

What it takes to win at the APAC Stevie Awards, according to 6 Jury Heads

[Chaela Mirano](#) May 27, 2025

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SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA – Behind every achievement recognized at the [2025 Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards](#) is a meticulous process of documentation, data, and deliberation. But perhaps more crucially, there is careful and nuanced human judgment involved.

Between February and March this year, more than 120 professionals from across the globe reviewed thousands of entries submitted by organizations from 23 countries and territories in the region. While these seasoned jurors evaluated innovation and impact, they also took on the challenge of decoding stories, scrutinizing documentation, and weighing results against intent and strategy.

These judges — a brilliant mix of storytellers, strategists, technologists, academics, and entrepreneurs — see the world from different angles. However, they all share the same obsession: What does real, resonant innovation look like in Asia Pacific today?

To find out how that question was answered in the judging room, **adobo Magazine** caught up with some of the 2025 Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards Jury Heads to hear their reflections on this year's entries, what moved them, and what innovation truly means in this region now.



Sean Rooney

Co-founder & Director, Amire, Australia | Jury Chair: Company/Organization & Achievement

As Director of **Amire**, a digital marketing agency known across Australia and Asia Pacific, **Sean Rooney** brings more than two decades of experience in SEO, paid media, and data-driven marketing. His work with brands like Microsoft, Toyota, and Unilever shaped a clear eye for results — and that’s exactly what he looked for in this year’s submissions.

“The Gold winners had a number of common traits,” Sean said. “They took advantage of the full word count, provided clear, well-written examples of their achievements — no fluff — and used bullet points effectively to summarize results. But most importantly, they submitted strong supporting documentation to verify their claims.”

For Sean, clarity and evidence were non-negotiable. Submissions that instantly stood out were those with “significant results aligned with their or their client’s objectives, backed by solid proof.”

He noted that the overall quality of submissions this year was impressive, with many entries coming close to Gold status. “A lot of them just needed to provide more documentation,” he told *adobo Magazine*.

A notable trend Sean observed was the growing integration of AI across entries, a signal of how fast the region is adapting. “It’s exciting to see how many organizations have embraced AI to improve business efficiency and client value. I expect this to be present in nearly every submission by next year.”



John Frederick “Fritz” Cruz

Senior Director – Head of Agency, BrandPlay, Philippines | Jury Head: Corporate Communications/PR & Publications

For seasoned communications strategist **Fritz Cruz**, who has led campaigns for multinational corporations, tourism boards, and the UN, it was the ability to combine strategy with impact that elevated the Grand and Gold winners.

The Jury Chair commented, “While many entries leaned on social reach and media mileage as success indicators, only a few went further to present qualitative data that addressed deeper communication challenges through innovative tactics. Those were the ones that truly stood out.”

What caught his attention immediately were submissions with well-articulated communication challenges, strategies, and measurable results. “Beyond promoting innovative strategies, I want to see campaigns that are responsive to the needs of the organization and the behaviors of the target audiences.”

Fritz also noted a shift in the industry’s focus. “This year’s submissions have significantly elevated the quality of campaigns and tactics. I also found it refreshing to see more entries centered on digital and community relations.

“It has become evident that brands and businesses in the Asia Pacific region are actively pushing the boundaries of effective communication. They are not only investing in conveying their messages but also making significant investments in promoting inclusivity and fostering relationships with their audiences through their campaigns.”



Dr. Richard Huzhaoyang

CEO, BrandChina WeStars Communicating, China | Jury Chair: Marketing & Events

With over 15 years of experience in branding and advertising, **Dr. Richard Huzhaoyang** leads both a communication firm and an academic program in advertising. His lens for excellence centers on transformative storytelling and regional relevance.

“This year, the Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards received a lot of works in Marketing & Events. The jury members spent a lot of time distinguishing the merits and demerits of these works,” Dr. Richard revealed. “Beyond adherence to the award’s core pillars — innovation, impact, and execution, we were particularly drawn to entries demonstrating a bold fusion of creativity and scalability.”

Dr. Richard emphasized the importance of what he calls the “golden thread:” a clear problem statement, solution, and outcome, backed by tangible data. “In my experience, submissions instantly stand out when they combine clarity of purpose with unexpected brilliance.”

According to him, this regional ingenuity is redefining global benchmarks. “The Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards acts as a catalyst for visibility and credibility in a densely competitive landscape. For APAC innovators, especially startups and SMEs, it’s a platform where ‘local brilliance’ gains global recognition through your submission to the platform. So, if your work amplifies the region’s voice in shaping global business narratives with it, it would be excellent!”

Dr. Richard proceeded to underscore how Asia Pacific brands are innovating differently. Where global players often lead with technology-first approaches, Asia Pacific stands out

with frugal, culturally attuned innovation. From Indonesia's use of WhatsApp as an AI health triage platform to Indian SaaS companies achieving remarkable cost-efficiency, regional startups are showing the world how to do more with less. Vietnam's motorbike-first delivery apps and Philippine fintechs tapping into *sari-sari* store networks transcend local workarounds and become scalable, context-driven models. "These aren't just adaptations — they're blueprints for the next billion users," he said.



Rajeev Aswal

Chief Technology Officer, Robotic Parking Systems, USA | Jury Chair: Technology & Sustainability

As a leader in automation and sustainability at **Robotic Parking Systems**, **Rajeev Aswal** brought a tech-savvy perspective to this year's judging panel, particularly when reviewing entries involving digital transformation and environmental innovation.

"The top winners distinguished themselves through a combination of innovation, measurable impact, and clear alignment with strategic goals," he observed. "Their submissions not only showcased breakthrough ideas or technologies but also provided strong evidence of results — such as increased efficiency, market growth, customer satisfaction, or sustainability."

What caught his attention instantly were submissions with clarity and focus, evidence of impact, and authenticity and passion. Rajeev admitted, "The best entries get straight to the point. They clearly articulate the problem, the solution, and the outcome within the first few sentences, making it easy for judges to quickly grasp the significance."

He cautioned, however, that “judges can spot a templated entry; what resonates is a story told with purpose and pride.”

This is why he advised 2026 entrants to “focus on clarity, outcomes, and authenticity.”

According to him, “Judges don’t need flashy language — they need to clearly understand what you did, why it mattered, and what results you achieved. Use hard data where possible to support your claims. Also, tailor your submission to the category — avoid generic write-ups. Lastly, tell your story with passion. Authenticity always resonates more than perfection.”



Alice Grace Bautista

President & CEO, OneBPO, Philippines | Jury Chair: Management & Customer Service

For **Alice Grace Bautista**, excellence in customer experience doesn’t begin and end with surface-level solutions. Rather, it’s a long game built on consistency and purpose. As President and CEO of **OneBPO** in Iloilo City, she has championed world-class customer service and digital support for global industries ranging from ecommerce to healthcare and education.

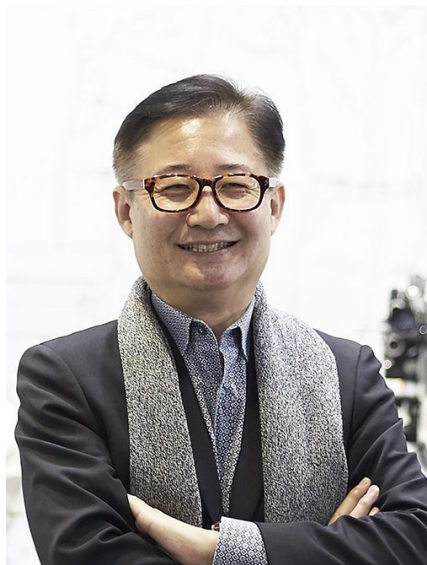
As Jury Chair for Management & Customer Service, Alice brought her operational and leadership perspective to the evaluation process, zooming in on the entire arc of a company’s customer-centric journey.

“As a judge, I look for three things: first are the customers; second are the innovations themselves; and third, the impact of those innovations on customer experience,” she explained.

It wasn’t enough for entries to merely impress on paper. For Alice, the strongest submissions were those that told a story of sustained excellence — not just a one-time achievement, but a track record of commitment to quality and performance.

“Excellence is consistency,” she said with conviction. “That’s why entries must show progress and performance from 2022 to the present. You have to look at what they’ve done over time.”

The companies that rose to the top, she continued, possessed more than just impressive metrics and sleek presentations. More than anything else, they had purpose-driven branding and a clear, evolving dedication to their customers.



Sangsoo Chong

CCO/Vice Chairman at MAD Stars, South Korea | Jury Chair: Video, Social Media, Websites & App

With nearly four decades of creative leadership to his name, **Sangsoo Chong** is a towering figure in advertising. As a founding member of **Ogilvy & Mather Korea**, he helped shape the foundation of modern advertising in the region, later holding top leadership roles across major agencies. For 17 years, he also mentored the next generation of creatives as a professor of Advertising and PR. Now serving as Vice Chairman and Chief Creative Officer

of **MAD Stars**, Sangsoo remains a driving force behind bold, idea-led work that continues to redefine the boundaries of creativity in Asia Pacific.

As Jury Chair for Video, Social Media, Websites & App, Sangsoo approached the judging process with one rule of thumb: surprise me.

“Shock value,” he said plainly, when asked about his criteria. “These days, most companies are doing excellent work — everyone’s solving problems well, and the level of execution is consistently high. But I’m looking for something beyond just a ‘good solution.’”

He added that, especially in highly saturated categories like video and social media, the creative work that stands out has to go beyond polish. It has to provoke, entertain, or break expectations.

“So: shock value. And also, make it fun.”

Winners were announced on April 02 and honored at a gala banquet on May 13 at the Lotte Hotel in Seoul, South Korea. Adobo Magazine was present as an official media partner of the 2025 Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards.

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[2025 Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards Alice Grace Bautista Amire APAC Stevies BrandChina WeStars Communicating Dr. Richard Huzhaoyang Fritz Cruz Ogilvy & Mather Korea OneBPO Rajeev Aswal Robotic Parking Systems Sangsoo Chong Sean Rooney stevies](#)