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Tantalising Texture and Taste: Selegie Soyabean Pte Ltd



Selegie Soyabean unveiled its brand of soft and silky beancurd to customers in Kovan Hawkers Centre in 1998, because the owners – all siblings – wanted to share their passion for the traditional Chinese dessert with others. Over the years, they have modified and improved on their favourite childhood dessert and today, are proud to serve up a high quality and finely textured bowl of traditional soya beancurd.

The delectable product aligns with the company mission to provide superior and uncompromising quality of soya beancurd at reasonable, affordable prices. Having expanded the business thus far, the company's longer-term vision is to develop Selegie Soyabean into a household name in Singapore, and progressively bring it to other parts of the world.

Opting for a cautious strategy, the company grew slowly but steadily. It added one shop every one to two years, fanning out to different parts of Singapore. To further grow its brand name, it started a catering service targeting medium-sized groups so that it would not negatively impact its core soya beancurd business.

Pleasing the palate

Desserts are only desserts – sweet or savoury snacks that bring a meal to a close, or to satisfy the cravings between meals, aren't they? Utter such a comment among dessert lovers and you would be in deep trouble.

Singapore has long been a food paradise, and in last two to three years, the city-state seemed to have quickly established itself as a dessert heaven too. Some of the world's most loved brands have set up shop here, while homegrown brands, most notably 2am:dessertbar helmed by award-winning chef Janice Wong, have also made their mark on the international dessert scene.

Clearly, desserts are not just desserts. 2am:dessertbar, for example, describes itself as “a cerebral experience that pushes the boundaries between sweet and savoury with carefully researched, high-tech dishes”¹. A good dessert experience thus goes beyond the taste buds – it engages and satiates all the senses.

But this does not mean local desserts are losing their shine to the new-fangled, western-style or fusion offerings as diners continue to savour familiar favourites like soya beancurd, *chui kway* (rice cake) and *chee cheong fan* (rice noodle roll), to name a few ubiquitous Chinese ones.

White as snow and just as smooth

Traditional local desserts are easily available, affordable and served in appropriate portions. Soya beancurd is believed to have health and beauty benefits like “cooling” the body when it is “heaty”, and helping to improve the complexion. Its popularity has spawned numerous soya beancurd brands that have become household names because of their expansive presence in numerous malls, and wide distribution networks including food courts, coffeeshops and hawkers centres.

¹ www.2amdessertbar.com/chef_janice.php

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As with other affordable traditional desserts and snacks, a small price variance between different brands of soya beancurd is unlikely to make or break a sale – provided they pass the “taste test” of discerning palates. And because desserts are not “essential”, unlike the must-have main meals, convenience and location are also important in ringing up a sale.

Besides the traditional style of serving soya beancurd, the smooth and silky dessert may be prepared with “embellishments” or a modern twist – with additional ingredients and flavours including salt, green tea, barley or wheat, as well as ginkgo nuts, glutinous rice balls with a selection of fillings, almond, grass jelly or fruits.

The soya beancurd dessert lends itself better as a quick on-site snack or as a takeaway as the shops typically do not encourage lingering, unlike some western-style bistros and cafes whose ambience is ideal for spending long, lazy weekends with friends, over cakes or snacks, and coffee. These frequent visits and pleasant memories can build brand loyalty and promote customer retention.

For traditional local snacks including soya beancurd, the number of returning customers supporting the axiom that the proof is indeed in the tasting. So the better the taste and texture, the more appealing it will be to customers.

Sweet desserts

Selegie Soybean had approached UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute (AEI)’s flagship Consulting Programme for assistance in market research, and to get ideas about realising its vision of expansion. There was some “solid performance” and “an appreciable, tremendous effort” by the consulting team, said Ms Koh of Selegie Soybean. Some of the recommendations from the team are projects that the company is already undertaking. However, “there are two very impressive ideas to be found, among the rest,” she said. She shared that the company will implement one of them soon, and roll out the other when they have the resources.

The student-consultants, who had wanted the hands-on experience to learn more about branding and marketing, were happy that their objectives were met. “The meetings with the SME, and talking through challenges with them helped us better understanding the complexities of staying afloat in the market,” they said. They also enhanced their communication skills as they had to work closely with the SME, each other and their project advisor. “It was overall a good experience as we now have a taste of a real-life consulting project.”

Project Advisor Chua Swee Kiat was proud of the student-consultants. “They did a very good job of integrating their knowledge of marketing theories and results of market research to come up with a viable and coherent strategy for the SME,” he said.

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