

UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute



A Handy Tool and a Helping Hand

Home-Fix DIY Pte Ltd is the largest do-it-yourself (DIY) retailer in Singapore with 23 stores. As well as its strong local presence, its network further extends to include 11 stores in Malaysia and one in Indonesia. Since its establishment in 1993, Home-Fix has grown from a single hardware shop to a brand that is synonymous with providing efficient, innovative and affordable home improvement solutions. It aims to be a one-stop shop for all DIY and home improvement needs, with top-of-mind recall among people who are house-proud and home-centric, or simply looking to acquire useful handyman skills and knowledge that are applicable in the home.

In addition to simply selling products, Home-Fix provides a host of value-added services including professional advice; repair, replacement and installation services; power tools rental service; workshops; a customised timber-cutting centre, as well as DIY classes. It is committed to empowering the young and old, and men and women alike, with the knowledge, confidence and tools to tackle DIY tasks that would otherwise have to be entrusted to a handyman. Cost savings aside, the satisfaction of mastering a new skill is immeasurable.

The new Home-Fix HQ building in Tai Seng Avenue houses the company headquarters, and serves as its regional logistics and training hub, and product development facility. Within the facility is an educational and experiential showroom where visitors can attend hands-on workshops, pick up product information and learn useful DIY tips.

In line with the objective of providing a total home improvement solutions package, Home-Fix caters to the growing needs of home-owners and commercial tenants who require professional plumbing, electrical and painting services. Cognisant of the fact that not everyone has the time nor inclination to DIY, it now offers a suite of “doing-it-for-you” or DIFY services which include professional repair, replacement, installation, painting and handyman services.

Widest variety, loads of choices

People in Singapore seem to enjoy browsing, comparing and pondering their options... and the more variety, the better. Window-shopping is fondly likened to a “national sport”, and weekends and public holidays will see crowds thronging the malls that are so huge that they are being positioned as lifestyle and/or entertainment “destinations”. Standalone stores have also become bigger – think megastores and superstores, and even supermarkets are elevated to hypermarkets because of their sheer size.

One of the principal advantages of a megastore is the wide range of goods under one roof, and the different brands and varieties available for a single item. Take a box of cereal as an example. A hypermarket is likely to stock cereals that differ in type and proportion of ingredients, flavour, country of origin, packaging, price and so on. Multiply the permutations and you will have shelves stocked with just one product! Complementary beverages like milk, which also comes in myriad varieties, are within easy reach. Because everything is readily available, casual and serious shoppers alike will be able to satisfy their distinct needs.

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DIY stores like Home-Fix are much smaller than hypermarkets like Giant and Fairprice Xtra, and shopping centres like Mustafa. Many of the stocks in DIY stores are also available in these big stores, yet these small DIY stores have their loyal following. Probably because they are perceived to be “specialists” in anything DIY, customers who want to embark on their own hands-on projects would gravitate there. The smaller premises also mean more personalised service, and customers can get product information, comparative analysis, and advice on what they need for their projects. This sort of specialist advice is almost impossible to get in a hypermart where staff tend to be generalists.

Fix it, even if it ain't broken

There is an emerging trend among the home-proud to pick up the tools and get the job done themselves. Some consider it a hobby, while others see it as part of routine maintenance for the home. DIY is certainly more cost-effective, particularly if the job is not a major one, and labour and transport costs will disproportionately skew the total figure.

Hobbyists and self-styled handymen usually have a general idea of what they need when they go to a store. They are frequent visitors who stop by a DIY store monthly or bimonthly, spending below \$50 each time. They prefer DIY stores as they can get the range they need, as well as relevant advice. To these shoppers, variety, quality and cost are important, and they turn to store assistants to help them make their final purchase decisions. In fact, a recent SMU survey revealed that the majority of respondents said they bought their things at DIY stores based on the help extended to them by the staff. The same survey also showed that household items formed the largest category of purchases made by respondents, thus corroborating the growing trend of home-proud hobbyists and their hands-on DIY home improvement projects.

Although the spawning of huge malls and stores suggest that big is beautiful, there is a sizeable group which prefers the more cosy DIY stores. These people are focused shoppers, and each trip, to a conveniently-located store, is likely to be a planned trip with specific things to buy. Understand the minds of this group of shoppers and you can build a loyal following. Remember, the beauty of home improvement projects is that they are never done!

Power “tools” that perform

Although Home-Fix has successfully expanded its business, it is constantly looking for more touch points to engage its customers. The company had approached UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute with the aim of getting evidence-based data to support its upcoming initiatives. What it got from the team of student-consultants under the SME Consulting Programme was “a report to further substantiate that we are on the right track,” said Mr Gordon Lee, Marketing Manager, Home-Fix. “Certainly, our objectives were met – and within a tight budget and timeline too.”

On their part, the student-consultants had to cross more hurdles than others to get the job done. Instead of the usual 12 weeks for the project, they had only eight weeks as a few team members were leaving on an overseas exchange programme. Good time management and planning, coupled with teamwork, cooperation and understanding from everyone including the client, Project Adviser Ms Regina Chow and the Institute did much to smooth the way.

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The team was able to apply much of what they had learnt in their Marketing courses to the Home-Fix project. From the basics in how to build a marketing research platform to data collection and collation, from concepts like brand positioning to competitive and strategic analyses, “we were happy we could use our textbook knowledge in a real-world situation,” said a student-consultant. Even the pressure on time, which was “definitely more than what we had ever experienced in an academic project”, gave them a taste of what is to come when they join the workforce. Their key takeaways were that they had “levelled up in terms of maturity and responsibility”, gained an understanding of the industry and developed important networks which they would leverage on.

Ms Chow considered it “a joy” to work with the team of SMU students. She found them “committed, proactive and positive”, which in turn made her supervisory role “more productive as it was also a positive learning journey for me as the project adviser”.

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