

Joint Media Release

Australia Malaysia cultural awareness becoming more complex in the *'instant gratification'* era

Monday January 18, 2016. Although overwhelmed by the positive response the new venture **Connect Malaysia** has received since commencing business in late 2015, it has highlighted to principal consultant Joe Perri the ongoing lack of intercultural awareness, appreciation and understanding that exists amongst Australian business owners.

The pace of economic globalisation means that business owners cannot function in isolation and must engage and interact with the rest of the world for their long term commercial viability and success. As a result, intercultural communication is not an option, but a very important necessity said Joe Perri.

From an Australia Malaysia perspective, much has been said and promoted about the export opportunities for Australian SMEs in Malaysia since the Malaysia Australia Free Trade Agreement (MAFTA) came into effect in January 2013. Today, six out of the ten top export countries for Australian goods are to Asia* with Malaysia moving into 8th position in 2014.

Equally, Malaysian business owners and corporations have been heading down under in increasing numbers lured by Australia's vibrant economy and position as one of the world's most affluent and advanced nations.

As pleasing as it is to see Australian businesses responding to the opportunities of the Asian Century, far too many business owners fail to appreciate the complexity of factors that are important to developing the deep meaningful relationships in Asia upon which the commercial engagement will be built said Joe Perri.

"This is especially relevant for doing business in Malaysia as Malaysians only do business with people they know and like and establishing this all important personal relationship that is crucial for success takes time".

"Intercultural awareness and associated behaviour have always been complex and fraught with danger – however, they have become even more precarious in today's instant gratification world and the lack of appreciation that some things simply just take time!"

Unfortunately Australian business owners are not alone and their Malaysian counterparts are also succumbing to the western *instant gratification* affliction.

At a recent seminar, Cultural Synergies principal, founder and author Dr Tom Verghese stressed to the audience that misinterpretations occur primarily from a lack of understanding. "Lack of knowledge of another culture can lead to embarrassing or amusing situations at best i.e. the kind of mistakes and scenarios that may be encountered on an overseas holiday".

*1.China, 2.Japan, 4. Republic of Korea, 5. Singapore, 8. Malaysia and 9. Thailand – source DFAT website

“However, in business, these mistakes are magnified to the point where they may confuse or even offend people – the very people SMEs are seeking to do business with thus making commercial engagement difficult if not impossible”.

To assist Australian SMEs seeking to do business in Malaysia, Cultural Synergies and Connect Malaysia have announced that they will join forces to provide a number of workshops on this subject. The first workshop is planned for late March or early April.

Working with business partners or customers from different cultures raises many challenges and requires new attitudes and skills said Tom Verghese and Joe Perri. “Without the right approach, cultural differences greatly reduce effectiveness of an overseas relationship”.

“Our objective of the intercultural workshops is to assist Australian SMEs to understand and appreciate the Malaysian culture and build intercultural expertise and capabilities”.

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Notes to the editor: Pictured together from left Cultural Synergies Founder Dr Tom Verghese and Connect Malaysia Principal Consultant Joe Perri

