



"WE'RE LOOKING TO REDEFINE THE TELEVISION EXPERIENCE"

The 2017 Asia-Pacific Communication Summit, taking place in Hong Kong on November 15 and 16, features a line-up of communication trailblazers from across Asia Pacific. Among them is Azran Osman-Rani, business innovator and chief executive officer of iflix Malaysia, one of the region's most notable 'challenger brands'. We asked Azran about using strategic communications to pit challenger brands against established rivals, what corporates can learn from start-ups and the future of video on demand.

INTERVIEW BY **MATTHIAS GUTSCHMIDT**

From your own experience with Air Asia X and now iflix, how would you characterise a challenger brand?

A challenger brand not only takes on existing incumbents who already have a dominant position in a particular market, but does so by challenging prevailing industry or market convention or long-held beliefs on what is or is not practical or feasible. Often, the value proposition of challenger brands are dismissed by both existing players as well as by customers who are already served by existing incumbents. They start because they identify segments that are below-the-radar, the latent demand from unserved or under-served segments typically ignored by incumbents.

How do you use strategic communication to position a business to make sure it stands out from the crowd?

Firstly, a very straightforward, clear value proposition, with one main selling point or a

single product without any variations, tiers, packages that add clutter or complexity to the offering. Then repeating that selling point over and over again. Secondly, in the different communication touch points, emphasising the target segment is facing with existing incumbent products or services, and how our offering directly addresses these pain points. Thirdly, the authenticity covered in the next question.

What's the recipe to making a challenger brand like iflix authentic in its own right in the face of such well-established competition?

While there are no magic-bullet recipes, we believe in the principle of authenticity of communication. Having us as leaders stand up and lead the brand from the front. We take every opportunity to speak directly, whether to the media, during events, or on our social media platforms. We cannot hide behind a brand but we bring the brand to live ourselves.

And our communications must be real and not corporate-speak. Target users can gauge whether or not the brand's CEO (spokesperson) is connected or detached from his own experience.

How do you go about building the right team to work on a challenger brand? And is this by definition much easier for smaller brands than big corporates?

Building a team that scales (e.g. AirAsia X reaching 2,500 staff in six years and iflix reaching 650 staff in 2 years) requires structure. We codified and defined our values. And specifically, we have to define the attributes that we look for when we hire people (especially those who will take on roles managing others) and having a distinct culture fit interview process; we have a clear on-boarding process, and a performance management process that focuses on lots of constant, regular two-way feedback. It's a lot of work, whether in a small or large organisation, and we see leaders

generally take culture for granted instead of giving it the same discipline and rigour as operations, marketing or finance.

The numbers point to Asia Pacific being a leader in mobile digital communications and also a driver for innovation within the field. What do you think contributes to that? And what are the challenges presented by such a diverse region in terms of cultures and markets?

Sheer numbers. Even if you exclude China and India, there is still another one billion people. They are entering the middle class for the first time, connected to the internet for the first time through the mobile phone. However, the challenge is that this is not a homogeneous group. There are different cultures, languages and consumer behaviours. Infrastructure (internet broadband, payment systems, logistics and so on) vary significantly and are usually under-developed in most markets. They require boots-on-the-ground to deal with these issues and connect with consumers, something that big global companies avoid because it's just too difficult.

What is the single most important thing a large scale corporation can learn from the start-up mind-set? And with so many start-ups crashing and burning before or shortly after their IPOs, what can start-ups learn from corporates?

(a) Courage to try something new and unproven; (b) relentless focus on one specific product or segment, instead of hedging and having a portfolio of initiatives that dilutes time, attention and resources; (c) speed and agility to keep iterating and changing, and constantly learning; and (d) humility to know that whatever success today can be replicated by competitors quickly, so tomorrow its back to square one to find the next innovation to stay ahead of the game. As for what start-ups can learn from corporates, it's (a) thinking big (global scale); (b) investing in growing the leadership bench beyond founders; and (c) cross-border communications and coordination.

What's the next big development on the horizon for the streaming video on demand business?

We're looking to redefine the television experience, especially to create an experience that is superior to how someone could consume

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television through an illegal pirated streaming service. That includes the level of personalisation, redefining the concept of a "channel", and creating a more socially immersive and community aspect to television shows that becomes "sticky". ●

**AZRAN
OSMAN-RANI**

CEO,
IFLIX MALAYSIA



In July 2007, Azran was appointed as the founding chief executive officer of low-cost long-haul airline AirAsia X. In 2015 Azran left AirAsia X and joined iFlix Group as its group chief operating officer and chief executive officer of internet television service iFlix. He is also an investor and board member with financial tech services firm MoneyMatch, and chief executive officer and co-founder of health tech start-up Naluri Hidup Sdn Bhd.

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Truth be told, there's a huge amount of noise and choice in Asia-Pacific communications. Mobile, digital, instant gratification - it takes more and more effort to tell resonating stories while simultaneously/at the same time encapsulate long-term goals. That's why we've assembled a core group of senior communication leaders, scholars and experts to join forces and engage in discussion.

Together, we want to look beyond the digital horizon. How can Asia Pacific's communicators act as a driving force for more authentic and relevant communication? The Asia-Pacific Communications Summit is your one stop shop for learning about the focus and direction in which the communication sector is moving and to engage with key stakeholder groups across the region.

Alongside Azran Osman-Rani, the Summit's keynotes and main session speakers represent such organisations as Facebook, the Foreign Trade Association, HSBC; Polycorn, the British Council, BASF, WWF and many more. Find out more about the summit at www.communications-summit.asia/apcs