

Direct marketing awards

to return this year

Association to hold event biennially, give priority to education

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ANNUALLY, there is a slew of prestigious awards locally that honour marketing communications agencies.

But last year, one prominent event, namely the Direct Marketing Association of Malaysia (DMAM) Awards, slipped off the radar. The DMAM is actually alive and well. When contacted, acting president Ray Choo says the association is looking at "spacing out" its awards show and having it every two years rather than annually.

"The DMAM comprises volunteers, and organising the awards on a yearly basis requires a lot of resources. Logistics is also something that we need to consider when we host the event, so we're looking at having it every two years."

Choo says the DMAM is also looking at the possibility of hosting the event simultaneously with other prestigious advertising award shows, such as the Fifties or Kancils.

"These two awards are among the most prestigious creative events in the country and there are plenty of synergies to be gained by collaborating with its organisers. It's not final and we're still exploring this possibility," he tells *StarBizweek*.

Choo also says the DMAM made a strategic decision not to have the DMAM Awards in 2010 so that time and resources could be focused on education and training.

"This was in response to a call from the industry players, who felt there was an urgent need to educate and increase the level of awareness of direct marketing."

Choo, however, assures that the DMAM Awards will return this year.

"The awards will be back in 2011. We shall commence planning for this event from this month. We are hoping that there will be more

entries and that more agencies will participate at the event."

The DMAM, founded in 2003, represents direct marketers, advertising agencies and consultants, and vendors, including letter-shoppers, printers, database owners and software providers.

It currently comprises 25 members, among which are Leo Burnett and Reader's Digest.

Choo, who is head of direct marketing for AIA, replaced former president Sreedhar Subramaniam at the recent DMAM annual general meeting.

"The DMAM recently had its AGM and Sreedhar resigned to pursue his vocation overseas. He has worked hard to help bring us (DMAM) to where we are today," says Choo.

The DMAM organises workshops, seminars, talks and other events to help enhance the direct marketing skills of members.

Choo says the organisation also carries out three types of training exercises, namely basic elementary, intermediary and high level training.

"We conducted a one-day, basic elementary training course three months ago and the response was good. The purpose of it was to help our members use direct marketing tools to reach out to more customers."

Choo says that the DMAM will conduct its next training programme in March.

"It will be another basic elementary course," he says, adding that the organisation is also in talks with the Government to help promote direct marketing activities as an industry in Malaysia.

"The key to achieving this is that we need to have more members within the DMAM. The larger the membership, the more vocal we can be in conveying our message to the Government."

On a separate note, Choo says the DMAM will also be launching a revised code of ethics

in February, which would be a self-regulatory measure for best practices in direct marketing in Malaysia.

"All our members will have to adhere to this code. For the past two years we took the initiative to review our code of ethics in view of various changes in legislation in the country. We wanted to ensure that it was still relevant and up-to-date.

"In reviewing our code, we had also studied the best practices from other countries, namely Singapore, Canada, the US, Britain and Australia. Considerable time and effort had gone into developing this code as we had reviewed several drafts with our members before finalising the code."

Choo says one of the biggest challenges for the direct marketing industry is that there is a lack of awareness and that it is frowned upon by society.

"There is still a lot of misconceptions about direct marketing. A lot of people still tend to see direct marketing and direct selling as one and the same."

Choo says the direct marketing industry has long moved away from the era when direct-mailer was the most commonly known form of direct marketing.

"Direct-mailer was highly successful perhaps 10 years ago. Today, telemarketing is more effective. It has between a 4% and 8% success in terms of response rate," he says.

Another issue for contention for the DMAM is the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) 2010 that was passed last year. The Act seeks to regulate the processing of personal data of individuals involved in commercial transactions by data users so as to provide protection to the individual's personal data, thereby safeguarding the interests of such individual.

"The PDPA will have a major impact on how direct marketing activities are implemented. The DMAM hopes to be in the fore-



Ray Choo ... 'We're looking at having it every two years.'

front of educating businesses about this legislation. It is important that all businesses are aware of this legislation when using databases for direct marketing purposes.

"All personal data must be obtained and processed fairly and lawfully. Before collection or processing, the data subject must be told of the company's identity, how the data will be used and any other relevant information which may affect their decision to provide the data."

Choo says that in the past, there had been a lot of abuse on databases, adding that he is hopeful that this legislation would put a stop to it and regulate the way direct marketing activities are carried out.

"Privacy is good business," he says. Still, despite the challenges of the direct marketing industry, Choo is nevertheless optimistic about its outlook.

"2011 is an exciting year for the DMAM. We are optimistic that the industry will continue to grow in tandem with the positive outlook in the economy and customers are more discerning now, seeking value added products directly either via online, telemarketing, push technologies and advertising media."

"The Government is (also) very supportive of the DMAM as we represent members from banks, insurance, logistics, CRM (customer relationship management) companies, advertising media and companies that deal direct with customers."