



Foresight, Fortitude and Food

The story of Golden Bridge Foods Manufacturing Pte Ltd is as much about the evolution of its food brands and products as it is about the vision, determination and creativity of the management team – the driving force behind the growth of the company from its humble beginnings to its current standing as a leading food processing powerhouse in the region, with global reach.

Golden Bridge Foods Manufacturing was founded in 1993 by the late Ong Tuan Seng, with the vision to develop quality food products to fulfil customers' needs and preferences. Even in the early years, it was clear that foresight and fortitude would be the guiding light for the company's achievements in the years ahead. From a small-scale Singapore factory with just 30 staff and a singular brand (Golden Bridge, its iconic heritage brand), today, the company staff strength stands at over 100 people and three brands (including Golden Lion and Kelly's), with a factory and office occupying some 9,000 square metres. The merchandise across the three brands spans canned products, waxed products, meat floss, sausages, *bak kwa* (sweet barbecued meat), noodles, bacon, cold cuts, luncheon meat and ham.

The family-run company is helmed by a second-generation management team of three, comprising Managing Director Ong Bee Chip, 56, and his elder brother and sister. Six other family members from the third generation work in the company in various key functions across sales and marketing to production, supply chain, and information technology (IT).

Pic on right: Stringent inspections and checks conducted by QC department. The new IT system helps QC to record, store and analyse the inspection results more efficiently.

Gritty about grub

Golden Bridge Foods Manufacturing is a bit of an anomaly among SMEs – innovation is imbued into the company's DNA as an ongoing process, and it has invested heavily in R&D, technology and machinery equipment. These efforts have helped to boost efficiency throughout its entire supply chain, and made the company stand out as an industry leader among the stiff competition.

The corporatisation of the company, which was completed in 2018, was also atypical of a family-owned SME. Even though it came at a price, the management team considered the investments as being necessary for the company's transformation into a regional brand, and to fulfil its mission to deliver premier value products and services to its local and overseas customers.



The management team's foresight and business acumen saw them embracing technology years before the government's call for manufacturing companies to go digital to improve their value propositions. For example, "the new ERP system integrates 16 points of our business functions, making it easy for us to monitor all our processes and also pull out any information we need very quickly", said Mr Ong. From invoicing to traceability, trend analysis, logistics, production, payroll and more, the versatile and scalable ERP system is the backbone of the company's IT infrastructure.

Over the years, the company has recorded many firsts in various areas of business. In product innovation, it is the first in Singapore to produce XO sausages, introducing a new level of culinary luxury to a well-known product. It is also the first company here to offer processed food in four categories, namely, chilled, frozen, dried and shelf-stable. In process innovation, the SME is the first in the processed meat industry to adopt the Microsoft AX2012 ERP system, and as the company expanded, it transited to the more sophisticated ERP system by Microsoft Dynamics AX, notching up another industry first. It is also one of only a handful of companies here which has attained the licence to export halal processed meat to the European Union (EU).

With a slew of prominent safety and quality marks and certifications, such as ISO9001, ISO2200, HACCP, SGS, SAC Accreditation Mark and SFA Grade A certification for its facilities, Mr Ong said that clients in the food business can have “added assurance” and “peace of mind” when they order from the company.

So much to chew on

The ERP is a key part of process innovation as the suite of IT applications allows the company to manage its four product categories. “It is not easy to produce chilled, frozen, dried and shelf-stable processed meats in the same factory. The ‘smart’ system helps us to maintain quality and efficacy, and increase our overall efficiency,” said Mr Ong. Process innovation is also enhanced by the company’s investment in machinery. “The imported meat that we receive is frozen solid. We have to defrost and cut it before we can process it. We cannot afford to spend hours just waiting for it to defrost, so we devised our own methods,” he said.



Product innovation extends to different aspects including the taste, type and packaging of its food items. “We must cater to the changing palates and lifestyle habits of the people who are buying our products,” he said. Truffle pork ham, for example, adds a hint of exquisite truffle flavour to pork ham, while luncheon meat for Japan is packed in smaller tins which make them ideal for late-night snacking.

Pic on left: Recording the status of the work-in-progress into the IT system.

Mr Ong’s frequent travels enable him to “get new ideas”, network with potential partners and clients, and garner a deeper understanding of different markets. His natural flair for business and on-the-ground knowledge have been serving him well – the company has penetrated markets that were hitherto closed, such as Japan and the EU. “For 50 years, Japan has not imported any meat products, until we went in,” he announced, with no small measure of pride. Food/Meat is classified as a “high risk” item and it took the company four-and-a-half years to satisfy the EU’s stringent import licensing criteria. Sending pork products to Muslim-populated countries such as Indonesia, India and Malaysia also posed a challenge, and it took patience, perseverance and a lot of planning to address the issues. Clearly, the management team’s foresight and fortitude are behind the company’s growth both locally and overseas.

As the world becomes more borderless, Mr Ong opined that the future of the company could well lie in its overseas markets. “Currently, the Singapore market makes up 80% of our business. In five years’ time, it could be 80-20, with Singapore in the minority.”

Keeping it in the family?

There is a Chinese saying that wealth cannot last beyond the third generation, which alludes to the first generation's hard work to amass wealth, the second generation's propensity to squander it, leaving nothing for the third generation which must start over. The western world has a similar aphorism – shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations.

Mr Ong firmly believes that the sustainability of a family-owned enterprise – especially if it is an SME – is very much determined by the “mindset of its leadership”. In his industry, for example, “renewal should be done every 10 years or you will be out of the game”. Practising what they preach, he and his team had invested in machinery and equipment, and undergone a restructuring exercise. “We put in place a professional company structure – not like an MNC's but more suitable for a family company,” he said.

The management team members, all of whom are in their late 50s and above, are aware of the ownership versus management-ship conundrum. The third generation is already getting hands-on experience at the firm, and his team expects to hand over the reins in the next five years or so. “Where there are talent gaps, we will hire qualified professionals. We run a business; we must be practical,” he said. So even though the company is a family concern and their father's legacy, Mr Ong and his siblings recognise that they may have to look outside the family to find the right people. But in all likelihood, given their acuity and far-sightedness, when the time comes for them to step down, the management team-in-waiting would have been well prepared, and up for the task to bring Golden Bridge Foods Manufacturing to greater heights.



Golden Bridge Management and HOD (from L to R): George Tay, Khor Zheng Hou, Ong Shiya, Jaren Tan, Mr Ong Bee Song, Mdm Ong Chew Yong, Mr Ong Bee Chip, Evelyn Ching, Irene Chang, Lee Ai Xuan, Teo Ni Zhen, Christopher Pang