

## GYM and FITNESS



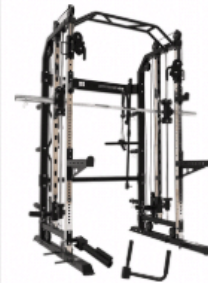
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## OPINION

## Why is it often difficult to get women to speak at conferences, when man say 'yes' straight away?

TrinityP3 founder Darren Woolley wants to see more women speaking at conferences, but his own experience as a session curator at the Mumbrella360 Asia conference leads him to believe there are deep-rooted issues at play

September 11, 2019 9:53

by **DARREN WOOLLEY**

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I doubt there would be anyone that argues against the importance of having a greater diversity of voices and opinions discussing the myriad of challenges and opportunities facing marketing, media and advertising. And by diversity I mean the full range of diversity including cultural, age, gender and more.

After all, as the most quoted historical figure on the internet (Albert Einstein) is quoted as saying: "We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them." Hearing the opinions of a greater diversity of professionals within the industry in the discussion around addressing the issues we are facing can only be a positive, right?

Therefore, it was refreshing attending the [Mumbrella Asia Finance Marketing Summit](#) last month in Singapore where there was a broad cross section of the marketing community represented on stage. From millennials to baby boomers as well as marketers, agencies and media – and a good representation across genders too. Although the latter is one area where some of the panels were challenged, relatively speaking.

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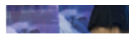
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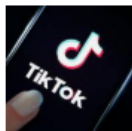


Now it is well known that Mumbrella has a policy of encouraging gender diversity in their events and this should be commended. But I have a confession to make. While I have been accepted (in the call for sessions) to curate a session at [the Mumbrella360 Asia conference](#) running on November 5-7 at the Marina Bay Sands Convention Centre in Singapore, it has been a challenge to recruit an appropriate representation of women for the panel.

Let me explain. The session is addressing the issue of pitch behaviour. It is not a standard panel, but a television game show format called 'The Pitch – A Game Show beyond All Others'. Like any game show it needs contestants and in this case I am looking for agency personnel who are involved either directly (business development and marketing roles) or indirectly (senior agency management).

Now I understand that the topic of pitching, especially in some markets, is highly controversial. There is often trade media reporting on unfair and unjust pitch practices and likewise it is a topic that can be polarising with both buyers (marketers and procurement) and suppliers (agencies). It is with a deep understanding of the sensitivities of the topic that we developed the format of the session for the MumbrellaAsia 360 session.

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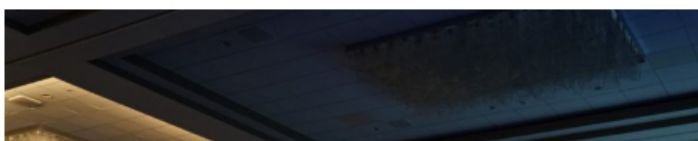
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Rather than taking a page out of the Institute of Communication Agencies in Canada and starting an industry 'name and shame' campaign against those advertisers who take advantage of the agencies in the pitch process, we felt it would be more productive and safer to have fun with a game show format.

Here is where the gender issue arises for me. I contacted a number of senior industry people and invited them to participate. Responses came directly and quickly from the men I invited, most of whom have senior management roles. The responses were almost immediate with most accepting to the point I had to turn down a few because potentially the panel of contestants would exceed the audience in the room.

On the other hand, the number of women I have invited so far is five times greater than the number of men and still we are short of women to be contestants. Why?





Some had to check with their boss, who then said 'no'. Other suggested it would be better if their boss were invited, who on checking was a man, so I said 'no'. One said 'yes' and then said 'no' because they were worried about what potential clients would think and so on.

Yes the topic is a sensitive one, especially for agencies. That is why we have deliberately designed the session to be fun. But it is an interesting observation that while the men of various cultures were happy to say 'yes', the women in the industry were far more cautious.

I can only speculate on the reason for this caution. It could be due to the apparent domination of men in the most senior roles (almost all the bosses that needed to be consulted were men), or as is common in many markets the women not feeling confident their opinion was important enough to be heard. Or it could be the workplace culture in the context of the wider diversity cultures.

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Now I know this is a generalisation and there are certainly professional women out there with strong opinions and willing to share them, but if we are committed to hearing a diversity of opinions in the industry – how do we make it safer for women to participate and have their opinions heard without fear or favour?

One way is to have a register of women who are not just willing, but able to stand up and be heard. I know of two. One is [Rock Star Keynote Speakers](#) founded by Chris Reed, earlier this year, for paid keynote speakers.

The other is [Peggy's List](#), which launched four years ago and more and has recently expanded into Singapore. Peggy is a reference to Peggy Olsen, the character in Mad Men. The list is free to join and is an invaluable resource for conference organisers to find the names or the women who want to contribute to the industry conversation, have a point of view to share and have the permission to share it.

In the meantime, if you know of anyone who fits the billing to be a contestant for our session then please do let us know. We can only

change the status quo together.




*Woolley from TrinityP3*


Darren Woolley is CEO and founder at TrinityP3 – a consultancy firm with a presence in Asia, Australia and Europe


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**topics** [CONFERENCES](#), [MUMBRELLA360 ASIA](#), [WOMEN SPEAKERS](#)

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CW 11 Sep 19

Rockstar key note???

Erm Keynote Women was around long before Mr Reed decided to try claim any connection with women!

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**Anonymous** 11 Sep 19

[Edited under Mumbrella's community guidelines] .

Can a credible female speaker who is represented by Chris Reed please identify yourself?

[Reply](#)

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**Charlotte Wilkinson** 11 Sep 19

I'm not represented by Chris Reed but am a regular speaker and listed in the Keynote Women's Speaker Directory.... to my knowledge the group haven't had any requests for panellists or speakers for this event

[Reply](#)

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**Mette Johansson** 13 Sep 19

Correct, Charlotte, we have not had any requests

[Reply](#)

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**ABC** 14 Sep 19

I have heard that they don't really have any staff handling their "rock star speakers" bureau, so even though they may in theory represent a dozen or so women speakers, they are [Edited under Mumbrella's community guidelines].

I'd also love to hear a credible speaker represented by them identify herself!

[Reply](#)

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**Anonymous** 14 Sep 19

I know some speakers who are officially represented by him, but I know of none who actually got [Edited under Mumbrella's community guidelines].

[Reply](#)

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**Insight time:** 11 Sep 19

What the superior man seeks is in himself, as the small man seeks in others.

Confucius

The woman who does not require validation from anyone, is the most feared individual on the planet. Mohadesa Najumi

For some validation is the lover on their arm, whilst for men they just need to be validated by the world.

Haruki Murakami

[Reply](#)

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**Binu Balan** 11 Sep 19

There is indeed a registry for women speakers based out of Singapore and now represented globally; it is the non-profit, 100% volunteer-run directory KeyNote Women Speakers ([www.womenkeynote.com](http://www.womenkeynote.com)), founded and chaired by Mette Johansson. KeyNote has been around since 2017.

Women who want to speak on stages can apply to be listed on this directory, alongside another 100 women from around the world and it's open to women who are speakers on any topic. In Mette's words, 'KeyNote Women Speakers want to make sure that no event organiser has the excuse that they couldn't find a female speaker!'

[Reply](#)

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**Simone Heng** 12 Sep 19

1000% Keynote Women Speakers are Amazing

[Reply](#)

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**Mette Johansson** 13 Sep 19

Thanks, Simone!

[Reply](#)

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**Sheila Berman** 11 Sep 19

I would suggest broadening the sources of speakers. Too often, it's the same companies represented in every event. Why not go on LinkedIn and check out the Marketing experts who write about what's happening in the industry?

[Reply](#)

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**Uma Rudd Chia** 11 Sep 19

I am incredibly surprised you didn't mention keynote women. The website has awesome Seo and the moment you Google keynote women speakers it pops up. Would have been good to do some desktop research. I hear you on women in marketing and advertising often taking a longer time to get back or differing to their bosses. There's a lot of politics to manoeuvre around to have your views and voice heard when you're a woman especially a Creative head. And it's usually men who are appointed as official spokespersons in most agencies. Thankfully I'm in a place where my bosses celebrate my views and encourage me to speak up and welcome me taking public stage. That was not always the case! Do checkout keynote women speakers. It's singapore's largest female speakers directory and represents a diversity of women in terms of culture, experience and background. Very experienced specialised and accomplished speakers in their own fields

[Reply](#)

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**Where are you?** 12 Sep 19

And where are you?

[Reply](#)

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**Simone** 12 Sep 19

Looking forward to your sharing at the upcoming Asia Professional Speakers Singapore meeting. That's another place for speakers! APSS. However, for both Keynote and APSS speakers are looking for paid appearances most of the time, so asking them to appear on panel for free probably would also mean a lot of "nos".

[Reply](#)

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**@Sheila** 12 Sep 19

Marketing experts publish/upload their published articles on LinkedIn, I would not say a marketing expert is someone that has had something published on LinkedIn.

[Reply](#)

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**Sheila** 12 Sep 19

Nowhere in my comment did I say marketing experts are those who publish on LinkedIn.

What I wrote was to go on LinkedIn and to "check out the Marketing experts who are writing about what's happening in the industry."

LinkedIn is a good platform to find thought leaders and experts. The active ones who know how to use LinkedIn, share their thoughts and experiences on their LinkedIn posts or link their articles or blogs on their posts.

[Reply](#)

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**Nikki** 12 Sep 19

I think it's great Darren has given some solutions and started the conversation and awareness of lists... but the point of the article highlights how Men are quick to say yes compared to women being more cautious. Uma Rudd Chia – great to hear you chime-in on real life from a female perspective. I agree there is a bit of politics to manoeuvre around for female especially when you are younger or less experienced compared to their male counterparts. That being said there are a lot of strong passionate women making headway in this space.

[Reply](#)

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**Mette Johansson** 13 Sep 19

Niki, I do agree that women need an extra nudge. Society has shaped women to be more reluctant. What I also experience is that younger generations in Singapore are much more bold and do like to speak up, which I think is a fantastic development!

[Reply](#)

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**SIMONE** 12 Sep 19

Oh and just to add. It isn't just women who are senior having to go through permissions from men above them for approval. I suffered for 4 years under a female boss who systematically blocked me from doing panel appearances, speeches and even a US TV appearance to speak about women in the Asian media industry. More needs to be done for the sisterhood as well.

[Reply](#)

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<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/fighting-manel-femme-edition-juliana-m-chan/> and here: [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/julianachan\\_manels-tips-manel-activity-6574450260872126464-qOsX](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/julianachan_manels-tips-manel-activity-6574450260872126464-qOsX) with tips on how to get female speakers!

Her tips are:

✅ For organizers:

- 💡 Look at both academia and industry
- 💡 Approach both junior and senior women
- 💡 Fly them in from Malaysia, India or HK
- 💡 If no expert can be found, find an investor, educator or policymaker
- 💡 ... just change the date!!!

✅ For speakers:

- 💡 nominate your female colleagues (and DO NOT participate if none can be found)
- 💡 make a public pledge to never again speak on a manel, like Francis Collins, director of the #NIH, and Jeremy Farrar, director of the #WellcomeTrust

✅ For audiences (men & women):

- 💡 call out manels on social media channels such as LinkedIn. Peer pressure works.

[Reply](#)

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**Mette Johansson** 13 Sep 19

And by the way, we have a handful of very credible, experienced and inspirational marketing people on our women's speaker directory ([www.WomenKeyNote.com](http://www.WomenKeyNote.com)). Do drop us a line at the bottom of the homepage and we'll help you get that 50/50 balance. There's no excuse for not having gender balance on speaking stages and panels!

For other conference organisers, we have experts in many different fields, and our extensive network means we can provide speakers beyond those listed.

[Reply](#)

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**jeb** 17 Sep 19

As a side point, anyone – male or female – who has the words Keynote Speaker on their bio needs to assess what they are doing in life.

Up there with Personal Branding as one of the worse phrases in current jargon.

[Reply](#)

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**Anne Miles** 21 Sep 19

Let's not diminish the validity of the point here that women were given the same opportunity and declined. Whether particular agencies were contacted or not is irrelevant. They are good solutions but off point.

I was wondering if others who are used to being diminished daily end up accepting that position? I know I did. Thankfully now I won't take it from

anyone – so maybe I should get on a plane?

[Reply](#)

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**Attitude adjustment** 22 Sep 19

Women need to learn this from men- when a man asked to be part of a panel or speak at an event, he will say yes and advise the powers to be at his work that he got invited and he accepted on behalf of the company. Women need to start doing the same accept and advise the powers to be at your work that you accepted to be on a panel or to speak. Women need to stop asking for permission. If a woman got invited to attend by the organisers that means the person inviting already believes in their ability to participate. I have actually tried this and it works. It was impossible for the company to reverse my involvement without looking like men who do not support in the advancement of women

[Reply](#)

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**Diva** 24 Sep 19

I thought the Econsultancy Digital Diva event this year was pretty good.

They too had trouble getting female speakers so they launched a female-only speaking event. Presenters are all female but the audience was male and female.

This year was the 2nd year they ran it and they had 10 female speakers.

Video highlights here: [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/wati-mohd-taib-56490a3\\_uassociate-diversity-digitization-activity-6581821015918239744-7Zd\\_](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/wati-mohd-taib-56490a3_uassociate-diversity-digitization-activity-6581821015918239744-7Zd_)

I think the bottom line is that if organisers are genuinely interested in getting female speakers, they will make an effort to go get them.

Stop complaining and start being proactive!

[Reply](#)

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**Anonymous** 25 Sep 19

I agree in organisers setting the bar however I do disagree with you on the Digital Divas event. I found it sub par and the title of the event patronising. There is a challenge finding senior women speakers but this is also representative that senior management is still predominantly male. The answer isn't in women only events it's in women, and diversity in general, being part of the day to day.

I received a request to sit on Darren's panel and I declined as he asked me "as a woman" not "as an expert" – there is a distinct difference.

[Reply](#)

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**Diva** 25 Sep 19

Subpar because the speakers were not good enough?

I actually enjoyed most of the presentations.

Maybe you were not invited by Darren as an expert because you're not.

But wrong of him to invite just women. He should be looking for experts and lots of experts out there, who incidentally happen to be women.

[Reply](#)

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**Anonymous** 25 Sep 19

You are welcome to your opinion. I do not agree and found the whole event cringeworthy as did the other attendees from my agency.

And thanks for questioning my credibility. As an Asian female regional leader with growth as part of my remit I am more qualified than the other women, and men, on the panel.

You are are better to ask [Edited under Mumbrella's community guidelines].

[Reply](#)

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**Hearsay** 1 Oct 19

Recently a very senior lady boss of mine mentioned that she is wary about event invites especially when she believes she is being invited 'as a woman' rather than 'as an expert'. I agree with her, it makes you question why you are in the room in the first place.

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