



Discovery + WarnerMedia in Asia

Job fears sweep a battered industry

While debate rages around the WarnerMedia/Discovery alliance announced last night, in Asia a fresh round of panic is battering an industry still reeling from this month's fallout of the latest phase of Disney's Fox Networks Group acquisition and an HBO Asia team only just unpacking boxes at their new WarnerMedia regional HQ in Singapore.

The full story is on page 8



Disney+ Hotstar heads for Thailand

30 June launch for hybrid service

Disney is rolling out its lower-cost hybrid streaming service, Disney+ Hotstar, in Thailand on 30 June. This is the third Disney+ Hotstar platform in Southeast Asia after Indonesia, which launched in September last year, and Malaysia, which goes live on 1 June.

The full story is on page 3

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Mark Francis joins Astro Malaysia – confirmed

Veteran Asia content exec, Mark Francis, officially joined Malaysia's Astro on Monday as head of content (OTT). Details of the KL-based platform have still not been made public. Francis was head of content for Malaysia-based regional streaming platform iflix before he resigned in mid-2020.

Claire Gorman takes over ABC International Services

Australia's ABC has appointed Claire Gorman as head of international services, effective 24 May. Gorman has been acting head of international strategy since Nov 2020, and will now combine both roles. ABC said the expanded remit reflected its commitment to communities in the Indo-Pacific region.

Disney+ Hotstar heads for Thailand 30 June launch for hybrid service

Disney is rolling out its lower-cost hybrid streaming service, Disney+ Hotstar, in Thailand on 30 June.

Pricing has not been confirmed, and the distribution partners have not been announced.

Disney has dismissed market rumours that the Thai platform will go live with an annual subscription of THB799/US\$25 and a monthly rate of THB67/US\$2.13. There may also be a three-month direct to consumer subscription option.

The platform has also not confirmed its slate of local Thai titles, and has kept any acquisitions very low key.

This is the third rollout of the lower cost Disney+ Hotstar platform in Southeast Asia after Indonesia, which launched in September last year, and Malaysia, which goes live on 1 June.

In Malaysia, Disney+ Hotstar direct-to-

consumer costs RM54.90/US\$13 for three months. The service will also be available through dominant subscription platform, Astro.

In Indonesia, Disney+ Hotstar costs Rp39,000/US\$2.73 a month or Rp199,000/US\$14 a year.

The full Disney+ service is available in Singapore (launched on 23 February 2021) for S\$11.98/US\$9 a month (or S\$119.98/US\$90 a year), with Indian streamer Hotstar available separately. Hotstar launched in Singapore in November last year.

Hotstar titles that may be part of the Thai service include Hindi and Tamil movies and series, such as *Teddy* (mid-June), *Big Bull* (end-June), and *1232 KMS* (from mid-July).

Netflix costs about THB400/US\$13 a month in Thailand.

Asian football fans will be able to see the definite story of the English Premier League in new premium documentary *A Whole New Ball Game*

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- The English Premier League broadcast rights in Asia are worth over **\$400m per year**
- In China, The English Premier League is the **most-followed football league** on social platforms such as Weibo and Toutiao, and became the first league to surpass 1million followers on Douyin (TikTok) in 2019
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- The English Premier League has a worldwide audience of over **four billion**



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TechStorm revamps prime time

New Wed, Thurs belt focuses on Asian originals



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TechStorm Originals Women's Specials: *Girl Up*

Asian esports/gaming/tech entertainment network, TechStorm, debuts its Asian original prime-time programming belt in June along with a call-for-collaboration with indie creators across the region.

The new prime-time belt, TechStorm Originals, kicks off on 9 June at 9.50pm (SG/Malaysia, 8.50pm (JKT/BKK), paying homage to Asian heroes and legends.

The belt will run on Wednesdays and Thursdays, featuring Asian start-up stories, behind-the-scenes narratives and exclusive interviews with "Asia's unicorns, dark horses and business titans".

Titles include *Business Bigwigs* featuring Singapore unicorn Patsnap and Indonesia's Blue Bird Group, along with a series of women's specials featuring Southeast Asia's top female professional gamers and streamers Kimchi, Wolfsbanee, Cherzinga, youth icon Ambry Nurhayati from Superfly Monkey Dragons, Singapore National Team professional boxer Samantha Quek.

Content heading for the belt also "delves deep into human stories of

movers and shakers driving Asia's esports scene, celebrating unsung heroes, hidden talents and their journey to stardom while highlighting the latest game reviews".

TechStorm founder and chief executive, Debbie Lee, says the originals belt is a response to millennial/Gen Z-targeted Asia-centric stories.

"By launching a time belt dedicated to championing the diversity of Asian representatives in the tech, esports and start-up ecosystem, we are positive the new pan-Asian titles will successfully secure an even bigger fan base internationally".

The belt will also include light-hearted entertainment about the latest gadgets, tech innovations and new app reviews, along with carving out a space as the go-to source for pop-culture content and icons across music, sport and design.

The June originals follow the May boost of additional Bahasa Indonesia subtitles ahead of Eid al-Fitr, adding to Thai, Traditional Chinese and English subtitles across its 24/7 channel and VOD catalogue for OTT partner platforms.

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Mediacorp's *Mr Kiasu* returns

Iconic comic character back in an online series after 20 years

Singapore's Mediacorp is returning iconic sitcom, *Mr. Kiasu*, at the end of the month after an absence of 20 years, with an all-new cast, an updated sense of humour, and a focus on younger viewers.

The new six-episode version, *Mr. Kiasu 2.0*, launches as an online series on Friday, 28 May, with all episodes (16-18 minutes each) accessible on Mediacorp's streaming platform, meWatch.

A character created by local writer Johnny Lau in 1989, *Mr. Kiasu* is inspired by Singapore's famed concept of "kiasu" (the fear of missing out) and revolved around a tongue-in-cheek portrayal of Singaporeans.

Mr. Kiasu debuted in 1990 in a series of comic books that ran for about a decade. A stage musical and a TV version in 2001. Lau resurrected the comic books in 2017, 18 years after laying them the rest.

The original TV series aired on Mediacorp's English-language free-TV service, Channel 5, for two seasons. The run ended in 2002.

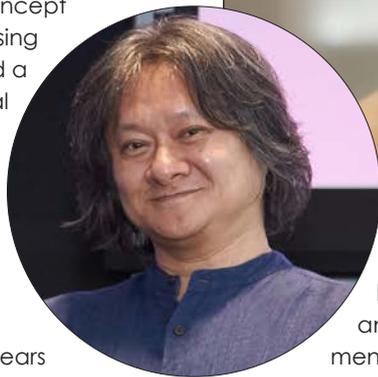
Lau returns as executive producer of *Mr. Kiasu 2.0*. Producers are Benny Koh and Tong Khoo Mun. The series is directed by Cheng Chai Hong.

None of the original cast are involved in the new series.

In the new version, *Mr. Kiasu* has been fired, but true to his never-say-die character, he aims to bounce back, improve himself and possibly even fall in love, all the while navigating the idiosyncrasies



Jaspers Lai in *Mr. Kiasu 2.0*



Johnny Lau

of a modern world filled with tech startups, fusion-health-sport-activities and the growing focus on mental-wellness.

"We want a different take from the original series, there's no point doing the same thing over and over again," Lau says.

The new series consciously courts younger viewers.

Lau talks about creating distance from traditional television production and writing focused on mobile/online audiences.

"We would like to see *Mr. Kiasu* being more relevant to the new generation," he says, describing the new cast of characters as "quite different from the original... much quirkier, a little bit weird, with a darker sense of humour".

The series, he adds, "reflects what people are now compared to early 2000, when life was simpler, and the humour was more straightforward.

"Now it's a different style of humour. There's a lot more challenge to define what's real, what's fake, people are more sceptical now than before," he says.

Jaspers Lai (*The Lion Men*) resurrects the lead role of *Mr. Kiasu*, originally played by Chew Chor Men.

Farah Lola plays *Kiasu's* colleague/best friend Rina; Dasa Dharamahsena as Blake, *Kiasu's* rival in the series; Mark Kinoshita as Danny, the CEO of startup tech company SaboTech; Jo Tan (*Forked*) as Sasha, *Kiasu's* eccentric gym trainer; Jalyn Han as Ah Ma, *Kiasu's* mother; and Joey Pink (*Zombiepura*) as *Kiasu's* girlfriend Ai Swee.

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Adapt... or die

Post-production houses in Asia talk about their approach to tech upgrades

Two realities dominate Southeast Asia's current premium content environment. The first is that demand for Asian scripted content has never been this high, driven by global/regional streamers and a bid by local platforms to be part of a sexy emerging story. The second is that Asian story-telling and creative resources and production infrastructure and processes are stretched to their limits – and in many cases go way beyond current capabilities – by burgeoning demand.

There are zero scare tactics involved in warning of what will happen if Asia's producers fail to step up and close the gap between the two realities. "If local content producers don't create content in the required formats, they will be overlooked, says Malaysian post house, Basecamp Films.

"The survival of production studios in Asia will completely depend on their ability to be able to supply content to the changing format requirements of the global and local streaming platforms," Basecamp Films' managing director, Scott Inglis, says.

His sentiments are echoed in Thailand, where Kantana Post Production MD, Pimlapat Chaiviriyachok, says it is "crucial for any production studios to adapt to new tech in order to keep up with the demands and specifications from any platforms".

Although Covid-19 has constrained cinema mastering services, Basecamp has "refocused our energies to provide our clients with high-quality high dynamic range Dolby Vision mastering services for their upcoming titles". The studio is currently completing broadcast masters for three Malaysian tent-pole movies in Dolby Vision. "Our clients are loving this because the content just looks so much better in HDR and it allows the content owners to market their films globally as premium Malaysian content," Inglis says.

The investment has paid off. "While it has been an expensive exercise to implement reference grade monitoring for picture and audio to master our cinema and broadcast content, we have been



Abang Long Fadil 3, post-production at Basecamp Films

rewarded with a reliably accurate pipeline which has become the backbone of the company," he says.

The upgrades extend across the region. In Vietnam, Capital Studios' CEO, Myke Brown, says international sound standards are now available to local directors and producers, leading to delivering new quality levels to local audiences.

"As the demand for streaming increases, we find that the diverse application and quality requirements for product increases," Brown says, talking about using gaming tools to create environments and then incorporating complex sound designs into these productions.

Vietnam's first Dolby-based studio, Capital Studio uses Dolby audio/video products in all its films, including Wych Kaosayananda's 2020 action feature, *One Night in Bangkok*. Head of audio post, Sergey Groshev, says he used Dolby tools "to make the scenes come to life".

One of Capital Studio's more challenging projects was Vietnam's *Virtual New Year Eve Countdown Show 2021*. Groshev used the Dolby Atmos work flow to manage the mix of multi channel recording, music and virtual environment.

Although it has been using Dolby products for about eight years, Thailand's Kantana Post Production started operating on Dolby Vision and a reference HDR monitor early this year.

Kantana's Chaiviriyachok says the upgrade enables the company to offer local and international clients – including streaming platforms – a broader range

of services. She says streaming platforms have had a significant impact on picture quality in Asia, accelerated by the rapid redirect from theatrical to digital releases because of Covid-19.

Relative newcomers to the Dolby universe, Singapore-based Beach House Pictures says "the rise of global streaming platforms... has definitely accelerated the adoption of new technologies such as Dolby Vision and Atmos in Asia". Beach House started using Dolby Vision in 2020.

"With UHD resolution already being widely adopted by many if not all the streamers, HDR will be the natural next step," says Benjamin Goh, head of post production and technology for Beach House-owned Space Lion Studios.

Dolby Laboratories couldn't be happier. "We are excited to be working with post production studios and production houses in Southeast Asia to enable them with Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos, says Pankaj Kedia, Dolby Laboratories' MD for Emerging Markets.

"Enabling content creators with the tools and infrastructure allows them to produce their shows with the highest quality of audio and video. Helping content creators realise and deliver their vision and intent is a key mission for us at Dolby," he adds.

No one disputes the value of keeping on technology's cutting edge.

As Capital Studio's Brown says: "Staying in touch and incorporating tech upgrades to a studio is part of being relevant, no matter the cost."

Discovery + WarnerMedia = ? in Asia

Job fears sweep consolidation-weary Asia teams; impact way down the line, insiders say

While debate rages around the WarnerMedia/Discovery alliance announced last night, in Asia a fresh round of panic is battering an industry still reeling from this month's fallout of the latest dramatic phase of Disney's Fox acquisition and an HBO Asia team only just unpacking boxes at their new WarnerMedia regional HQ in Singapore.

No timetable has been given for the formation of the new combined entity, which will be named next week. The deal is subject to regulatory scrutiny and approval.

For now, there's a little consolation and perhaps some breathing room in Asia's long-held position as "an afterthought, prioritised according to the size of the business", industry sources said Monday as speculation mounted about the pending announcement. The view was supported by the timing of the company-wide town hall – 1am in Singapore on Wednesday, 19 May.

With multiple rounds of consolidation behind them, few harbour any illusions about the looming bloodbath.

Savage cuts were flagged by the US\$3-billion savings mentioned in last night's announcement along with the benefit of "significant overlapping and duplicative expense base [that] can be rationalized to drive efficiency".

The two companies combined headcount in Asia is about 800. It's too early to assess the exact extent of the duplication.

WarnerMedia and Discovery's combined annual revenues in the region amount to an estimated US\$540 million.

Without its licensing business, Warner-

Media's annual revenues in Asia are estimated to be US\$320 million; about 60% of this is said to come from crown jewel HBO, which operates a suite of premium linear channels along with direct-to-consumer streaming service HBO Go. HBO Max is not yet available legally in Asia.

Discovery's annual revenues (including the New Zealand free-to-air business and the Scripps' channels), are said to be about US\$220 million, with margins said to be way below the approx 40% reported in the network's heyday a decade ago.

Led by Discovery president and CEO David Zaslav, the new entity's projected 2023 revenue is US\$52 billion.

Consolidation-weary staffers in Asia spent last night combing through the joint AT&T/Discovery presentation outlining the benefits of creating a new mega-entertainment entity, with more than 200,000 hours of content, scouring reports out of the U.S., and trying to read between the lines of internal notes sent by AT&T chief executive John Stankey and WarnerMedia CEO Jason Kilar.

"It is becoming clear that WarnerMedia has effectively demonstrated its right to lead in the future media landscape," Stankey said in a company-wide email seen by *ContentAsia*.

"However, we are now in a world where relevance and future success will be tied to greater scale and growth globally," he continued.

Stankey also said that "to be one of the best global media companies requires not only broad and deep creative assets, but an investor base and access to capital to make it happen. The

decision to combine WarnerMedia with Discovery is rooted in this conclusion".

"WarnerMedia's continued evolution to direct relationships with customers will be accelerated, enhanced and secured by this decision," he added.

Speculation has already surfaced about the future of WarnerMedia and Discovery's linear businesses in Asia, with a careful watch on signs that they might follow Disney in axing linear services in Southeast Asia to focus on streaming.

Stankey's note, however, highlighted a commitment to the linear business. "The complementary nature of this combination of companies is critical," he said, adding that it "allows for two important things.

"In our core linear business, a combined offering of programming will stretch across the most powerful advertising demographics and will strengthen the combined company's value proposition in fast evolving markets.

"Further, the programming line-up broadens our audience and will deliver more value to our distribution partners," he said, adding: "In our direct-to-consumer efforts, we add an important and popular content genre, coupled with the strengthening of our upcoming effort to scale internationally".

In his own note, Kilar – whose role in the new entity is unclear – talked about six weeks of momentum, including the *Friends Reunion*, which drops next week, and the June launch of HBO Max is another 39 countries.

"This is a defining moment for us. And I recognize that it will take all we've got to keep collective focus on the mission. We can do it :-)," he said.



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The BIG List

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June 2021	14-15	DW Global Media Forum	Bonn, Germany & Online
	16-18	Vietnam Telefilm	Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam & Online (7-30 June)
	28-30	MIP China	Online
July 2021	14-16	BroadcastAsia/CommunicAsia	Singapore & Online
August 2021	25-27	ContentAsia Summit	Online
	27	ContentAsia Awards	Online
September 2021	1-3	APOS September Edition	Online
	8	AVIA Vietnam in View	Online
	9-12	Gwangju ACE Fair	Gwangju, Korea
October 2021	8-13	Canneseries	Cannes, France & Online
	9-10	MIP Junior	Cannes, France
	11-14	Mipcom	Cannes, France
	30 Oct-8 Nov	34th Tokyo International Film Festival	Tokyo, Japan
November 2021	1-3	TIFFCOM 2021	Tokyo, Japan & Online
	8-11	AVIA Asia Video Summit - State of Piracy	Online
	10-12	Busan Contents Market (BCM)	TBC
	23-24	APOS India	Online
	24-25	Dubai International Content Market	Dubai
December 2021	1-3	Asia TV Forum & Market	Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

* As of Monday, 17 May 2021

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Disney+ aces Philippines demand

Japanese anime dominates overall

Disney+ and Netflix are duking it out for digital dominance in the Philippines, with Netflix taking half the top 10 spots for the week of 5-11 May, but ceding the top two to Disney+. Amazon Prime Video runs a distant third with two of the top 10 spots for *Invincible* at number five and *The Boys* at number eight.

Disney+'s top titles were *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* and *WandaVision*, both of which cleared 19% more

demand than market average, says data science company Parrot Analytics.

At 17% above demand, and in third and fourth places, were Netflix's *Stranger Things* and *Shadow and Bone*.

The top show of the titles measured was Japan's *Attack on Titan*, which cleared 39% above average market demand.

The Disney+ streaming service has not launched in the Philippines.

Top 10 overall TV shows: The Philippines

Rank	Title	Platform	Difference from Market Average
1	<i>Attack On Titan</i>	MBS	39.0
2	<i>My Hero Academia</i>	YTV	24.2
3	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	ABC	22.2
4	<i>The Falcon And The Winter Soldier</i>	Disney+	19.3
5	<i>Game Of Thrones</i>	HBO	19.3
6	<i>WandaVision</i>	Disney+	19.1
7	<i>Stranger Things</i>	Netflix	17.7
8	<i>One Piece</i>	Fuji Television Network	17.0
9	<i>Shadow and Bone</i>	Netflix	16.7
10	<i>Spongebob Squarepants</i>	Nickelodeon	16.5

Top 10 digital originals: The Philippines

Rank	Title	Platform	Difference from Market Average
1	<i>The Falcon And The Winter Soldier</i>	Disney+	19.3
2	<i>WandaVision</i>	Disney+	19.1
3	<i>Stranger Things</i>	Netflix	17.7
4	<i>Shadow and Bone</i>	Netflix	16.7
5	<i>Invincible</i>	Amazon Prime Video	15.0
6	<i>The Mandalorian</i>	Disney+	13.5
7	<i>The Crown</i>	Netflix	12.1
8	<i>The Boys</i>	Amazon Prime Video	11.9
9	<i>Lucifer</i>	Netflix	11.8
10	<i>La Casa De Papel (Money Heist)</i>	Netflix	11.3

Date range: 05-11 May, 2021

The total audience demand being expressed for a title, within a market. Audience demand reflects the desire, engagement and viewership, weighted by importance; so a stream/download is a higher expression of demand than a 'like'/comment. In this dataset we are comparing the demand that exists for each series in this market, against the average TV show. A difference of 1x represents the market average and 10x means a series is ten times more in demand than the average TV show in this market



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