

IAS to boost standards in advertising industry with certification and training

BY GWYNETH YEO |

Abiologist by training, Goh Shu Fen stumbled upon the advertising industry by chance and landed her first job with Ogilvy in the mid-1990s. She recalls undergoing a 10-week training programme, where she learnt the finer points of planning marketing strategies and even how to put together a proposal for clients.

"I was very lucky," she says. "Even though I did not study anything related to advertising, I learnt everything and had the opportunity to practise on my clients. But if you were new, never studied anything related and went to work in a 10-man shop, you won't see the big picture and no one will have the time to teach you."

Twenty years later, Goh notes that many small set-ups are still unable to provide the necessary training for their staff.

Goh is co-founder of R3 Worldwide, an independent marketing consultancy that was set up in 2002. Since July 2013, she has also been the president of the Institute of Advertising, Singapore (IAS) and has actively embarked on a number of initiatives to tackle the labour crunch in the industry.

"In the marketing communications industry, at least 60% of your costs are people costs and it's a people business. Yet, there are agencies that are generally very poor at developing their talent and keeping them," she says. "So, what we want to do is help our members that are limited in their HR training resources come up with training programmes."

IAS was founded in 1990 as a non-profit organisation with the support of the Economic Development Board (EDB). Its aim is to upgrade the standard of advertising in the industry through the provision of education and training courses. It currently has 75 corporate members, including creative and media agencies such as Ogilvy & Mather, BBH and ZenithOptimedia, marketers such as NTUC Income and Asia Pacific Breweries, and media owners such as MediaCorp and Singapore Press Holdings. On top of that, there are 10 ordinary members who are individuals.

"IAS' membership is all-encompassing, so it has this great opportunity to bring together people from the different agencies as well as clients, to take the industry to the next level and tackle some of the issues all of us face," says Goh.

To address the issue of training for new staff, IAS will be launching a localised version of the IPA Foundation Certificate course in Singapore later in the year. The course is a 30-hour online learning programme designed for junior industry people, regardless of their area of study, and aims to equip participants with knowledge of the entire brand communications process, from the client brief to final execution. The course was developed by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), the 99-year-old trade body and professional institute for advertising, media and marketing communications agencies in the UK. At the end of the three-month course, participants will have to pass a final examination before they are awarded a certificate.

"A lot of agencies don't have a formal training programme for their new hires because they don't have the resources of a big agency that can run a programme for 10 or 20 people each year. So, we are partnering with IPA and franchising their training programme to offer it to new entrants, probably those with less than two years of experience," says Goh.



IAS launched its inaugural Career Fair in February last year at the Red Dot Design Museum, drawing more than 500 undergraduates over the course of five hours

"We want to make sure that agencies have no excuse for not training their people."

Another hurdle that the industry encounters in hiring is a lack of awareness about the industry and a lack of understanding about what it entails. "I remember when I was a kid, I loved to watch ads, but I never thought that there was a job or career for people who came up with those ads. Then, I read the book, *Ogilvy on Advertising*, and I was so inspired that I wanted to find a job in advertising," says Goh.

Viable career option

"There is a general lack of awareness of this industry as a viable career option among graduates. Even those who study mass communication have very little idea," Goh says, adding that the industry is unable to match the salaries of large companies such as Google and Facebook. "We can't attract with pay alone and we need to recognise that that is a significant barrier, but at the same time, we are an industry that can appeal to millennials by empowering them and allowing them to work in a creative environment."

IAS launched its inaugural Career Fair in February last year. According to Goh, 17 creative and media agencies as well as media owners participated in the fair, setting up booths at the Red Dot Design Museum and drawing more than 500 undergraduate attendees over the course of five hours. Besides seeing some successful hires during the fair, Goh says the agencies had some great ideas to attract the students. "What the agencies did was not just have a booth. A few of them held an open house, so the students could visit and have a feel of their office. Some media agencies organised Skype interviews with their big boss back in the office. In that short time, the students got to speak to people and find out what a media planner does or what public relations is about."

Another initiative that IAS will be piloting together with EDB in April is the Place Talent Right programme, to help attract and retain top talent within the advertising and marketing industry. "This is

a graduate programme where we get a client and its agency to partner with and hire fresh graduates, for six months at the agency and six months at the client. At the end of that, the graduates can choose which side they want to work for," Goh says. "The proposition is that, either way it benefits you. If you are the agency and they choose to work for the client, they become your client. They will know you better and they will know how to work with you better."

The pilot programme is expected to commence with five to 10 agency-and-client pairs, with each pair taking in two candidates. While IAS provides a framework for the programme, the firms will have the flexibility to rotate the candidates among the different disciplines in the company and select a senior staff to provide guidance and mentorship. IAS and EDB will also be monitoring and mentoring the

trainees and providing complementary access to developmental programmes organised by IAS.

Recognising talent

Besides providing training, Goh is also aware of the need to recognise the effort put in by the people in the industry. In November 2014, IAS revamped its Hall of Fame awards, and introduced nine new categories to commend teams and individuals for their work behind the marketing campaigns. The new categories include "Creative Team of the Year", "Technology Team of the Year", "Creative Agency of the Year", "Media Agency of the Year" and "Rebel Agency of the Year".

"It was a big risk," says Goh. "Bosses of agencies want to promote their agencies, not their people, because their people get poached. But when we rolled it out last year, we got very good traction, because I think they know that if they don't recognise their people and allow them to be recognised, they will lose them to another industry."

In the same month, IAS unveiled a new logo and rebranded itself as the "ideas people". The rebranding campaign is expected to show up in print advertisements and television commercials and will feature the names of the people behind those campaigns.

To fund the new talent attraction and development initiatives, EDB awarded IAS a grant to cover 70% of the costs incurred by IAS from 2014 to 2016.

In her two decades in the sales and marketing industry, Goh has worked with brands such as Unilever, Coca-Cola and BMW, and in her consultancy business R3, she has worked with Unilever, Singapore Airlines, Fonterra and Visa to drive marketing effectiveness. Yet, she has noticed that few locals take up management positions in agencies. "It's a shame, because marketing has so much to offer," she says. "If you look at some of the biggest companies, some of the world's largest advertisers, almost all of their CEOs have a marketing background. It's actually a great function."



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