

Augmented reality magazine by NTU Singapore earns international recognition with brand new reading experience

NTU's revamped HEY! bags two prestigious international Gold Quill awards



With its fresh and bold design, engaging content, and the creative use of augmented reality (AR) in its bimonthly magazine for students, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) has earned approval from new and old readers alike, and now the evaluators of a prestigious international communication and marketing competition.

The evaluators at the 2020 International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Gold Quill Awards were wowed by the “combination of great design, good writing and the smart use of technology” in HEY!, NTU’s groundbreaking multi-platform magazine that was relaunched in August 2019 as a title fit for the smartphone generation.

NTU’s way of breathing new life into a print medium has been recognised with an Award of Excellence at the 2020 IABC Gold Quill Awards, making it the only winner from Singapore in a competition dominated by multinationals in North America and Canada. The magazine was also chosen as one of the seven winners of the Best of the Best Award – an accolade given to the crème de la crème among the Excellence Award winners in the competition.

Alongside stories by student contributors and the use of smartphone photography to reflect the view of the world through the eyes of ‘digital natives’, the refreshed HEY! provides a new way to experience the print medium through the use of NTU’s HEY! AR mobile application.

Readers can point their smart phone at the pages of the magazine and unravel the stories beneath, and interact with the pages that come to life. For instance, in the launch issue, students who downloaded the app had fun posing with a Tyrannosaurus rex that popped out of a page.

The magazine cover featured an NTU dorm room but through the AR app, readers could have a view of the entire room as if the cover was a 360-degree photo.

AR has also introduced a whole new way for readers to engage with the magazine's contests and giveaways. For example, students got to win home décor items featured in a HEY! story on upcycling by submitting their photos with the 3D models of the objects placed virtually in their own rooms.

The NTU HEY! AR app, available on the App Store and Google Play, trended number one on both platforms under the education category in Singapore at its launch.

One IABC Gold Quill evaluator said: "The engaging visual style is fresh and fun, bright and bold, [and] seems on brand for a smart university", while another highlighted how it provides valuable information for students, and "reflects the feel of the campus and university and what students could expect."

Another evaluator praised NTU's "choice of colours, layout, styles and the outstanding use of imagery and 3D animation, alongside the selective and effective use of AR".

In the evaluation of the entry, the NTU in-house team was hailed for its resourcefulness, and congratulated for "finding a way to actually reduce the cost per copy at the same time as introducing elements of technology," and a "great example of a novel way to engage your readers and achieve business outcomes."

The organisers have invited NTU to write a white paper on HEY! as their contribution to the global communication practice. With these latest additions, the award tally for HEY!, which was launched in 2011, now stands at 22.

NTU President Professor Subra Suresh said: "We are focussed on harnessing the power of digital technology and tech-enabled solutions to support better learning and living experiences, the discovery of new knowledge, and the sustainability of resources at the NTU Smart Campus. These efforts also extend to communication and a 'smart' publication like HEY! offers a range of options to share the NTU experience with our target audience of prospective students, current students and recent alumni, by adopting latest technologies such as augmented reality and other mobile and online tools.

"The NTU community is pleased that by being selected as the only winner from Singapore to receive the Best of the Best Award is a clear indication that HEY! is on par with the world's best in corporate communications. This award also reflects NTU's standing as a global university."

More reasons to read HEY!

HEY! has been delivering facets of campus life and inspirational success stories of students and graduates through its big, bold use of visuals, a breezy editorial style in print and online.

Annual reader surveys have consistently shown that about 80 per cent of HEY! readers experience the magazine in print. A recent HEY! survey found that seven in 10 of the digital natives are likely to interact with AR through a print magazine.

NTU Chief Communication Officer Dr Vivien Chiong said: "During the revamp of HEY!, we did several audience studies, reflected on the world today and how the young target audience gets their information. Digital devices are carried by almost everyone, and today's smartphones already come with AR. Fast and reliable data networks are everywhere, attention spans are short, and the young expects news to be informative and yet entertaining.

"Our readers told us print is not dead, so it's especially satisfying to have combined the digital and the physical realms to create a new product that offers new spatial and sensory experiences for our digitally-savvy audience."

To ensure the magazine's content is relevant to the university audience, student writers were recruited to join the editorial team. Second-year communication student Chia Kun Liang has been involved in both the magazine's revamp and as a student writer.

"The incorporation of AR has brought about a refreshing possibility to what print media can offer. My experience here has indeed given me the most empowering platform to develop impactful work, and has built my passion towards breaking boundaries through storytelling as an aspiring content creator. It's truly heartening to see that more of my peers have been extremely responsive to our interactive content," he said.

Fellow HEY! student writer Sergul Toh, a second-year communication student, said: "I was very excited to be part of the revamp of HEY!, from gathering views on how to improve the magazine, to becoming a student contributor. The team used many new elements that really re-energised the publication, especially with the integration of AR technology."