



PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

# INFLUENCED BY TECH

*Evangeline Leong (above) is the chief executive officer and founder of Kobe Global Technologies, which is changing the influencer marketing industry through technology by using artificial intelligence to identify "real influence" and relevance for brands.*

**AS TOLD TO VIVIEN SHIAO**

## WHAT IS KOBE GLOBAL TECHNOLOGIES ABOUT?

We offer instant access to 20 million eyeballs via over 4,000 influencers in our Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) patented Artificial Intelligence influencer marketing platform. We empower connections between advertisers and social media influencers, leveraging on influencers' ability to broadcast messages to millions of users so that advertisers can get represented in front of their target audience in a credible manner.

## WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO USE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE? HOW HAS IT HELPED YOUR BUSINESS?

We believe that relevancy is the most important factor in selecting suitable influencers for businesses. The relevancy of an influencer can come in various categories such as interests, demographic profile, brand sentiment, content strength, stage of life or even medical condition.

In a nutshell, the more we understand our influencers – the better we can pair them relevantly with advertisers. To do this scientifically, objectively and at scale, artificial intelligence (AI) is the only answer.

With the use of image recognition in AI, we can get insight from the images that influencers share by understanding the content such as scenes, food and objects. Often, contextual content (captions) may not be sufficient to tell us about the content; whereas image recognition can generate a lot more data about the influencer.

We also make use of natural language understanding in AI to extract insight such as keywords, categories and concepts from contextual content – even if they are not explicitly being mentioned. For example, a millennial may not explicitly say that he or she is a millennial but will express him/herself using words such as “YOLO”, “Study Hard Play Hard” etc, and we are able to learn from these concepts that the person is likely to be a millennial.

AI has helped us to pair influencers relevantly with advertisers; and as a result, produce content that is authentic, engaging and impactful to advertisers.

## WHAT WAS YOUR INSPIRATION?

Inspiration struck when I first visited a humble wanton noodles stall in Circuit Road. With marketing as the centre of my universe, I was curious how the stall owner, Uncle Danny, managed to have constant streams of customers even without any academic knowledge of marketing.

His answer was simple: “My word-of-mouth recommendation is good,” he said in Mandarin. And the Chinese wording gave rise to the name Kobe.

His words made me rethink the connection between advertisers and relevant influencers to unleash the full potential of word-of-mouth on social media for both parties.

## HOW DID YOU END UP BECOMING AN ENTREPRENEUR?

I have been in the digital marketing industry for almost 10 years, and had the opportunity to witness the rise of web, search and social functions through Yahoo, Google and Facebook.

In the local scene in the early 2000s, resources were concentrated on web development. In the 2010s, the focus moved on to digital advertising. The next wave currently is content storytelling and artificial intelligence. I knew we were building Kobe at the best time to catapult Singapore to a global spotlight and uplift the country's digital marketing industry.

## WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY?

The influencer marketing industry has a debatable reputation. There have been many sagas and scandals revolving around influencer marketing. Common misconceptions include influencers being fake or deceitful.

However, Kobe aims to change the perception that people have of influencers. With Kobe's PCT patented AI system, the influencers chosen will be based on relevancy and authenticity, over the traditional selection method based on popularity or “style fit”. This will help to improve the credibility of using influencers for marketing strategy.

In addition, Kobe has introduced the #UNCUT programme, an initiative that aims to promote authenticity. Through #UNCUT, the influencers will be donating part of their money received from the campaigns to charity organisations. Through this initiative, we want to involve our influencers in helping society and at the same time, inform people that influencers are not just there to make money.

We have since had an overwhelming response in the participation of #UNCUT, differentiating Kobe as the influencer platform with trusted influencers.

## WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

True to our brand mission, we are working on further empowering the market through education, hand-holding of advertisers (small to large) on a broad outreach – so that we can all see better use of our digital marketing budgets and works created through the industry.

We will also share with our network of influencers what we have learnt about optimal utilisation of their power of influence; and content creation.

We are simultaneously working on international expansion plans and some new technology products, and hope to unveil them to the market soon.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO BUDDING ENTREPRENEURS?

We have the answers, all the answers; it's the questions we do not know.

If you have a business idea or you're struggling to get your startup kick-started – congratulations! You know an awful lot about your idea and your industry – and I know with enough grit, you'll find the answers. Just make sure you're asking the right questions and working on the right ones! ■