BRINGING THE SIMPLICITY OF ONLINE AD BOOKINGS TO OFFLINE ADVERTISING

Two women in ad-tech take bold steps to digitalise traditional media with the aim of helping local businesses grow with effective advertising.

F or most SMEs, offline advertising is something that is not really looked at as part of their marketing strategy. One reason is that offline advertising is still an incredibly manual process with many of the tasks handled by media agencies, who focus mainly on large corporate clients with big budgets.

Add in the myriad media formats, complex jargon and different utilisations of said formats, it can be daunting for SMEs to venture into offline advertising, especially when compared to how easy it is to set up an online advertising campaign.

But what if there is a way to run an offline advertising campaign as easy as it is an online one?

SIMPLIFYING OFFLINE ADVERTISING
In comes AdEasy. Founded by Melissa Sim and Therine Goh, who are the CEO and COO of the company respectively, this online platform aims to simplify the whole ad-buying process especially for SMEs.

The platform is designed to provide a fully integrated one-stop-shop solution for not only advertisers but ad sellers as well.

Functioning akin to an online marketplace for ads, AdEasy has made the ad buying process almost as easy as the Airbnb accommodation booking process.

That's quite a tall order considering the many different formats available for offline media. However, AdEasy has managed to do so, offering a range of offline advertising options from cinema to print, and out-of-home to broadcast on their platform complete with information such as pricing and reach. As easy as the AdEasy platform might be for advertisers to use, simplifying the whole media buying process was quite the challenge for Melissa and Therine.

"Advertising is a decades-old industry, but even now, its processes are still very manual. We are not only listing a single format but all of them. When we first started, there was no existing platform like AdEasy, so we had to build from ground-up. We spent about a year simplifying everything to just a few steps, and did away with a lot of marketing and media jargons that would confuse our SME clients. As every different media may have their own terms for the same things, we had to make things more understandable for the layman," Melissa elaborated.

The effort has paid off as the platform sports a simple-to-understand and user-friendly interface that comes complete with all relevant information that even a first-time advertiser would be able to book the right ad space.

DEVELOPED BASED ON EXPERIENCE
The AdEasy platform is a reflection of the experience of Melissa and Therine. Both are veterans in the ad industry, with Melissa having done media sales in Media Prima, and Therine being a marketer in Genting Berhad and General Mills. The platform was developed to incorporate their experiences from both the media and client side of the advertising industry. The skew towards SMEs on the platform is especially apparent as Therine has experienced the struggles that SMEs with limited budgets would go through.

"Having worked at Genting then at General Mills, I've experienced the shift from having a large marketing budget to having little to no budget at all. So I know the challenges that SMEs face having to do their own advertising without the luxury of a media agency's assistance," said Therine.

"The hours spent researching, calling and meeting with media sales reps; and the uncertainty on which media to book after doing comparisons – those pain points were real. AdEasy was conceptualised to provide a solution for small-budget advertisers like me back then," Therine added.

EDUCATION IS KEY
AdEasy isn't just an online marketplace for offline advertising. One of the biggest challenges that SMEs usually have is their misconception of offline advertising, and their inexperience with solid marketing as a whole. Melissa and Therine want to address that.

"Most of the time when an SME ventures into offline advertising, they purchase it because it's cheap. However, they do so without understanding the proper utilisation of the format," said Melissa.

"So when the campaign fails, they assume that offline advertising doesn't work for them," she continued.

To address this issue, AdEasy runs bi-weekly trainings for their clients when they first sign-up. This allows them to educate their clients on the basics of marketing and advertising before they actually start using the AdEasy platform.

AdEasy's free Advertising 101 training draws on both Melissa and Therine's experience in the industry to educate clients in coming up with a basic marketing strategy, and how to fully utilise advertising formats in their most effective manner.

Therine's marketing experience in a large local organisation, and a multinational company (MNC) especially plays a crucial role in educating their clients as the training's content draws on that experience with simplified practices and process that are more suitable for SMEs.

Education of clients aside, one of biggest challenges that AdEasy faces is changing the mindset of SMEs in general.

According to Therine, many SMEs blur the line between marketing and sales. So when SMEs hire a marketing person, more often than not, that person also has to do sales as well. Therine adds that when their clients come to their training, they make it very clear that marketing and sales are two very different things.

"You need to hire the right people. People with sales skills don't always have good marketing skills and vice versa, people with good marketing skills don't necessarily have good sales skills either," Therine explained.

CONSTANT GROWTH
AdEasy has came a long way since the idea was first conceived back in 2013, and it continues to grow. From the single media partner they had back in 2013, they now boast 50 media partners with 80 media profiles and 482 ad packages that span all offline media formats. And more are added to the platform each month.

With a recent partnership with Malaysian big data firm Ebizu, AdEasy now offers offline advertising performance reports that track out-of-home advertising campaigns' results. Tracking options for other offline media types are slated in the pipeline.

Melissa concluded, "Our goal is to help SMEs grow by empowering them with effective media buys. Having data on ad performance is key to better decision-making and higher ROI. AdEasy intends to make the tracking of offline advertising campaign's results as easy as how digital advertising performance is being tracked now." SME