

Q&A: VJ Anand

Regional Head of Creative and Managing Partner of VaynerMedia APAC



VJ is in the growth business. He helped build Gojek into Indonesia's first unicorn tech startup. He grew his Creative Labs team from 10 to 120 people. At VaynerMedia he joined a team of four and has grown it into an agency of 225.

This guy is on rocket fuel. We managed to catch him at a rare moment of rest.

Q: These are strange and unusual times. How has the pandemic been for you personally?

VJ: Pandemic has been tough for me just like anyone else. But at this point I've just gotten used to it. Miss travelling back home and seeing my family and friends. Couldn't get married. But there's also some good that came out of it, making new friends in Singapore. More bonding time with the team here in APAC. Learning new things, getting into NFTs. Vaynermedia APAC has also grown so much during the pandemic, so there's not just negatives to remember there's also some positives from this.

Q: Do you have a side-hustle? What do you do outside your job as a counterbalance to the stresses and strains of your job?

VJ: I won't call it side hustle but I love collecting stuff, sneakers, now NFTs. I've also been helping our startups across APAC, just to see them grow and get branding right from the beginning, that's also a proud moment. I would call these my hobbies and passion points more than side hustle. It helps my day job and also helps me have a different creative outlet to channel my ideas and thinking.

Q: In your career, which one piece of work are you most proud of? And why?

VJ: I love what me and the team used to do in Nandos Malaysia ages ago. We used to do social hijacks way before everyone else started doing them. In the startup Gojek, I loved the last campaign I did, a music video with Indonesian rapper Rich Brian. It all started on Twitter and blew up as a music video. It was so organic not many knew it was actually orchestrated, proud of that. Those two campaigns became cult hits in those countries. I love it when the work goes beyond the advertising and marketing industry and when a whole nation talks about it. I'm also proud of not just the work but the culture and size we have built VaynerMedia APAC to in the last two toughest years of anyone's career. We took it from 4 people to 225 people in two years across APAC. We've become probably the top social-first agency in APAC in those two years. I'm also super proud of that.

Q: If you weren't in advertising, what would you be doing now?

I love cooking, so I'd probably be a chef or run a small restaurant. Or I'd be a semi-professional karaoke singer. Or a teacher, following my parents' footsteps.

Q: Are awards important?

I don't focus on awards, I want the work to be a hit among the people, especially the ones not in our industry. If that happens, then there's usually an award there. I help my younger teammates with awards. They are young and they deserve to win, they have all the talent too, so I help them get it if that's what they want. But I don't want them to be obsessed with awards. I feel like there was a whole toxic generation that was obsessed with awards - they would cheat and scam to win. That is not the right attitude and not right for our industry. Do good real work, and then go for awards. Not blindly go for a win.

Q: What does it mean to be a juror of The Caples Awards 2022?

I've judged at Caples in New York before. I think people sometimes forget everything in the social age is very Direct One to One nowadays. Long time ago Direct Medium used to be the stepchild of TVCs and Outdoors, but social media is a direct medium. So I'm excited to see DMs evolve to what it is today. Something so powerful. And I think Caples has so much potential to be in the new world. Also, when I first judged The Caples it was also my first time in NYC, so it was magical the whole experience.

Q: What sort of work are you hoping to see?

New age Direct thinking. Usage of more people going direct via social and digital. And also the occasional classic Direct printed stuff. Wish we could see some things physically. In hand.

Q: I know, I know. Impossible question but - what is your one all-time favourite piece of advertising, the one idea you both admire and envy and wish that you'd done yourself?

I'm not the most traditional creative person, I'm more digital but the one that got me into advertising was a TVC. A film from Yasmin Ahmad in Malaysia and it was about the Indian festivities, a Deepavali commercial. Young boys in the hip places of Malaysia pretending to be gangsta and all only to be stopped by the grandmother of one of the kids. The exchange of words and the humiliation, I remember that till today and it makes me laugh. Reminded me so much of my grandmother. I think that's my all-time favourite. Yasmin had the ability to make a nation laugh or cry. That's the power of advertising.