



An All-Rounded Perspective: 3D Printing Studios Asia

3D Printing Studios Asia provides a range of services using advanced 3D technologies. From printing to scanning, designing and consulting, the company offers end-to-end solutions for a cross-section of industries. To engage existing customers and interest new ones, the SME operates a retail-cum-studio near the central business district, where visitors have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of various 3D printer models, as well as obtain professional advice on 3D printing.

3D Printing Studios Asia also conducts training for customers possessing varying degrees of domain expertise. These sessions range in complexity from the basic through to professional levels, catering to their customers' needs.

A pioneer in 3D printing, the company today stands among the leading 3D technology service providers in Singapore. In addition, it has a presence in Australia, where it extends a repertoire of 3D-related services underlined by cutting-edge 3D technologies. These include 3D Modelling, 3D Designing, 3D Printing, 3D Scanning, Rapid Prototyping, Reverse Engineering and Training. It also retails desktop 3D printers and consumables to different industries in the fields of Medical, Engineering, Architecture, Marketing and Education.

3D Printing Studios Asia had participated in the UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute's flagship SME Consulting Programme with the objective to discover the company's "current business strengths and weaknesses, and where it can be further improved," said Jason Joo, Owner and Managing Director, 3D Printing Studios Asia. His focus, for this project, lay in the Medical Technology and Architecture fields. A team of three student-consultants, supervised by an industry veteran as Project Advisor, and supported by a Project Manager from the Institute, undertook the project, to develop business-to-business (B2B) marketing strategies to fulfil the SME's objective.

Looking from different perspectives

3D printing, which was commercialised in 1984 by American Chuck Hull – when he filed his own patent for a stereolithograph fabrication system – has opened a world of new possibilities in many fields. For instance, the team at 3D Printing Studios Asia has expressed its excitement publicly, on the company's, about the "tantalising proposition" that in the near future, 3D technologies will be able to support the scan and print of replacement body parts. In Architecture, 3D technologies have proven superior as 3D models can be produced quickly (in one to two days, compared to the four to six weeks required for traditional scale models), and are more cost-effective. Significantly, 3D printing produces models that are more accurate and can capture a higher level of detail – which is beneficial to many industries.

Given the optimistic outlook for 3D technologies, the company wants to raise awareness of its services among its target market segments (Medical Technology and Architecture), with the ultimate goal of gaining a larger, sustainable market share.

Before the student-consultants embarked on the design of relevant marketing strategies and tactics, they sought to better understand the SME's target market segments and the 3D industry. One of the hallmarks of the SME Consulting Programme is the use of scientific methodologies, and for this project,

the team had used, for primary research, in-depth interviews and an online survey. The secondary research was based on publicly-available information of the SME's competitors.

Growing layer by layer

The qualitative and quantitative data provided valuable insights. According to the Competitor Positioning Map, 3D Printing Studios Asia was perceived to provide superior customer service vis-à-vis its competitors. The interviews revealed vast differences between the two target market segments, which indicated to the team that different marketing strategies would be needed for the two segments.

The survey results were mapped onto a Customer Decision Journey, which comprises the stages of Need Recognition, Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, Purchase Decision and Post-Purchase Decision. On analysis, the student-consultants found that within each target market segment, there was also great disparity between early users and advanced users of 3D technologies. However, there were similarities in terms of the main desired attributes when it came to 3D-related services, namely, pricing and speed. The team thus used the similarities as the common basis on which to craft the company's Unique Value Proposition (UVP) – a statement that paints a clear picture of what the brand has to offer, distinguishing it from its competitors.

The student-consultants designed a strong positioning statement aligning with the UVP. The marketing strategies were developed using the SAVE framework (R. Ettenson, E. Conrado and J. Knowles: [Rethinking the 4Ps](#), Harvard Business Review, January 2013). Instead of the traditional 4Ps (Product, Place, Price and Promotion) of marketing, the SAVE framework focuses on Solution, Access, Value and Education of a product or service.

3D Printing Studios Asia's customer service was found to be its foremost differentiating factor, so from this UVP and other findings, the team provided four key recommendations – each supported by clear marketing strategies and tactics, proposed timelines and implementation guidelines.

From soft to solid strategies

"I participated in the SME Consulting Programme with an open mind, and was ready to accept constructive feedback and criticism of my current business," shared Mr Joo. A satisfied client, he said that the programme "met all my expectations and beyond" as he now had a "better understanding" of his company.

Mr Joo appreciated the scientific approach as it lent credibility to the findings and recommendations. The objectivity of this "outside perspective" brought him clarity, and "I now know what I need to do to bring my business to the next level," he said. Calling the recommendations "a double validation and confirmation of the strategies and actions I need to do", he and his team were very busy "executing the recommendations" in the months immediately following the report submission. He expressed his confidence that "the future will be more prosperous" for his business.

The student-consultants, in participating in this project, were looking for hands-on experience in consulting, and the opportunity to add value to a real-life company. Although they met with some hurdles along the way – such as in data collection, timelines, methodologies and communications – the team successfully overcame them and also honed their soft skills. In particular, they enhanced their abilities in people management and communications, adaptability (when one method does not work, look for an alternative one), focus, and project and time management.

Project Advisor Jeanette Ng acknowledged the "steep learning curve" faced by the student team, due largely to their unfamiliarity with the 3D printing industry and the limited data from the primary research. Also, "the B2B marketing strategies do not translate easily into addressing the real-life, complex issues of an SME with limited resources, in a fairly new industry". Nonetheless, she was all praise for the

student-consultants who “persevered and continued to do their best – notwithstanding the challenges that arose along the way”. She credited them on delivering a “very successful project, filled with good insights and valuable outcomes for the SME”. Her parting remark was, “We are very proud of their efforts.”

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