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Point Break: Sway of the Far East Interview with MJ Sorenson, CEO of MJ Global Communications LLC

By Lunita S V Mendoza with [Asia TV Forum Insights TV Magazine](#)

The year was 2013. The English Premier League was warming up its hands to grab US\$1.47 billion from broadcasters in Asia alone for live rights to matches until 2016, making Asia the biggest single chunk contributor to the League's sales of all their overseas rights to live games for the three-year period.

Elsewhere in the region, the OECD Global Forum gathered to discuss competition issues in TV and broadcasting, where new technologies and the dynamic effects of convergence were starting to change the way consumers access audio-visual content. Indeed, the emergence of new products and services facilitated by convergence were starting to lower barriers to entry and render markets more competitive.

Asia was touted to be at the centre of the TV and film growth story, where spending on entertainment was beginning to be fueled by a rising middle class with high disposable incomes.

China became the fastest-growing filmed entertainment market in the world, followed by Thailand and then India.

The force was strong that year. And while Asia was not a new region, it acquired neoteric eminence when its sheer numbers, originally thought a cumbersome socio-economic snag, started to translate into substantial sums that detonated the calculator.

MJ Sorenson, CEO and Founder of MJ Global Communications LLC, was one of the lucky few who managed to catch an early wave in and hung ten on her first Asian client, establishing a pattern of success.

"I have been working in the international TV environment since my days at MTV, over 20 years ago. I've seen the unique ways to market a channel outside of the US, to promote a TV brand differently in different countries and vice versa.

"My business start was prompted by a request from the CEO of an entertainment event in Zurich, a former partner from the International Emmys, who asked me to help him promote the new event globally. He reminded me that I was quite connected – I have over 2,000 LinkedIn connections and that there were few communications specialists who work in global television.

“I had the unique experience of working with many major television network heads, who were Board Members of the International Emmys – the International Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. These were a powerful group of international television executives from other cultures who connected with each other and closed major deals. As I travelled for events, I noticed the unique communication among various cultures and television companies – from Turkey to Singapore, from South Africa to Russia, from Brazil to the US and so on.

“Over the past 15 years, I had been to Asia for markets, so I was excited to secure my first Asian client – Mongol TV. Little was known about the Mongolian TV industry and it was such a fascinating story to help share. The Mongolian TV industry was going through a revolutionary change, with Mongol TV leading the way. I was brought in by The Format People, a UK/US company who was commissioned to help Mongol TV build their studio and production teams from the ground up. They brought established western television experts, from a variety of disciplines, to teach the Mongol TV staff how to produce a daily, live morning news show; how to raise their production standards overall; how to find and nurture talent, as well as how to create the best graphics.

“They did this so well, they were nominated for an International Promax Awards in 2014. The talent was there, it just needed to be unveiled, refined and promoted. That is what is exciting about working in Asia as a westerner, uncovering the talent and beauty of the cultures and seeing first-hand how they interpret television and then telling the rest of the world.”

Five Fabulous Feelers

INSIGHTS@ATF: Your Asian strategy is strong. What areas does MGC see itself contributing towards moving forward?

MJ: My Company is looking at India and China as the first level of expansion and then Korea and perhaps Vietnam. Also, I hope to continue sharing my knowledge of the global industry with young Asian producers. In September 2015, with The Format People, I gave a presentation on the Power of PR for Producers at a KOCCA-sponsored event, and this year, I went to Beijing to speak to another group of professional producers. Not only do I share my experience, but I gain valuable insight into the extremely talented Asian production community and truly enjoy our exchange of ideas.

INSIGHTS@ATF: Is your portfolio sustainable with a line-up of Asian companies?

MJ: Yes it is, I work with large broadcasters such as Zee TV in India, and have worked with Star China; and I handle communications for Bomanbridge Media, a growing Singaporean production/distribution company, who helps established Western producers find places with Asian broadcasters, as well as broker intra-Asia deals. My portfolio also includes Enlight Media in China; CJ E&M and KOCCA in Korea; Mongol TV and others. Additionally, I have several projects where I am connecting US companies with Asian partners.

INSIGHTS@ATF: What has been the most difficult manoeuvre thus far in your communications direction with the clients you have now?

MJ: Some clients, both established and newer, are having growing pains – this is a luxury problem as their businesses are doing extremely well. Their time to discuss communications' efforts is sometimes limited. Also, the pace at which they are growing means there is a fluid story to tell, with new twists and turns every day, and I find this aspect to be quite exciting. That said, all of my clients are very experienced in the global space and we are in synch with the overall communications strategy.

INSIGHTS@ATF: Apart from the digital hoo-hah, what has been the most prominent landscape change in

the industry thus far? (Already accounting production standards, piracy nosedive and formats that have successfully travelled)

MJ: A major change I have witnessed over the past 10—15 years is the increasing willingness, enthusiasm and trust that Westerners now have to collaborate with Asian producers and companies. Also, the promotion of the creative Asian production community is blossoming within Asia and outward. Asian producers have become more outgoing and want to showcase their talent on a bigger, international stage.

INSIGHTS@ATF: If you could do it all again, what would you do differently?

MJ: I definitely would have ventured into Asia a few years earlier with my business. However, my company is growing extremely well, and I am fortunate to work with premium clients. I am thankful to all the wonderful people both in Asia and around the world that have helped me to get where I am today.

More on MJ Sorenson On

the Road to Success

INSIGHTS@ATF: Who are your business influences?

MJ: Richard Branson is someone whom I watch and try to emulate. He is a true entrepreneur, bold risk taker, and global player in the entertainment industry and beyond. He shares his success with his colleagues, which I admire.

For the TV business specifically, I was fortunate to learn directly from some of the best modern TV executives – at MTV Networks. Former CEO Tom Freston, and President Sara Levinson had a strong global vision for the company and started creating international channels right from the start when other TV outlets were too cautious.

As for a PR influencer, my mentor is international PR maven, Mary Powers from MPowers in Canada. And I want to mention Michel Rodrigue from The Format People, who brought me onboard to work with some of his Asian clients and projects. Michel was integral in helping to revolutionise the Mongolian TV landscape.

INSIGHTS@ATF: What has been the best business decision you've made?

MJ: The best business decision I've made is for my company to expand into Asia, where there were, and still are, few western PR and marketing agencies for the global television industry. I am continually discovering exciting opportunities in China, India, Mongolia, Korea and throughout the region. I am fortunate to collaborate with some of the very best Asian broadcasters and producers to secure global attention for their programming and company activities.

INSIGHTS@ATF: What is the best piece of advice given to you? **MJ:** Be

bold – don't be afraid to take chances and make mistakes.

About MJ Global Communications

MJ Global Communications (MGC) was founded in 2011 to address the unique marketing and communication needs of the global entertainment industry. The company is actively working in Asia to help raise both company and executive profiles from the region to the global industry.

MGC's portfolio of clients include: Zee TV India, Star China, Mongol TV, Enlight Media China, Bomanbridge Singapore, among others. In the past year, MGC CEO, MJ Sorenson, has been a featured Master Class speaker in both China and S. Korea discussing the importance of global communications for Asian format producers. MGC led successful campaigns to have 3 Asian female executives to be named to The Hollywood Reporter's Most Powerful Women in Media list; as well as placement of hundreds of articles in major trade media such as Variety, The Hollywood Reporter, The New York Times, Content Asia, C21 Media, World Screen News and more.

MJ's career spans from helping to develop MTV Networks international division, in marketing and programming roles; to heading marketing and communications for the International Emmy Awards. Prior to launching MGC, she spent several years with major content market organizer, Reed Midem, handling North American sales for MIPCOM and MIPTV. She also served on the Board of New York Women in Film & Television as VP of Communications.

ASIA Insights

MJ experienced first-hand how the region's broadcast industry has changed and it parallels the evolution of the Asia TV Forum. In the year 2000, when she first attended ATF, with the International Emmy Awards, she encountered the event's beginning -- an intimate, casual gathering at the Sentosa Resort, with very few non-Asian participants. Over the years she attended and witnessed ATF becoming one of the top global content markets - attracting major international studios, top-level executives and producing high concept conferences that highlight new trends within the region.

Over the years, MJ also took notice of major changes in Asian content production standards as well as the respect and credibility that Asian companies have achieved throughout the world. Piracy was a major problem 10-15 years ago, and this issue has lessened dramatically, helping to elevate Asian companies so that they are seen as equal players in the industry. There is a stronger trust, on both sides, to do business. Particularly in regard to the Format genre, the maturing of the Asian market has meant that Asian companies who are playing by the industry's rules -- officially licensing formats and shows -- enjoy the benefits of being part of a global brand. Many companies reach top ratings with formats like The Amazing Race, Asia's Top Model, The Voice, Idol, MasterChef, and others. Both pan-regional and country-specific formats have been successful. With rising production reputations, Asian companies are increasingly able to present and sell their own unique formats to the world. Major UK company, ITV, is distributing home-grown China format, Sing My Song internationally. And JiangSu's top-rated format, Super Combat Teams was just optioned in the U.S. Many western companies have now opened branches in Asia -- Fremantle Media, Talpa, Endemol, etc.

MGC is continuing to expand its company's reach into Asia and is excited to see how much further the industry will evolve in the region, and in which direction it will move. They see Asia holding the best opportunities for the content industry's growth today.