



PATRICK GOH/THE EDGE



A new book on the shelves at MPH Bookstores is *GO For It!* by Michael de Kretser, consummate public relations guru and CEO of GO Communications. Instead of a stiff textbook of PR dos and don'ts, an opportunity once offered by a publisher, the 174-page paperback offers insights into and anecdotes of Michael's 30 years in the business.

Peter, his son and founder of GO Communications, made the suggestion over a cup of coffee one morning and the idea appealed to Michael. "I had all these stories and thought it would be a good way to share them," he says. "I wrote the book in six months; it was all in my mind, raring to go. I've said everything there is to say though, so I can never do this again. If I ever write again, it will have to be a work of fiction."

So far, Michael has orchestrated numerous award-winning campaigns, built two PR empires across continents and secured recognition of all sorts, including being the first Malaysian PR professional to be inducted into the International Who's Who. His inherent understanding of the industry comes across in this zingy compilation of candid, bite-sized stories.

"PR used to be fun," says the warm, no-nonsense CEO. "It's a creative industry and the best part is coming up with super ideas, building brands and increasing bottom lines all at the same time. The problem is that practitioners today are very formulaic in their approach, behaving as though they're accountants. They are rigid and conservative; there is very little outside-the-

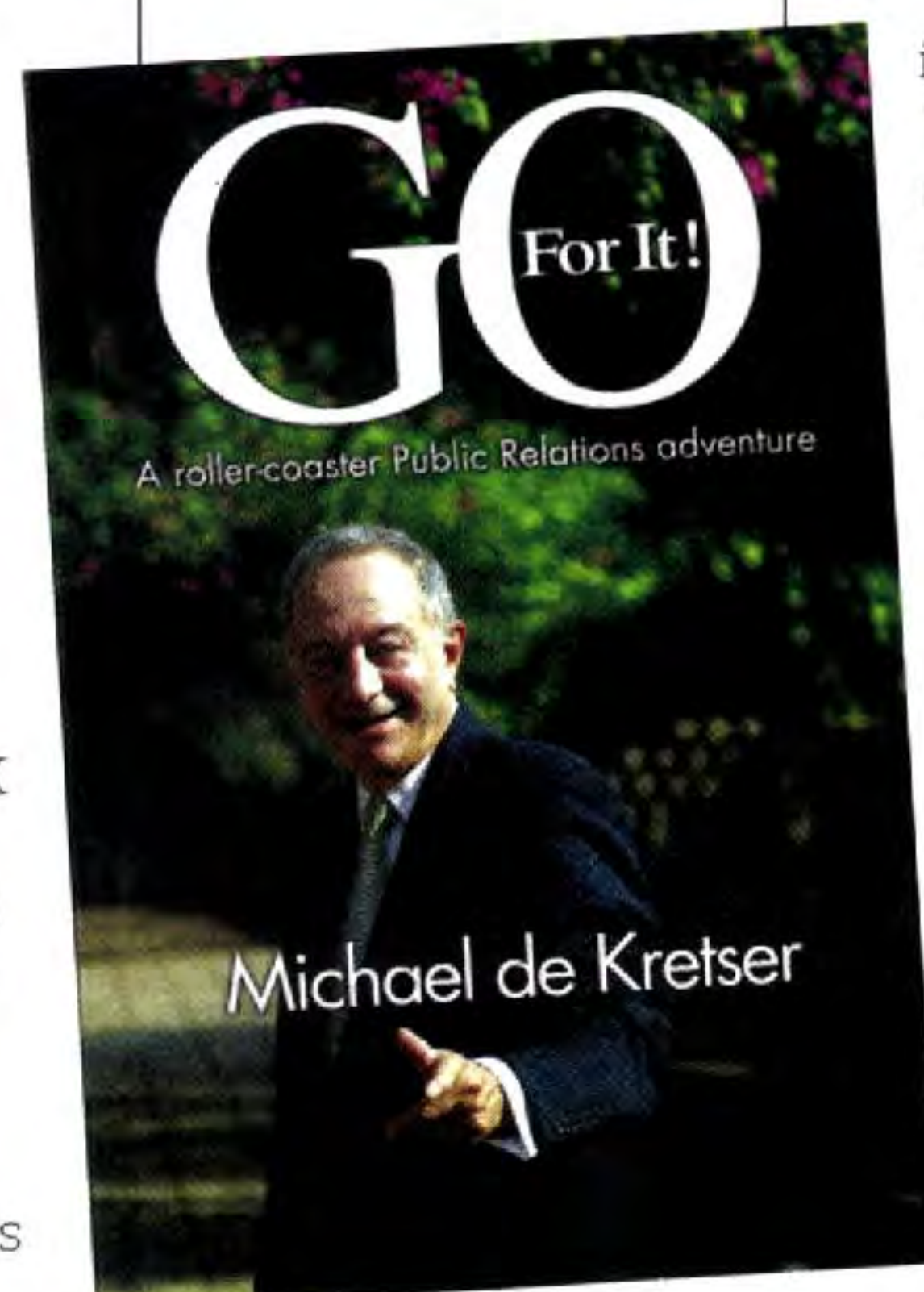
The guru goes for it

Go Communications' CEO Michael de Kretser shares a look into his rise to the top of the public relations game in his literary debut

box thinking. To stand out in a competitive marketplace, you have to have something brilliant that intrigues and engages."

And Michael has an entire portfolio of just that: unorthodox, spectacular campaigns that earned his clients news headlines and his company a reputation for being bold. The book captures the highs and lows of his journey, starting with his early beginnings as a journalist, his move into PR as a consultant for the Australian Liberal Party at 24 and the successive formation of his first company, MDK Consultants. Its founder charts its expansion into the UK and Asia, accompanied by personal and professional anecdotes told with delightful irreverence.

In one chapter, Michael writes about his effort to have Singapore Airlines' instantly-recognisable icon, the Singapore Girl stewardess



in an haute couture sarong kebaya, installed at London's Madame Tussauds. "It was for the airline's anniversary and they said, boy, if you can do it, go ahead." He presented the proposition to the Tussauds' board and they agreed after months of discussion. "She was the first commercial figure to be immortalised at the museum and it was a money-can't-buy proposition. It was possibly the most left-field idea I've ever had and the publicity was worldwide." He had made history.

The usual approach by any other practitioner, he says, would have been to send the media a press release announcing the anniversary followed by phone calls begging the editor to run the story. "You see that a lot today but that's not how PR should work," he insists. "A truly effective campaign creates a story that has the press calling you instead of the other way around."

Within the pages of *Go For It!* is a gripping dive into human psychology, business philosophies and relationship management. Michael seems to stumble upon the resources he needs, finding inspiration in the most unexpected people and places. A seemingly ordinary encounter at a bar gives substance to a pitch for Parker Pens; a lesson on incentivising an unmotivated worker he observed at a tea

plantation launched a police arrest campaign that snared his client a strong share of the motor insurance market in Singapore. The benefits of staying at a love hotel in Taiwan and opening shop above an Indian restaurant in Malaysia are all succinctly jotted down here.

Having worked across continents has given him a broad perspective on the business. Asian clients are far more conservative than their European counterparts but the fun and challenge here is convincing them to take that leap, he laughs. "They would say we need a great never-before-done idea but when you come up with one, they say 'It's never been done before? Then it's too risky.' You have to be a great salesman, get them to believe in your ideas."

And Michael is one of those men who could sell ice to an Eskimo. The key, he emphasises, is doing it creatively at a reasonable budget with maximum guaranteed impact. "I think some people are just more left-field than others," he shrugs. "Great ideas can just hit you, but they can also be developed. You have to really immerse yourself in the creative thought process. Implementing campaign strategies isn't difficult; people are enthusiastic when they're working on something good. If you're open enough, you just know when you've got a good idea on your hands and you can't wait to run with it." **E**

GO For It! retails at RM32.90 at MPH bookstores and royalties from the book will be channelled towards the National Kidney Foundation.