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the Donald in Asia

A lethal combination of humour and marketing acumen, this Donald has Asia in the palm of his hand

BY LUNITA S V MENDOZA

Like every genius and leader, Donald Tan, Director, Sales & Marketing, iKONVERGENZ started young. In this tale however, it also started with Batman & Robin's "Death in a Family" No #3...

Batman & Robin's "Death in a Family" No #3, you say? Yup.

As a supplement to his allowance as a 17-18 year old, I'm sure Donald didn't know it would start him on a long and passionate path to what he loves and does best. Blessed in this way, this most pleasant and fun-loving man – who by the way is a major rocker – has grown from strength to strength since those young and wild days.

"I started a comic business with a few friends during my 2 years in ACJC (a junior college in Singapore) and was able to hone my skills in marketing while

“... a great marketer is one who is able to seize the opportunities in the market and put forth plan that will help catapult the company, its brands and products to greater heights.”

selling the comics. One of our strategies was to purchase certain issues in large quantities and wait for the prices to escalate before selling them off at a high profit."

Sneaky. But why didn't I think of that?

Subsequently, Donald attended a career talk on Marketing in his second year and knew that this was it for him. According to Donald, the talk was very useful as it helped him understand what he needed to do to pursue this career path.

"I never looked back since then."

Donald's lucky stars continued to shine as he moved from academia to the working world, having the privilege to work in many different industries as a consultant and having worked for many clients in telco, process engineering, consumer, FMCG and financial industries.

"Accordingly, with what I had learned from consultancy, i.e. having to understand the different companies, its environment, its competition, its markets, etc in a short period of time and apply appropriate marketing mix to help them succeed in Asia, I was able to move from one industry to another after I went in-house, starting with Siemens Medical."

Despite the different industries, the commonality has been Marketing in Asia Pacific. Having a good understanding on how marketing works and the requirements for each country provide the basis to adapt appropriate marketing strategies to the different industries across the region. In addition, since Asia Pacific is itself dynamic and ever changing, Donald's hands-on field experience and the relationship he built in Asia Pacific provided the necessary foundations for success for the companies he worked for.

We wondered if there were shifts or

evolution in the world of marketing since the old days. But no different from days of yore, Donald reminds that like in life, "in marketing, there is always a need to deal with constant changes."

But this very fact has been one of the main reasons for this Donald's stay as "there is never one straight-forward approach in addressing the market."

"The more experience the marketer, the better he or she is able to adapt to the changes. The more he or she is able to efficiently use the resources available. In addition, one must not forget about the human factor that is required with the job, since personal relationship in your network can help seal a deal or provide valuable information in the job."

Today, this insightful inspiration gives his passion to iKONVERGENZ, a division of Europe-listed Micronas. At the time, iKONVERGENZ was a start-up focusing on an entirely different product portfolio from its parent company.

With no customers then and literally unknown to the market, Donald had to explore how best to approach the markets and build the business with the limited resources he had.

"I created the necessary marketing mix to position and present iKONVERGENZ to the customers. I also tapped on my friends from the media in the region to provide the much needed publicity for the company and products."

"After 6 months of hard work and constant market visits, we landed our first customer in Malaysia. Our customer base has expanded to Taiwan, China, Korea, Turkey, Japan, USA and across Europe since then."

The challenges today is to continuously provide the necessary marketing and communication approach for new products, new markets and new

customers while ensuring that my existing customers are well taken care of."

In terms of marketing and branding, Donald literally built the marketing department and customer base from scratch, setting up all the necessary processes and protocols, while developing and designing the respective brand and product identities to help position iKONVERGENZ to where the company is today.

More than this, Donald also found himself running around the globe, talking to potential customers and marketing iKONVERGENZ. To date, iKONVERGENZ has 16 registered trade marks to distinguish iKONVERGENZ and its products from its competition in Singapore and other countries, a customer base from around the world and constant invitations to present their expertise at conferences, trade publications and seminars.

"Not bad considering that we had none of these before I started in mid-2004."

Not bad indeed.

However, nothing has come without good old hard work; it being the mother of good luck. Hard work and a knack to seizing opportunities, Donald today proudly holds a Doctorate in Marketing.

"For me, it is about constantly improving myself and not close the door to learning. I was given the opportunity to further my education company-sponsored and decided on a doctorate from one of the top universities from Australia. After all, my philosophy in life is to give my best in everything I do, so why not aim for the top at the same time."

A little known secret as well, Donald's biggest marketing challenge was marketing himself to his wife. Having known her since she was 13 must have been a mean feat to suddenly market an image of potential husband material.

"Actually, it was more like how she marketed herself to me. I was captivated by her. She is definitely the better marketer because she applied the A.I.D.A. approach. She first created the AWARENESS to let me know she existed in Sunday School, made me INTERESTED to find out more about her, created the DESIRE to make me do things that I never thought I would and got me to take ACTION by going down on my knees to propose to her."

We can hardly wait to see how great a marketer his 2 kids will be, coming from 2 marketing gurus... **ww**