

UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute

Cosy and Comfortable: Eptex International Pte Ltd

The logo for Eptex, featuring the word "epitex" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters are a dark brown color. The 'e' and 'i' have a slightly different shape, with the 'i' having a dot. The 'x' is composed of two 'k'-like shapes.

Eptex International Pte Ltd is a home-grown bed linen company whose products have found their way into the homes of a large clientele. Founded in 1997, the owners hold fast to their passion of providing quality bed linen that promotes good sleep, while constantly evolving to cater to the changing and varied tastes and preferences of the mass market. The linens are made from natural fibres extracted from bamboo or cotton, and are traded under two brands – the mainstream Eptex, and the niche CrescentDale – with each having its own distinct style and characteristics in terms of design, function and finishing.

Who are you sleeping with?

Never discount the value of a good night's sleep, says the doctor, and it's wise to heed his advice. The body needs sleep to repair, refresh and rejuvenate itself, and this period of rest is essential to a person's overall health. According to the National Sleep Foundation¹, females are 1.4 times more likely than males to suffer from insomnia. The odds stack up as people age and also if they are overweight. Sleep disorders are now recognised as being "real" problems which require medical attention. In recent years, Singapore hospitals have set up or expanded their sleep disorders units or clinics, and there are also more private practices specialising in sleep disorders.

Thankfully, for many people, having a good night's rest can be achieved without counting the proverbial sheep (which is itself a myth as counting sheep will only activate the mind and keep you awake)!

Being comfortable and relaxed when you are in bed is important, so even if you were to wake up in the middle of the night, it is easy to fall right back to sleep. Linens that are smooth, soft, and easy to cosy up to would fit the bill, and for customers who have found the brand that offers them these value propositions, that's usually who they are going to sleep with. And they tend to continue with the same bed fellow unless there is a "disruption" to their purchase routine, for example, a strong pull factor that gives them reason to try out a different brand of bed linen.

Can Eptex exert the irresistible pull to bring in customers who are devotees of competing brands? Can it capture a larger percentage of the brand-neutral group, and can it deepen relations with, and therefore hold on to, its existing clientele? Phrased differently, how can the company stand out in the mass market, and thus gain a larger market share? These and other questions about growing the business prompted the company to turn to the UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute (AEI)'s flagship Consulting Programme.

¹ www.sleepfoundation.org; www.medicalnewstoday.com

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No time to sleep

“Though we have been in the market for more than 15 years, not many people know us,” shared Judy Zhang, Managing Director, Epitex. “We are very anxious to know why, and also what we need to do to make the brand known and recognised by the general public.”

Armed with a brief from the client about the broad issues that needed addressing, the team of three student-consultants, supervised by an industry veteran, tapped on what they learnt in the classroom as a basis for their consulting project. Using scientific and methodological approaches, they embarked on primary and secondary research to obtain a holistic view of the brand and its standing vis-à-vis other bed linen brands. Through in-depth interviews with different stakeholders, an online survey and mystery shopping, they collected qualitative and quantitative information. The findings were collated and analysed by the team, after which they crafted the brand strategy recommendations for the SME’s consideration.

The brand audit provided the SME with valuable information about “the big players of our trade, their competitive strengths and where we came up better or short,” said Ms Zhang. The company also learnt more about how its competitors are doing in relation to distribution channels and marketing platforms.

Towards a good snooze

With the valuable input and workable recommendations it received from the consulting project report, Epitex pronounced itself “very happy” as “our expectations were met nicely,” said Ms Zhang. “We now have a clearer vision based on proper foundations and not on gut feeling. This gives us more confidence going forward.”

Adding that “all the recommendations are very precious for us”, the company is in the midst of implementing them progressively. Despite the busy pre-Chinese New Year season, the first phase was successfully rolled out in mid-January 2015.

For the student-consultants, the allure lay in “working with seasoned entrepreneurs and learning from industry professionals”. Unlike academic projects where problems have “modelled solutions”, the project offered an opportunity for hands-on experience, and they could “maximise learning of consultancy work through the 10-week programme,” shared a team representative.

All year 2 students, the team had initially grappled with their heavy workloads, CCAs and the demands of the project. They were able to manage their time better with the help of the timeline tool offered by UOB-SMU AEI, and with the advice of Project Adviser Chua Swee Kiat. The team acknowledged the “pivotal role” played by Mr Chua as he was instrumental in steering them in the right direction each time they went astray.

For Mr Chua, “there was never a dull moment working and interacting with SMU students!” Having worked with numerous teams of student-consultants, he has found them to be “diligent and resourceful, always applying themselves fully to their projects despite their many other student commitments”. He also commended the UOB-SMU AEI staff for their help and guidance, and complimented them as being “really good facilitators”.

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Project Adviser
Student-consultants

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