

Projecting the Future

As an innovation leader, Val Morgan is envisioning and shaping the future of cinema advertising in Australia.

Images by Scott Ehler

Teamwork, innovation, and forward-thinking are the core components of the Val Morgan Cinema Network, which represents more than 1,800 cinema screens across Australia.

Damian Keogh joined Val Morgan as CEO in July 2011, bringing to the role a diverse range of media management, sales, marketing, and business development skills. Prior to joining Val Morgan, Damian led the sales and marketing team at pay-television advertising house MultiChannelNetwork [MCN], playing a crucial role in the organisation's revenue growth from an annual turnover of \$50 million to \$350 million over a seven-year period.

Before that, Damian worked with the Seven Network in sport sales and marketing, and was the head of Olympic marketing for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Additionally, Damian has represented Australia in basketball, including three Olympic campaigns in Los Angeles in 1984, Seoul in 1988, and Barcelona in 1992.



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The CEO Magazine spoke to Damian about his journey across the sport and media landscape, the evolution of cinema advertising, and Val Morgan's ambitious plans for growth.

The CEO Magazine: How have you utilised your background to lead your team at Val Morgan?

Damian: I think it's actually helped. I approach management a little bit like the ethos within a lot of sporting teams, particularly around creating teamwork and collective strategy, which is something that every successful team and business needs.

The other thing that I've learned through sport is that every season is a new season. For us, we run Val Morgan on quarterly targets and business plans. Every quarter is like a new season, and we work to continue to improve performance. We work at ensuring we have clear strategies and targets, with performance indicators that stretch people and maximise performance. A successful sporting team is about having a high-performance culture, and that's something that I've tried to inject into Val Morgan.

A team atmosphere is really important. I think the nature of my leadership style is quite personable, and I try to make work fun. We have a saying here: "The better we do, the better we do."

How does that motto translate in times of uncertainty?

Within any sales organisation, you go through a few ups and downs, and that's where your process, core values, knowledge, and experience really come into play. One of the things we've tried to do here is to be innovation leaders.

An innovation leader, or idea-generating company, knows it's not about working longer hours or making more calls when times get tough; it's about looking at what you're doing and thinking

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about how you can change the paradigm and come up with new innovations.

How has the advertising industry evolved in recent years, and how are you addressing these shifts?

The advertising and media landscape has changed incredibly over the past 10 years, and a lot of that change has clearly been driven by technology and new media, which is around online and connectivity through the desktop, then the laptop, and then mobile and tablet. It's really changing consumer habits, and advertising habits and approaches have to be changed as well.

Once upon a time, all the money went into television and newspaper advertising. Newspapers are now suffering significant declines in their advertising because their classifieds have shrunk and their readership is diminishing.

There have been a lot of changes in advertising. Interestingly, cinema—which is a form of audiovisual advertising, which I've always been pretty much involved in with free-to-air and pay-TV—was always considered to be a very impactful and engaging environment to be able to show advertisements. But there were a number of key barriers to utilising cinema advertising.

Since I joined Val Morgan, a large focus for my team has been removing those barriers and being able to line cinema up with television to be able to be planned, bought, and measured like television but with the knowledge that if your ad is showing in cinemas, then it's a lot more impactful.

With the digitisation of cinema, a significant traditional barrier for advertisers has been removed. According to Standard Media Index data, cinema advertising was the fastest-growing media in the country in the 2013 fiscal year.

We represent all the major cinema chains in Australia, so we are an aggregation model, which is very powerful for the industry as it allows us to combine all our attendances to create some good reach metrics for advertisers, which is pretty important for the cinema industry.

Val Morgan is synonymous with cinema advertising. It's a very well-known brand, and it's been around for more than 100 years.

Looking at outdoor advertising, Val Morgan has a couple of thousand screens across Australia. Have you focused on growing that side of the business?

Yes. We really believe in that side of our business, so we've invested in digital retail and digital outdoor signs. We're looking at global trends, and we see that digital out-of-home signage is growing at a significant rate compared to static signs. All our screens are digital, and that allows greater impact and provides the flexibility to change and be creative pretty much instantaneously.

What does the future hold for Val Morgan?

I do believe that if you don't aim for something, then you might hit anything. That being said, I think the transformation of Val Morgan requires a bit more work. We've got some further significant growth opportunity on the cinema and the outdoor advertising sides of our business. Certainly, growing the scale of our outdoor advertising arm will be important moving forward.

In terms of looking forward, I'm enjoying what I'm doing at the moment, I'm enjoying the people that I'm working with, and I'm enjoying the industry that I'm in, so that's my primary focus while there's room for growth and development. •