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THE exclusive alliance between Petaling Jaya-based public relations (PR) firm Essence Communications and one of the world's largest public relations agencies, Burson-Marsteller (B-M), is expected to create a better business synergy between both companies to capture potential business.

Both companies signed an alliance agreement on Thursday, which will see Essence Communications becoming the exclusive affiliate partner of B-M in Malaysia and the first point-of-contact for the global firm's clients in the country.

B-M Asia-Pacific president and chief executive officer Bob Pickard says the company previously worked with different partners in Malaysia to serve its clients locally but it has reached a time to form a permanent alliance with a local party to serve its clients effectively.

"Our customers want us to be in the Malaysian market, which is an important market in Asia. We are here to be client-centric. We have a partner that we are very comfortable with. It is convenient, efficient and has perfect chemistry effect," he tells *StarBizWeek* in an interview.

He says B-M and Essence Communications have collaborated in a few different projects before this permanent alliance.

"Why bother to set up an office from scratch when you already have a partner here? And the partnership is ongoing," Pickard says, adding that the company's local clients include *HP* and *Accenture*.

He says B-M will offer international reach and capabilities, training resources and tools in the alliance while Essence offers the Malaysian network, its market expertise and its successful track record.

Essence Communications group managing director Felix Heinimann says the new cooperation will enable Essence to further sustain and cement its position as one of the leading PR agencies in the country.

"The tie-up will open new avenues and greater access into a wide network of profes-

A synergistic alliance

Essence to be first point-of-contact for B-M's clients in Malaysia



Bob Pickard (left) and Felix Heinimann.

sional expertise for Essence, which would complement efforts in finding the right solutions for our clients," he says.

Heinimann says both firms will share expertise and staff for relevant client engagements under this collaboration.

"Essence will also have a chance to tap on the facilities of B-M in terms of training, international resources and expertise, which will be a big boost for our talents," he says.

Asked on the possibility for B-M to take up a stake in Essence Communications, Pickard

says: "We are interested in Essence Communications as an affiliate partner now but the future has all kinds of possibilities."

B-M is a part of Young & Rubicam Brands, a unit of the world's communications services network, WPP Group. The firm's worldwide network consists of 68 own offices and 67 affiliate offices, together operating in 92 countries across six continents.

Essence Communications is 60% owned by WPP and the remaining by Heinimann. The Malaysian communications firm provides

integrated solutions designed to support business goals, marketing strategies and the unique value of client brands. Its clients include Etihad, Cyberview and Fitness First.

On the performance of the PR industry in Asia-Pacific, Pickard says it was comparatively robust last year and a lot of clients or advertisers have realised that PR is a value-added mechanism, especially when used in high-impact, digital campaigns.

He says clients are becoming more PR-centric nowadays and the industry performance this year is expected to be better than last year.

Heinimann says PR is taking a more prominent role in Malaysia and is becoming an important tool in communications; thus the market is expected to continue to grow further.

To utilise PR as an effective tool in communications, he says: "The most important thing is to really know what you want to achieve in your business. Then ally yourself with experts who can assist and guide you in communications to achieve your business results."