional benefits could be automated by agents. That poses a practical question for every category. Which decisions do customers enjoy making, and which would they happily outsource?





The implication is more useful than a headline number. Brands need emotional meaning for people and clear information for machines. Desire, trust and memory still matter. So do accurate attributes, availability and proof. A product described as wonderful gives a machine rather less to work with than a precise explanation of what it does.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE MUST CHANGE THE IDEA

Sandeep Joseph, CEO and co-founder of Ampersand Advisory, argued for independent thinking as a planning discipline. His proposed system ran through diagnosis, design, deployment and learning. The plan should respond to evidence and changing conditions, with periodic strategic resets, rather than become a spreadsheet everyone treats as sacred after approval.

Sandeep assigned machines the faster pattern-finding, forecasting and reporting work. People still needed to define the growth problem, interpret culture and challenge assumptions. His conclusion widened independence beyond ownership: the useful quality was the freedom to recommend what works. That is a test any agency can take, whatever appears

above its reception desk.

Stanley Clement, CEO of Mediabrands Content Studio Malaysia, made the cultural challenge wonderfully uncomfortable. His presentation was titled “Local Is Not Enough”. Growing up here can create confidence that we understand Malaysians. It can also become an excuse to stop asking. Knowing where someone is does not establish why they should care.

Stanley’s Mitsubishi example showed the difference. A vehicle’s Wet Mode could invite predictable weather-triggered advertising. The Roving Rain Cloud instead put a storm cloud on an Xforce and drove it around on clear days, complete with lightning and rainwater. A familiar Malaysian condition became a product demonstration people could encounter on the street.

For 7-Eleven, Iftar O’Clock adapted the logo into a breaking-fast clock, using state-specific times from JAKIM across digital outdoor and social placements. The campaign supplied information people already needed. Stanley’s deck cited a 114% year-on-year rise in Ramadan promotional meal sales, attributed to the campaign’s awards entry. That is a reported campaign result, not an independently established causal effect.

His Safi example was equally instructive. Rather than default to a conventional deodorant advertisement, the brand used expressions women already employed for underarm concerns. Cultural understanding shaped the language, packaging and creator activity. Stanley also drew a distinction between an audience identified through data and a community held together by relationships. A targeting segment cannot tell you everything about belonging.

CONTENT THAT EARNS ITS PLACE

Syamil Fahim Mohamed Fahim, CEO of seeNI, brought that question of belonging into publishing.
His presentation asked whether knowing an audience’s age, gender and location meant knowing what mattered to them. The proposed move was towards motivations and everyday needs: reassurance, identity, useful guidance, emotional connection and something worth discussing.

That gives editors and commercial teams a better starting question than how many pieces they can publish this month. What does this particular story help someone do, understand or feel? A recipe earns its place differently from parenting guidance or an entertainment conversation. Treating all three as interchangeable units of content overlooks the very reason audiences seek them out.

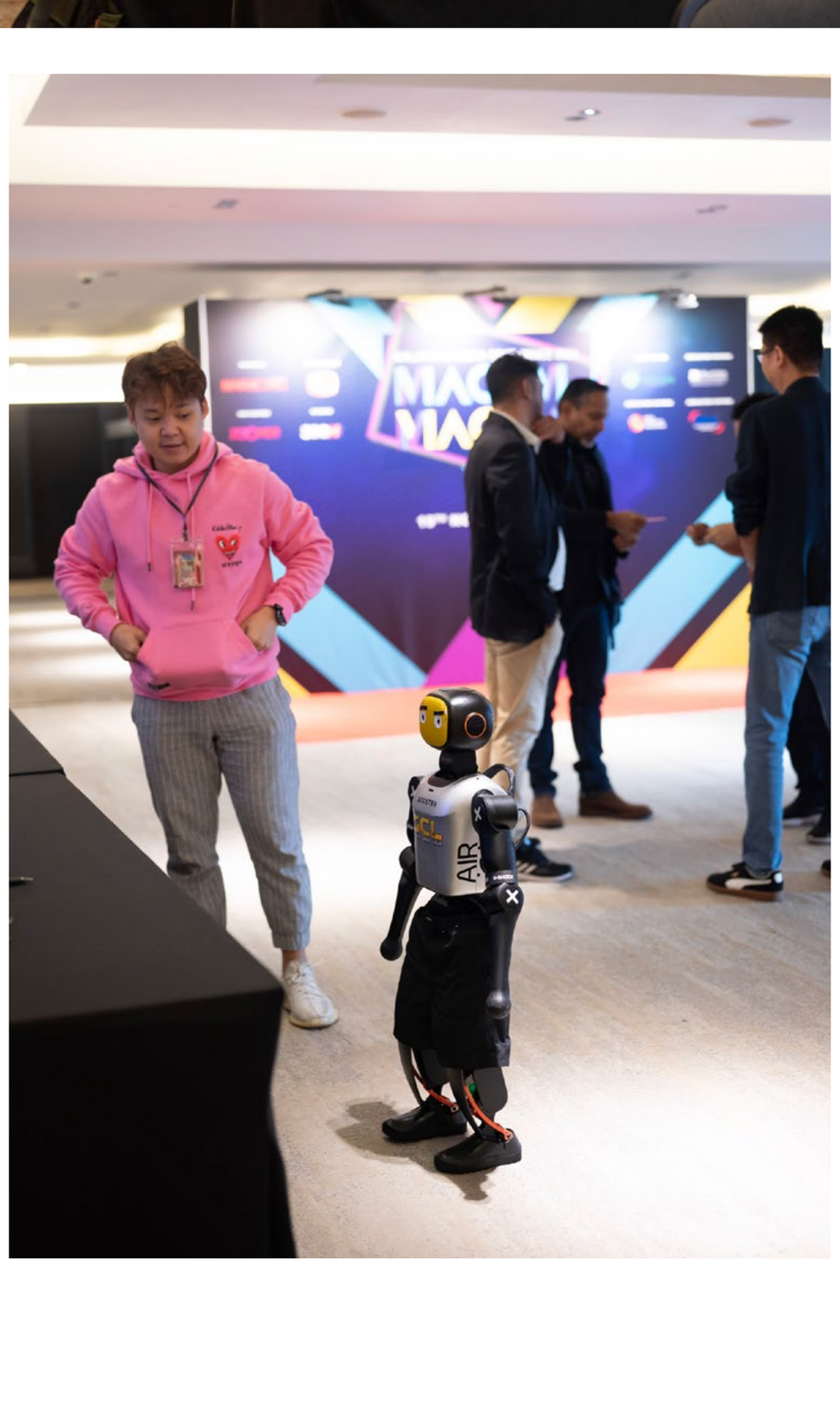
Syamil’s organising idea was manfaat: content that benefits people. RASA’s recipes, Pa & Ma’s parenting guidance and Remaja’s opportunities for young

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people illustrated different ways of earning attention. The commercial proposition connected content, community and commerce, while preserving a reason for the audience to participate. The advertiser's need for exposure cannot carry that relationship alone.

Microdramas and emerging creators extended the possibilities. The deck proposed mobile-first stories with products that belong naturally in characters' lives.
A food campaign, for example, could connect recipes, creator demonstrations, social challenges and cooking workshops through the same brief. This was a proposed partnership model, not a claim that every combination already delivers proven sales.

Henry Tan, Astro's Interim Group CEO, showed what happens when a story develops into a larger audience world. His High Council example moved from a series into films and fandom. The presentation reported RM13 million for Kahar's box office in 2024 and a 2026 box-office figure of RM20.5 million and counting in its series-and-film timeline.

The wider opportunity lies in what fans do with a story after watching it. They discuss characters, share favourite moments and introduce other people to the world they have discovered. For a media owner, that participation can extend a property's relevance beyond its original format. For an advertiser, it creates opportunities that depend on respecting the story and its audience.

The lesson for brands is to look beyond the available advertising slot. Could a partnership offer fans a worthwhile experience, a useful product or another way to participate? Each extension needs a reason to exist beyond the sponsor's



presence. A popular title opens the door; it does not automatically make every commercial idea welcome. Audience enthusiasm deserves care, not simply a longer shopping list.

WHEN THE DASHBOARD LOOKS BETTER THAN THE BUSINESS

Darren Yuen, CEO of Omnicom Media Malaysia, opened his argument with RM1 million. Given that budget, what would the industry promise: impressions, clicks, sales or profitable growth? His deck framed the challenge as an accountability opportunity. Activity was plentiful. Proof of contribution needed more attention.

Darren distinguished attribution from incrementality. A platform can assign credit for a conversion; that does not establish whether advertising caused an additional





sale. His three desired outcomes were profitable sales, customer value and future demand. The last matters because a business cannot keep harvesting existing demand indefinitely without replenishing it.

His hypothetical campaign comparison exposed the trap. Campaign A reported six-times return on advertising spend, but its incremental revenue and margin left a RM400,000 loss after media. Campaign B reported a lower 3.5-times return, yet delivered RM250,000 after media. Both used RM1 million. The figures were explicitly illustrative. The lesson was real: the prettier platform ratio can conceal the weaker commercial decision.

Darren also challenged agency incentives. Would leaders reward a team for sending revenue elsewhere when that served the client better? Would they reduce investment if the evidence showed insufficient value? Integration requires those decisions, not merely a new organisation chart. Shared ambition has limited force when everyone is paid to defend a separate territory.

Bala Pomaleh, CEO of dentsu Media Malaysia, supplied a practical route through the measurement problem. Start with the business question, connect one more step and use the evidence to make a better decision. Reach and clicks remain useful; their value increases when connected to customers, sales, margin and retention.

Bala's education simulation made the danger of cheap leads obvious. One platform generated leads at RM40 but registrations at RM4,000 each. Another charged RM90 per lead yet delivered registrations at approximately RM643. The numbers were illustrative, not client results. Following the journey to enrolment reversed the judgement suggested by the initial acquisition metric.



His four methods—tracking, matching, testing and modelling—came with explicit limitations. Tracking does not reveal what would have happened anyway. Matched data covers only those matched. Tests cannot explain the entire mix, and models depend on assumptions and data.

The recommendation was to combine evidence appropriate to the decision, not search for a magical dashboard that settles every argument.

That is an achievable starting point for teams with finite budgets. An education advertiser can connect enquiries to admissions. A telco can follow acquisition through retention. The first request need not be for every database in the company. It can be for the next piece of evidence that changes an actual spending decision.

ONE CUSTOMER SHOULD NOT MEAN FIVE SCORECARDS

Eldon D’Cruz, Head of Strategy at WPP Media, closed the loop with a question many businesses should put above their reporting screen: if every channel is winning, why is the brand not winning? His presentation located the problem in fragmented objectives and ownership across the same customer journey.

Eldon contrasted centralising decisions with integrating outcomes. His DBS example described joint business and technology leadership working to a shared scorecard. The broader principle was to align objectives, decision rights and measurement across media, creative, commerce, data and customer experience. Connected software cannot compensate for

... when everyone returns to the office, who will connect the work to the result?...

teams pulling towards incompatible definitions of success.

The deck ended with a practical timetable: one shared KPI within 30 days, one connected campaign within 90 days and a connected way of working within 12 months. It was a proposal for action, not another prediction to admire. The next brief could become the first test of whether the organisation meant it.

MACAM-MACAM ultimately offered a demanding way to think about progress. AI should improve the work and leave room for judgement. Local knowledge should change the idea. Content should earn participation. Measurement should change decisions. None of these promises survives for long without leaders willing to change incentives and working habits.

For a magazine industry used to discussing reach, this was a useful change of emphasis. The strongest examples began with something people wanted to do: eat, learn, belong, enjoy a story or make a purchase. The media choice followed that purpose. Technology then helped deliver, extend or evaluate the experience. That order is worth defending in the next planning meeting.

The robot was memorable. So was the rain cloud. But the conference's most consequential challenge was considerably less theatrical: when everyone returns to the office, who will connect the work to the result?

Malaysia's media industry has plenty of ingredients. Now comes the cooking.





PICTURE GALLERY

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