

## UOB-SMU Entrepreneurship Alliance Centre



### Healthy, Tasty, Convenient – Unisoymilk Powder

“Created for your everyday needs”, the slogan for Unifood International (S) Pte Ltd aptly encapsulates its core food business. Established in 1994, it has its beginnings as a general wholesale trading company specialising in the supply of food packages and festive hampers for the Chinese Seventh Month Festival.

In 2006, Unifood created the Unisoymilk powder range of products. With the tagline, “Bringing you health through the natural goodness of soya”, the company prides itself on a range of products that is all natural, delicious and nutritious, offering the perfect blend of nutrition and taste to complement the modern, healthy lifestyle.

Through strategic distribution and marketing efforts, Unisoymilk powder is today the Singapore market leader in the instant organic soy milk powder category. Unisoymilk powder has also penetrated the regional market, boasting a presence in Indonesia and Malaysia, and in the last three years, also in Brunei, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand.

Unifood aims for Unisoymilk powder to be the market leader in instant organic soy milk powder, and a recognisable healthy lifestyle brand in soy powder and its related lifestyle products, for the region.

### Go organic

Use less salt. Cut back on trans fat. Go easy on sugary drinks. Eat organic. Exercise. Do an online search of “healthy lifestyle”, and chances are high that most, if not all, these words would feature in the articles that pop up.

According to the USDA National Organic Program<sup>1</sup>, organic food is produced by farmers who emphasise the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance the environmental quality for future generations. Organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products come from animals that are not given antibiotics or growth hormones, and organic food is produced without the use of conventional pesticides.

Although there is no definitive research that ranks organic food above conventional food in terms of nutrition, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is already a buy-in among people. According to a Euromonitor International survey, the Asia-Pacific organic food market registered a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.2% between 2006 and 2010, and is projected to show a CAGR of 8.9% till 2015<sup>2</sup>. In grocery stores and supermarkets, the proliferation of packaged food and drink items that claim to have organic sources are another example of the belief that organic is good.

Soy products are generally regarded as being healthier than dairy products, and organic soy products are seen as being healthier than conventional soy products. In Singapore, the much-loved soy drink (“*tau hwey tzu*”) and soy curd dessert (“*tau hwey*”) have gone from being anonymous – served in generic/disposal plastic cups and bowls – to having their own brand identity complete with name, logo, kiosk or shop at downtown and heartland malls.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.organic.org/education/faqs](http://www.organic.org/education/faqs)

<sup>2</sup> “Organic Food in Asia Pacific” article by Euromonitor International. As quoted in project report: “Brand Audit on Unisoymilk Powder in Singapore” (p8)

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Yes, soy beverages are a local favourite, which explains their ubiquitous presence in the diet of people young and old, and across professions. But with so many choices for a seemingly simple soy beverage spanning brands, fresh versus sachet, liquid versus powder, conventional versus organic, how does one distinguish one “*tau huey tzui*” from another?

### **Take the taste test**

Singaporeans are known foodies who will travel long distances in search of a new dish or the tastiest food. More often than not, it will be at the recommendation of somebody who has tried it out. Similarly for soy beverages, a recent SMU survey revealed that soy beverage drinkers consider taste and familiarity with a brand as foremost reasons for buying a particular brand. These reasons are followed closely by price and convenience in preparation.

Singaporeans are generally open to new tastes and flavours. A case in point is the numerous grades and flavours of durians that have made their way into the country over the years, and how quickly they are snapped up by durian connoisseurs! Even the traditional Chinese New Year “*lo hei*” dish and mooncakes are not spared; they now come in multiple innovative flavours.

It used to be that people would shun organic foods as they were deemed to be tasteless and over-priced. However, with the improvements in food technology, organic food is now comparable to conventional food in taste. In terms of price, the gap has closed somewhat, but as people do recognise the value of organic food, they accept the premium that comes with it.

### **Towards better health**

Unifood International wanted a brand audit of Unisoyn's organic soy milk powder in Singapore, with particular focus on working adults from a specific age segment. Working through the SME Consulting Programme managed by UOB-SMU Entrepreneurship Alliance, the company was “delighted to receive very comprehensive and detailed analyses and practical recommendations,” said Marketing Manager Andy Oh.

Methodological and scientific approaches were used by the student-consultants to gather data. The findings from the qualitative and quantitative analyses “reinforced our belief and observations, such as where we fall short, and the challenges we face in our marketing efforts,” said Mr Oh. As some of the recommendations given by the student-consultants were already in the client's plan, the findings provided the impetus to “activate the suggestions early,” he said.

Not only was the client happy with the consulting team, Project Adviser Regina Chow found them “a pleasure to work with”. “The students are self-motivated, show initiative and possess work smarts to carry out their tasks effectively and efficiently,” she commented. Even though the team had faced initial problems in getting sufficient numbers of respondents with the required profiles for their surveys, they overcame the hurdles by being “diligent and resourceful”.

As for the student-consultants who had no prior knowledge of the client's industry, it was a crash course comprising research on the many offerings of soy beverage before they could even begin to craft the survey questions. They were also aware of the tight project timeline of 11 weeks. Still, it was effort and time well-spent as it exposed them to the real world, concluded the student-consultants.

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“It is quite different from an academic project as this project required us to align the objectives right from the start with the client,” said a student-consultant. They worked closely with each other, providing regular updates to the team which included the client Mr Oh and adviser Ms Chow. From Mr Oh, they got a better insight into the challenges faced by SMEs when competing with the big boys, such as talent attraction and retention as well as limited resources for brand awareness campaigns and marketing initiatives. From Ms Chow, they learnt more about marketing and client management – all relevant skills which will stand them in good stead when they join the workforce soon.

**Project Adviser: Ms Regina Chow**

**Student Consultants:** **Bay Ting Ting Serene**  
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