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As part of the *Café Insights* series of interviews with inspiring speakers, The Insight Bureau recently caught up with Mark Laudi, an award-winning radio and television presenter, and entrepreneur based in Singapore.



**AV:** Hello and welcome to another in the series of Café Insights and today I'm at The Fullerton Hotel here in Singapore with Mark Laudi.

**ML:** Hi Andrew, good to see you.

**AV:** Great. Mark is best known for his time as a broadcast journalist with CNBC where he was for about 7 years, and previously on radio as well. Welcome to Café Insights. So, what keeps you busy these days?

**ML:** Well thanks for the invitation Andrew. I guess there are two things that I am focussing on most of my time; one of course is to host business events ...

**AV:** ... yes, and that's how we work together ...

**ML:** ... and hosting business events is really, I suppose, an extension of the sort of work I used to do at CNBC, except of course it's much more fun because you actually get to see your audience, unlike in Television. And I also focus a great deal of my time on coaching others how to present, with a specific focus on media training -- and not just the traditional media, but also social media. As you know, a lot of companies produce their own content these days, including for internal communications where CEOs might be required to give town hall addresses or manage strategy changes or brand changes for an internal audience or staff, and also to focus a lot on pitching. So, lots of entrepreneurs, CEOs going on road shows, CEOs ahead of difficult Annual General Meetings ... those are the sort of people I help to make a better impression on their audience.

**AV:** Interestingly you say internally as well, because it does matter very much about how you communicate with your 'troops' on the ground.

**ML:** Well, you know, if Shakespeare was alive today he wouldn't be saying "all the world is a stage", he would be saying "all the world is a video!" And there are enough examples where CEOs have been caught out, not because they didn't present well in front of their internal audience but because somebody in the audience pulled out their mobile phone and recorded them, and put that on YouTube, and all of a sudden, these comments that were made internally to a small group have become public knowledge, spread far and wide. Mitt Romney famously had that happen to him during the presidential election campaign a few years ago, do you remember that? That was a charity event and somebody recorded his comments ...

**AV:** ... and within seconds it was all over the world!

**ML:** Exactly! It's gone so much further than just "I'm talking to staff" or "I'm talking to the Media". You're talking to *everybody* at the same time.

**AV:** I was going to ask you, with all the experience that you've had working in the media, what are the biggest changes that you have seen, and I guess that it's really in terms of how pervasive and immediate social networks have really made communication.

**ML:** Well, how long have we got? I mean, the fact is that the media in the way it existed when I joined Radio or CNBC just doesn't exist anymore! And the trend is quite obvious; advertisers follow audiences. You know, advertisers don't actually buy airtime or space in the newspaper, they buy access to an audience. So if the audience is no longer reading the newspaper or watching the TV station, where do the advertisers go? The answer, of course, is online. The end result of that is a disintermediation of the media. Do we really need the media? Do we have a media organisation now... Cafe Insights – that's 'insightbureau.com/media' or 'Insight Bureau TV'. There is really no need for media in the form that it was 15 years ago. Now, that doesn't mean that they will cease to exist, because there is still a certain amount of credibility that comes with a third party storyteller, but certainly, you know, I can't think of any other industry that has changed as much as the media.

**AV:** Back to the moderating, which is the world in which you and I work together, you have been moderating a number of different events, both internal and external. There have been conferences where there has been an entire day that needed a safe pair of hands to guide them through, to keep the time, but also to make sure that the issues are properly covered. And other times where it has been just the single session that was the most important session of all -- the highlight, the keynote or the keynote panel -- that needed to work well. What are some of the examples of things that you have done like that?

**ML:** Well, I suppose a recent example, which also was quite weighty, I have to say, was managing a discussion among various *conflicting* parties in an industry where you had some very extreme views. Unfortunately it was Chatham House rules' so I can't tell you any details, except to say that we had people kind of lunging across the tables at each other, sounding a little bit worse than European Greek debt negotiations! But you know it was quite dicey and so my role was really to make sure that everybody left the room having made progress on their positions, maybe be less intractable, may be more willing to cooperate and work towards a resolution if not actually solve the problem altogether. And you know, to that end, I would hasten to add you mentioned keeping the time, you know, to be honest that's an important part -- and a good moderator would keep to time as much as possible – [*Laughing*] – that was actually the least of my worries at that time.

**AV:** Well that's interesting because I don't think people would have thought about the importance of moderating internal confidential meetings like that. More often of course, we are talking about high profile events where an organisation has invested an awful lot of money in a programme. This is one of the things that I am talking to my clients about all the time; you spend all this money on a keynote, you've flown all of your executives in, in some cases you've spent a lot of money even bringing your clients together, yet, what kind of thought process has gone into place to really make sure that that event programme that you have devised actually works?

**ML:** You would expect me to agree with you now ...

**AV:** I would! [*laughter*]

**ML:** ... and of course I do, but let me just explain a little bit as to why: Dan Raviv; Tom Brokaw; Peter Jennings; do you remember these names? These were the big names of American television and the reason they were so famous is because they were the "anchors". And, as the name suggests, they held everything together. In a TV station, there was little as important as the anchor. Reporters come and go, stories come and go, locations even come and go. At the end of the day it is the individuals who were holding all of it together -- the anchors! And so they are called anchors for a reason. They're the ones where all the emphasis is because the TV stations recognize that without that anchor you don't have a face that ties it all together. You don't have the ability to nut-out an issue from a third party perspective. If you choose somebody internally to moderate an event, the chances are they are going to ask much softer questions. After all, it's their boss who they are

interviewing on stage. So the bottom-line is, if you're running an event, you really need to look at the moderator, not as the guy who keeps the time but that you really look at as the Anchor without whom you don't *have* the show!

**AV:** When I think of some of the keynote speeches that I have seen, on paper we've had a really great person, and everyone had anticipated this to be really fantastic. Yet on the day it was quite a let-down because, well, we didn't really get the real person. What we got was a prepared speech, what we got was someone else putting out a lot of corporate fluff. What people in audience want to see is *how* that person managed to do what they did, how did they feel, what did they anticipate, what is their vision for the future ... and I think this is one of the things that is kind of lacking in many programmes, and I try and encourage that as much as I can.

**ML:** Yes, it can be difficult for people to let go of the prepared speech and to not choreograph things as much as they might have done in the past. But let's again take a step back and look at what audiences actually want. Consider for a minute what gets the most hits on YouTube. Do you know what gets the most hits on YouTube?

**AV:** No.

**ML:** Well, let me tell you; it's music videos, how-to videos and close circuit television footage of something extraordinary happening! And in all cases, we are now no longer looking at these highly produced, slick, well choreographed productions. The clips that get the most hits are the ones that look real, the ones that look authentic, that don't look staged, the ones that really carry across that, hey, you are here with us in the moment. And so in order to take what the audience is already expecting and putting that on stage doesn't require a lot of courage. It just needs a speaker who is given the freedom to be able to do that, to not have to read the script but who *is* able to make comments (within the agreed conversational topic of course). But the audience is so much better served when you have that element of authenticity, sincerity and surprise.

**AV:** Another aspect of this, which we were chatting about earlier, is how organizations sometimes think about events as 'discrete', like it happens on Thursday and Friday. But it doesn't; an event has a lead-in and a lead-away, and I think being able to draw from much of the content either to excite people to come to the event or to give tangible take-aways that people can share after the event is something that a lot of organizers fail to do.

**ML:** True. In content marketing terms it is called 'tent-poling'. We are all so conditioned now to watching things on video and expecting to be able to see a video on whatever subject we want, that event organisers really do themselves a disservice by just having the speaker speak and not capturing it on camera. So, they've paid you and your speaker the fee to appear, how are they now leveraging this investment? To be able to say we didn't just have a two day benefit of having the speaker onsite, but we had three months' worth of benefit in the lead-up to help promote the event. And we've had another six months of benefit after the event by having captured the speaker either on stage or in an additional interview. And that content obviously doesn't just then help to reinforce the event that you've just held but also helps you market next year's event to your paying audience or to your sponsors or to your staff or whoever you're doing it for. You know, we really need to look beyond the traditional way in which events used to be staged and realise that not only is it *possible* for us to use technology to extend the value of the event but we *have* to extend the value of the event to cater better to our audiences.

**AV:** And I've seen it done very well; a mix of the content in the conference and also soundbites from the speakers, but another element, of course, is getting the reaction from the delegates themselves.

**ML:** Exactly. And any number of delegates will tell you that the events that are most engaging, the ones that are most memorable and the ones that they will come back to next year are the ones where they felt they had a role to play, they didn't just come along and listen to endless plenaries. They came, they got involved, they got engaged, they contributed to the content in some form. Television can, doesn't have to, but television *can* play a role in ensuring that this community of people consisting of the speakers, the delegates, the sponsors and exhibitors too lives on long after the event and actually lives on all year round, so that next year when the event rolls around again you're not kind of re-activating people from scratch and kind of saying "Hey, remember us? We met last year". You're actually simply *extending* that community for another year and building on it. And I might also say, that if you think that people aren't going to go to your event because they can watch it on YouTube, that is a *very* big misunderstanding of what events are all about. I mean, people go to events to *meet* people. Yes, the content is important, but it's the value in *networking* that frankly television can never replace.

**AV:** I remember we had a discussion when I was at The Economist Group about how the Internet was going to kill conferences. But far from it! People still want to come together, look each other in the eye, shake hands and share experiences...

**ML:** ... because it's the chance meeting -- how many times have you bumped into your next business partner in the buffet line?

**AV:** Exactly. Fascinating stuff Mark. Thank you very much for spending a little time with me today. You're a busy guy, you're flying all over the world doing various things, anything interesting coming up?

**ML:** Well as I focus very much on moderating business events and presentation skills training in the various forms that I have mentioned, it's certainly taking me throughout Asia but also taking me to the Middle East increasingly, US and Europe. And I can't wait to get the opportunity to interview *you* on *Café Insights* for a change Andrew

**AV:** Well sure, we will turn the tables another day! Thank you very much indeed.