

**UOB-SMU**  
**Asian Enterprise Institute**



**Small in Size, Big in Function:  
Hughco Group Pte Ltd**

Hughco Group Pte Ltd is a local company specialising in nanotechnology products. Its core business is the manufacture, distribution and sale of protective sealant products

to the local and international markets. The SME also specialises in custom formulations, providing innovative, high-tech coatings to customers.

Together with its global partners, Hughco works closely with leading nanotechnology institutes located in Germany – the recognised world leader in nanotechnology, and the US – another strong contender for nanotechnology advances. Its vision is to leverage on emerging capabilities in the area of nanotechnology to develop innovative new surface technologies that can replace conventional coatings, and create leading-edge products for widespread use. Already, the SME has made headway with its in-house brand, LiquidGlass, which is formulated in the US and produced locally. LiquidGlass–Glass Protect is certified to be scratch-resistant and of 6H hardness.

Hughco's products are created with a manufacturing process involving silicon dioxide (SiO<sub>2</sub>), which produces durable coatings that are completely safe, quick and simple to apply, easy to clean, and environmentally-friendly. Surfaces treated with these products become extremely hydrophobic (water-resistant), and are resilient to staining and soiling, and damage caused by multiple elements including UV rays and bacteria. The ultra-thin, breathable and invisible protective layer makes it ideal for both porous and non-porous surfaces such as stone, wood, glass and textiles, PCB boards, metal and plastic. The coating will prolong the lifespan of the items, reduce time and maintenance costs, and minimise the chemicals used during cleaning.

In Singapore, Hughco distributes its range of surface sealant products for mobile phones, apparel, car windscreen, stone surface, wood surface and footwear.

**“Out, damned spot! out, I say”<sup>1</sup>**

It is common practice that treasured possessions are better looked after by their owners. For items like formal wear, bags and shoes, in addition to careful usage, proper cleaning and storage, owners can consider going one step further to minimise potential damage *before* it occurs – by applying a protective sealant coating on them. Despite the obvious benefits, there appears to be low awareness and even less local demand for such surface sealant products. The weak consumer demand and lack of understanding of the product benefits hamper the SME's capacity to expand its market penetration. To address its concerns, Hughco had approached the UOB-SMU Alliance Enterprise Institute (AEI)'s flagship Consulting Programme.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote of Lady Macbeth, from *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, Act V Scene 1

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The team of student-consultants, guided by a Project Adviser, examined Hughco's B2C business model, competitive market conditions and target consumer segment with the aim to develop strategies that will help bolster its market share. Embarking on this project, the team had three clear objectives – to uncover and understand the challenges faced by local SMEs when entering new markets; to learn to tackle business challenges with a mix of analytical skills and typical problem-solving frameworks and turn findings into meaningful insights for the SME, and to have an opportunity to interact and learn from an industry expert – in this instance, their Project Adviser Paul Teo.

### **Small but hugely significant**

One of the key strengths of the Consulting Programme is the use of scientific methods to obtain reliable data for analysis using proven theories and frameworks. For this project, the team worked with primary and secondary research methods.

Secondary research provided an overview of Hughco's position in the surface sealant market vis-à-vis its competitors, and the team opted for a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis and a Competitor Analysis. The secondary research clarified the information that the team would need to uncover during the primary research, and also helped determine the methods and platforms that would best suit the purpose.

Primary research comprised an online questionnaire survey to uncover consumers' perception of surface sealant products, and also examined the usage patterns of existing customers. The data from the quantitative research, in addition to providing valuable data, was used to refine the questions for the qualitative research. In separate sessions, two independent focus group discussions yielded meaningful insights on a range of salient consumer impressions and behaviour. The face-to-face sessions also elicited other issues relating to the consumers' awareness and perception of the various brands and products, buying decisions and marketing platforms.

Using proven techniques, the team collated and analysed the data to generate pertinent insights that formed the basis of their strategic recommendations.

### **A solid defence**

The way the UOB-SMU AEI consulting team fully immersed itself in the project impressed Ms Cynthia Goh, Business Development Manager of Hughco. "Throughout the project, the students were truly engaged in terms of finding information related to my business, doing outfield research, ensuring robust online survey participation, as well as organising the focus group discussions," she said. "I am pleased with the report. Although it is not what I expect (if it were) from a professional, it is still up to standard." Hughco has already adopted some of the recommendations suggested by the team – with good results – while other proposals are "still in progress". Not only did the SME benefit from the analyses and recommendations, it learnt how to gather and analyse data, and generate reports, using various research software and business frameworks that were used during the project.

The student-consultants were happy to have achieved their three objectives. The tight timeline of eight weeks was their biggest challenge, revealed a team member. "Our planning for milestones had to be done meticulously in order to give ourselves ample breathing space, and to ensure that our market

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research was done with sufficient rigour,” he said. They also had to be disciplined in their communications with the SME and Project Adviser in order to “reduce the time lag between key project milestones”. He gave credit to Mr Teo for “value-adding to their project experience”, citing his timely input and spot-on ability to alert them to potential pitfalls, and pointing them in the right direction. “We are fortunate to have him as our Project Adviser,” he said.

Project Advisor: **Mr Paul Teo**  
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