



SMU partners with branding titan to help startups tell their story

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Learn the science of good storytelling in Asia's first Brand Hackathon

We live in a world of almost infinite choices.

Most of us wake up in the morning and have to pick from ten different brands of coffee and choose between three ride-hailing apps to get to work. On the streets and online, we are bombarded with thousands of new products vying for our attention. How can startups stand out in this crowded landscape?

Branding and design expert Lim Sau Hoong believes that telling a compelling brand story is key. She has partnered with Singapore Management University's Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SMU-IIE) in [The Brand Hackathon](#), a 48-hour intensive collaboration between founders and designers to co-create compelling brand stories.

Sau Hoong has been integral in some of the world's most famous brand stories. As a visual advisor of the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, she helped put up a masterful sensory feast that presented China at its best. Prior to being the curriculum director of the Brand Hackathon, she was the Creative Director of Ogilvy & Mather Singapore, Beijing and Shanghai, and was a judging panelist at the Cannes and New York Advertising Festival.

She shares some useful tips to get started on creating a brand story:



about your motivations and goals

A successful brand story powerfully communicates the core values of the entrepreneur, according to Sau Hoong. "It is a relatable journey that evokes a strong emotional connection between the company and the customers."

Take Airbnb as an example. A decade ago, who would have thought that millions of people would willingly stay at the home of a stranger, or open their space up to some random person they met on the internet? Airbnb spun a story that talks about "coming home" wherever you are, and that story formed a trusted community of travelers and homeowners now worth billions.

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Humans are hard-wired for stories. Important ideas are passed down through fables and fairy tales; history's most important information are translated into stories. We trust, understand, and are generally more receptive to good storytelling.

Think big but focus on the small details during execution

During the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the Chinese government used the opening ceremony as an opportunity to reposition the country as a modern and progressive society. "They were not shy about delving into its centuries long tradition of innovation and invention," said Sau Hoong. The over ten minutes long [opening ceremony](#) was a masterful sensory feast that presented China at its best – complete with reenactments.

The secret was in the details, with China focusing on what is intrinsically associated with them. Similarly, the 2012 London Olympics achieved great success, albeit at a lower budget, by highlighting what is most popularly associated with them in pop culture: a very witty James Bond-esque entrance of the Queen.

In the grand scheme of things, all Olympics opening ceremonies could have been the same: an opening number by the host country, lighting of the torch, and entrance of the athletes as the main points.