

Bomb-thrower, bystander, or builder?

They've done it again. A small group of barbarians has once again strengthened the resolve of most citizens to lead their everyday lives, fearlessly. Business as usual, The growing importance of Indonesia on the global economic stage will only heighten the tension between the mainstream and the fringe, in the years ahead.

This is a good time for all of us involved in the economic welfare of Indonesia to ask ourselves a simple question as we go to work today: who am I? If we are helping to build, if we are builders in that sense, we have every reason to be proud of what we do. If we are innocent bystanders, now is a good time to consider becoming a little more pro-active. But if we are bomb-throwers, knowingly or unknowingly, or we know destructive people in the workplace, now is a good time to help make that change for the better. If your business has consumers, if you are a marketer or have colleagues who are, there are simple things you can do.

To begin with, try and ensure that you know what you and are saying is right. That applies equally to what others are telling you, expecting you to believe what they say. In other words, get the facts right. Question, don't just accept. One of the most bewildering situations I witness all too often is the confidence with which marketing pundits talk about "the Indonesian consumer". Probed, they reveal that the basis of their knowledge is data garnered from 10 big cities, whose residents don't add up to even 15 per cent of the country's population. Most sales data is restricted to these 10 or 15 cities, as is most media data. It doesn't embarrass them to realise that they actually know only 15 per cent of their market, not Indonesia, as they remain blind to 85 per cent of Indonesia's consumers.

Pushed, many will then defend their ignorance by saying that the bulk of their sales are achieved in these cities. The premise that the big city dweller spends more than other consumers is simply wrong too often. For example, the average monthly spend on cellular phone networks is Rp. 50,000 per month. The reality is that the difference in the spend levels of the big city resident, the small town dweller and his kampung counterpart hovers at no more than 10 per cent between them. With almost half the population connected today, with growing numbers of new entrants each month, the cellular phenomenon is one to be watched by all marketers.

Too many of them don't know, because they simply don't care, that almost 90 per cent of Indonesia's population lives in just 16 of Indonesia's 33 provinces. Densely populated, most of the residents of the five major islands live in close proximity of these big cities with many travelling to and fro every day. But half of them actually live in *kampungs*, almost a fourth live in the much smaller cities and towns, and a fourth in the Top 20 cities of Indonesia. Any marketer, even a novice, will know that life in the big city, the town and the village is different. Regardless of where he or she might do their shopping, they lead the rest of their lives at home. That is where they cook and eat, bathe and dress, listen to the radio and chat with their friends. Not in the big city where the breadwinner may have been earlier in the day.

Home is where he goes at the end of the day, where he relaxes with his family. That is where she watches her favourite television program. Two out of three Indonesian women are housewives. To assume that her big city counterpart lives a similar life, watches the same program she loves, is a hopeless leap of poor judgment. With all TV audience data gathered from only these 10 cities, trillions of advertising rupiahs are wasted each year in the name of reaching a target audience that was ill-defined to begin with. This is not just my opinion, this is a fact that can be proven over and over again, brand after brand. Unquestioningly, the average media planner in an ordinary advertising agency flushes billions down the tube every day. Simply because the all-too-easy but all-too-flawed connection was made between sales data and TV data from just those 10 cities.

Here is the obvious truth. If you cannot see the target clearly, you have no hope of hitting the mark without collateral damage. That collateral damage, or wasted marketing funds, can be immensely expensive. That will happen every time the target definition is based on demographics sprinkled with some disconnected psychographics, all limited to 10 cities. You might as well shut your eyes when you fire that shotgun. The language needs to change to “Brands Used Most Often”, “Main Grocery Buyer”, “Intenders” and similar definitions that connect with the brand in question. To presume that the lives of the big-city dweller, the small-town resident and their kampung counterparts are all one and the same is far from the truth. To then assume that the teenage daughter is as involved with the news her father has tuned in to on the only TV set in the home, is to add insult to injury.

Big advertising budgets are being wasted in Indonesia, every day. The unquestioning slavery to ‘1300 GRPs’ for example, adds to some of the longest commercial breaks anywhere in the world. That in turn leads to people walking away to do other things while the advertising runs, almost endlessly for three minutes or more. The more intelligent way to achieve better results for all concerned, is for higher rates, shorter commercial breaks, fewer repetitions of the same advertisement. Try suggesting that to your marketing colleagues and watch them recoil in horror. It’s as if common sense has left them all in a stupor, unable and unwilling to question what they were taught to do, by rote.

It would not be too difficult to demonstrate a saving of at least 20 per cent to any advertiser who spends over a billion rupiah a day on advertising alone. To prove the point would be a pleasure, given the opportunity. That goal would be achieved by working with the relevant stakeholders, both internal and external. The confidence inherent in the challenge emanates from those simple but essential steps: getting the facts right, defining the target intelligently, then going beyond the numbers to engage the target audience. The money saved could be better used, to the benefit of customers, shareholders and staff alike.

These opinions are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, a syndicated survey with over 25,000 Indonesians 14 years and older interviewed each year. That national database is updated every quarter. Almost 90 per cent of the population is covered, from the cities, towns and villages of Indonesia. Not only can it help uncover the truth, it can also help to keep all stakeholders on track with quarterly reviews.

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