

NANYANG OPTICAL

A Sharper View with Coosh: Nanyang Optical

Nanyang Optical Co Pte Ltd was established in the 1950s as a lens grinding and edging workshop. Over the years, it has expanded its presence and expertise to become one of the largest optical eyewear companies in Singapore.

Today, its 16 retail stores island-wide offer a broad range of optical goods and eyewear across the categories of sunglasses, spectacles (frames and lenses), and contact lenses. Like other optical chains which carry a variety of brands from luxury names like Armani, Chanel, Dior, Prada, Ray Ban and Versace, to generic frames for mass consumption, Nanyang Optical also carries a range of top-tier to niche and mass-market brands.

Already a household name among the baby-boomer generation in this little red dot called Singapore, the company has continued to keep up with the times and evolving demographics with its innovative new designs, technology and services. Its Alexis Eyewear, for instance, focuses on premium eyewear brands while The Optique of Tomorrow and Sport On cater to active users. More recently, the SME rolled out yet another new line of eyewear. Named “Coosh”, it comes with resilient hinges and springs for flexibility and comfort, and is made to withstand the rigours of high-impact physical activities. With these attributes, Coosh is especially suited to National Servicemen (NSmen) and active, style-conscious individuals.

Nanyang Optical, a former client of the UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute (AEI)’s flagship SME Consulting Programme (SCP), is turning to the SCP again – this time, to seek viable marketing strategies to promote Coosh among its two target consumer segments. A team of three student-consultants, supervised by an industry veteran and supported by the Institute’s manager, worked on the project.

Looking into the Horizon

The optical industry here will not fall out of favour any time soon, not when Singapore has the dubious honour of being the myopia capital of the world, with 90% of students requiring glasses by the time they leave school; where the glare from the tropical sunlight compels many to don sunglasses, and the desire to look good drives people to view glasses as fashion accessories.

The potential for growth in the optical industry is both a boon and a bane. While it suggests a ready and growing consumer base, there are also multiple optical companies which are competing for a bigger slice of the pie. For Nanyang Optical therefore, it is essential to have a unique selling proposition, for it to rise above the competition.

To get a better understanding of the industry, the SME and its products, the student-consultants conducted primary and secondary research. Using methodological and scientific approaches – the hallmark of the SCP – they delved into the optical industry’s current and future trajectories, and Nanyang Optical’s standing vis-à-vis its competitors. The team also undertook consumer behavioural research to find out consumers’ typical spend on retail items; their knowledge and perceptions specific to eyewear; their receptiveness towards a product like Coosh, and their preferred marketing platforms.

A Clearer Vision

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research that spanned a survey, mystery shopper and on-site observational studies, the team assembled the data for analysis. This real-life factual

information and feedback lent weight to the analysis and findings, and underlied the recommendations that the team would give to the SME in their final report.

The student-consultants examined the target customer segments of Coosh – NSmen and active individuals – through the categories of demographics, psychographics, state of mind, and market size. Using the perceptual map (one for each segment), they charted the relative positions of optical shops and products by price, comfort, frame design and durability. They also used the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis twice, to determine the attributes of Nanyang Optical and Coosh.

The team chronicled the consumer-decision journey as he/she moves through the different stages – from awareness to familiarity, consideration, purchase and loyalty. The findings pertaining to each stage of the journey provided them with salient feedback on what actions could be taken, at every stage, to build awareness and a positive perception of Coosh, ultimately driving sales for the eyewear line.

A strong brand narrative was curated for Coosh that would resonate with the target consumer segments. The final report included marketing communications for online and offline initiatives. There was also a comprehensive 120-day execution plan for the proposed recommendations which encompassed the pre-launch, launch and post-launch stages of the plan.

Flexibly Hardy, Stylishly Resilient

The Consultant for Nanyang Optical, Jack Hong, Co-founder of Research Room, said that they had “high expectations” of the SCP because of “prior experiences, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations from fellow SMEs”. Their expectations were again validated by the team’s “competencies, pro-activeness, collaborative team dynamics, and their focus on delivering the most impact for the business”. The recommendations helped to “shape the company’s strategic marketing tactics”. He shared that the first campaign “garnered more than 10 times the response” compared to the next most successful campaign in the company’s history of media campaigning.

Mr Hong added that the “scientific approaches, including data and interpretations, are the most convincing to the senior management” as they substantiated what was previously only a “gut feel”. The information “helped shape the senior leadership’s read on the market, giving them much more confidence”.

“We found the project to be one of the most exciting projects we had worked on throughout university,” proclaimed the student-consultants. They were looking to gain exposure to the challenges faced by SMEs, and also to apply theoretical frameworks to solve real-world problems; both objectives were met. “Working with the SME involves having more responsibility, professionalism and initiative to always put our best self forward to value-add and deliver the best to our client and also create a more fulfilling learning experience for everyone.”

Of their Project Advisor Marcus Loh, the team was grateful for his guidance and for teaching them “new and interesting frameworks which helped us in forming better research findings and brand narratives,” said the students. “He did an amazing job in making it a beneficial experience for us.”

Mr Loh considers it “a joy to work with students from SMU who have been shortlisted for projects with UOB-SMU AEI”. A returning Advisor who has supervised various SCP projects, he complimented the student-consultants on their “rigour, motivation and keenness to learn”. As an advisor and industry practitioner, “I have the benefit of hindsight, of being able to offer guidance to students from perspectives on a strategic level, around broader business concerns and implications”. His past record

and know-how ensured that the project stayed on course and culminated in a solid report that was directly relevant and delivered good value to the SME.

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