

Turning TI



BY LEENA ENGGAT

IN this month's cover story, we talked to Kelvin Hong, the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Tableview Malaysia. For a man who landed in advertising nine years ago by chance (check previous issues for the story), this has been a great achievement. The first two years were probably the most crucial in determining if advertising was to be his permanent cup of tea. It pretty much is. Kelvin Hong's career in advertising started back in 1995. Throughout his career in mainstream advertising, he has witnessed all the ups and downs an ad agency could possibly go through.

His love and passion for advertising is becoming much more intense. The only difference is that he's sitting on the other side of the fence. He is at the helm of a company that founded tabletop advertising, a non-traditional outdoor advertising media that is fast gaining recognition. Com-

binning a background of mainstream advertising and an in-depth knowledge of tabletop ads, Kelvin is one person who would truly understand the various requirements of advertisers, marketers, advertising agencies and media specialists.

Today, Kelvin Hong and his dedicated taskforce are commandeering tabletop advertising with exclusive rights to market ads in more than 2,000 outlets covering *mamak* restaurants, coffee shops, cafes, delis, colleges, universities and hypermarket food courts. Conceptualizing and building a new advertising medium from scratch was no easy feat, he said.

Tabletop advertising, known as 'TableTalk' is a two-way communication media vehicle and potentially interaction tool between the advertisement and the

consumers. The next time you're sipping *teh tarik* at your favourite *mamak* restaurant, or having a quick meal after grocery shopping at Tesco food court, you'll probably be zapped into one of Kelvin Hong's TableTalk Ads.

"TableTalk's pro-longed duration of exposure is rather unique. As long as the customer is seated, he or she will be exposed to the advertising message on the table"



All Smiles...Kelvin and Ravi, Manager of Lotus Restaurant Bangsar.



How can TableTalk fit into an advertising campaign?

Outdoor advertising has always been an integral part of any communication plan. In order to achieve a higher reach and awareness outside of the more traditional medium, advertisers are now constantly looking for different media vehicles to carry their messages more effectively and efficiently. Having said that, TableTalk fits comfortably into any advertising campaign. Whether it's a thematic or tactical campaign, launch or follow-up, the usage and scope is almost endless.

Although TableTalk appeals to people from all walks of life, it can also be further streamline to specific target groups through selection of outlets and location. Mobile phone companies, whose target audience consists of students, can place TableTalk ads in college or universities cafeterias or at restaurants frequented by students.

Do you think TableTalk Ads is more powerful compared to some other advertising



TableTalk



medium?

Comparatively, no singular media is powerful on its own. It is the media mix, as well as utilizing the strengths and any uniqueness of a particular media that would then make the overall campaign powerful. It would always boil down to budgets, whether or not the medium would then become an extremely powerful tool.

But one thing is for sure. TableTalk's prolonged duration of exposure is rather unique. As long as the customer is seated, he or she will be exposed to the advertising message on the table. Moreover, TableTalk can afford to be more informative, unlike other outdoor medium, as the audience can choose to read the copy if it is intriguing or relevant enough. Interesting tabletop ads sustain the attention of audience and can be a source of interaction and a topic of conversation. A good example is how likely are you to order 'Green Spot' or 'Kickapoo' when you go to a 'mamak' restaurant? What consumers sometimes need are just little reminders, as the saying goes, "Out of sight, Out of mind".

can also help with product penetration due to the relationship we have fostered with the outlet owners. This would be crucial when there is a new product launch and product trial is vital. And in order to exploit any medium to its fullest potential, we would appreciate a full briefing to enable us to provide the best possible packages as well as any other ideas to bring the ad much closer to the consumer.

Share with us some of the characteristics you possess which brought you to the helm of Tableview Malaysia.

I would say I'm the type who dislikes procrastination. Procrastination can be costly, as work done at the last possible minute may mean settling for less than satisfactory as we may have to settle things quickly and cut corners. Forward planning, having the ability to see 3 to 4 steps ahead is essential. That's what I've learnt from some of the gurus in the advertising industry.

I'm the sort of person who works better under pressure. Those who know me well enough will know that I seldom ever lose my cool under the most challenging circumstances. Being hot-headed will not solve any problems. Of course it's easier said than done. You can try this, the next time you're faced with a challenge, just tell yourself the task has to be done whether you are happy or angry, might as well do it with a smile. It would lighten the burden a lot more and would enable everyone around you to be more helpful.

When I see a good opportunity I go after it. However, I will not waste too much time pursuing ideas that may not be feasible in the long run. The good thing is that I am willing to either let it go or simply put it aside if the situation is truly beyond our control.

Spend your time wisely or you'll miss the boat for bigger and more realistic opportunities. That's my philosophy in life and I urged the younger generation to seek solutions and ideas in the shortest time possible before a decision



is made.

Last but not least, having a great team perfects the equation of success.

Being one of the first media owner to initiate a creative competition called "Turning The Tables Creative Awards", tell us more it.



Well, as Ham puts it, the idea was conceptualized after a few drinks and witnessing a pub brawl where glasses were thrown and tables turned.

At that point was the birth of 'Turning The Tables Creative Awards'.

Alcohol brings out the best and the worst in people! I urge all creatives who are seeking ideas to slam-dunk a couple of shooters and let the ideas flow!

On a more serious note, "Turning The Tables Creative Awards" or TTT2003 in short is the first ever-creative competition to reward the most creative tabletop advertisements. TTT2003 is for us to fully realize the potential of TableTalk from the creative point of view. TTT2003 is opened to professionals and students.

Special thanks goes to Ham and his dedi-



Kelvin and Jamal, President of Presma during the smart partnership signing ceremony.

How is Tableview considered different as compared to other media owners?

Well, this is a tough one. We have a tool called 'HeartBeat' which allows us to understand specific consumer behaviour that will guide us to more accurate placement of TableTalk ads. A crucial element which affects the results of 'HeartBeat' is the correct definition of the brand's or product's primary and secondary target groups.

Branding is about giving life to a product. Advertising is about breathing life into a product. 'HeartBeat' is life. HeartBeat is about understanding the lifestyle, habit and action that triggers consumers at different levels. Hence ensuring that there is minimal wastage of the advertising ringgit. Beyond advertising, we



WHAT THE TAG TEAM SAYS:



"Each day brings new and different challenges. With clients giving us very different briefs as to their requirements and for Tableview to constantly provide innovative methods of going beyond placing an ad on the

table. For us, to understand the ever changing scene at the mamak restaurants, we take every opportunity to have our meals there, observing and even at times, talking to our audiences.

My heart soared when I actually saw for the first time, somebody interacting with the TableTalk ad!

Observations and feedback are important for us to know what makes or breaks a campaign. How we can further improve our method to provide better solutions and the most important - the competitive edge to our clients."

Su-Lian Woo, General Manager



"Today, marketing TableTalk is a lot easier as it has penetrated well into almost all the popular 'mamaks' you can think of. Advertisers are more receptive to the idea of placing a 'table mat' right in front of the audience

because of its duration of exposure. At least 2-3 enquiries come in everyday for TableTalk. Truly, TableTalk has lived up to its tagline 'Making your Brand the Topic of Conversation'.

Yeoh Cheng Yee, Senior Account Manager



"At first it's no easy task sourcing for the right type of material. Then the maintenance of TableTalk was the next key issue to tackle. Installation and removal of expired ads is no easy task. But with the constant strong support from

outlets, we are able to ensure a smooth level of operations in the fields. Their confidence in the medium has made TableTalk truly a topic of conversation. What do I personally think about TableTalk as a medium? Mind-boggling but definitely ingenious!"

Gopi Ramakrishnan, Operations Manager



Students are kept informed about the latest promotion.



ROBOX AD... More eye-catching compared to normal light boxes because of its constant movement, rotating.

cated team at ADOJ. Without them, TTT2003 wouldn't have been possible.

Mind sharing your vision for Tableview in the next 5 years?

One can never forecast accurately elements such as market forces and economical fluctuations that will affect the choice of business strategies. Having said that, such observations are quite evident especially in the ever-volatile advertising industry.

We are planning to expand our tabletop advertising business to other countries due to the strong and consistent demand from certain advertisers and business partners. I view this as an excellent opportunity to reinforce a brighter future for TableTalk. We are also in the midst of finalising strategic alliances with a partner who has patented a technology to light up tabletop ads.

Definitely plans to introduce more effective and efficient medium are underway. We will be introducing other media within our network of restaurants and colleges after witnessing the positive feedback from all parties.

One of them is the 'Rotating Light Box Ad' or 'ROBOX AD' in short. It is more eye-catching than normal light boxes because of its constant rotating movement. During the trial phase, we have received very positive and encouraging feedback from customers and restaurant owners.

We plan to install at least 500 of these in some of the highest traffic outlets by mid 2004.

Any advice you would like to share with the industry?

Today's consumers are no longer standing still. They are a lot more mobile with the need to be out and about frequently. Prime time is no longer the best time to get their attention as these days, attention span of the typical urbanite is getting

shorter and shorter due to the hectic lifestyle which is becoming extremely common in our society. So what do you do? It's time to bring your advertising messages to them instead.

I do hope advertisers will give more priority to the outdoor medium in the near future, as these are the supporting medium that enhances top-of-mind recall nearer points of purchase or decision making. To be there when your target group is not at home watching TV, reading the papers or listening to the radio.

Final question, as a media owner who has found his "nest", what would be your advice to the young & ambitious media-owners wannabe?

To all media-owners-to-be, any space you see out there are potential media space. Keep your eyes open and put on your thinking cap. You'll never know. You could be next to introduce a breakthrough advertising media. @



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