

Jasa Marga
Going for Profits

Dato Najib - Emerging Asian Leader

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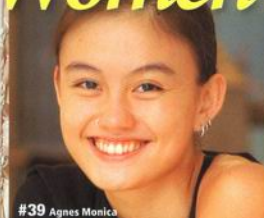
Most Powerful Women



#36 Siti Hardjanti Rukmana



#31 Krisdayanti



#39 Agnes Monica



#3 Kristiani Herawati Yudhoyono



#1 Megawati Sukarnoputri



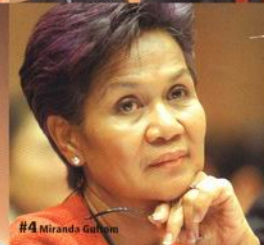
#2 Sri Mulyani Indrawati



#34 Martha Tilaar



#6 Mari Elka Pangestu



#4 Miranda Gultom

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Spinning democracy, transparency

Inke Maris has built a booming business out of public relations in Indonesia. At the center of her mind is the promotion of democracy and transparency in the country. **By Albertus Weldison Nonto**

ANYONE WHO WATCHED national television broadcaster TVRI a decade ago will be familiar with the face of Inke Maris, 57, and her interviews with prominent personalities as part of her work in presenting the station's English news service.

She has disappeared from the screen now but remains a strong presence behind the cameras and is now better known for her prominent public relations firm, Inke Maris & Associates, which turns over more than Rp15 billion per year in revenue.

She started the company 20 year ago, when it was one of the pioneers in the industry. "I saw the opportunity in the industry, and in the past five to 10 years public relations has played a far more important role in Indonesia, helping to cement corporate branding or image, assisting with the marketing mix strategy and for government, which needs strategic communications to socialize its programs to the public," she says.

According to Inke, the government made the right decision to deploy PR companies to assist its communication strate-

gies, since the role is so crucial. "The wrong statement can be harmful for a career politician, and both politicians and business leaders need to know how to communicate well with the public," she says.

In business, public relations is also crucial in assisting with brand sales strategies or to deal with crucial issues facing a company.

She recalls when PT Newmont Minahasa Raya was charged with damaging the environment. Her task was to explain clearly the problem in the light of solid facts.

"We worked with more than 10 accredited international laboratories and came out with the same conclusion that there was no environmental problem. Then it was a fight to change the public perception," she says.

In the field of political economy, PR has also played a role in revamping the business and investment climate in Indonesia. In the era when there has been much inconsistency in Indonesia's government policies, Inke has striven to present a clear picture for foreign investors about policies in order to maintain a good business climate in Indonesia.

"The public should see PR companies as

a strategic partner in building reputations to achieve goals, both in the private and government sectors," she says.

Essential insights

A KEY FACTOR IN THE WORK OF A PUBLIC relations operator is to make a client aware that transparency and openness are crucial in determining the success of a company or a political movement.

"We explain to them that communication is very important. For the government sector we always encourage them to communicate in order to gain attention for their program."

It's not surprising to learn that it was Inke and her firm that ran the media center for the "SBY-JK" campaign for presidency in 2004.

When she won the job from the candidates' campaign team she was assigned to design a media center for Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Jusuf Kalla and their team that could cope with media affairs, analyze public reaction to the campaign topics, monitor public perceptions and recommend strategic steps to advance their position.



"I have to say that dealing with political PR is tough compared to dealing with the business sector, because politics is so fluid," she says. But she also sees an increasing trend for political parties to make use of PR companies to handle their communication strategies.

Inke also believes that even though society is becoming more open and the government tends to become more transparent, the role of PR is still important.

For business, Inke says it is clear that the role of a PR company should be to encourage operators to be more open and provide as much information as possible to the public.

One long-running client of her firm is Singapore Airlines (SIA), which for more than 15 years has entrusted her with work such as publicizing all financial reports and holding workshops for the media on the airline industry.

Tough competition

INKE, WHO LEARNED HER CRAFT AS A communicator with the BBC's Indonesia section in London, doesn't claim to have played an important role in making the PR business boom in Indonesia.

"I don't want to make that claim," she says. "I feel that there are so many global PR consultants who believe that Indonesia is a market for them to do business the competition is getting tough," she laments.

She insists that her own PR work is far more idealistic than foreign companies that just concentrate purely on big-ticket consultancy fees. Other local players also adopt an idealistic view of their work, she believes, and help to promote the issues of democratization and transparency to both business and government sectors.

"We want to promote and contribute to democracy in this country, fight against corruption."

Inke, who holds a Masters degree in mass communications from Leicester University in England, admits her idealism sometimes makes her selective in her choice of clients. She does not accept clients or organizations with a bad reputation for being

full of KKN (the Indonesian initials for corruption, collusion and nepotism).

When she accepted SBY's offer to work with his team in 2004 she saw that changes were necessary. She pointed to the ASK-ESKIN (Asuransi Kesehatan Kemiskinan - Health Insurance for the Poor) program and noted that programs such as this normally only existed in socialist and developed countries, making it worthy of attention.

Her main concern was to be able to see the platform of the political party. Similarly, the same policy is applied to business organizations, making it essential to build into the project an initial careful learning process regarding the client and its needs.

"THE WRONG STATEMENT CAN BE HARMFUL FOR A CAREER POLITICIAN, AND BOTH POLITICIANS AND BUSINESS LEADERS NEED TO KNOW HOW TO COMMUNICATE WELL WITH THE PUBLIC,"
INKE MARIS

There is no shortage of public relations firms in Indonesia but Inke believes many operators only think they can practice PR but are not really professional.

Earning the title 'professional' only comes with the ability to plan, analyze and measure outputs.

"For example before we ran the Buyat Bay program for PT Newmont Minahasa, we conducted what we call a 'perception audit' to measure the acceptability of our messages," she recalls.

Government watchdogs

ANOTHER CLIENT IN THE GOVERNMENT sector is the Indonesian Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center, one task

that fits with her commitment to promote transparency in Indonesia.

The State Audit Agency (BPK) is another government client that is a perfect fit. Her work with this latest client includes assuring that communication strategies work both internally and externally.

Inke admits that much of BPK's product is difficult to be understood by the public, and her role is to make it easier to understand.

As an individual, Inke is part of a communication team to assist the Commission for Corruption Eradication (KPK).

At PPATK, Inke's role is public opinion building by persuading all stakeholders to work to strengthen the role of PPATK.

Now the House of Representatives is amending the anti-money laundering law, which needs to be benchmarked to international standard.

Inke points to the result of her work, showing media coverage that shows that public perception of the PPATK is improving and there is increasing awareness of its role in combating corruption and money laundering from drugs, corruption, gambling, human trafficking as well as terrorism.

"I commit my idealism so this country will be more open, organized and transparent," she says.

Inke's well-known face has helped her to win new clients, but at other times winning business involves taking part in open bids for small projects.

An internet presence has helped her to win international clients. Overall, she says, winning business is a lottery: "Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose," she smiles.

At the moment Inke Maris & Associates manages more than 30 clients of whom 70% are international clients. Inke admits that dealing with international companies is usually a simple process, since there is an appreciation of time and expertise.

Local customers can be frustrating. All too often they only invite Inke and her team to hear their ideas so that they can implement themselves. For Inke, that too is just business. **GA**