Bold plan to boost ad talent takes shape

The training scheme aimed at graduates attracts 133 applications on its first day

BY LANCE ANG

AN AMBITIOUS programme to deepen the advertising industry’s talent pool by targeting graduates — the first of its kind in Asia — is under way.

The Talent Draft Initiative (TDI), as the scheme is called, attracted 133 student registrations on its first day alone, indicating the allure the advertising game has for many.

But that allure has not given Singapore a large group of advertising-savvy professionals, a problem that prompted the International Advertising Association (IAA) Singapore and the Institute of Advertising Singapore to act.

“As Singapore is a small country, there are not enough big companies like Microsoft and IBM to invest in enough training,” said Mr Sorab Mistry, IAA Singapore’s chairman at the programme launch at the Singapore Management University (SMU).

“We are heading towards a digital age. This makes it even more crucial to groom world-class talent within the advertising industry.”

The ball started rolling in late 2005 when Dr Tony Tan, then Deputy Prime Minister, put the TDI committee together with the heads of the three local universities and five polytechnics.

The initiative that resulted saw each institution shortlist 20 candidates from across all disciplines. These will then be whittled down to 80 and then divided into five teams with a specific project brief and a mentor. After a series of presentations and interviews, 24 will be picked to work for top creative agencies including DDB Worldwide, McCann Erickson and Crash.

The two-year training programme will cover all aspects of the industry. It will include subjects such as marketing and finance taught by tertiary professors and chief executives from the country’s leading advertising firms. The aim is to have one intake of students every year.

Mr Mistry said: “We looked at similar programmes in Canada, US and Australia to devise the best curriculum there is.”

He believes the diploma the students will get at the end of the programme will have many benefits: “This selection process will weed out the best, who will have significant job prospects up there with the top people. They will also be equipped to compete with the best in New York and Hong Kong.”

Students told The Straits Times that they were enthusiastic about the initiative.

Ms Esther Huang, 23, a fourth-year business student at SMU, said: “Yes, I’m definitely interested. I feel that many people don’t know the internal dynamics of the industry. You must have the passion and hunger to survive in this industry and this initiative teaches you just that.”

Ms Chan Yoke Wan, 22, a third-year business student at SMU, added: “I feel that many people have quite a narrow perspective of the advertising industry and this initiative gives you a regional, and even global view of the industry.”

Photo: Toh Boon Yi

GROOMING THE BEST

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