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SPARKLE

NSBM MARKETING & TOURISM MAGAZINE



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DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

DEPARTMENT INTRO

DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND TOURISM IS THE DEPARTMENT WHICH MOLDS CREATIVE MARKETERS AND COMPETENT TOURISM EXPERTS TO THE MARKET. THE DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND TOURISM OFFERS DEGREES, DIPLOMAS AND CERTIFICATE COURSES IN BOTH THE MARKETING AND TOURISM FIELDS FROM NSBM, APPROVED UNDER UNIVERSITY COMMISSION AND UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH, A HIGH RANKING FOREIGN AFFILIATED UNIVERSITY. STUDENTS WILL EXPERIENCE LEARNING AND REAL BUSINESS ATMOSPHERE THROUGH DIFFERENT INTERACTIONS WITH THE DEPARTMENT. THROUGH THIS PROCESS, DEPARTMENT WILL ENSURE TO CREATE COMPETENT GRADUATES TO THE INDUSTRY WITH NECESSARY ANALYTICAL SKILLS. WE WELCOME STUDENTS WHO WISH TO ENLIGHTEN THEIR CAREER PATH IN BOTH MARKETING AND TOURISM FIELDS.

VISION

VENTURING TO BECOME THE FRONTIER
IN EXPLORING MODERNISTIC HORIZONS IN
SOUTH ASIA

MISSION

WE EXPLORE NEW BUSINESS POSSIBILITIES WITH COLLABORATION OF SOCIETY AND STAKEHOLDERS, WE DELIVER THE BEST EXPERIENCE TO OUR STUDENT COMMUNITY AND WE EXPEDITE BEST RESEARCH PRACTICES.

VALUES

EXPLORE. EXPERIENCE. EXPEDITE

FACULTY OF BUSINESS
C1



VICE CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE

IT IS WITH PRIDE THAT I CONGRATULATE THE DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT, FACULTY OF BUSINESS ON ITS SECOND ISSUE OF THEIR OWN DEPARTMENT MAGAZINE SPARKLE ON WORLD TOURISM DAY 2022.

AS ONE OF THE MOST VIBRANT DEPARTMENTS IN NSBM, I AM DELIGHTED TO WITNESS HOW CAPABLE OUR STUDENTS ARE. AT NSBM, WE STAUNCHLY BELIEVE IN ENSURING THAT OUR UNDERGRADUATES STRENGTHEN THEIR CORE ACADEMIC ABILITIES WHILST SHARPENING THEIR SOFT SKILLS. AS THE VICE CHANCELLOR, I AM PROUD TO WITNESS HOW OUR STUDENTS HAVE BEEN GIVEN A GREAT PLATFORM TO SHOWCASE THEIR TALENTS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT, FACULTY OF BUSINESS.

SOUTH ASIA'S FIRST-EVER GREEN UNIVERSITY, NSBM, STANDS WITH THE PERCEPTION OF UNDERGRADUATES PARTAKING IN THE ROOTS OF NECESSARY SOFT SKILLS ALONG WITH THE BEST ACADEMIC BASE TO BECOME A GLOBAL GRADUATE, A SOPHISTICATED LEADER, A TEAM PLAYER, A COLLEAGUE AND A VALUED ADHERENT TO THE SOCIETY. THEREFORE, WE PROVIDE THE BEST FACILITIES, STARTING FROM MODERN TECHNOLOGY-EQUIPPED CLASSROOMS, AN EXPERT PANEL OF LECTURERS, EXTRACURRICULAR AVENUES AND INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE. MOREOVER, GOING HAND IN HAND WITH EXTERNAL BUSINESS PARTIES, WE PROVIDE THEM WITH ENOUGH OPPORTUNITIES FOR A SECURED FUTURE, THUS REVITALIZING THE SRI LANKAN FUTURE GENERATION.

CARRYING FORWARD THIS VISION, NSBM WILL ENGAGE IN MORE ENDEAVORS AS SUCH IN THE FUTURE TO PROVIDE THE NEEDED EXPOSURE TO ITS UNDERGRADUATES. AS THE VICE CHANCELLOR OF THIS ICONIC EDUCATIONAL HUB IN SRI LANKA, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE NSBM TEAM WHO IS ALWAYS COMMITTED TO ENSURING THE BEST.

IN CLOSING, LET ME EXTEND MY SINCERE WISHES AND THANKS TO ALL THE RESOURCE PERSONNEL, DISTINGUISHED PERSONS, ACADEMICS, AND MY DEAR STUDENTS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE MAGAZINE.

PROF. E.A. WEERASINGHE
VICE CHANCELLOR
 NSBM GREEN UNIVERSITY



DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE

I EXTEND MY HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT, FACULTY OF BUSINESS ON THE SUCCESS OF LAUNCHING THE SECOND ISSUE OF THEIR DEPARTMENT MAGAZINE SPARKLE EMBEDDED WITH GREAT IMPORTANCE, ON WORLD TOURISM DAY 2022. I AM PROUD TO WITNESS HOW OUR STUDENTS HAVE BEEN OFFERED MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE WITH THE INDUSTRY AND SHOWCASE THEIR TALENTS BY ONE OF THE MOST DYNAMIC DEPARTMENTS IN NSBM. I SINCERELY WISH THIS MAGAZINE A SUCCESS!

PROF. CHAMINDA RATHAYAKE



HEAD OF ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT & QUALITY ASSURANCE MESSAGE

THE WORLD AROUND US IS CHANGING RAPIDLY. CHANGE OF BEHAVIOURS AND ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY ARE TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE WORK, LIVE AND COMMUNICATE. WHAT THE FUTURE LOOKS LIKE IS UNCERTAIN, BUT IT IS INTERESTING. IT IS A PLEASURE TO CONGRATULATE THE DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING & TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN PRODUCING THE SECOND ISSUE OF ITS MAGAZINE SPARKLE. MAY THIS BE DEVOTED TO KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND REALIZING OPPORTUNITIES OF THE FUTURE. I WISH YOU ALL THE VERY BEST!

PROF. J BARATHA DODANKOTUWA



DEAN - FACULTY OF BUSINESS MESSAGE

I TAKE GREAT PLEASURE IN CONVEYING MY BEST WISHES TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING & TOURISM MANAGEMENT FOR THE COMMENDABLE EFFORTS PUT FORTH BY THE STUDENTS AND THE ACADEMIC STAFF IN PUBLISHING ITS ANNUAL MAGAZINE – SPARKLE-2022. WITH UNRELENTING DEDICATION, EFFORT AND CHARISMA SINCE ITS INCEPTION, THE DEPARTMENT INHERITS SUCH A WONDERFUL JOURNEY AHEAD. I WISH THEM ALL TRIUMPH!

MS. THILINI DE SILVA



HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING & TOURISM MESSAGE

DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING & TOURISM AIMS IN BUILDING, DEVELOPING, AND DELIVERING THE MOST ENGAGING AND RELEVANT LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN BOTH MARKETING AND TOURISM FIELDS. LAUNCHING ITS SECOND SUCCESSFUL MAGAZINE, SPARKLE-2022 IS ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE ACHIEVED BY THE DEPARTMENT IN ITS JOURNEY. I AM PLEASED TO CONVEY MY SINCERE FELICITATIONS TO THE STUDENTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR THEIR DILIGENCE. CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR WELL-DESERVED SUCCESS!

MR. VENURA COLOMBAGE

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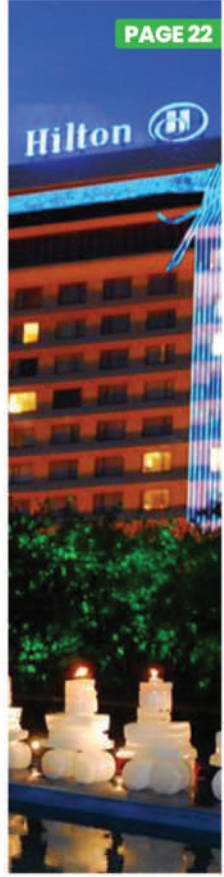
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FOLLOW YOUR PASSION, DREAM BIG AND BE AUTHENTIC.

Ms. Gayani Punchihewa

Head of Wijeya Integrated Media & Digital Media Marketing
Wijeya Newspapers Ltd.



Could you please give us a brief introduction about your role in your organization?

I work as the General Manager heading Integrated and Digital Media Marketing Functions of Wijeya Newspapers. Wijeya Newspapers is undoubtedly the market leader in the Print Media industry and my key responsibilities include taking that market leadership to the Digital space in terms of advertising revenue. It's a team work and we work very closely with all brands in Sri Lanka and advertising agencies in developing digital and integrated advertising campaigns and identifying the "right fit" of the medium to advertise within the Wijeya portfolio.

Specifically for SMEs, what could be the new trends in tourism marketing in the new normal from your point of view?

The post-COVID 19 era or new normal as we all commonly refer has changed drastically how people communicate, interact and engage with each other.

While physical interactions had to be limited digital interactions grew exponentially. This applied to marketing communications as well. Corporates and SMEs alike had to rely on digital communication methods to communicate and engage with their stakeholders and it is true for the tourism sector as well. While restricted to their homes people across the world started longing more for travel and physical interaction, seeing new places and experiencing new cultures etc. Big corporates and established businesses had enough reserves to withstand the standstill of the global economy and restrictions imposed on travelling, but SMEs struggled to survive. Unless SMEs adapt to new normal conditions and embrace the opportunities it presents it will be tough for SMEs to survive in the longer run. In terms of new trends in tourism marketing for SMEs, the shift to the online marketplace and online marketing will be the biggest trend. This stresses the importance of having a digital presence as a player in the tourism industry.

Also, there is a rapid increase of new niche markets emerging in nature-based tourism and experiential tourism where tourists seek meaningful experiences and the formation of value chains where SMEs can easily participate. Specifically, in terms of digital marketing, new trends will evolve around organic search and collaboration. For SMEs, to navigate these trends successfully it is important to pay attention to experimenting with new types of content, coming up with innovative ideas, making your presence felt in the digital space as a thought leader and having the perseverance to turn environmental challenges into biggest opportunities.

In your opinion, how could the government support SMEs to re-brand Sri Lanka destination?

First of all, all stakeholders of government bodies should agree on the "Branding theme" for Sri Lanka as constant changing of themes and thematic advertising and changing tag lines, logos can be disrupting the functionality of other industry stakeholders. When Sri Lanka's USP and branding theme is constantly changing it prompts the marketing communication materials of all other stakeholders within the country to adapt to new themes which will be very costly for SMEs.

Designing a tourism marketing policy with a proper vision and breaking it into short, mid and long-term goals is very important and ensuring the continuity of the policy irrespective of changes to governing bodies or parties in power. Tourism is no longer self-sufficient, therefore SMEs in the tourism sector should be part of the national policy framework. Government support should extend to the digitalization of tourism, smart city concepts and the facilitation of digital payment platforms.

Would you mind sharing some insights on how future tourism marketing could be aligned with SDG goals for SMEs?

Out of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Tourism is supposed to be mostly related to SDGs 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17. These SDGs are developed as a shared blueprint for people and the planet for peace and prosperity for now and the future (UNDP). On the other hand, tourism is considered an important contributor to economic growth, poverty elimination, job creation, and environmental protection.

A carefully designed and crafted tourism marketing can help communities to preserve natural and cultural heritage, nurture peace and intercultural understanding, empower communities and create trading opportunities.

With the rise of awareness of sustainability and green initiatives and environmental consciousness of travelers marketing communications promoting sustainable and green practices will play a key role in the future of the success of SMEs.

Collaborations with host communities in promoting sustainable value chains and cross-over economic activities can be the focal point of marketing communications.

There won't be one particular way or a strategy to incorporate SDGs in marketing activities as all 17 SDGs are integrated. They recognize the overflow effect where the action in one area will affect all other areas. Balance in social economic and environmental is needed for sustainable development.



In the next 5 years, what kind of compulsory skills and additional traits are expected from graduates who want to build their careers in the marketing field?

The marketing field is very dynamic and versatile. The knowledge you are having today can go obsolete very quickly if you are not updating your knowledge and skills on par with the vibrant changes in the marketing environment. Being open to changes, agility and quick thinking would be traits that would help a future marketer to succeed.

Since marketing concepts are evolving and we are treading towards human-to-human (H2H) marketing, the ability to develop customer-centric marketing approaches based on data-driven decisions would be a sought-after skill.

Technological proficiency while having empathy and great interpersonal skills would be commendable traits to have too in the future.

Any other suggestions, recommendations or important notes for the entrepreneurial tourism marketing businesses initiated by university graduates?

Follow your passion, dream big and be authentic. The world of tourism is moving into more meaningful experience tourism. In the other parts of the world, we can see huge growth in cycle tourism, bird watching tourism, kayaking tourism, heritage tourism, walking and hiking tourism, food tourism, etc. Find your unique USP to venture into, your blue ocean. Let big players fight in the red ocean.

Harness your strengths, sharpen your skills and always be on the lookout for new learning opportunities.

Networking, being part of industry bodies, and developing digital skills is a must too for anyone who wants to venture into an entrepreneurial journey.

Tourism has great potential in Sri Lanka given the country's strategic location unparalleled natural beauty, rich culture, and heritage. As university graduates, you would be taking this entrepreneurial journey with a lot of knowledge and skills.

While developing technical skills, knowledge, and competencies it is very important to develop leadership qualities and soft skills as well for an entrepreneur.

I wish all the very best and congratulate all involved in publishing this timely magazine.

IF YOU WANT TO
 BUILD UP YOUR OWN
 BUSINESS AND
 SUCCEED FROM
 YOUR
 COMPETITORS,
 BE IN THE
 COMPETITION
 FIRST

Mr. Lahiru Weerawardana

Managing Director
 Travel Trends Leisure Pvt. Ltd.

Could you please give us a brief introduction about your role in your organization?

I am the founder and managing director of Travel Trends Leisure. I started my journey in the tourism industry in a well-known tour operator. Beginning as a transportation assistant and ending as an assistant manager, I have been operating tours mainly in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Chinese markets. Then I joined a finance company to be the operations manager and then head of operations for their travel division. I always have a dream to start my own travel business, and in 2016 October, I made it happen with three large tourist groups from Mainland China. In 2019, I also established another consultant company on facilitating foreign direct investment opportunities in Sri Lanka.



What could be the new trends in tourism marketing you identified as an SME tourism business in the new normal?

I still could not forget the downtimes that the pandemic has brought to my business. But I will not deny that it also brings lots of potential to the industry. The family and regular travelers are still there, but I do recognize the “revenge” demand from youth travelers who have a more diversified travel style, therefore, targeting youth travelers with more innovative offerings could be the right direction. Besides, many countries are switching between setting restrictions and releasing restrictions which made many travelers afraid of booking holidays as they may get stuck in another country, so islands seem to be more popular in their choice of destinations in this case, and also this type of sun and sea holidays could allow them to be away from the crowds easily compared to city holidays, and most island destinations, in general, is small, therefore, the control of the COVID-19 spreading is relatively easy. One of the examples I could give you is Maldives. It re-opens its tourism in the very early stage even when most of the countries are still closed and markets itself as a safe and COVID-free destination which attracted a lot of travelers. So I believe communicating the connections between your offerings as an island and a hassle-free safe environment to travelers could be effective, and building trust with travelers is crucial. Sri Lanka, as an island, has many forms of tourism available such as wellness tourism, health tourism, and ect. which can be developed further to fit in this new rising demand for a safe and secure environment.

What kind of major challenges are you facing in the tourism recovery as an SME?

If we talk about the business itself, the main challenges are human resources and funds. In a short period, finding talents could be difficult as many professionals left the industry to make a living during the pandemic, and it is doubtful how many of them will come back during the recovery of the industry. Even if they came back, the skills they had may not be at the same level and their understanding of the business could be outdated as well. This will require lots of effort and time to train them back to be ready for the new normal. Besides, lack of enough funds to restart the business is another challenge in the short period as in the

-past 2 years, our expenses are much more than our profits, even the pandemic enables all the players to start from a similar point, but lack of funds would limit our opportunities in competing with large cooperations even we have a great plan to gain a bigger market share. It is not as simple as who acts fast and who wins the market, probably it works among large corporates who have enough funds to act, however, for SMEs, funds could be a crucial factor for them to be even in the playground. Moreover, how to allocate funds in a lean way is also challenging. If we talk about the environment, our competitors are more diverse than before. There are fully online tourism companies, and how to compete with them to grab the youth traveler market is challenging, in which how fast we should go digitalization or how deep we should integrate the technology into our business are some important questions to answer.

What would you prioritize as an SME to succeed in the period of tourism recovery?

I would focus on break-even and social media marketing. For the first few years before fully recovering, I believe bringing a decent volume of travelers would work in this stage, and at the same time, be active on social media. When the operation starts, our partners and customers would view our social media pages to get an idea of what we have done during the blackout periods and our future plans for the new normal, therefore, being active in social media is very crucial for us to spread the message that we are ready to offer updated products and services to you. And with more bookings, we could allocate a higher budget for marketing. And it is very important to understand why tourists are booking holidays with us as well as why tourists are not booking with us. The digitalization of Sri Lanka tourism industry is relatively slow and the majority of the players are still in the old school. I would like to accelerate our digitalization journey such as upgrading the company website and hiring a team dedicated to digital marketing likewise because I realize if you have a good digital

platform, with a global reach, we could receive bookings even from markets that we are not targeted in.

In your opinion, how could the government support SMEs to re-brand Sri Lanka destination?

The government should be sensitive to the trends of tourism and understand what SMEs are specialized in. For the past years, the government mainly focused on bringing dollars through the support of large corporates, and they always prioritize them in their promotional activities. If they could appoint an officer dedicated to the SME sector and listen to the industry monthly, I believe the promotional activities would be more effective, especially if they want to promote alternative tourism such as wellness tourism or adventurous tourism in which certain SMEs are leading with deeper knowledge than those large corporates who have a larger product portfolio but lack of expertise in certain areas. The demand of youth travelers from emerging markets has drastically changed, and some large corporates who established their businesses in traditional markets could not catch up with this change as fast as certain SMEs, so hearing from them is very critical.

Any other suggestions, recommendations, or important notes for the entrepreneurial tourism marketing businesses initiated by university graduates?

If you want to build up your own business and succeed from your competitors, be in the competition first. You might have many ideas to start on your own and have many good marketing contents likewise, but those might not match the market expectations. So always be in the competition first to understand what the market is, what others are doing, and what your customers are expecting before coming up with your own innovations. You need a base to innovate, and that you could obtain by facing the competition.



**WE NEVER
STOP LEARNING
IN TRAVEL**

Mr. Gary Bowerman

PRODUCER, ASIA TRAVEL RE:SET
CO-FOUNDER & HOST, THE SOUTH EAST ASIA
TRAVEL SHOW
DIRECTOR, CHECK-IN ASIA

Could you please give us a brief introduction about your rich background?

I was born in Oxford in the UK, and while growing up, my mum was a travel agent. After school, I would go to her branch and stamp the travel brochures and refill the shelves. I listened to the conversations between the agents and customers about trips to amazing places. I was hooked. This was long before online travel booking. Oxford, where I grew up, is a beautiful city with lots of tourists and university students from around the world, so international cultures and languages were all around me from a young age. These factors inspired me to travel – not just for pleasure but in my career. After graduation, I spent a year in Australia and New Zealand, and then a year in Central and South America. I later became a writer and researcher for a travel guide publisher, edited the magazine of the American Society of Travel Agents and became a columnist for CNN Traveller. I relocated to Shanghai in 2004, and co-founded Check-in Asia, an Asia-focused research and marketing firm that works with travel companies, hotels, airlines, NTOs, banks, consumer brands and research organizations worldwide. I relocated to Kuala Lumpur in 2010. I am very lucky. I get to work on fascinating tourism projects, speak at conferences, give guest lectures for students and comment on Asian travel issues for global media. I enjoy being able to give back some of the experience and knowledge that travel has gifted me.

What kind of current and future challenges do SMEs face in tourism?

Globally, travel and tourism are dominated by big business interests. However, the SME and startup sectors are critical for incubating innovation and new concepts and initiatives. SMEs are also much closer to the cultures and environments they represent and the technology eco-systems that young travellers want to engage with. Like most business sectors, real innovation often comes from outside the big corporates, and they either invest in or acquire innovative startups and recruit talent from SMEs to improve their own service delivery. Now, more than ever, there is space for dynamic and meaningful ideas in travel and tourism, and there is plenty of venture capital for focused and ambitious SME businesses. The pathway to success is as difficult as ever, but windows of opportunity do exist. Travel entrepreneurs need to focus on how inbound, outbound and domestic travel are changing, build strong teams and be prepared to take hits along the way. Tourism is, after all, a competitive business, and it is vital to stay focused on the shifting hopes, expectations, and desires of customers. Strip away the technology and the business speak, and tourism was, is and will be a people business.



What kind of marketing competencies a SME should develop in order to be successful in the tourism industry recovery?

The consumer world is very different now to just 4 or 5 years ago. The mass conversion to mobile has altered the attitudes and demands of consumers of all ages. This was happening before the pandemic. Although travel is all about 'real world' experiences and sharing new places in person with those closest to us, the marketing of travel is primarily mobile for the streaming generation. It is also highly saturated and difficult to achieve engagement because every travel brand on the planet has improved their digital capabilities, especially during the pandemic. The core of travel marketing however has not changed. It must be meaningful to your customers, and it must be supported by faultless customer service. Travel companies must connect with travellers on an emotional and a practical level. That sounds simplistic, but it really isn't. Too many brands allocate too much budget to high-production videos, and neglect the core driver of success: delivering inspiring travel experiences. Young consumers today are unforgiving. If you fail them once on service, you don't get a second chance. This is a huge mistake as young people are not just potential repeat customers, they have the power to damage your brand reputation through negative social media posts. So, it's vital to build an SME company culture that respects marketing as an agile set of multifaceted business skills. Marketing is about understanding your customers, and communicating with them at every stage of their journey with you. It's not just about glossy videos, KOLs and social media likes and shares.

In your opinion, how could the government support SMEs to re-brand their destination?

This is a difficult question, but it is an important one. In many countries, governments provide the financial support for NTOs, and their destination marketing campaigns and promotions for both the travel trade and consumers. The debate gets trickier when we talk about SMEs, because there is inevitable consternation about whether governments and SMEs are natural-fit partners. Personally, I would like to see more governments invest in long-term national travel and tourism training and development programs. These would be designed by travel professionals to get more young people interested in building a career in the industry, and offer cutting-edge skills training. As more young people engage with key travel and tourism issues, more new ideas will develop and flourish organically. Whether those young people establish their own SMEs, join start-ups or prefer a career with a travel major is less important. We will be nurturing free-thinking talent to confront tough challenges and forge customer-focused solutions for destination promotion and management. That is what the travel industry needs now, and will need even more in the coming years. Young people are future travellers, future entrepreneurs, and future thought leaders. Let's unleash their voices and their talents.

Would you mind sharing some insights on how future tourism marketing could be aligned with SDG goals for SMEs?

Climate change and the worsening impact of extreme weather events is happening now, everywhere. We cannot pretend this will get better. It won't. Instead, we must take urgent, broad-ranging actions across the travel industries now. It is often noted in the media that airplanes, theme parks and resorts are large contributors of carbon emissions and that over-tourism is killing the planet. These facts are hard to argue against. However, the biggest benefit of travel is education, opening our eyes to see the world as it really is. Travel brings people together to share experiences and foster a stronger, more determined mindset to make a real difference. Young people building startups and SMEs grew up under the dark cloud of environmental degradation, and they saw how ineffective the global response has been. They understand the immense challenges the world is facing. I believe young people will create inventive ways to make their SMEs sustainable and contribute to helping the planet heal. We should listen carefully to their different concepts of planet-friendly development because the older generations wielding economic and political power have failed young people over the last 50 years.

In the next 5 years, what kind of compulsory skills and additional traits are expected from graduates who want to build their careers in the tourism marketing?

We never stop learning in travel, and we must all be 'all-rounders' now. The vital skill is the ability to multi-task and to work effectively across departments and projects, and communicate with different teams, suppliers, and customers. Developing the skills for which you are studying will remain important, because the travel industry will always need highly skilled people. However, pushing yourself further to understand diverse aspects of travel, tourism, entertainment, wellness, retail, technology, and lifestyle will enable graduates to navigate the changing composition of visitor economies. This begins from the very first career steps, and continues all the way along the career path. Being able to pair practical business knowledge and marketing skills with continued professional learning will help us confront tricky new challenges as they emerge – because there will always new challenges!

SUSTAINABILITY IS A KEY FACTOR IN THE CURRENT TOURISM MARKET

Mr. Mani Sugathapala

Director of sales and marketing of Citrus Leisure PLC



Could you please introduce yourself? And how has your career path been so far?

I'm Mani Sugathapala, I have been in this industry for about 40 years. I started with accountancy and then joined this path. I worked in the Maldives for some time and then came back to Colombo and joined Grand Hotel Nuwara Eliya for 8 years in the sales, front office, and rooms division. Then I joined John Keells and when I left the company in 2011, I was the head of sales and marketing for all the Sri Lankan hotels except Cinnamon properties Colombo and was also appointed as the assistant vice president for John Keells Holdings. Now I am the director of sales and marketing at Citrus Leisure.

SMEs play a vital role in the tourism industry at present. What could be the reason behind this prominence?

Mainly the "trends". With the new technological developments, tourists use smartphones and other devices to review hotels, restaurants, shops, excursions, and any other to see reviews of the places and services. With the new social media pages and other review applications, tourists check images, read guest reviews, and make decisions on purchasing products and services. With new apps such as Pickme and Uber available, tourists could easily hire a cab and travel to different locations. Tourists use google maps and other online maps to see routes and directions to different locations, rather than seeking directions from the locals or travel agents. Solo traveling is a new trend that is becoming popular among the young generation.

In your opinion, what are the most significant challenges faced by SMEs in our tourism and hospitality industry?

Small and medium hotels, restaurants, and shops selling tourist items and souvenirs faced many challenges during the pandemic. Many employees had to be laid off and these employees had to find alternative employment and there is a massive shortage of labour. Even some of our staff (Citrus's) left, joined totally different fields like factories or went abroad. Another thing is the demand for small and medium grocery stores dropped because everything is available online on e-commerce websites such as Daraz and online grocery stores such as Keells and Cargills etc. Tourists also took other forms of public transportation such as tuks, buses, scooters, and trains where the demand for private transportation companies went down.

What are some marketing strategies used by your company to survive and grow?

There are a few strategies like influencer marketing where celebrities who have a good number of followers on social media go to hotels and share their stories which are content-driver marketing campaigns based on endorsements by celebrities and general influencers. Also marketing on mobile platforms. According to some surveys and research, around 60% of all travel-related decisions are made via a mobile device by the customers, therefore the marketing should focus on mobile platforms. If I want to visit a place, I would go to the web and search in my leisure time but the younger generation will mostly take the phone and immediately find information and that's the difference. I do the same thing but there's a generation gap. And also we have experience marketing in which rather than marketing a product or a service, marketing an experience is highly effective. For example, tourists might want to see how typical Sri Lankans prepare their breakfast. Tourists would love to see people cooking with firewood on clay pots with all Sri Lankan spices, banana leaves, and all. Now for them, that's a new experience! Then video marketing where video content has proven to be highly effective in tourism marketing. Highly engaging video content is a key to tourism marketing as we all are social media driven. In the current world, most of the travel-related decisions made by customers are based on the content they see on social media, therefore, a highly effective social media strategy is a must in tourism marketing. Also virtual reality (VR) tours. The pandemic has forced businesses to make more intelligent use of tourism technology, and virtual reality is one of the most promising areas to explore. This can allow potential customers to experience a hotel, airport lounge, restaurant, local attractions, or even certain tourist activities from afar, with no risk. Safety & hygiene is also important in marketing in the current post covid era, as it is a concern for almost all travelers. Proper communication of the safety and hygiene practices is therefore important. Also understanding the customer journey and planning the marketing activities accordingly. The customer journey is defined as the steps, touchpoints, or interactions customers have with a company. The journey starts from the moment they hear about the service, that's their first impression or hook. Ideally, the journey should never end with a brand as long as both sides keep in touch. Prioritize Personalisation. Modern customers want to be treated as individuals, which is where personalisation marketing comes in. The basic principle is to try to target people with more relevant marketing messages, which appeal to them on an individual level. For example, some tourists will say they are very fond of sea creatures and we can arrange a visit to a turtle farm. This could mean, for instance, sending a personalized email, and showing them a product they might like. To be effective, personalization marketing requires you to capture user data and make intelligent use of it, often through AI and automation. This data could be past bookings, web browsing habits, or activities on social media.

At present how the government has supported you and what else do you expect from them in the long run during the industry recovery?

At the moment the government is helping us with loans and paying interest. Actually what I think is government should focus on marketing destinations. Normally for a year, there are 8 or 9 trade fairs all over the world. However, with the shortage of money, they couldn't participate in trade fairs as well. We are on our own buying tickets and going is not enough. It's better if government sustains promotions and markets destinations. One or two years back it was written on a website that "Sri Lanka, best place to be in the world." We must also start marketing. The key for the government to get money is to promote Sri Lankan tourism and it will also improve foreign exchange as well when more tourists visit us.

Do you encourage startups in the industry?

In my opinion, I do not encourage SME startups at the moment as it will be difficult for them to have return on investments. But if you do something out of the box then you can survive with the business. If not it's very hard to start a new business because there are lots of competitions. For example, big hotels also don't have businesses, a person selling for \$200 has to sell for \$100 and a person selling for \$100 has to sell for \$50. So my advice is not to start tourism-related businesses immediately as it will be difficult to survive.

What are your comments on marketing sustainable or eco-tourism?

Sustainability is a key factor in the current tourism market. Marketing a sustainable tourism product would appeal to a larger audience who are keen on sustainable practices. Further, this will help gain great recognition for the business.

Where do you picture the Sri Lankan tourism industry in another 10 years of times?

In 10 years of time I see Sri Lanka will do well. I want Sri Lanka to have a very expensive niche market. Like not only for Sun and beach, Sri Lanka can offer so many things like hills, mountain climbing, trekking, nature walks, eco forest lodges, and many more. Sri Lanka should capture high spenders who can afford expensive places. Not a lot of people at once but a few people who spend more. That's what I feel.

If you were to make a final remark on SMEs in the tourism industry and their way forward, what would it be?

I believe SMEs need to form their competencies by making efforts with influencers, promoting experience, and creating good video content. Sustainable eco-tourism and social media marketing also need to be highlighted. Understanding the customer and prioritizing personalisation marketing is also important.

**Interviewed by Heshara Gunawardena
Article by Heshara Gunawardena**

UNIVERSITIES SHOULD PAY MORE ATTENTION TO MAKE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) WITH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEADING UNIVERSITIES AND SMES

Prof. (Dr). Sivesan Sivanandamoorthy

Professor in Marketing
Coordinator Tourism & Hospitality
Department of Marketing
Faculty of Management Studies &
Commerce
University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka



Could you please give us a brief introduction about your academic role and specialized areas?

I am a professor in Marketing attached to the Department of Marketing, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Jaffna – Sri Lanka and presently serve as the coordinator for the Tourism and Hospitality Management Degree programme. Member of the board of study of Master of Business Administration and Member of the board of study of Graduate faculty. I completed Bachelor of Commerce Honors in Marketing at University of Jaffna – Sri Lanka in 2006. Further, I did a Master of Commerce in University of Kelaniya – Sri Lanka in 2011, and won two different prestige's scholarships in 2014: Australian postgraduate scholarship and the Australian Federation University scholarship to read the Doctoral Philosophy in Tourism Governance for sustainable Heritage Tourism at Federation University – Australia. My specialized areas are in marketing, sustainable marketing, tourism, cultural heritage and service marketing.

Specifically for SMEs, what could be the new trends in tourism marketing in the new normal from your point of view?

The tourism industry makes a substantial contribution to economic and sociocultural development in the developed and developing countries throughout the world. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in Sri Lanka's economy, irrespective of their development status. SMEs' contribution to the economy is multidimensional, consisting of output growth, employment generation, poverty alleviation, economic empowerment, and export growth, among others. In Sri Lanka many tourism related SMEs including hotel and homestay, Spas and Ayurveda, cafes, food and beverage shops, travelling and guiding related business, surfing and diving, and souvenirs and handicrafts are. Tourism related SMEs mostly depend on international tourism rather than domestic tourism in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile Sri Lankan tourism industry has been disturbed by several incidents including civil war, Easter Sunday attack 2019, COVID 19 pandemic and present economic crises. As a result of that, tourism related SMEs have been totally affected. The COVID – 19 forces business people as well as tourists to transform for digital platforms. In Sri Lanka, many leading hotels, travel agents, and tour guides are using digital technology to reduce the human interaction in the process of provision of service.

What kind of current and future challenges do SMEs face in tourism marketing in Sri Lanka? In Sri Lanka SMEs encounter with many challenges:

1. Political instability: in Sri Lanka, it can obviously observed that during last the couple of months, government is in the incompetency level. Political instability is the propensity for regime or government change, political upheaval, or violence in society, or instability and uncertainty in government policy, such as regulatory, tax, property, or human rights law.
2. Technological development: many SMEs in Sri Lanka meet major challenges by rapid technological development. They are struggling to adopt new technology because employees are not sound in IT. During the post COVID – 19 pandemic era, digital technology played a big role in the travel and hospitality sectors throughout the world, in the case of booking, reservation. But in Sri Lanka small hotels are using a very traditional mode.
3. Lack of networks that can contribute to a lack of information, know-how, and experience of domestic and international markets.
4. Increased market competition and concentration from large multinational enterprises caused by globalization and economic integration.
5. Inability to compete against larger firms in terms of R&D expenditure and innovation (product, process, and organization).

What kind of marketing competencies a SMEs should develop in order to be successful in the tourism industry recovery? The following strategies are well appropriate for increasing marketing competencies:

- Promoting integrated marketing communication- increasing the capacity of integrated marketing communication and using digital and physical communications tools in the integrated way.
- Diversifying channels of financing by developing private SME lenders, motivate the foreign investors.
 - Developing SME database and credit risk analysis of SME
 - Providing tax incentive
 - Promoting public, private collaboration.

In your opinion, how could the government support SMEs to re – brand Sri Lanka destinations?

The government should support owners, policy-makers, and managers of small enterprises to offer the creation of new networking clusters at domestic and international level for the development of new products, new services, and technological adaptation to survive in the turbulent market.

- Organizing explore visits to SMEs abroad.
- Promoting private public partnership.

As academics, how could we support tourism marketing of SMEs from your point of view?

Academics can provide consultant services to SMEs to promote their business. Further they do research and encourage their students focusing research on SMEs.

Any other suggestions, recommendations or important notes for the entrepreneurial tourism marketing business initiated by university graduates?

For the tourism and hospitality degree programme students, provide the internship programme for university programmes. Universities should pay more attention to make memorandum for understanding (MOU) with national and internal leading universities and SMEs to share their theoretical and practical experience with students.

About Ms. Nilupul Chandrasena

Her Research experience counts over 18 years in Market research and social research in both quantitative and qualitative, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Customer Experience Management and Engagement, Touch point monitoring, Customer communication, Quality Management System auditing, Strategic Planning & Business development, MIS, and Brand Management. As a Researcher her expertise lies in Consumer, Brand/Product/advertising research, Social and Employee/organizational climate test.

At present she serves at NielsenIQ Sri Lanka as the Head of Qualitative research. NielsenIQ is a global leader in market research in USA. Her previous experience counts in the insurance sector where she has served as the Head of CRM and Research at Allianz Insurance Lanka Ltd and Janashakthi Insurance PLC. Her CRM expertise extends to developing digital CRM platforms for service efficiency, driving customer centricity, soft skills development based Training and Talent Development for the frontline staff of Customer service points and Contact centers. A product of University of Sri Jayawardenepura holds Master of Business Administration in Management (MBA), Bachelor of Arts in Social sciences, Postgraduate Diploma in Marketing (SLIM), Member of SLIM and a Lead Auditor in ISO QMS9001: 2015, QMS 2008, QMS2000 (Bureau Veritas Certification).

Specifically for SMEs, what could be the new trends in tourism marketing in the new normal from your point of view?

Tourism is the third-largest foreign income earner in Sri Lanka and during the last decade there has been unprecedented growth in the industry, especially after the civil war ended in 2009. However, in the recent past, tourism industry in Sri Lanka has been adversely affected due to a series of unfortunate incidents/situations which the nation had to undergo since April, 2019. The Easter Sunday attack in April 2019 followed by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 and fuel/economic crisis in 2021/2022 which has curtailed the tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka due to the travel



Nilupul Chandrasena

Head of Qualitative research
NielsenIQ Sri Lanka

**TOURISM CREATES
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR SMALL
ENTERPRISES**

bans imposed and limitations in flights to the country which hampered the export trade as well. SMEs make a tremendous contribution to the national economy of any country regardless of them being developed or developing countries. Sri Lanka as a developing country, SMEs are perceived as the backbone of the economic growth of the country which amounts to 80% of all types of business. SMEs contribute to 52% GDP and 42% of employment (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2020). Its contribution has been immense in terms of alleviating poverty, reducing unemployment, economic empowerment, export growth and promoting rural development (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2020).

There are numerous tourism-related small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) based in the tourist destinations across the country. Businesses such as hotels and guesthouses, Ayurvedic spas, cafes, restaurants, food and beverages, transportation, traveling and guiding, surfing, and diving, ornaments, souvenirs, handicrafts, and handloom/batik garments as common business types of tourism-related SMEs. Factors such as firms' capital assets, number of workers, sales revenue, level of human capital, and size positively affect SMEs' profit and productivity.

Table 1: SME Classification in Sri Lanka

SME Category	Manufacturing Sector		Service Sector	
	Number of Employees	Annual Turnover (Million)	Number of Employees	Annual Turnover (Million)
Micro	1–10	≤ LKR 15	1–10	≤ LKR 15
Small	11–50	≤ LKR 16–250	11–50	≤ LKR 16–250
Medium	51–300	≤ LKR 251–750	51–200	≤ LKR 251–750

Source: Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Sri Lanka (2002).

First and foremost, we need to build our brand name as a tourism destination and build up traveler confidence to visit Sri Lanka. To revive the tourism in Sri Lanka there need to be focused and aggressive marketing campaigns via social media-based communication which is trending to promote tourism in Sri Lanka. Building up brand image of SL through foreign missions, focus on promoting attraction to tourist destinations in coastal areas, central hills, and significant cultural/ heritage cities in many parts of the country.

Rebuilding tourism is a priority of the government, but the industry should be more sustainable and resilient in the future to overcome the challenges.

Segmented marketing with affordable packages offered at the hotels and related services to the low budget tourists, attract high end tourists who has more spending power.

Digitalization in tourism services is expected to continue to accelerate, including a higher use of automation, contact-less payments and services, virtual experiences, real-time information provision. Enhance online selling, reservations, payment facilities which would provide convenience to the tourists.

Providing the necessary training and initial capital to uplift potential micro/small entrepreneurs to revive/start their businesses. Knowledge in finance management, Ensure product/ service quality by adhering to international standard certifications. (ISO9001, ISO14000, OHSAS18001, ISO 22000, etc.)

What current and future challenges do SMEs face in tourism marketing in Sri Lanka?

Current challenges:

- SMEs are the prime victims of COVID-19 and the recent economic crisis in the country since the resources such as finance and other resources that SMEs hold were not sufficient in comparison to large-sized enterprises. COVID-19 pandemic has put millions of small and medium-sized enterprises at risk and shaken the nation in an unprecedented way. During the pandemic tourists arrivals were limited due to their hesitation to travel to another country and on the other hand travel restrictions were another bottleneck to operate the tourism related SME's.

- After the pandemic outbreak, many SMEs had to struggle with consequences of the economic crisis particularly on the import restrictions on materials needed for production process causing shortages, escalating overheads resulting in loss of revenue and profitability.
- Further most of the SME's experienced inability to pay back bank loan and interest repayment, cash inflow shortages, lack of sales, lack of revenue growth, and increased cost associated with COVID-19 spread.
- Some SME's experienced shutting down their operations due to high operating costs. These escalating issues cause loss of revenue, profitability, Fuel crisis, high transportation cost, cost of production, lack of demand for goods, less tourist arrivals, air fares increased by 200% during the season, unemployment due to shut down, import restrictions due to devaluation of the rupee.

Promote on-arrival visa to tourists

Supporting tourism businesses to adapt and survive, Tourism sector can establish linkages with local entrepreneurs depends on the types of suppliers and producers linked to the industry's demands, the capacity of local suppliers to meet these demands, development of tourism in the destination areas.

Future challenges:

- Threats on tourist arrivals due to high cost of air fares, minimum arrival of aircraft to the country, cost of accommodation, shortage of fuel and high transport cost which must be borne by the tourists.
- Increasing cost of living and other macro-economic factors in the Europe and other parts of the world.
- The hotel sector may struggle to maintain their amenities and facilities to the tourists with the shrinking revenue.
- Tourists are attracted by alternative tourist destinations such as Maldives, Seashells, Singapore etc.
- Low budget tourist will not bring in adequate income to the country unless high spending tourists are attracted.
- Cost of skilled labor in the country and brain drain due to migration for foreign employment.
- Constrained social security system in the country, international warnings to avoid travel to Sri Lanka.

What kind of marketing competencies should a SME develop to be successful in the tourism industry recovery?

Social media, web campaigns, cater to the correct TG segmented marketing (attract high net worth tourists vs low budget tourists), create a positive word of mouth about the benefits/offers/ customer care and services offered in the tourist destinations.

First, domestic tourism must resume in full capacity and assist to mitigate the impact on jobs and SMEs established in the tourist destinations. Thereafter should focus on international tourists. This requires global co-operation on the travel restrictions which must be lifted safely.

Small businesses have a great influence on how tourists perceive destinations as well as on the destinations' image. For instance Kandy city is known for handicrafts based SME's which are continuing for generations. Capitalize on these unique aspects when promoting the industries in particular geographic location during the recovery stage of the tourism.

In your opinion, how could the government support on SMEs to re-brand Sri Lanka destination?

Major responsibility of any government is to provide strong support to the SMEs since they are the backbone of the country's income and employment generation. Although Government provides short term relief to SMEs, long term mechanisms are imperative therefore, it is required to introduce policies to safeguard SMEs related to tourism.

- Since the hospitality sector and related SME's suffered a lot during the pandemic, government should intervene to provide essential support continuously to SMEs of the hospitality firms for their long-term sustainability.
- Hospitality firms are still struggling to generate their income and they seek urgent support for financial assistance from the government and other connected institutions in nations. The biggest challenge for the growth of a small enterprise is the integration of many responsibilities. In small food processing companies, they do not have a different workforce for marketing, operations management, human resources, financial management, and networking. On the other hand their cost of production has merely increased during last one year dramatically causing loss of revenue due to reduced demand.
- Government should maximize tourism's potential for economic development by enhancing the linkages between tourism and other sectors through agricultural and micro and small enterprises.
- The sector can also minimize foreign exchange leakage by stimulating local entrepreneurs to start tourist establishments and encouraging local entrepreneurial activities
- Infrastructure and basic amenities development, Focus on infrastructure, basic amenities development in historical sites, heritage cities, spots where tourist attraction is found to be more.
- Financial support & policy making through banks and government institutions
- Advice and coaching on crisis management, business continuity planning and sustainability for SME's
- Marketing opportunities identify the supply chains involved and support them to uplift their capacity.

- Promote organic farming through SMEs to enhance the supply of agri based food to the hotel sector.
- Provide assurance of social security in the country for the tourists by providing clear information to travelers and limiting uncertainty.
- Up lift health care facilities in the tourist destinations/areas.
- Evolving response measures to maintain capacity in the sector and address gaps in supports
- Strengthening co-operation within and between countries to welcome export goods produced by the SMEs
- Promote a sustainable recovery. Sustainability may become more prominent in tourism choices. Natural areas, regional and local destinations are expected to drive the recovery, and shorter travel distances may result in a lower environmental impact of tourism.
- Domestic tourism is expected to benefit, as people prefer to stay local and visit destinations within their own country. Domestic tourists are often more price-sensitive and tend to have lower spending patterns.
- Traveller confidence has been hit hard by the crisis, and the ongoing uncertainty. This may lead to a decline in demand and tourism consumption, which must be mitigated.
- Traveller behavior will be influenced by the evolution of the crisis, as well as longer term consumer trends that are reshaping in the way people travel. This may include the emergence of new niches and market segments, and a greater focus on safety protocols and contactless tourism experiences.
- Safety and hygiene have become key factors to select destinations and tourism activities. People are likely to prefer 'private solutions' when travelling, avoiding big gatherings, and prioritizing private means of transport, which may have an adverse impact on the environment.
- Skills shortages in the tourism sector must be addressed through the hotel school management and vocational training colleges

- Crisis management will be a particular area of focus. Safety and health policy issues also. Tourism policy will need to be more reactive and in the long term it will move to more flexible systems, able to adapt faster to changes of policy focus.

As academics, how could we support tourism marketing of SMEs from your point of view?

Provide knowledge through short courses in finance mgt, accounting software, business development/marketing, customer service, computer skills, quality mgt in production or services (free seminars/webinars/workshops) to the SME's

It is observable that many SMEs, particularly micro and small enterprises have lack of business management and marketing knowledge to develop their entities. Therefore, it is vital to aid/knowledge in finance management, developing marketing planning, identifying target markets, segmentation, customer care, computer literacy, necessities to obtain bank credit facilities such as preparation of feasibility report for bank loan applications, collateral, interpreting the documentation and overall business consultancy and advisory services.

Any other suggestions, recommendations or important notes for the entrepreneurial tourism marketing businesses initiated by university graduates?

Focus on sustainability, stable finance management, cost minimization approaches without compromising the quality and service levels. Sourcing of inputs from the local context to the production floor than use of imported raw material and goods.

- ☒ Quality mgt adherence on quality production process and expertise to meet the requirements for export trade through EDB.

Conclusion:

Tourism creates opportunities for small enterprises because the start-up costs and barriers to entry in this sector are low and it is even accessible to the poor. Tourism promotion would be successful with small business promotion, and small, family-centered enterprises the industry.

It is known facts that during the economic crisis, the financial performance of SMEs was worsen leading to temporary closure of some of the business operations where production would be permanently discontinued and caused uncertainty of the employees for their job security. COVID-19 created increased debt, lower productivity, and low investment and thus many SMEs were fighting to sustain the prevailing worse scenario. The tourism-related SME's such as hotels, restaurants, transport sector, handicrafts and many other related businesses were affected due to the paralysis of the industry.

The government, non-governmental organizations and financial institutions should be conscious of the struggle for financial management of the SMEs and should make decisions that would help SMEs to survive. These steps should generally cover wide range of activities such as tax reduction, income support, deferral of tax, business relief, capital injections, moratorium debt payments, subsidies, support for the welfare, social security, and government-guaranteed loan facilities. On the other hand taking immediate steps to regain the brand image of Sri Lanka as a safe destination for tourism with uplifted basic infrastructure facilities is of paramount importance.



IN HILTON'S POINT OF VIEW



Mr. Mahesh Fernando

General Manager – Hilton Colombo

I have been working with Hilton for 26 years. And I'm a second-generation hotelier. My father used to work in the industry therefore, I used to be around hotels and the industry from a very young age.



Mr. Karim Schadlou

General Manager – Hilton Colombo Residences

I have been in the hospitality industry for more than 30 years. I started my career in 1988 in a very small hotel and I have been in Hilton for the past 22 years.

Could you give us a brief overview of your career in the tourism and hospitality industry?



Mr. Krishantha Damunupola

General Manager – DoubleTree by Hilton
Weerawila Rajawarna Resort

I studied at Trinity College and then I finished my higher education at the University of Colombo. While I was at the university, I worked as a night receptionist in a hotel and at that time the general manager was a German called Stephen, he asked me whether I would like to take on more responsibilities and that was when I decided I want to have a career in the hospitality industry. And then I had the opportunity of joining the Maldivian chain called Universal Resorts, because they opened their first resort in the seashells islands and then I was a pre-opening front office manager of that resort, and then after two years it was taken over by Hilton International so I was involved in the rebranding of the property. That's where my journey with Hilton worldwide started and I had the privilege of helping out a few hotels in the Middle East and African region. I had the opportunity of going to South Africa and Malibu, and then they transferred me to Eastern Europe so I was based in a city called Dubrovnik, in Croatia, a beautiful country and city of course, and then I had the opportunity of again doing some pre-opening assistance. Due to personal reasons, I had to come back to Sri Lanka, and then I had the privilege of getting involved in another pre-opening that's called OZO Kandy. I worked there for three years and then again, I went back to Hilton to open DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawilla and this is where I'm at the moment.



Ms. Gitanjali Chakravarthy

General Manager – Hilton Yala Resort

I have been in this industry for over 25 years. I started my career after my A/levels, I never thought of getting into the hospitality industry, I wanted to become a doctor but I couldn't get into medical college because I was lacking 2 marks and then I was undecided on what

I wanted to do. Then the atmosphere, good food, and beautifully dressed people of the hospitality industry made me tag along with this industry. Then I wanted to work in a hotel for about 3 months just to understand whether I really liked hospitality so, I went in as a management trainee to one of the John Keels hotels and worked for a period of 3 months and just loved the industry. That was the start and I thought if I only continued to work in this industry, I would probably be able to reach the highest positions in the industry so, I wanted to get some professional qualifications. Then I joined the Ceylon Hotels School which today is known as the Sri Lankan Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management, I did my four basic courses and then intermediate level and advanced level, and passed out in 1992. It was since I have been in the industry so, to be very precise including my training period to now it's over 30 years.

In your POV, are SMEs in any form competitive with the Hilton Hotel chain?

Ms. Gitanjali Chakravarthy

General Manager – Hilton Yala Resort

It's not a direct competition but based on what they offer they can become competitive because when you say SMEs, they are these small boutique hotels or not even the boutique could even be homestays. And sometimes I have heard from guests that staying in a Sri Lankan home gives them a better overview of the Sri Lankan culture and they can experience how hospitable Sri Lankan people really are. The hospitality could be different from a homestay and a hotel atmosphere. There might be guests who would love to experience the hospitality of a real Sri Lankan house. Therefore, I can say the SMEs are not a direct competition but in terms of service and the facilities and the hospitality that they offer definitely they can be a competition to the hotel industry. Sometimes we as big hotel companies have a lot to learn from SMEs as well, it's always giving and taking, I don't see them as a competition I see them as a complementary industry. We could work together because you can't always have only five-star hotels you need to have three-star hotels, homestays, and boutique hotels because then we have a wide range of products to offer to people who visit Sri Lanka. So, they definitely aren't a threat.



Mr. Mahesh Fernando

General Manager – Hilton Colombo

So, what I see here is that maybe if you add ten SMEs together, they'll be equal in size to a large-sized hotel. If they really run it well, they would be competitive with anyone because they are targeting a niche market of maybe 10 or 15 guests. But when you multiply it by ten it is a hundred and fifty guests. Therefore, I would say indirectly they will be our competitors. But we look at it in a positive way because it improves the whole image of the country and I would say it is a snowball effect. If you look at Airbnb for example, they have developed homestay tourism in Sri Lanka. I think some of our guests

also prefer going to these places. We have our own advantages as established hotels with amenities that some customers like to experience.



Mr. Karim Schadlou

General Manager – Hilton Colombo Residences

Hilton is more like a full service, what you just mentioned is for more individuals who are looking for an experience on a homestay. But in our case, we're running a hotel with larger capacities, and as said it is a full service which is given our guests full facilities including recreational facilities, meeting facilities, and the whole experience.



How should government authorities support the industry to rebrand Sri Lanka?

Could you share some initiatives that you have initiated to help promote Sri Lanka during the crisis?

Mr. Krishantha Damumupola

General Manager – DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort

Sri Lanka was rebranded, as before we were known as Ceylon. The government could do a lot of things to market the destination. Unfortunately, I really don't think that there is a genuine effort given by the authorities, because we don't have a national policy to rebrand Sri Lanka. Every time a new government comes into office, they have a different agenda. So, the first thing that needs to be done is to come up with a national policy, so that whoever comes into power they will not deviate from that.

Mr. Krishantha Damumupola

General Manager – DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort

The first thing that we have done during the covid pandemic is, we opened a luxury hotel, I consider this as a huge step taken forward because no one would have dreamt of opening up a hotel during a pandemic which we have done. So, I mean you need initiatives of this capacity because everybody has a negative thinking process. I think you need to come out with a positive mind during these tough times.

Ms. Gitanjali Chakravarthy

General Manager – Hilton Yala Resort

First of all, we need to understand what we offer and everybody should work in one direction. Sometimes different government officials deviate, they don't have a common goal. First, having a common goal is what Sri Lanka needs. We really need to understand

who we are, what Sri Lanka is all about, and what we have to offer and then collectively work with the industry because the government alone cannot promote tourism in Sri Lanka, together with the private sector, they need to have a common goal and work towards that goal to promote tourism. Therefore, in my opinion, everybody has a responsibility not only the government but everybody in the corporate sector including all of us have the responsibility to promote this country because we have a lot to offer that other countries don't have.

Ms. Gitanjali Chakravarthy

General Manager – Hilton Yala Resort

During this crisis, I cannot recollect anything, because I'm now attached to a hotel that is still in the stage of pre-opening, in 2019 soon after the Easter Sunday bombing, I joined Hilton and since it is a pre-opening property, I had no opportunity, I didn't have any team members, the hotel wasn't ready for guests at that time, and I would say that I was not able to contribute actively towards the tourism industry. We can say that we have done our best to promote the property. Wherever I had worked I have made sure that we have 30% of repeat clients which indirectly tells you that we have in some way contributed towards the betterment of the industry, why people come back is that because they are happy and the reason why they are happy is that we have given what they expect. So, getting people to come back to Sri Lanka is also indirectly helping the tourism industry to do better.

Mr. Karim Schadlou

General Manager – Hilton Colombo Residences

When it comes to tourism, I think the government can do more to promote Sri Lanka as a destination. They need to do some drastic changes. That's my personal opinion.

Mr. Mahesh Fernando

General Manager – Hilton Colombo

It's a bit of a devastating effect on the industry, but indeed we all survived. Here we are talking with you (NSBM Undergrads) and now all of us are in a good state in terms of capital structure. Even during the pandemic, we looked after everyone we have never send anyone home and we're ready to bounce back. Tomorrow, if thousands of tourists walk into my hotel, I can handle it. We all have suffered, we all know it, but it's important to look after the people as well. We trained people during this pandemic, to serve our guests once the pandemic is over. And we never gave up. In my opinion, still being in the industry as a big shot after a devastating pandemic is indeed a help to the industry.

Mr. Mahesh Fernando

General Manager – Hilton Colombo

Everyone always says that the government is responsible for everything. But the government is us, the people, in my opinion. Therefore, it's better to get together and make the framework to make peace in the country, and the infrastructure. I believe overall government's job is to make sure that everything runs properly and that people are okay, people are happy, and that the rest is in our hands.

Are there any upcoming plans you're focusing on to promote Sri Lanka?



Mr. Krishantha Damunupola

General Manager – DoubleTree by Hilton
Weerawila Rajawarna Resort

Yes, we have a lot of plans, and with a new minister in office who has a clear vision for the future of Sri Lanka tourism. I sincerely hope that everyone will support him and his office to ensure that he would be able to take the country in a different/better direction.



How do you comment on the social media influence of Hilton here in Sri Lanka?

What are some strategies/approaches you have used to increase your brand awareness among generation Z?

Mr. Krishantha Damunupola

General Manager – DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort

Social media is very important even nowadays we heavily depend on social media to promote the hotel, and to create a positive impression. We take the advantage of social media, as we take all the feedback given to us on social media very seriously. Especially, as I said we have understood that social media can be very distractive and, as well can definitely lift you up. Since we know both sides of social media, I think I have a little bit of experience and expertise to handle that platform.

Mr. Krishantha Damunupola

General Manager – DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort

When you say “Hilton” everybody knows Hilton without any doubt, we are lucky that we have a brand that is known all over the world. But then when you have a brand that is been recognized by the world, the most important thing is to maintain that. I see it as the most difficult task. We have to check up on the expectations of our guests who are coming to our property. They definitely expect an international standard of services. It is a bit of a hard task to maintain the standard with the available resources in the country. As you know, most of the skilled workers are leaving our country because of the present situation. So even if we get trainees or talented people, we need to do a lot of training and to do a lot of work on them to bring them up to that particular standard, because we cannot compromise the standards that we have.

Ms. Gitanjali Chakravarthy

General Manager – Hilton Yala Resort

When it comes to social media, Hilton is very active it’s not one person who handles social media for us, even every manager or every senior member is empowered to share what we do within our company. So, obviously compared to most of the other hotel companies in Sri Lanka Hilton is extremely active and that brings in a lot of clients to keep returning to Hilton because whenever something new happens the industry immediately knows, and people get to know it immediately. Yes, social media has been really good for Hilton and we use it very actively.

Ms. Gitanjali Chakravarthy

General Manager – Hilton Yala Resort

Mainly most of the companies, including the company that I worked for before, I wouldn’t mention names because it’s not ethical, they may be using bloggers and social media influencers to increase brand awareness because people tend to believe what they say rather than what we say. No matter what I say about my product or my service, what somebody else who has really experienced it tells the world, people tend to believe. In truth, I would say social media has played a huge role in increasing brand awareness today.

Mr. Karim Schadlou

General Manager – Hilton Colombo Residences

Certainly, we’re a very strong brand, I mean Hilton has been here for almost 35 years in the country. Now we would basically interact with the youth, especially in Sri Lanka to promote hospitality not only for brand awareness but in general hospitality, which is to promote Sri Lanka as a destination. I’m a foreigner and I think that there are a lot of opportunities for Sri Lankan hospitality. So yes, there are a lot of initiatives, and training programs even in the three properties that we have right now. So, I see a very good trend in the growth of the industry.

Mr. Mahesh Fernando

General Manager – Hilton Colombo

When it comes to attracting the youth, our company has always thought about it. We changed our code of conduct, most importantly, you are free to carry a phone at work and answer the phone. Not only that, but we also changed things regarding the hairstyles, that our staff can have more personalized ways as long as it matches the working environment. If newly graduated students are coming to work with us you may ask the people who are with us whether they are happy or not.



In your POV, what are our most prominent selling points as a tourism destination?

Ms. Gitanjali Chakravarthy

General Manager – Hilton Yala Resort

Obviously, we're a very diverse country we have the beaches, the mountains, the ancient cities, the historical sites there's so much history in this country. I have heard from a friend of mine who is working in the Eastern part of the country that there are so many places that tourists haven't been to and that even Sri Lankan people haven't discovered. I'm ashamed to say that being a Sri Lankan I haven't traveled to all the places that somehow my foreign friends have traveled and they have shared information about those places. First, we have a lot to offer we need to identify what these places are, and only if we know the value of those then we are able to take them to the outside world. In fact, there's no country like Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, even we Sri Lankans haven't discovered the full potential of Sri Lanka as a tourist destination.



As an industry expert, what kind of compulsory skills and additional qualifications you're expecting from graduates of this field, and what is your advice for them?



Mr. Krishantha Damunupola

General Manager – DoubleTree by Hilton Weerawila Rajawarna Resort

One thing that I would like to say is that theoretical knowledge is good but as I said theory itself is not enough. You need to have experience in the industry because I have seen students who have done really well in their academic studies may not live up to the expectations when it comes to real life. It is good to have theoretical knowledge but then again you need to have practical knowledge as well. Certainly, it is the experience that you should be looking at, having the theory on top of the experience is going to make you very special. What you should keep in mind is that, in this industry, there's one thing that you cannot skip for certain, you may be having a degree but you should start from zero. It is important to gain experience from every level. When you become a general manager or any similar designation you need to know what is happening below you. Then only you would become a successful Manager.

Ms. Gitanjali Chakravarthy

General Manager – Hilton Yala Resort

They have to be professionally qualified obviously because that's the reason why I told you I went to the industry for three months and then wanted to go back to school and study professionally. Because it's very important to know everything about hospitality if you're going to be working in a hotel someday. While the professional qualifications are important what matters the most is the attitude. You need to put that pride attitude aside, and you need to be extremely passionate about the industry, if you want to be in the hotel industry you have to be a "people" person. Another important thing is to treat your co-workers well. Because what we forget sometimes is that the guest is important because

he pays our money but we don't realize that our team members are the people who look after our guests who bring that money into the organization. That's why I'm saying the team members are equally important.



Is there a job market for new graduates in the industry or will they have to seek opportunities abroad?

Mr. Mahesh Fernando

General Manager – Hilton Colombo

We all have to go abroad at one time because we need to go and see the world we need to go and earn some money. In my opinion, in our industry no one is jobless. Everyone wants a job. As long as you are willing to learn and you are willing to take a risk, to break some glasses and plates and learn, you have a good future in the industry.



Mr. Karim Schadlou

General Manager – Hilton Colombo Residences

Exposure is the key, I mean to go abroad there's absolutely nothing wrong even myself I wanted to go abroad, I wanted to see the world, I wanted to explore the different cultures and the mentalities and I recommend everybody to go abroad but you always have to come back home one day.



Interview by Arosha Peiris
Article by Arianna Hamy

DIFFERENT THEMES, ”” WONDERFUL STORIES ““

Could you give us a brief overview of Theme Resorts & Spa?

We call our group Theme Resorts & Spas because we have created our resorts with distinctive themes that relate to the culture of respective locations in Sri Lanka. Precisely segmented to the need of potential travelers' leisure and experience-based tourism. Our resorts are uniquely located in terrains of breathtaking vistas and exceptional beauty. We are currently comprising 11 hotels with 274 keys. Respectively our resorts are Maalu Maalu Resort & Spa – Passikudah, Aliya Resort & Spa – Sigiriya, Kithala Resort – Tissamaharama. Our boutiques are Mountbatten Bungalow – Kandy, Glendevon Bungalow – Nuwara Eliya, Parangi Weligama Bay and Tea Experience factory – Mandaramnuwara. Our campsites are Wild Glamping Knuckles and Wild Glamping Gal Oya. Our wellness properties are Ayurvie Sigiriya and Ayurvie Weligama. Our resorts segment into Round Tour Hotels, Beach Resorts, Ayurveda/Wellness properties, and Experience-based hotels. We provide exceptional services with a welcoming smile and Sri Lankan Hospitality from one generation to another.

What kind of a career have you witnessed up until this moment?

In my career, I've grown up with the Theme Resort & Spas, where I have gone through a lot of challenges that were enthusiastically handled. In operations particularly the last 3 years, at the beginning of my career, I've faced internal issues such as staff recruitment and retention, maintaining the high standards of the resort, and managing the available resources which were effectively handled with the guidance of the management. But the real challenges came after the 2019 Easter attack and which completely affected the entire industry. The same rescission continued with COVID-19 and the country's prevailing Economic Crisis. Though with the challenges we faced, we focused on COVID-19 quarantine centers for revenue generating and did promotions on attracting local tourists to keep the resort functioning. With today's competition, we have managed to keep the competitive edge throughout the years.

What have you identified as our selling points to the tourists?

As an accommodation provider, we constantly do our market research to identify the changing needs of travelers and booming countries to our resort/ Sri Lanka. What we have identified is not like the old days when travelers were more concerned about luxurious accommodation, and full board/ half board packages, nowadays travelers are more interested in collecting memories and having experiences. As a diverse destination, Sri Lanka has a lot to offer from Culture, Heritage, Nature, and Adventure activities.

With the help of these researches, we have designed the services such as exploring wildlife, trekking, cultural tours, variation of food & beverages, authentic cooking demonstrations, customer-friendly lodging facilities, and wellbeing services accordingly to keep the guest satisfied during their stay at the resort. Talking about our resort, location with ground facility and wide beach area, large swimming pools and two plunge pools, restaurants, night club, karaoke, recreation facilities, indoor gymnasium, play areas, and SPA gives the ultimate satisfaction and experience that a tourist needs.

Are we doing enough to market our attractions by providing proper infrastructure and other facilities to meet tourist expectations?

Well, I think the Government has to do more things here. Because the focused development of tourism began after the 2009 civil war. We have an unmatched geographical location as a whole, hundreds of natural tourist destinations with Flora and fauna you will not see in any other country, surrounded by blue sea, mountains, and jungles with various species. Changing climatic conditions within a short distance makes Sri Lanka a unique tourist destination.

But still, we have not identified the potential of the country as a tourism destination, and the awareness of the Sri Lankan tourism product in the global tourism industry is very much low. I think this may change with the commitment of the politicians and officials who are directly responsible for the tourism industry. Respectively doing primary and secondary research to identify the current situation of the industry and then making a business plan for the tourism industry as a whole. Also, they need to identify the infrastructure gaps and propose solutions. Most guests' primary intent in visiting Sri Lanka is to travel to their expected tourist destination without any hassles. Therefore, from the arrival to the departure providing smooth traveling and other infrastructure facilities is a must. And the mode of traveling and baggage transport facilities should be freely accessible with the provision of fuel, vehicles, and professional staff to assist. The lodging facilities needed for different tourist segments should be available and proper guidelines for the tourist should be provided by the government in order to run a smooth operation.



Theme Resorts & Spas

Mr. Wohara Dissanayake
Resort Manager Maalu Maalu

What kind of new initiatives can we adapt to market our destinations after almost 2 years of industry shutdown?

As you all know, post covid tourism changed the way for tourism. Now tourism has to deal with many challenges. Apart from man-made disasters now we have to deal with natural disasters, climate changes things like that. So, we have to look at new ways and means to deal with these challenges. Therefore, we have to focus more on online-based and digital marketing-based tourism.

Few initiatives we have taken are,

- Increases the awareness campaigns of our destinations through foreign and local travel agencies, foreign and local media and social media, brand.com, and related websites.
- Gathering more information on target tourists, demographic, psychological insights, and lifestyle characteristics to develop strategies to attract the tourists.
- The tailor-made market offers by traveling type – Discounted offers or bundle packages link with our own resorts and unique destinations.
- Increase the exposure of the Resort by influencers – Usually bloggers, Youtubers, Tik Tokers, and Instagram personalities who have highly engaged audiences. We could invite them for our resorts/ destinations to visit and make promotional videos through them in their media.
- Create Destination-focused Videos – Not limited to just our own resort, but make videos of the tourist destinations and promote them through social media.

How can the SME tourism sector incorporate Sustainability Development trends to acquire an upper hand in competing with industry giants?

In an actual scenario when talking about sustainable tourism development, SMEs have a bigger advantage. Because we're already implementing strategies and truth to be told we have less carbon footprint than industry giants. The thing is SMEs have not really focused and put more thought into sustainable development. Because the damage to the environment from SMEs is minimum, we also focus on local productions and maximize our limited resources. If we put more focus SMEs can capitalize within the sector and have the upper hand.

What kind of marketing strategies are implemented to reach and sustain your Ayurveda/wellness target market?

We have provided differentiated product offerings such as Ayurveda/ Wellness, SPA, and spiritual activities such as Yoga to attract a target segment of tourists and have established the proper surroundings suited to the customer's expectations. Also, in order to sustain our customers, we have introduced customized therapy sessions and diagnostics. Training our staff to provide the best service

they can and giving the best service possible is a key factor in our resorts. We focus on communicating the offers and advantages of wellness tourism to our target market. Finally, we have a highly professional staff who will look after the guests with their maximum effort during their stay.

Could you give us an idea behind the initiative of some of these CSR projects undertaken by Theme Resorts?

As a company, Theme Resorts & Spas is highly engaged in CSR activities. We believe CSR is part and partial of our business. And our belief is to build in and around our community. So, supporting the local community is a key factor that we are considering, where we have invested in many projects to support the community and enhance the quality of their lives. The "Plant A Coral" project was also initiated after the tsunami when our chairman Mr. Chandra Wickremasinghe realized it is time to take initiative to plant corals in the Passikudah region and we've been continuing it for a decade. Other CSR Activities we are conducting are; Running a school to teach English & computer studies, 65% above local purchase, and 55% of the region area staff.

In the next 5 years, what kind of market demand will be there for tourism and hospitality graduates? And what would be expected from them?

Certainly, there'll be a huge demand. Not only in Sri Lanka but internationally as well. So of course, they have to be in line with the challenges and the requirements of the current industry trends. And their knowledge should not be limited to the hotels/ tourism technical or operational sector, it has to be beyond that. Destination knowledge, IT, and Digital Marketing would be an added advantage when entering to the industry. Having knowledge of different cuisines, destinations and global trends will be expected from the graduates. Also, we expect fresh graduates to have knowledge of finance, and new marketing tactics as well.

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Article by: **Tharindi Weerasuriya**





**2019 WAS A ””
YEAR I CANNOT
FORGET IN MY
LIFE ““**

Ms. Manelki Emmanuel

ASSISTANCE BUSINESS MANAGER SOFTLOGIC HOLDINGS PLC

INTERVIEW BY: NESANDI GUNAWARDENA
ARTICLE BY: NESANDI GUNAWARDENA

Could you please give a brief introduction about yourself?

I'm Manelki Emmanuel, currently involved in my full-time job as the assistant business manager for Softlogic and the business manager for ODEL e-commerce division. I graduated from NSBM in December 2019 with a bachelor's in International Marketing, then I completed CIM and graduated this

How was your time at NSBM? And what was your favorite memory at NSBM?

NSBM is a place that created so many memories in my life in terms of achievements, friends, events, and all of that. My best memory at NSBM was taking part in the We Got Talent in 2015 at Nelum Pokuna. I was then doing my foundation. I met many new faces and first took myself out of my comfort zone to really do something I like. I just loved every bit from the practices till the last event. So many memories I was able to create.

What was the biggest change you faced when you first started university? And how did you overcome it?

The biggest challenge I faced would be adapting to a big group of classmates during my first year. I was the youngest in a batch of around 600 as I remember. Sometimes I was too shy and I am a more introverted person. But there are many projects which we had to complete together during our modules, and many events which require us to work as a team, it was those experiences that made a change in me where I became a good teammate and learned how to deal with certain situations to succeed.

How did the university provide you with the foundation that was needed to successfully enter the workforce and the real world?

I would say NSBM provided me with the foundation even before I joined. One day after school, I, wearing my school uniform, and my parents visited a few potential institutes. Finally, we went to NSBM in Nugegoda. Then we were introduced to one of the lecturers at NSBM and she explained marketing in a way that made me decide to pursue my future career in branding and marketing with just a simple example of Coca-Cola. I never expect that this visit would be the start of my passion for marketing, and it is this start that encouraged me to dig deeper into my interests in marketing at NSBM.

What would you say to aspire young females who want to follow in your footsteps?

Marketing is all about the enthusiasm and curiosity to understand a customer and deliver what they need through products or services. Wherever you go, every single product involves marketing. There isn't a way something can be promoted without marketing or related skills. In my case, the world-renowned brands I deal with at my current job involve a lot of creativity and trends, and learning and working on new ideas really excites me.

What motivated you to join the career path that you are currently pursuing?

I would say internships in different areas such as human resources, marketing and sales, accounting, and extra. I had experience in human resources as well as marketing and sales departments. Unilever and MAS internships are very suitable for those who want to learn new things or are unsure of their career in the future. In those internships, you get to work with different teams where you could see how things are done in different departments, and eventually, you know what you want to do.

What achievements are you most proud of?

2019 was a year I cannot forget in my life. NSBM offered me the best time of my life through an AIESEC project in Italy. I was fortunate enough to work with robots and put myself out to do my two favorite things traveling and teaching. Getting selected for that was my biggest achievement.

What are your aspirations for the future?

I aspire to be an individual who doesn't postpone happiness. My passion is traveling around the world, and it is also the motivation for me to work harder to live for what I love.

Lastly, what advice would you give to undergraduates who will be stepping into the corporate world soon?

Never live to work but work to live. Be responsible for your work and always work hard to be a successful person but do not forget to enjoy your journey along the way you grow.



ALWAYS BE THE BEST VERSION OF YOURSELF



Ms. Radinka Guruge

GUEST RELATIONS MANAGER –
SHANGRI-LA COLOMBO

Could you please give a brief introduction about yourself?

As you already know, I have been a student at the National School of Business Management. I have studied and followed the stream of Events, Tourism, and Hospitality Management B.Sc. offered by Plymouth University. Currently, I work as the guest relations manager for Shangri-La Colombo, it is an international hotel chain. I am very passionate about tourism and hospitality and working towards its betterment.

How was your time at NSBM? And what was your favorite memory at NSBM?

It was the opportunity to meet students and connect from all parts of Sri Lanka. The opportunity is that we got to experience a real-life working environment and the time that we spent together creating and visualizing our projects to study for our exams. The sense of belonging was restored in us.

What was the biggest change you faced when you first started university? And how did you overcome it?

I would not say that there was a change as such because from school I straight-ahead started with my studies at NSBM. So moreover, it was the opportunity to learn from each other, grow together, understand people's strengths and weaknesses, and help each other go through university life. Focus, give your best when you are at the university, and understand that time you spent and the things you learn are important for your future.

How did the university provide you with the foundation that was needed to successfully enter the workforce and the real world?

Plymouth University did offer me an understanding of the working environment as we had a 3-month summer break and other opportunities where we were able to work and study in the real environment which made me understand the industry and make me understand where I should go once I complete my studies.

What would you say to young females who want to follow in your footsteps?

I would say “always strive to be the best version of yourself” and “never settle for less.” Always aspire to be the best in whichever field you are in and commit yourself and do the best you can even in the smallest task you complete on a day-to-day basis.

What motivated you to join the career path that you are currently pursuing?

Like I said, I understood that this industry would cater to my strengths thus I sort my studies in the same industry which now I am a part of and working for an international hotel brand where I get to meet people from different nationalities on a day-to-day basis and help to create moments of joy.

What achievements are you most proud of?

There are many. I am just 28 years old, and I am leading Sri Lanka’s number one hotel brand Shangri-La’s guest relations team. I am very proud that at this young age to be able to achieve something like that and I mean it is not an easy job. It requires a lot of standards, perseverance, and focus which I have been able to do. I have had many achievements in this organization for the past one and half years. I was recently sent abroad to train teams, I was recognized as one of the best individuals who has delighted guests over a period, and I will continue to move forward to achieve more things.

What are your aspirations for the future?

To be one of the best hospitality professionals in the country and to be able to make Sri Lanka a place open for tourism and make people aware of what a beautiful country we have and all that we could offer.

Lastly, what advice would you give to undergraduates who will be stepping into the corporate world soon?



**INTERVIEW BY: NESANDI GUNAWARDENA
ARTICLE BY: NESANDI GUNAWARDENA**



Sachin Weerasooriya

BSC (HONS) MARKETING MANAGEMENT – CLASS OF 2016
MANAGER, MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS – LOLC HOLDINGS PLC

**DO IT WITH
PASSION OR
NOT AT ALL**

Could you give a brief introduction of yourself?

My name is Sachin Weerasooriya, I consider myself a friendly, vibrant and a creative person.

I was born and raised in a paradise beach town Negombo. Ave Maria Convent as well as St. Bridget's Convent, Colombo 07 had sheltered my preliminary education and talents.

I am currently employed as the Manger, Group Marketing Communications for LOLC Holdings PLC, the most diversified multinational conglomerate in Sri Lanka. In a brief outline, I am a content writer, value creator for brands, marketing communications & digital proficient.

How was your time at NSBM? and what was your favorite memory?

I would say 'those were the best days of my life'. NSBM was once home, it retains the most wonderful memories and the most amazing things that ever happened in my life. It was a roller-costar full of exposure and experiences that will last a lifetime.

I was always an in-class performer with grades as well as an active key member in plentiful of projects. During my time, I was a Plymouth Batch Representative for NSBM in 2013/14, the Secretary of the Film Production and Multimedia Club, a member of the chartered choir of NSBM and I was also a founding committee member of the Students Activities Club, where we initiated the first ever sports fiesta in the history of NSBM. There was a new hope and a new experience every single day. Most of us were never home, given a weekend or holiday we were there at university, precisely at the cafeterias or the study-areas.

I honestly cannot handpick a single memory to be my favorite, because the thought of university days itself is wholesome and much loved. Amongst the all-best things that NSBM had to offer, the most exceptional was the bond of friendship. Every reminiscence that involves my circle of friends is always nostalgic, favorite and very dear to me.

How did the university provide you a foundation that was needed to successfully enter the work force and real world?

NSBM was much more than a just a university or a degree awarding institution. NSBM is honestly a knowledge hub and a learning paradise. So much to learn, so much of exposure, so many experiences to gather, only if you do it the right way. It is not only a place where you would gather only book knowledge, but also a place where you will understand and learn life. A place you will retain an abundance of key learnings for a lifetime. University was the place where I analyzed and fixed my real life SWOTs to adopt myself to the outer world challenges. The university facilitated a fair play field for us to refine our strengths and to understand our weaknesses. I was given the opportunity and freedom to test the depth of my capabilities as well as flaws. At the university, I mastered the art of playing my strengths for the greatest opportunities at grab. I learnt from my mistakes without having to face real-life consequences. I was also taught to be smart about the threats I had to face in life. In my journey at NSBM, every episode taught me a new lesson, molding and motivating my younger self to face the real world with confidence.

What motivated you to join the career path that you are currently perusing?

I believe that my parents were my greatest drive to choose my current path. Ever since I could recall, I remember being exposed to dialogues, books and discussions on marketing concepts, strategies, branding and value creation, which developed my intense eager towards Marketing. My Mom herself as an academic laid the right foundation for me at an earlier stage itself to peruse my studies in the field of Marketing. While, my Dad being a great marketing professional himself was my all-time true career inspiration, where I chose to recreate my career path in the same industry as him. When I completed the first year at the university I understood that I had an intense passion towards Marketing burning within the roots of my blood, I exactly knew that Marketing

What is your greatest career strength?

I would divide my strength into two. Number one is my personality and my authenticity. The way I believe in myself and the way carry myself, I do it with confidence. I always stay authentic to myself. Number two is my comprehend knowledge in my arena. I have completed all my studies within the field of Marketing and i have specialized my experience in Marketing Communications, specifically within the service industry, exposed to all capital markets, banking and non-banking financial sectors in both the Government and Private sector organizations. I play my strengths as it demands and mostly I work on my instincts. I believe that my greatest career strengths is the perfect balance between both number one & two.

What advice would you give to young women entering into this profession (Marketing)?

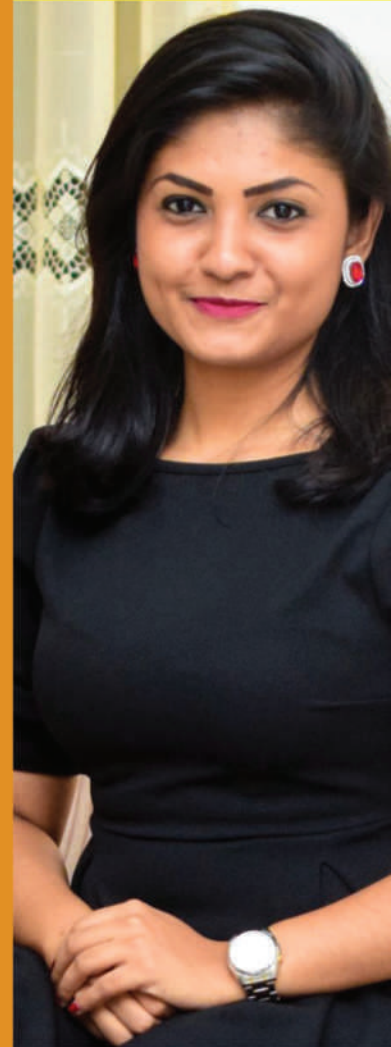
If you are entering the profession of Marketing, my advice is very simple "do it with passion or not at all". I firmly believe that Marketing is not everyone's cup of tea, you will be successful only if you do it with passion. Also if you are a young women entering the industry, 'believe in yourself, believe in what you do, and standup for yourself, Always!'

What achievements are you most proud of?

I am proud of my entire journey so far. When I was hitting the quarter century in life, I had completed all my qualifications including my degree, CIM full qualification, MBA and I was also able to position myself in a managerial role with my previous employer (Securities and Exchange Commission of Sri Lanka). It was not at all an easy mission. I took up many challenges on a tough journey. But, I would proudly consider myself a winner.

What are your aspirations for the future?

I aspire to be ME, to be better than I was yesterday. I would want to push myself and to keep challenging myself every single day until I become the best version of myself.





What was your motivation to get into the position you are currently in?

The biggest motivation for me was the job-role and the company. At LOLC Holdings, I am not working for just for one company or a country, but for a wide spectrum of different entities operating both local and international. We have a centralized Marketing Communications Division, where we cater to the entire group simultaneously. LOLC is currently operating in 21 countries in the Asian and African continents, diversified in to different sectors such as financial services, leisure, plantations, construction and real estate, manufacturing and trading, digital and technology, mining, strategic investments and advanced technologies.

In my present role, I am handling above-the-line campaigns (TV, Press, and Radio), corporate communications and PR for the group. I am currently gaining a wide range of exposure in different industries and localities, and I love it. I suppose my position satisfies both my vision and my passion. If you love what you are doing, you will always stay motivated.

When I got into this field, I started my career from scratch as an intern and then an executive, assistant manager, to this. It was not a quick jump from anywhere. It was a whole process and a ride that brought me a long way. I believe my entire career journey, every step of the way also motivated me to become who I am today.

As a young female what are some challenges you faced while working in the industry and how did you overcome it?

In my industry, things are more ad-hoc than anticipated, thus, work life balance becomes extremely tough at times. In my case, I always analyze the level of importance of the task before accommodating it. I make a priority list and tick-off the jobs as it completes. Most of the time I will go an extra mile to reach the completion, on the other hand, it is also important to learn to say 'no' to certain things that are conflicting. Similarly, delegation and teamwork will save you in the long-run. Going up in the ladder, another general challenge we all face in Sri Lanka is gender equality but I feel that our generation is beating up that challenge quiet well to a greater extent. Persistently, I think that believing in yourself and being passionate of what you do is the key to beat anything and everything.

What advice would you give an underregulate who would be stepping into the cooperate world soon?

When you are choosing your career, always remember that you work to live, and it is not the other way round, therefore, always choose something that you are passionate about, something you love, and something you don't mind doing every day, for a lifetime. Always choose happiness over anything else. At any point, if you feel it is not right for you, you should leave it and put yourself in something you love. Switching or quitting is nothing to be afraid of as long as you are following your passion.

As I said earlier as well, "Believe in yourself, stay authentic to yourself, and just do what you love" that alone will take you to greater heights in life.

THE LITTLE SEOUL AT THE HEART OF COLOMBO



MEET

MR. DANIEL KANG

CO-OWNER AND CO-FOUNDER OF KANG'S KITCHEN

Shall we start with a little brief on yourself

My name is Daniel Kang and I'm a South Korean who was born and raised in Sri Lanka and completed my higher studies and graduated in South Korea. And I'm the co-owner of Kang's Kitchen and I manage all the operations, marketing, recruitments and basically all functions of the restaurant.

Can you tell us a little about Kang's Kitchen?

Kang's Kitchen is a family owned Korean Restaurant, and we focus on serving authentic Korean food. My parents started the business for their love of cooking, and they actually maintain and handle the recipes and the kitchen while I handle the operations and customer's. Our best selling dishes are Kangpunji, and dumplings. The kangpunji is our version of fried chicken and is our signature dish and has our brand name "Kang" incorporated to it. And It's been about 4 and half years since we started, and we are also looking for expansions into other avenues such as snacks and experience.

**I STARTED
CONCENTRATING MORE
ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

**WE FOCUS ON
SERVING AUTHENTIC
KOREAN FOODS**

How do you maintain customer relationships with Chaiwala Colombo?

One of the milestones would be, having 80% local customers and 20% foreigners coming in to dine because, initially when we started, we only had Koreans and Chinese coming in and very few locals, even though our target market were locals. That was actually a difficult period for us because there are not many Chinese and Koreans in Sri Lanka. So to overcome this issue, I started concentrating more on social media, mainly Instagram, for marketing because a lot of Sri Lankans are on Instagram so that helped really well in attracting a lot of Sri Lankans to Kang's, that is the biggest milestone so far. Also, we have got a 4.7 rating on UberEats right now but sometime back we had 4.9 and was the highest rated restaurant at that time. The 4.7 now is not bad but I take the highest rating as a milestone we achieved as a business because it helped our business's reputation.

What are some of the current issues that you face as a small business?

I believe that for most of the people in Sri Lanka, Korean food is still new. It's not as famous as Japanese, Chinese and Thai so that's one area we are trying to build up. And the other issue would be the dollar depreciation and import crisis because all our Korean sauces are imported from Korea and with the crisis the costs of these sauces are increasing.

How did the pandemic affect Kang's Kitchen?

We had zero dine-in customers during the pandemic so our sales dropped, and UberEats was the only way we ensured some sales were happening. It was difficult for us just like for any other restaurant but we mainly survived due to UberEats, Kang home delivery service and Instagram Marketing.

How are Kang's Kitchen's sales after the pandemic?

Obviously, the pandemic is still hitting us hard, but unlike the lockdowns and initial periods of the pandemic, we are having dine-in customers now, and our sales are even better than before the pandemic. So, I'm currently very satisfied with our sales.

As you mentioned earlier, you are someone who has studied in Sri Lanka even though you are Korean, so how has the understanding about both these cultures helped you in establishing a Korean restaurant in Sri Lanka? And most importantly building customer relationships.

Yes, me knowing about both the cultures definitely helps a lot in building customer relationships. Growing up here in Sri Lanka enables me to understand the Sri Lankans' thinking patterns, likes and dislikes, cultural background and everything, since I was obviously exposed to all that So, I have started thinking like a Sri Lankan actually. And because of that actually, whenever I try to post on Instagram and create content, I always consider what Sri Lankans might like. And I believe that's the reason our Instagram page also grew quickly. And obviously since I was in Korea for a long time, I understand how to present Korean foods to Sri Lankans in a Sri Lankan way, as a Korean restaurant, so that it's easy for customers to understand. So yes, me knowing about both the cultures definitely helps a lot in building customer relationships.

**I HAVE STARTED THINKING LIKE
A SRI LANKAN**

Kang's Kitchen is very Instagram famous, so why is it that you utilize digital marketing media and not traditional marketing channels? And how has digital marketing benefitted Kang's Kitchen?

Social media marketing gets us to our customers. For example, if there is a new dish and people don't know about it, social media benefits us, because the engagement is very high with the customers and we can communicate really well with our customers rather than traditionally calling and talking to them directly. And it helps us in terms of making sales and getting feedback especially when customers are angry at us, we get to communicate with them in two-ways. And also, social media enables us in building customer loyalty.

What is Kang's Kitchen doing to build customer's trust?

One thing is that I'm always at the restaurant to handle everything and ensure that nothing goes wrong, and if something goes wrong it's just the matter of how you handle it and apologize for it, and I do it myself because it's obviously better for the restaurant. Even customers like it when a Korean guy comes and accepts and corrects a mistake. And that's one reason why we don't have a manager here because I try to manage everything myself. And I also have close friends who were previously my customers, that help me out in different ways to improve as well, so I manage the tasks as much as possible to build customers' trust.

Do you take customer complaints, Google and Facebook reviews seriously into account?

Yes, I do. I make sure to reply to each and every review personally. If there are any bad or negative reviews, I inform my staff to take corrective measures.

And I personally take Google reviews seriously, because that's what's visible to everyone searching restaurants through Google. And also when talking about Facebook reviews, I don't think Facebook reviews are considered by people, even I don't dine out based on Facebook reviews. So it's not necessarily important to me.

I MANAGE THE TASKS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE TO BUILD CUSTOMERS' TRUST

The world is becoming environment conscious now, do you have sustainability programs?

Well, Kang's Kitchen is 70% plastic-free. And we still have earth lovers telling us that we use a lot of plastic. But frankly about 70% of our containers and most of the utensils in the Kitchen and dining area are paper boxes, and glass. The rest of the 30% is still plastic because they are irreplaceable and we have no other choices in Sri Lanka So, in terms of sustainability, I won't say that we are the most sustainable business, but we are to some extent and we will be 100% sustainable if companies introduce new environmentally friendly products for restaurants.

KANG'S KITCHEN IS 70% PLASTIC-FREE

What are your latest and future business initiatives?

So, we recently partnered with Daraz to deliver our dry food packets island wide. I also took the initiative to set up a Korean themed wall at the restaurant, to give the restaurant a more Korean ambience.

And other than that, I want to introduce new avenues in future like the snack and dry food market, along with more of the Korean culture into Sri Lanka in different ways as mentioned earlier. And I also want to tap into the Korean BBQ market, that's actually something I want to do in future. Stepping in to experience driven initiative is one of the most important ideas we have and waiting for give life to it!



AN ARTICLE AND INTERVIEW BY:
 SHAJANI PERERA
 ANJALIE PIERIS
 VIDUSHA FERNANDO
 AKITHMI VIDVANTH

Could you give us an introduction to the company and like what's the inspiration behind starting BUOST ASIA?

There was no clear motive, I went to Ananda College. Out of many things, I could say, we are good at event organizing. We grew up being part of events and wanting to do events.

What happens in event industry is that, you pick few artists, create a band with a proper theme and within few months of marketing, you start to make conversions. Technically after few months of branding and marketing, you want to get 3000 - 4000 people on board.

From the beginning of time we saw how we market an event and made great conversions. We were great at getting people on board. So I was thinking why not implement the same set of services to the corporate audience. That was the whole motive behind BUOST.

Inspiration would be us wanting to do something. When we are 19 and 20 years old, we have so much of energy with us, so there should be a way to channel it out. And this was my way.

A peek into the **AGENCY LIFE.**

Mr. Thisara Jayasinghe
CEO & Founder
BUOST ASIA Pvt. Ltd.

“

Any agency should be able to adapt to any crisis and maintain the same energy they had with their very first client.

”



We didn't know where we were heading, yet I could say we came out as a different entity. At times we were a content marketing firm, a digital warehouse. When compared to the companies in the space coming out we were nothing different. We wanted to do everything. But we were truly good at making audiences and converting them.

Today, we are calling ourselves a performance marketing agency, We are an agency that help people grow and reach their true potential with creatives and data.

As a start-up, what were the key strategies you used, and the milestones BUOST ASIA have achieved throughout its journey?

In 2018 (After 8 months of starting), we were working with an apparel giant in Sri Lanka. And the client became Sri Lanka's most engaging Social Media Platform. Took us some time to realize how big this is. Agencies are about how you help your clients grow. When your client is growing, its true that the client takes you to places. People will recognize you for that client. We actually piggybacked that client, to get more businesses. With us even not approaching we were recruited by many. From Kelly Felder to Aqua Fresh to Vision Care to Konica Minolta. We made sure we justified the people we work with and they took us to places.

Next milestone was us moving into the Australian Market, there after it was "crazy". Ever since we have been working with them we have brought dollars to the country as well which is a justification to the SL economy. Apart from that we figured out our right market.

What is the main target market of the company? And what are your basic operations at BUOST ASIA?

The target market as a B2B business are reliable brands, mostly in the printing industry, mattress industry in SL, UK and Australia. In Australia our target is not to work with bigger corporations, mostly we are looking at SME's in Australia.

Mostly we are given the chance to work on brand revamping in the Australian market. In the last 3 months, 5 branding projects were completed just for Australia and 1 for USA. We rewrite their brand story, and give them a whole new look and feel and take over their marketing aspect – consisting of the monthly retainer and incentive basis (Digital - paid).

In terms of branding, we evaluate their brand, what they have been doing, what type of sale they were making and there itself we analyze what type of market they tap from clients POV and what can be tapped onto. When working on their marketing aspect its like working on their traction and making sales.

What are the main operations strategy you use at BUOST ASIA ?

BUOST is given to handle brand's digital aspect mostly, and sometimes ATL promotions. We have project managers, designers, copy writers and paid media strategists whom would work on the following. In order to maintain a good efficiency level, from project manager creating the budget and setting the digital strategies to achieve the KPI's to designer and copy writer creating the plan with non-paid and paid content with a 5 day buffer for feedback before execution, for the client, we create an atmosphere of smooth work flow.

What are the clients BUOST have worked with on large scale projects and challenges BUOST had to face when initiating ?

Out of clients like Kelly Felder, Konica Minolta and Vision Care, recently we were working with Frank & Arlo. It was a rebranding project. The client did not like the idea of a complete rebrand. As it was hard to use the same elements and give a new look and feel, with our research a complete rebranding was necessary. The challenge here was client and us, not being on the same page. This was resolved with our client success manager and led to a great result for the brand at the end.

Out of the strategies you have mentioned earlier in functioning, any challenges you have faced and how you overcame?

Adapting to new technology (ASANA) is hard and the challenge we faced was employees adapting and coming on board with it. So we had to do some tactics to overcome them. We made sure it was important that all had to allocate a task to another, hence most had to come onboard. Now the whole company is very much dependent on it, from meeting minutes to each task allocation every thing is transparent. We also created a document and training session on using the application to give the basic understanding on ASANA.

With the pandemic, economic crises what are the main challenges BUOST has faced up to now and what are the strategies used to overcome them?

Within the pandemic, getting new clients was not hard for any marketing agency. Because most individuals came up with business ideas, so they won't struggle financially. With companies, digital was at its peak. So during the pandemic getting new clients was not hard, but retaining the existing was the challenge.

There were clients who were with us for maximum 3 to 4 months, they were not sure whether its right to spend on marketing during this pandemic and whether it was worth it. So to overcome giving them a service which more than what they expected was required.

Finally what strategies do you recommend for BUOST for it's future?

We don't know how future treats us. Right now we are going for an acquisition thinking that it will be the easiest to move past the future challenges for BUOST. But what if we face challenges that has nothing to do with this acquisition. So I would say, any organization should be able to adapt and maintain the startup mindset energy along with corporate ethics. As an entrepreneur, its not just the people I work with I take care with BUOST, but also their families. So whatever it is we move forward.

Article and Interview by:
Janith Wickramasooriya
Gihini Hirimburegama
Nikita Dias



CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN ASME AND *Strategies* TO OVERCOME THEM

Can we get to know the personals behind the success of 'Molly Boulevard (Pvt) Ltd.'?

The main reason for our success is the essence and the chemistry we have as a family. Myself, Hemanjalee Wimalaratne, started my career in Banking industry and fully moved to managing the business in 2010 to uphold my passion in fashion. My husband, Mr. Disney Fernando who is an entrepreneur from the inception, jointly worked with me till date and has committed and given his experience for the success of 'Molly Boulevard'.

HEMANJALEE WIMALARATNE
CO-OWNER, MOLLY BOULEVARD (PVT) LTD.

Can you explain us about the brand name 'Molly Boulevard'? How did you get the idea for the business?

'Molly Boulevard' is a boutique clothing store mainly focusing on lady's wear. Our main target market since the origin was Urban women seeking to be unique and aspire their own goals in life and in fashion. Molly clothing wear is the portrayal of the passion I had for some time in fashion, to design and to develop garments with quality and uniqueness.

When did you start the store 'Molly'? A little bit about the history of the company.

We commenced our operation in 2009 with a small outlet in Negombo with a dream of seeing my passion been worn by courageous women around Negombo. Then I wanted it to expand locally and globally. We moved into the main street of Negombo in 2015 while launching our website www.molly.lk. I would say this was the start of Molly's journey as famous clothing wear brand in Sri Lanka. Right now, we have expanded our business to Colombo as well.

What are the basic operations carried out in 'Molly'?

At Molly we design our clothing line up adhering quality and timely fashion sense. We develop our own clothing line, which is enjoyed by many young women around Sri Lanka. We also engage in trading at Molly through accessories and shoes.

“Loyalty brings rewards to our consumers; rewards ensure consumer retention to the business.”

Can you explain us about the growth of 'Molly' since the day you started operation to now?

The expansion of the business occurred physically and in digital medium. We are very proud of our loyal customer base. Most of our sales revenue is generated through our main two physical stores in Negombo and Colombo and through online sales. Our website has expanded globally and customers from commercial countries like USA, United Kingdom, UAE, Canada enjoy our clothing line up.

From the start of the business to now, who were customers targeted by Molly? Did the target market change with the expansion of the business?

At the origin of the business, we focused mainly into Lady's garments due to high demand that existed at the time in the market. With the expansion of our stores, we decided to include kids wear and gents wear to the line-up because of the potential we had as a brand.

What issues do you face in communicating 'Molly' to the customers?

As a start-up back in 2009, the main issue we had was how to communicate our brand to the consumers. We built our social media and website as a result of that. We improved our social media presence through paid promotions. Through card promotions we improved our website sales and direct sales. Customer reviews are very important factor too. We have spent a lot of time in responding to customer queries with a dedicated team to improve this.

How do you manage to keep a closer relationship with your customers?

We introduced a loyalty programme to our customers. Customers can enjoy special discounts with reward points. This helps us to maintain a closer relationship with customers and to improve sales. Reward points can be used to identify improvement regarding our customer relationship. Loyalty brings rewards to our consumers; rewards ensure consumer retention to the business. We also analyse the reviews from Facebook and google to improve customer relationship.



How can you describe the customer buying behaviour? What issues and challenges do you face regarding this area?

Negombo is a cultural city, so is Sri Lanka as a country. Customer behaviour changes festive wise. Religious festivals such as Christmas, Sinhala, and Tamil New Year, Ramazan, etc. motivates our consumers to purchase new clothes. We introduce special festival-based clothing and accessories and sales promotions during these periods. Events in the region gives considerable impact on our sales too.

What sources are you using in your market research to understand what your target customers want? Do you face any challenges in this area?

Social media, local fashion magazines, fashion shows and other fashion materials are main sources we use to understand the latest trends. We consult with different fashion designers as our market research base to understand timely trends. New trends may not fit to our region and there are chances to fail. Therefore, we always try to keep our trademark clothing line up as a constant line up, so our customers have different choices.

Tell us a little bit about your manufacturing process and challenges your face to maintain costs?

Most of our products are designed in house. We outsource pattern/sample development and production for our brand to maintain our quality standards at 'Molly'. Also, we visit our overseas suppliers frequently before any purchases. Main challenge we face is our importation process. It is costly as our quantity is limited. But it is a cost we are willing to take to maintain our quality.



How often do you come up with a new collection? Also how do you handle this situation as an owner of a shop as the priorities of the people have changed due to the current situation in Sri Lanka?

Our collection is updated every week and we showcase our new products in our social media and website. We are currently recovering as a country after facing a horrific pandemic and the ongoing economic crisis is not helping as well. We are planning to focus more on essential items in our clothing line up while trying to release new trends. Even though the costs are increasing, we are trying to maintain our quality and pricing strategy for the future. For that our strong supplier relationship has helped to strike positive deals and to carry out our daily activities with a great understanding.



Explain how much your business is and has adapted with the current technology?

We use latest technology for our e-commerce platforms (mooly.lk). We have outsourced our web development and they support us 24/7 to carry out online based business activities smoothly. We ensure latest environmentally friendly ways are used to develop our product line up. We release new products weekly, and we ensure weekly promotions are carried out in our social media and website. It is always challenging to handle when there is a troubleshoot. But our web development team constantly are updating our websites with latest technology available in the market. We adapt to the latest trends, technologically and environmentally as a sustainable clothing company.

What steps have u followed to overcome some of the major issues faced during the business activities at 'Molly'?

Our company structure is a limited one. Me (Hemanjalee Wimalaratne) and my partner, Mr. Disney Fernando always makes sure to interfere any consumer related issues that come up in the business. Marketing activities are being evaluated in a daily basis and our marketing team comes with different card based and online based promotions to keep the engagement strong. Operations activities are headed by me (Hemanjalee Wimalaratne) and Mr. Disney Fernando, to make sure we meet the productivity standards. All in all, our personal commitments as a family to our brand 'Molly' has helped us to achieve these heights in a very competitive clothing market in Sri Lanka.

YOU SAY CHAI, WE SAY HI!



ਪ੍ਰਠਮ ਡਾਢਾ ਟੈਕਾ, ਵਾਣ ਡਾਢਾ ਹੀ :))



HAIWALA COLOMBO FIRST OPENED ITS DOORS ON MARINE DRIVE IN COLOMBO IN MARCH 2021, AND HAS SINCE RISEN IN POPULARITY AND BECOME A PART OF EVERY SQUAD'S END-OF-NIGHT PLANS BY OFFERING AROMATIC BLENDS OF CLASSIC CHAI TEA AS WELL AS A UNIQUE STREET FOOD EXPERIENCE.

NOW RUNNING OPERATIONS IN 5 LOCATIONS, IN HAVELOCK, MARINE DRIVE, ONE GALLE FACE MALL, INDEPENDENCE SQUARE, AND IN DEHIWALA, WE SPOKE WITH MR ROSHAN ILYAS, ONE OF CHAIWALA COLOMBO'S SIX FOUNDERS, TO LEARN THE STORY OF HOW THIS POPULAR STREET FOOD DRINK CAME TO BE, WHICH YOU WOULD HAVE SEEN A POST OR TWO ON SOCIAL MEDIA, WITH "CHAIWALA COLOMBO" PAINTED ACROSS THE CUP PICTURED IN FRONT OF A SMALL FOOD TRUCK DECORATED BY TWINKLING LIGHTS WITH A BARISTA DRESSED IN BRIGHT YELLOW SHIRTS

Whois chaiwala colombo?

We are a group of 6 friends, Shehan, Imran, Rishard, Omer, Shameen, and Roshan, who have shared many memories together for years. We are all scattered across the world because of our different professions. One of us is an airplane pilot, another is a top manager from a major telecommunications firm, and the rest of us are entrepreneurs.

How did Chaiwala Colombo start?

Since we were so far apart and didn't get to spend time together with our busy lives and separate careers, we wanted to create and build something we could work on together and share our knowledge gathered from the countries we live in and give back to Sri Lanka, where it all began. Shameen (the pilot) was the one who initiated this passion project. He'd lost his job for the time being due to the pandemic. So, in order to help him and work on our passion project, we began brainstorming in late 2022. After a few unsuccessful business ideas, the idea of turning Chai into a business came about by accident. We noticed we were sipping Chai a lot throughout our discussions. We then thought to ourselves, "Why don't we work on our concept with an affordable product like chai that can help Sri Lankans relax and bring out their "Machan moments" like it did for us." Chai was embedded into our lifestyles. We were served chai tea wherever we went, whether at a relative's house or when we were out together. With our experience, we knew we didn't want to create a product and then promote it; instead, we wanted to work on a concept that would be embraced by everyone at all levels, as well as a compelling story. We wanted to prioritize the concept first, then the story, and finally the product.

How do you maintain customer relationships with Chaiwala Colombo?

Chaiwala Colombo first introduced four drinks to satisfy customers with different needs and the bestselling of them are Tandoori and Cardamom Chai. Other options include sukku coffee, and ginger plain tea, which is being experimented with to enhance the flavor. Modern technology makes this management easier. When business was uproaring, a barcode system was implemented to keep up with the high demand and to satisfy the customer with superior service without delay and to obtain existing customer information and provide them with better service facilities. And also, introducing a user-friendly hotline number system to relevant outlets - 07-Chaiwala (0724249252)

What barriers have you faced so far?

Not to forget, the Covid-19 pandemic struck us big time. During the boom of our business, when we were selling about 1500 cups per day, the country went into lockdown and faced many challenges. We were forced to put a hold on all operations which caused low cash flows. There are other challenges we face daily which we don't consider as big challenges and we understand we need to overcome like customer waiting time, delivery issues caused by traffic, and high costs of raw materials.

How do you maintain the standard and quality in all of your outlets?

In all honesty, maintaining the operations is hectic. With the support of our labor force and the choice to use only premium product spices like brown sugar and the use of mineral water, we are able brew fresh matches everyday in a centralized kitchen with high tech equipment and with all of this we were able to create standard operational processes.

What are the steps taken to obtain a superior competitive position in the market?

Mainly by connecting and engaging with many celebrities who enjoy our tea. They often share their experiences and reviews on social media, not because we asked them or sponsored them, but because they enjoy our tea. We always engage in customer perspective, receiving feedback from customers for better service. We also partner up with organizations for events of all scales to spread awareness of our presence. Chaiwala also has a strong social media presence on Instagram and Facebook, which we use to promote our products, brand ourselves, and communicate with customers.

What has been the progress since the launch?

With the introduction of different types of liquids, the signature tandoori chai tea was originally served in a clay pot. But then later plastic cups and paper cups were introduced because some customers did not return the clay pot. Following customer feedback in terms of packaging, we introduced a first of its kind, portable material made of aluminum foil to make it easier for the consumer to handle the teacups while protecting them from heat resistance.

CHAIWALA COLOMBO?

Our objective is to establish a significant presence within the city limits of Colombo; we currently have 5 locations and plan to expand within the city, gradually spread to other parts of Sri Lanka, and then go big and expand globally!



**COLOMBO
COFFEE
COMPANY**

PREMIUM COFFEE BEANS
100% High Grown Arabica



MEET

MR. SHERVIN FERNANDO

GENERAL MANAGER OF LAVAZZA SRI LANKA | COLOMBO COFFEE COMPANY



THE TOTAL COFFEE SOLUTIONS PROVIDER IN SRI LANKA

“**COFFEE CONSUMPTION HAS NOWADAYS BECOME MORE OF A TREND AND A LIFESTYLE, ESPECIALLY AMONG THE MILLENNIALS AND THAT IS WHAT WE AS A BUSINESS ALSO ENCOURAGES**”

SHERVIN FERNANDO
GENERAL MANAGER

LAVAZZA SRI LANKA | COLOMBO COFFEE COMPANY

To start off, can we have a small introduction about yourself?

My name is Shervin Fernando, I am currently operating as the general manager for Colombo Coffee Company, also known as the Lavazza Sri Lanka. I have been working for CCC for nearly a year now and it has been really wonderful to work for such a dynamic company.

It sure is! Moving on to Colombo Coffee Company, give us an introduction about the company, its Vision and the Mission, and the purpose that CCC stands for?

CCC is a company that was formed a decade ago, where the initial steps were taken by Mr. Ajith Dias where it was named as Jual X Trading initially. Thereafter it was renamed as CCC somewhere around 2013 or 2014. As a business, we are mainly focused on providing coffee solutions for our clients, primarily the B2B base such as hotels, Restaurants, Cafes, etc. We provide them with solutions such as coffee machines and accessories, relevant training, technical assistance etc... and also we cater to the B2C base as well through the modern trade arms and other retailers as well. Our Vision is to expand the sustainable aspects while uplifting the local

talent in terms of Baristas, and on the other hand, the mission is to grow heavily into the export market by having their own plantations, processing and thereby provide a 100% Pure Ceylon Coffee brand into the Local & Foreign markets.

What is the relationship that CCC has with Lavazza coffee brand?

Well, CCC is also known as Lavazza Sri Lanka, where

“**WE ARE THE FLAG CARRIER FOR LAVAZZA COFFEE IN SRI LANKA!**”

We have a partnership with them which has been there for 10



years and it has been growing. We maintain very close relationships with Lavazza Italy, where we will have their portfolio with us in the future for the longest of times.

What are the key milestones that CCC achieved throughout the journey so far?

Well firstly, up until the first 6 years since the establishment, CCC was only catering to the B2B segment, and thereafter they took a strategic step in 2017/18 to move into the B2C base as well, making their offerings available for the retail customers through the modern trade. This was one big milestone. And then later towards the latter part of 2019, CCC decided to introduce our own local coffee blend which is known as Toscana Ceylon, which is very much preferred by foreigners and has higher rates of demand, especially from hotels in the Island. And above all this, one main achievement accomplished was being able to sustain the pandemic, basically to be resilient and to keep our heads up despite the tough times.

How significant was the pandemic to CCC?

Well we had a direct impact from the pandemic, where the revenues did fall drastically due to the decline in the tourism industry. Following that, strategically, we wanted to have a greater focus on the retail aspect, you know going directly to the customers and also utilizing the online platforms such as Uber and PickMe. During the pandemic, one main concern was to look after the workers and one thing that CCC is proud of is the fact that the workers had never undergone any salary reductions during the time.

Moving onto the strategic side of the discussion, I would like to ask you what is the marketing communication strategy at CCC?

Well, since we have two aspects to consider as a business, B2B and B2C, the marketing communications will be altered accordingly. Currently, 70% of the

revenue comes from the B2B base while the remaining 30 % from the B2C base, hence this ratio is followed while setting up marketing budgets at CCC. So when considering the B2B context, it is mostly Direct communication where we engage via interactive marketing efforts with our clients. We conduct PR and brand activation campaigns, conduct forums to educate the clients and promote the brand amongst them better, and a bit of outdoor advertising as well. On the other hand, with regard to the B2C base, CCC is very active digitally where we have a solid presence on social media platforms such as FB, Instagram, and LinkedIn. We also put out visual content through the YouTube platform to connect better with our audience. Apart from that we also have an informative website with several contact points providing the visitors with greater convenience. And considering the modern trade arms, we provide certain incentives to the customers with regard to the orders that they make. That's pretty much on the marketing efforts that we currently engage in.

What is your strategy for Customer Relationship Management?

Well at CCC, we always make sure that a comprehensive database of the clients and customers is maintained internally. Any customer who contacts the hotline or the sales team directly will be recorded in the system, and also since we have listed ourselves on Daraz, Uber and PickMe, through those platforms too, we receive data about the customers. And through these databases, we directly communicate with them and build relationships



Even during the pandemic and the recent import restrictions that were imposed, we were able to constantly update our clients and customers regarding stock availability. So that they can easily plan out their purchases if they are to make any sooner or later. Doing so helped to manage our relationships with the key clients and to prevent them from going through any inconveniences. We also make use of Social media in building and maintaining relationships with customers, where we instantly engage with the audience and cater to what they require from us.



Do you'll conduct market research? Does CCC make a greater effort towards that?

To be very frank, Currently, CCC doesn't have a market research strategy within the organization. We had plans to have a 3rd party research arm with us but due to the pandemic and the chaos it caused, our focus was diverted to other aspects such as managing the stocks. Hence we couldn't really implement it. But in the near future, we would have that research arm and have a better future, we would have that research arm and have a better marketplace understanding through that and we believe that it will help us immensely when strategizing in the future.

How are the logistics managed within CCC?

CCC's logistics are basically an in-house function where they take care of all the aspects internally including the stocks, transportation, and delivery. The machinery and other accessories are imported from the countries such as USA, Germany, and Singapore and thereafter they will be stored in the warehouses after the completion of all clearances and other customs procedures. Thereafter the stocks will be delivered to the destinations as

per the orders made by the customers. In the case of Toscana Ceylon, we source the raw green coffee beans from the local planters and thereafter will be sent to the 3rd party coffee roasting location. That's the only value addition carried out in terms of manufacturing at CCC, where the rest of the offerings are imported.

How does consumer behavior affect CCC?

Well, so far it's all positive. We have seen a huge rise in the demand levels despite the adverse impact of having low tourists caused by the pandemic. Coffee consumption has become more of a trend and a lifestyle and that is what probably has led to this hike in demand, after all, that is what we also as a business encourage. Especially if we take the millennials, you will rarely see a youngster holding a cup of tea in a café, it would rather be a cup of coffee. There is a coffee culture that is being built among the millennials and of course it has become more of a lifestyle. built among the millennials and of course it has become more of a lifestyle.

“ WE ACCOUNT FOR 95% OF THE MARKET SHARE IN THE HORECA SECTOR ”

Moving to the operations, how do you all strategize your operations?

We always work on a demand plan where we take both historical data and current trends into account, based on that we strategize our main operations. So mainly the purchasing team will be placing the orders with the relevant suppliers considering the lead times, shipment arrival times, lead times to source the dollars (which is a major constraint nowadays), and other procurement demands. Thereafter the stocks will be sent to the clients and the customers based on the orders that they make. Apart from that we also source green coffee beans for Toscana Ceylon and those will be roasted in the 3rd party location and will be sent as a finished product to the relevant modern trade arms and the outlets. That's pretty much on the operations.

What are the marketing channel dynamics that are used at CCC?

As I said before, we have two outlets in Colombo and Galle, where customers can come and shop the offerings that we have in store for them. Also, we have our products listed on platforms such as Uber, PickMe, and Daraz, so through those platforms too, the products are being distributed to our customers.

How does IT play a major role in CCC?

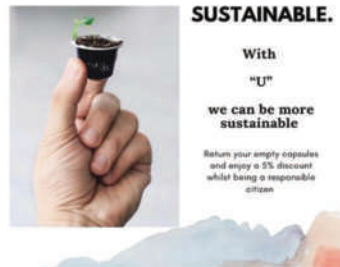
IT surely plays a major role in managing operations at CCC. IT connects all the departments, branches, and external entities associated with CCC, and that allows a smooth flow of information across the business at large. We use IT to optimize our marketing communications and also to store information about our stakeholders such as the clients, consumers, modern trade arms, suppliers, investors, etc... allows a smooth flow of information across the business at large. We use IT to optimize our marketing communications and also to store information about our stakeholders such as the clients, consumers, modern trade arms, suppliers, investors, etc...

What are the other initiatives carried out by CCC?

Well we have realized that our Nespresso capsules create certain pollutants to the environment, so due to this, we have established a sustainable arm where we established a Nursery of plants from the returned capsules. We as an organization place major importance on being socially responsible and to be so, such initiatives are important. Apart from that we also hope to expand our coffee plantations locally and to have our own roasters planted. That will allow us to have a better say in the manufacturing process. Also, we wish to serve the foreign markets while extending our portfolio.



SUSTAINABLE.



Moving to the last couple of questions, what are the challenges that you all faced when implementing the above-discussed strategies?

Well to be quite honest with you, every day is a challenge in the current situation. We face lots of economic chaos, post-pandemic effects, and we anticipate more uncertainties. Hence its quite tough to pinpoint precisely, but nevertheless, we need to increase the scope of our strategic areas, for example, as I mentioned the market research strategy should be well extended. So with all these, we would be focusing on the key areas of operation and go by the year hoping for more favorable conditions in the country in the years to come.



Finally, sir, what are the future strategic measures that CCC can take in order to improve the business in terms of internal operations, industry collaborations, and international collaborations?

Well I think internally we would want to have an ERP system established in our IT systems so that we can have better operations with regard to the technical aspects. So we are looking for those investments to happen in the future. In terms of industrial collaborations, we need to have a research arm as I mentioned above since we believe in market research a lot. We also look forward to collaborating with some brands that share similar brand values with us and thereby increasing our scope, such as Elephant House, etc. Internationally, we would like to have strategic alliances with certain distributors in other countries, different regional levels especially focusing on our local coffee blends such as Toscana Ceylon.

**AN ARTICLE BY
Mithila Perera
Vishwa Pamuditha
Savin Dassanayake
Rengaraj Nithushan**



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WHY IS CONTENT THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Marketing has evolved drastically throughout the time. Marketing used to be an area where companies with big budgets thrived and small enterprises were left behind as there was a huge amount of resources being spent to promote any business and the costs were too high for many companies. However, fast forward to the digital era, and there are little to no barriers to entry. Today anyone with access to the internet can start promoting his/her business almost instantly.

Social media is a very powerful tool with immense potential when it comes to Digital Marketing. With the proper use of websites and social media channels, businesses with little to no marketing budget can achieve a lot. Digital marketing has a lot of aspects such as performance marketing, content marketing, SEO, etc. Out of these many aspects, content marketing can be identified as the foundation of digital marketing. It's such an important aspect of Marketing.

The end goal of Digital Marketing is to drive engagement towards the company's social media handles, websites, etc., and to do that properly a business needs various types of content. Those can be content such as video content, designs, images, flyers, even articles, and much more. These types of content will drive engagement toward a business. Those engagements will be likes, views, clicks etc, and eventually, they will convert into followers or subscribers who will eventually end up being the customers of a particular company.

The content itself has evolved over time and the content that would work for you will vary depending on your audience. In the early stages of digital marketing people preferred reading hence, the strongest content was articles blogs, etc. With Facebook and Instagram, people started to prefer images, posts, and other creative designs, hence companies quickly adopted and focused on putting out creative posts on Facebook and Instagram. At present we can see people starting to shift towards short videos. Hence almost every company today puts out video content on platforms such as Tik Tok. Instagram and Youtube have realized this and their algorithms have started to push reels and youtube shorts. Since there is a huge push from the apps algorithms itself toward video content companies are adopting to post short yet eye-catching video content.

Content marketing is what attracts your audience, content is what creates the first impression digitally. Hence investing in quality content is vital at this point in time. However quality content alone will not help you go the distance. Thorough audience research is required as every business has its own unique audience and the only way to impact that audience virtually is by putting out content that would resonate well with them, Hence by conducting a throughout audience research and finding out what your audience likes and dislikes one will be able to create a powerful content marketing strategy that will have a strong impact on the company's digital marketing activities.



20 FUN FACTS ABOUT TOURISM, FOOD THEN BEVERAGE, AVIATION AND SUSTAINABILITY.

SPANISH IS THE HAPPIEST LANGUAGE IN THE WORLD

The National Academy of Sciences released a study which suggested that Spanish is actually the happiest language in the world. After the analysis of around 100,000, used most frequently in the top 10 most popular languages in the world, the researchers were able to determine that Spanish used the most positive language. The top 5 happiest languages are as follows: Spanish; Brazilian; Portuguese; English; Indonesian.

THE BIGGEST CRUISE SHIP IN THE WORLD IS THE 'WONDER OF THE SEAS'

In 2022, the WONDER OF THE SEAS was listed as the biggest cruise ship in the world. With a gross tonnage of 236,857, this huge cruise ship features 18 decks, can accommodate up to 6,988 guests and has a total of 2,300 crew members. Owned by Royal Caribbean International, this cruise line also owns the second and third largest cruise ships in the world – the Symphony of the Seas and the Harmony of the Seas.



THE MOST EXPENSIVE PIZZA IN THE WORLD COSTS \$12,000 DOLLARS.

That's because it takes 72 hours to make, and it can only be made in your home by 3 Italian chefs. The pizza is topped with 3 types of caviar, bufala mozzarella, lobster from Norway and Cilento, and pink Australian sea salt.

THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF NON-FATAL PLANE IN JURIES IS TURBULENCE

There's a reason why the seat belt sign should always be obeyed. Between 1980 and 2008, US air carriers experienced 234 turbulence accidents, resulting in 298 serious injuries and three fatalities, according to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

When the seat belt sign was switched on, two of the three fatalities were determined to be passengers who were not wearing seat belts. Buckling up isn't "the law" in the air, but it's well worth the effort to ensure your safety.

AIRPLANE TIRES ARE INFLATED TO ABOUT SIX TIMES THE PSI OF CAR TIRES

The real reason airplane tires do not burst when landing is because they are made of thick rubber.

However, their strength under pressure is due to more than just their thickness. According to a Wired study, plane tires are inflated to over 200 psi, which is roughly six times the psi of a typical automobile tire. In fact, according to a National Geographic experiment, the tires on a Boeing 737 can sustain nearly 900 psi before bursting.



THOMAS COOK WERE THE WORLD'S OLDEST TOUR OPERATOR

The travel organisation, Thomas Cook, was initially founded in 1841, with a train journey from Leicester to Loughborough being their first package holiday. Costing 1 shilling and 6 pence, the 22 mile train journey had a total of 500 passengers. Unfortunately, Thomas Cook collapsed in 2019, with thousands of flights cancelled and jobs lost. They do, however, still have a website which allows for customers to "package their own holiday".

RECYCLING FACTS

500,000 trees are cut down to produce Sunday newspapers each week. If you were to recycle your copy of the Sunday edition of the New York Times, you alone could save 75,000 trees. And if we all recycled all our newspapers, we could save about 250,000,000 trees each year!





KETCHUP USED TO BE USED AS A MEDICINE.

Back in the early 1800s, people thought tomatoes had medicinal qualities.

One doctor claimed they could treat diarrhea and indigestion, so he made a recipe for a type of tomato ketchup which then became a pill.

CERTAIN MUSIC CAN MAKE YOU DRINK FASTER.

Researchers had an experiment to see how people's drinking habits changed based on the music that was playing.

Loud music seemed to make people drink more, AND faster.

IN JAPAN, CHEFS HAVE TO TRAIN FOR OVER TWO YEARS IN ORDER TO QUALIFY TO SERVE PUFFERFISH.

Pufferfish is a delicacy in Japan, but if it's prepared wrong, it can kill the person eating it.

AIRPLANES CAN TRIGGER LIGHTNING

When a plane flies through clouds, the static created can actually encourage lightning to form. Fortunately, even if your jet is hit, you'll most likely be unharmed. Since 1967, there hasn't been a plane catastrophe caused by lightning in the United States, and increased safety measures have made lightning strikes less risky than ever before for passengers.

When lightning strikes a plane, the electrical current is distributed uniformly throughout the conductive aluminum interior, and grounding the plane's interior electrical systems avoids surges that could disrupt its operation.

A Faraday cage or Faraday shield is an enclosure used to block electromagnetic fields. A Faraday shield may be formed by a continuous covering of conductive material, just like the aircraft you're flying on.

NO ONE KNOWS THE ORIGIN OF CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES.

There are a few ideas of where this popular recipe came from.

One suggests Ruth Wakefield, the creator of chocolate chip cookies, ran out of nuts for ice cream cookies and used chocolate instead.

Others suggest chocolate chunks accidentally fell into the mixer, but the true story has never been confirmed.





ONE OF THE MOST EXPENSIVE HOTELS IN THE WORLD IS THE EMPATHY SUITE SKY VILLA AT THE PALMS CASINO RESORT IN VEGAS

With prices starting at \$100,000 per night, this suite is the most expensive in Vegas and one of the most expensive in the world. You might want to start saving for this one!

CLIMATE CHANGE FACTS

Sustainability facts show that cycling 10 kilometers each way to work can save you about \$1,700 in transport costs but most importantly, you will save the world 1,500 kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions every year.

GREEN ROOFS AND WALLS KEEP THING COOL (LITERALLY)

Boosting oxygen levels, reducing temperatures, and enhancing water balance are among the array of environmental benefits that green roofs and walls have. While keeping the temperature down, the walls often see an increase in biodiversity with birds, bees, and butterflies calling the greenery home.

PLASTIC FACTS

Plastics make up the most litter collected during international coastal cleanups. These plastics include plastic beverage bottles, plastic bottle caps, food wrappers, plastic grocery bags, plastic lids, straws and stirrers, and foam takeaway containers.

WATER FACTS

Australians could save about 800,000 megalitres of water, which is more than the whole of Sydney Harbour just by using more water-efficient appliances and products.

THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IS THE LARGEST GLOBAL INDUSTRY BY EMPLOYMENT

As a whole, the tourism industry ranks as the top industry in the world by employment. In the UK, for example, approximately 1 in 10 people are working within the tourism industry. Whether you're looking for a fast-paced job working in the sky or a quieter role on the ground, the tourism industry has a wide variety of positions to best suit you. Within these roles are also a diverse range of tourism types, read on to learn more!





WIND POWER IS THE FASTEST GROWING FORM OF ELECTRICITY

It's a tale as old as time, or since 2000 B.C. at least, that wind power is versatile in powering sail boats, water pumps, and farm activities. The electricity production source is projected to cater for one third of the planet's energy needs by 2050.

VEGETABLE GARDENS REDUCE GREENHOUSE GASES

By growing produce from the backyard, we can minimise carbon emissions from the atmosphere and mass agricultural production – which causes 25% of greenhouse gases.

CERTAIN MUSIC CAN MAKE YOU DRINK FASTER.

Researchers had an experiment to see how people's drinking habits changed based on the music that was playing. Loud music seemed to make people drink more, AND faster.

"FAT FREE" AND "SUGAR FREE" PRODUCTS MAY NOT BE HEALTHY AT ALL

Popular culture has spent the last few decades alternating between villainizing fat and sugar (both essential nutrients, mind you), prompting food producers to unveil fat-free and sugar-free lines of their most-popular products. But just because something is missing fat or sugar doesn't necessarily make it healthy; in fact, it can be quite the contrary.

To make up for a lack of fat, companies will often add artificial chemicals like Olestra or extra sugar to enhance the taste of their product. This can lead to even higher calorie counts than their full-fat counterparts. Conversely, sugar-free products generally contain added fat and artificial sweeteners, which have caused all kinds of controversy in the health world and may actually promote weight gain³. Not great for your health.

Products promoting themselves as "99% fat free" have become quite common throughout the prepackaged food industry, as well. What you need to realize, though, is that this is usually calculated by weight, not calories.

PHONE CHARGERS ARE THE MOST COMMON ITEM LEFT IN HOTEL ROOMS

Ever had that sudden moment of realisation after checking out – you've left your charger! Well, if so, you aren't alone. Followed by toiletries and clothing, phone chargers are the number one most common item left in hotel rooms. So next time you're walking out of your hotel room for the last time, make sure to check that you haven't forgotten your phone charger.





MONEY SPENT ON TRAVEL MAKES YOU HAPPIER THAN MONEY SPENT ON MATERIAL GOODS

Research has shown that people are made happier spending their hard earned money on travel, rather than material goods. A psychology professor from Cornell University, Dr. Thomas Gilovich, has studied the subject and determined that people are actually made happier when spending money on experiences, rather than material goods. Travel really does make you happy!

THE ENTIRETY OF CHINA OPERATES ON BEIJING TIME

Despite the country covering a total of 5 time zones, the whole of China actually operates on one time zone, Beijing. This is another great fact about the travel and tourism industry that I never knew until recently. Following one standard time, UTC+8:00, their daylight saving time hasn't actually been observed since 1991.

ITALY IS HOME TO A FREE WINE FOUNTAIN

For some of my readers, I can imagine this will be one of the facts about the travel and tourism industry which excites you the most! A small municipality of Ortona, Caldari, is the home to a popular tourist attraction – a free wine fountain! Yes, it's true, there is genuinely a wine fountain in Italy that is completely free to use, and you can go visit. So, next time you travel to Italy, make sure to book somewhere close to Caldari di Ortona (preferably within walking distance).

SOME OF THE MOST UNUSUAL ATTRACTIONS INCLUDE THE TEMPLE OF RATS AND THE ISLAND OF THE DOLLS

Some of the most interesting facts about the travel and tourism industry involve the most unusual attractions! Now, these are just a couple of the most unusual tourist attractions that I found, however, there are many more which you could explore.

The Temple of Rats, formally named the Karni Mata Temple, is located in India and is simply a temple that is full of rats. The temple is home to approximately 25,000 black rats and some white rats, and you can visit!

Another unusual attraction is the Island of the Dolls in Mexico. Similarly, everything this attraction offers is in the name. The original home of Don Julian Santana Barrera, a lone inhabitant, this attraction hails a tragic background story.

PILOTS AND CO-PILOTS WON'T EAT THE SAME MEAL BEFORE A FLIGHT

In most cases, both the pilot and co-pilot will not eat the same meal before flying the aircraft. This is because they want to reduce the risk of both pilots contracting food poisoning from eating the same food.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE?

What does it mean to know your audience?

Every business has its own unique set audience. They can be their followers, their subscribers, or even their day-to-day customers. A person can't possibly talk to every single person that interacts with their business and get to know them individually. Especially in this digital era that we live in, it is vital for a business to know its

A question that most of you may ask is why is it important to know your audience. The answer is quite simple. When a business is either putting out content across their Marketing channels or even developing a new product if they fail to know who their audience is their marketing efforts or their new products would not resonate well with the audience and it will result in massive losses. Hence it is very important for a business to have a good understanding of who its audience is before conducting any marketing-related activities.

HOW TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE?

There are different methods practiced by companies worldwide in an effort to get to know their audience better. Surveys, Listening to the customers, Reviewing data and analytics, Experimenting with content, etc, are some of the ways companies attempt to understand their audience better.

Surveys are a very common method used by many Sri Lankans, I'm sure all of us have at least answered a considerable amount of surveys throughout the course of time. Surveys are very useful when conducting marketing research and gathering a heap of data regarding the customer's concerns, preferences, etc.

Listening to customers means reading thoroughly through the reviews and comments various customers have given about the products or services. By listening to these reviews and comments an enterprise is able to get a better idea of how their content of their services are resonating with their audience and make the necessary amendments.

Social Media tools have in-depth analytics, by diving deep into these analytics a business is able to find out what type of people have an interest in their business. Those analytics show data such as age, gender, location, and even interest, etc. hence by thoroughly analyzing these data a business will be able to get a

Once you have gathered all this data it is time to create a buyer persona. A buyer persona can be a defender of the ideal customer of your business. It is a fictional character with all the characteristics of your ideal customer. Hence speaking directly to this fictional character and producing content etc that would resonate well with it will in fact make your business thrive as you are now armed with the ability to have a stronger impact. That's because you know exactly who you are speaking to.

1. OUT OF ALL CONTENT MARKETING PLATFORMS OUT THERE, **'WEBSITE'** IS THE #2 CHANNEL USED IN MARKETING. SOCIAL MEDIA IS THE NUMBER ONE PLATFORM FOR CONTENT MARKETING.

2. CUSTOMERS ARE AROUND FOUR TIMES MORE LOYAL TO **ECO-FRIENDLY BUSINESSES**. THEREFORE, IT IS CRUCIAL FOR BUSINESSES TO INCLUDE ECO-FRIENDLY PRACTICES INTO THEIR BUSINESS ACTIVITIES.

5 INTERESTING MARKETING-RELATED FACTS

3. **FRIDAY** IS TYPICALLY THE DAY WITH THE HIGHEST CLICKTHROUGH RATES POTENTIAL, AT 2.7%. WHEN SCHEDULING POSTS WITH A CALL-TO-ACTION (CTA), TRY SHARING THEM ON A FRIDAY. YOU MIGHT HAVE BETTER LUCK!

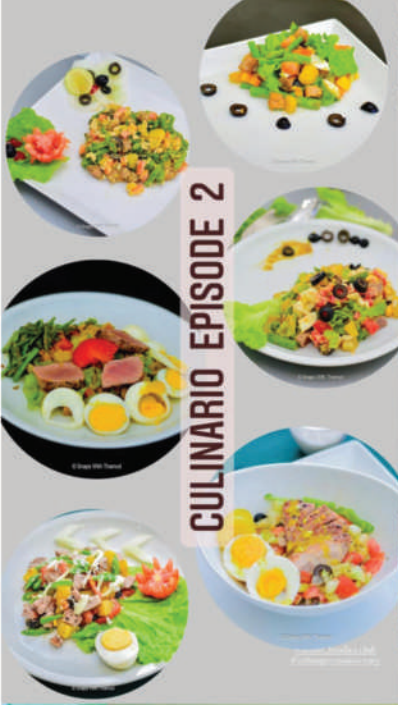
FRIDAY!

5. **FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, AND TWITTER** LEAD THE PACK AS THE MOST COMMON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USED BY MARKETERS. HOWEVER, IT IS IMPORTANT TO DO THOROUGH RESEARCH TO UNDERSTAND WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM IS MOST SUITABLE FOR YOUR BUSINESS TYPE.

4. **EMAIL MARKETING** HAS THE HIGHEST RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES. AS THE ABILITY TO SPEND IS LESSER FOR START-UPS, THEIR BEST CHANCES AT GETTING MORE BUSINESS IS THROUGH EMAIL MARKETING.



(SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.HUBSPOT.COM/MARKETING-STATISTICS](https://www.hubspot.com/marketing-statistics))





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