

SWISSBAKE

Gourmet Goodness: Swissbake

Swissbake, part of Commonwealth Retail Concepts Pte Ltd, has been providing premium-quality European breads and confectionary products in Singapore since 2003. Its fresh, daily-baked products span healthy breads, cakes, pastries, savouries and pies. Using traditional recipes, baking techniques and quality ingredients, the bakery prides itself on producing wholesome, great-tasting food for its customers.

Swissbake received its halal certification in 2017. Today, Muslims and other customers can enjoy a wide variety of halal gourmet bread and confectionary items at over 50 cafes, retail outlets and bread corners across Singapore. Its products are also sold online, along with other gourmet and artisanal foods directly curated by Swissbake and other food brands under the Commonwealth Capital Group.

In the face of rising competition, Swissbake wanted to increase demand for its packaged breads, and it was in this context that it had approached the UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute (AEI). According to Ms Chan Zi Hua, Assistant Marketing Manager of Commonwealth Retail Concepts, the company sought to discover the “exact reasons behind some of the issues the brand was facing, address them and see how we could improve the business”.

Working through the SME Consulting Programme (SCP), the signature programme of the UOB-SMU AEI, a team of three student-consultants undertook the business strategies innovation project to enhance Swissbake’s packaged bread line sold in the supermarkets. The student team was supervised by an industry veteran as Project Advisor, and supported by the Institute.

A healthy treat

Some of the challenges facing Swissbake centred on quality and price, brand awareness and unique selling propositions (USPs), and the student-consultants set out to address them using scientific methodologies. They tapped on secondary research to “scope out the issues from a top-down perspective”, explains a team member, and obtained information from reputable entities such as research houses and news agencies. Competitor reports, online resources and social media posts provided a general feel of on-the-ground sentiments. A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis was also conducted to determine Swissbake’s standing in relation to similar players in the market.

The primary research spanned on-site interviews, online surveys and focus group discussions to “support the problem statement, substantiate the secondary research findings and to test the feasibility of the recommendations from a bottom-up approach”, says a student-consultant. Having garnered a better understanding of consumer behaviour and trends in the bread segment, the team proceeded to analyse how these would impact Swissbake, and where it could strengthen its presence and appeal to the customers.

A wholesome fulfilment

The SCP team conducted research using scientific methods, and the findings and suggestions were “well beyond our expectations”, shares Ms Chan. The recommendations took into account the limitations of the SME’s current business model, and were deemed “effective and feasible”.

The qualitative research methods, in particular, “validated some of the guesswork we had”, explains the Assistant Marketing Manager, and plans to test out some of the SCP team’s proposals. The overall findings “allowed us to understand our (potential) customers”, which in turn addressed some of the issues the SME was facing.

The student-consultants considered the project an eye-opener. While they were able to tap on their knowledge and past experiences, they realised that in the real world, the “most unique solution may not



be the most suitable one for the client". Instead, "it is the ability to leverage on the client's existing strengths and resources to overcome their weaknesses and threats ... that really add value to the client".

The student-consultants also gained valuable insights into customer behaviour because they had to put themselves in the shoes of the consumers. They came away from the project with the realisation that there is "no one-size-fits-all solution for any business" as all companies are dissimilar and face different challenges.

Project Advisor Ms Tong Sing Eng provided the team with "clear direction in times of confusion", says a student-consultant. Ms Tong alerted them when they went "off track", provided "encouragement in challenging times" and gave advice on "stakeholder management".

On her part, Ms Tong ensured that clear objectives and milestones were established from the start, with properly-defined roles. Constant reference to the project deliverables at each stage of the project development kept the team focused. She shared that the quality of work was "commendable and exceeded client's expectations". The student-consultants, who had a very intense academic schedule, fulfilled their project commitments and delivered on the objectives. She highlighted for commendation their "thorough analyses" of the research and "well-considered recommendations".

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