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Building a strong digital profile anchored by a professional like-minded network and a cohesive body of work is how we do it

Enabling women to be seen, be heard and be valued

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by ROWENA MORAIS

Why Thrive exists

Thrive, now in its fourth year, is a women-only meetup. Let me begin with the why, as in why I am doing this work of enabling women to be seen, be heard and be valued. The incredibly personal why is that I built what I had long yearned for but never found. Years of keeping my head down and building the training and development business we started in 2004 took so much from me. I kept the focus but yearned for the opportunity to also meet others, to bounce off more ideas, to get the support I needed, even if only sporadically and for limited spurts. So I built what I sought.

And while I don't always have the self belief Oprah possesses, I am empowered by being a creator.

"On my own I will just create, and if it works, it works, and if it doesn't, I'll create something else. I don't have any limitations on what I think I could do or be." -- Oprah Winfrey

Who is Thrive built for?

The bigger focus of Thrive is that having found a reason to start a regular and safe space for women to connect, explore, discover, learn and grow, I realise that many others need this too. While there are many networking

avenues and there are the benefits that come from conferences and other kinds of ad-hoc gigs, there are fewer opportunities for a gathering, a platform, a regular space for women.

What are Thrive Meetups meant to achieve?

Thrive exists to help women be seen, be heard and be valued. How? We do this by focusing on three areas specifically:

- building a strong and clear digital profile (a LinkedIn profile is critical)
- building a relevant and purposeful network around ourselves (why you need to)
- building a strong and relevant digital portfolio (here's how you can take the first step to build your body of work).

The aim has always been to create a safe space that women can come back to, again and again, to connect and reconnect. We empower career women by connecting those who are starting out professionally (and needing support) with more established women (who can mentor, support and share ideas).

While it's important to ensure fun and excitement, it has always been important to provide an avenue to discuss the hard and taboo topics which challenge women across industry.

These meetups are a place for

women to gather, to learn from each other, to provide support and encouragement but not just in general ways. We each have experience and expertise that we can bring to bear. We each can gain a better appreciation of who is among us and what value they bring, what issues they face. In so doing, this more rounded view helps us all set a context to the challenges of the day.

Women seeing the experience of leaning in. Women giving each other a platform and being supported. Women being present wherever decisions are being made. Women leading. Women empowered. Women empowering other women.

In hushed tones and quieter conversations at these Thrive meetups, I hear about the challenges women face in the corporate world and as they embark on entrepreneurial ventures. I hear about struggles to be heard, to be taken seriously, to be visible in the ways that matter. I hear about the need to bounce ideas and get feedback, to be mentored. And these conversations reaffirm our agenda, the common struggles, the heartaches and pain. Coming together for a brief few hours, headlined by a theme and a guest speaker, it is a welcome respite for many, a chance to let down the guard, talk freely, share ideas and learn new things.

Thrive Meetups occur at least once a month. Thereafter, guests are free to join the closed-door Thrive Facebook Group to keep in touch and continue the conversation. These continue with periodic Thrive Weekend Drop-Ins, gatherings simply to catch up and chat.

Where do Thrive meetups take place?

The meetups which I have been running since 2017, were face to face gatherings. Based in Kuala Lumpur, I held these meetups monthly in well-appointed restaurants. The following

year, I made an inroad into Singapore too. 2019 saw me leave Kuala Lumpur for Canberra but coming back to Malaysia a number of times, I was fortunate to run more meetups that year. There were peals of laughter over drinks and great food in unique and colourful venues, lending the ambience for what needed to also be a night of fun and relaxation.

Then 2020 landed. I faced a pivotal moment last year when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Was I making the right move to translate these meetups online? How would I recreate the same atmosphere and importantly, ensure a feeling of shared experience and intimacy that I was sure would now be lacking? How would I continue running these meetups online with all the meeting fatigue which had well and truly set in?

I considered. I weighed up my options, running through a mental list of pros and cons, all the while confronting a realisation that I knew I needed to continue. This led to a completely online meetup which transformed Thrive last year.

Nine online meetups in 2020. Frankly, I'm shocked at how many I developed given all the upheaval around me. But as I shared in my post, What I Learned in 2020, "...perhaps it was precisely for this reason, that these sessions came together so well with topics like developing a hacker mindset, building strong brand visibility and courage as a skill. 2021 will start with our 21st meetup."

You're invited to join a Thrive Meetup

I hope this gives you some backdrop to consider what's available. Career women, regardless of industry, job title or geographic location - you are cordially invited to join the Thrive meetups. For more details on upcoming meetups, [visit rowenamora.com/thrive](http://visit.rowenamora.com/thrive)

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PROGRAMME Director at **VerticalDistinct.com**, a media and learning organisation, Rowena Morais provides support through curated learning, communication and content development. She supports HR and Tech professionals through digital resources and internationally accredited programmes delivered across APAC and the Middle East. Author of Build a Body of Work, Rowena was Founding Editor of HR Matters Magazine in Malaysia for eight years. A LinkedIn profile writer, ghostwriter and editor, she helps organisations and senior executives with communication, branding and content development. Over the last decade, she has been helping people refine their LinkedIn profiles and digital presence. Rowena runs meetups for HR folk and career women in both Kuala Lumpur and Canberra. She runs her boutique marketing and communications consultancy, Digital Confluence, from Canberra. Invited to the TEDx stage twice, Rowena delivers workshops on leveraging LinkedIn and has a Skillshare class, Build Influence through LinkedIn. You get two months premium membership free when you sign up on Skillshare where you can take her class and more - [visit https://skl.sh/2KqEfp](https://skl.sh/2KqEfp)