

AMICI

Events and Catering

Cheers To Change: Amici Events & Catering

Answering the call of business transformation with enthusiasm has been crucial to the growth and success of Amici Events & Catering. Meaning “friends” in Italian, the company began life as an intimate restaurant tucked in a shophouse in Singapore’s Holland Village. It was so named because Founder and CEO Willie Tan believes that “great company and great food are synonymous with a great time”. Amici has undergone significant transformations and transitions in its business since its launch in 2000.



A lavish grazing-table spread — from artisanal cheeses to decadent desserts — showcases Amici’s commitment to quality.

With quality food still at its core, the brand has made innovation its calling card to survive and thrive. Mr Tan, an accountant by training, had, by his own admission, “zero” experience in the food and beverage (F&B) industry when he started. What he did have were gumption and a can-do spirit. “Over the years, we learnt by tackling all the intricacies of running an F&B business, including taking care of our customers,” he says. “Today, while we don’t run a restaurant anymore, our catering business was born from opportunities to cater to home parties that were organised by restaurant patrons.”

Mr Tan shares that when the team took up the initial home catering opportunities some 15 years ago, they “started again without experience, but always tried to do our best and understand how the customers wanted things”. Noting that the catering business is “very,

very complex”, he says that the challenges the company faced included myriad variables, such as the event venue and flow, as well as manpower considerations, that might not be under Amici’s control. However, over the years, the company has developed its own strategies, procedures and protocols “to ensure that every event is well taken care of”, says Mr Tan, adding that these standard operating procedures (SOPs) are essential.



Founder and CEO Willie Tan is the driving force behind Amici’s culinary innovation and success.

Raising the glass: A story of growth

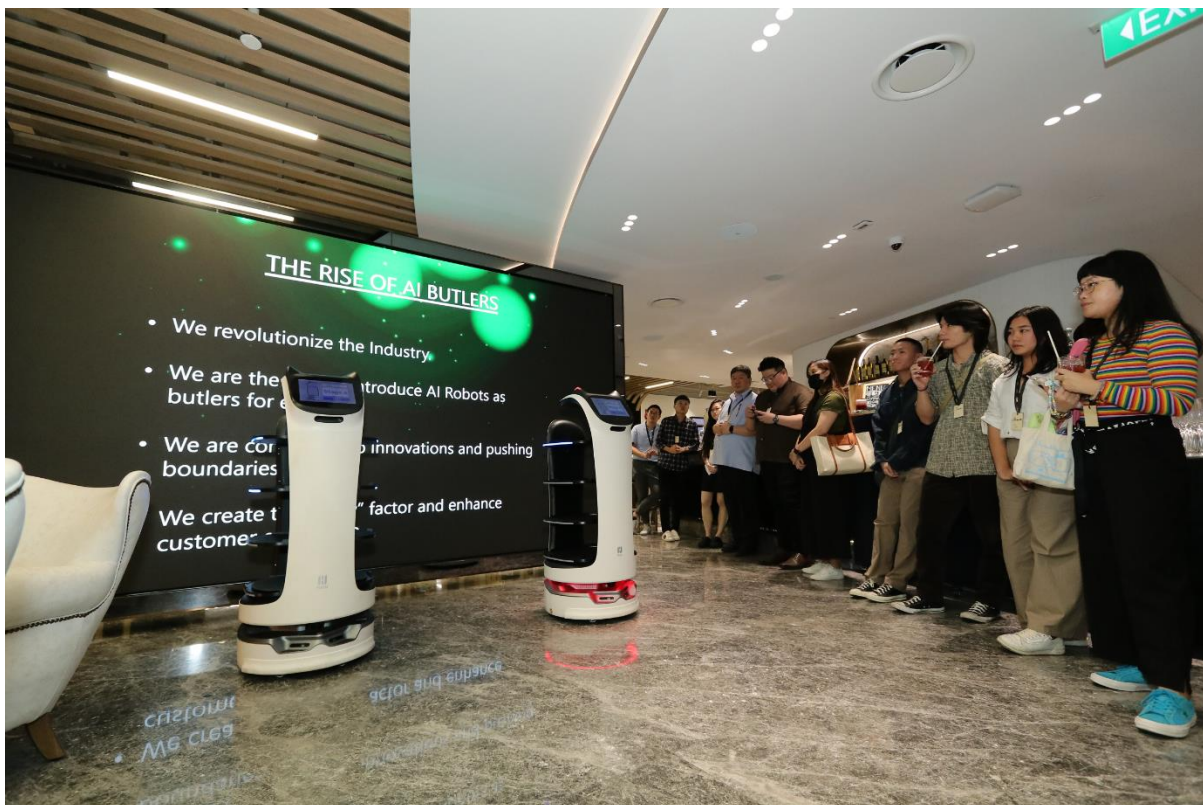
Amici has certainly tasted success with its hard work and efforts, with the business growing several-fold. “When we first started, we were very small. When we had slightly bigger events, we had to rent equipment from suppliers. But today, we have grown so big that we have a whole warehouse full of equipment,” Mr Tan says. “For example, we used to have maybe 100 Main Course Plates. Now, we have 3,474 Main Course Plates on hand.” In fact, he adds, “we now do equipment rental; it has spun off into a new business unit”.

Despite its successes, the brand places innovation at the forefront and takes its industry pioneer position seriously. “We’re always trying to do things that people don’t. We’re always striving to be the first one to do it,” Mr Tan says. For instance, Amici introduced an elegant, tiered and disposable “high tea” tower, which, at the time, fulfilled an untapped need in the industry.

The company also launched its premium deluxe bento range, which comprised international cuisine presented in a beautiful acrylic bento box. Sharing that he was initially worried about the higher price point of the product deterring customers, Mr Tan reveals that the premium bento concept took off during the COVID-19 pandemic. “People couldn’t host events because they couldn’t have gatherings, so this item became very popular, especially when we helped corporations in delivering them to individual homes,” he explains.

Robots at your service

Amici’s foray into the realm of AI (artificial intelligence) robots sets the brand apart as a pioneer in the industry. Partnering with a local technology company, Amici actively contributed to the design and development of these cutting-edge robots. The brand then consistently deployed the robots at its events, allowing for a novel experience and continual machine learning to take place.



The AI “butlers” are a futuristic blend of tech and hospitality — redefining event experiences.

These AI robots, affectionately named “butlers”, are revolutionising the way Amici’s events and catering are executed. They are adept at navigating event venues, attending to guests and delivering impeccable service. Thanks to their advanced algorithms and machine learning capabilities, the robots can adapt to varying situations and provide personalised experiences for guests.

The 10 “Italian” butlers — girls Luna, Isabel, Greta, Dona and Emma; boys Antonio, Dante, Luca, Marco and Angelo — can even converse with and engage guests. The inclusion of AI robots, Mr Tan states, does not only improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Amici’s services but also adds an element of novelty and excitement to its events.

Savouring success beyond the plate

Amici’s success today has been hard-won. The company had a gradual beginning, with efforts being directed towards gaining brand recognition and building a trusted network of suppliers and manpower. Now, Mr Tan leads a solid team, which he views as the future of the business. This includes expanding Amici’s manufacturing division, which was introduced nine years ago.



Staff members meticulously preparing dishes to ensure every catering event is a memorable feast for clients.

With many businesses, such as hotels and airlines, outsourcing their F&B needs, Amici is perfectly poised to tap into this market. “We have a factory in Malaysia and just started our manufacturing plant in Singapore. In Malaysia, we specialise in pastries and baked goods, while in Singapore, we cater to the rest of the savoury food spectrum,” Mr Tan elaborates. “The manufacturing plant will also bolster our production and storage capabilities — reinforcing our catering business.”

On the topic of business continuity and sustainability, Mr Tan notes that he has offered several key staff members the chance to invest in the company and possess shares. “My plan is to eventually transfer the business to them in the long term. They can run the show — having a personal stake in the company — while I can transition into an advisory role,” he says.



The Amici team celebrating their shared success with a thumbs-up for innovation and dedication.

Regarding the prospect of an initial public offering (IPO), Mr Tan recognises its allure — “everybody’s talking about it” — and has weighed the pros and cons. “An IPO could really help us, by providing us with more resources and allowing us to grow faster,” he says. Already with a presence in Malaysia, the company harbours ambitious expansion plans, including further growth overseas. Regardless of the trajectory, he reiterates the brand’s ethos: “We must constantly innovate.”