

# ELITEZ

GROUP OF COMPANIES

## Powered by Passion and Professionalism

Elitez Pte Ltd was established in 2010 primarily to offer flexible employment to homemakers and retirees, giving them a sense of purpose and a means to earn an income.

The company, co-founded by Derrick Teo and Wayne Chen, has its genesis in their participation in community work, says Derrick, who has been involved in grassroots activities since he was 19 years of age. Now 35, he is Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Elitez and Wayne, 37, Executive Director.

A fortuitous meetup over coffee with some friends brought Derrick and Wayne together. Strangers before that, they realised they held similar values and have a penchant for business. Several coffee sessions later, Elitez was born. Within the year, the company had scored a few projects with Unilever, providing part-time personnel to promote the organisation's FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) brands in the supermarkets.



*Derrick Teo, Chief Executive Officer of Elitez Group*

"We enjoyed what we were doing – recruiting, coaching and managing our team," shares Derrick. He found it fulfilling to engage with the "aunty brigade", a fond nickname for the seniors who, having dedicated many years of their lives to their families, were feeling "left out" when their families no longer required much of their time. "Elitez soon became their second home." As for Derrick and Wayne, "what started as a fun business quickly became our passion and mandate."

In the second year of setup, Elitez recorded 19 clients, its reputation having spread via word of mouth. By 2013, the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) was the market leader in the provision of personnel for FMCG below-the-line marketing, with a clientele featuring major global brand names.

A major restructuring in 2014 paved the way for the SME's expansion. Today, the Elitez Group features a collective expertise of human resource (HR) solutions spanning foreign talent placement, recruitment process outsourcing, a compendium of HR administration services, and training.

Elitez, which has an imprint Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, is looking to expand its professional HR services to Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Taiwan.

### People power

The period 2010 to 2013 could be characterised as a time of "survival" as the company competed for marketshare, recounts Derrick. Its competitors in the promoter management industry had more than a decade's head start, so Elitez had to "run faster, think better, react more rigorously"; it also turned to technology and innovation to elevate its service delivery. "We were the first to use a mobile app for our supermarket promoters to clock in and clock out," he enthuses. They had purchased 150 mobile phones for the team's use. "We taught them how to download and use the app for work. They went on to download other apps, such as shopping apps, and also went online to watch their favourite Korean dramas after work," he says with a smile, glad that he could enrich the lives of his aunty brigade, which includes a few uncles too. Clients, too, appreciated the convenience afforded by technology.

They could access the manpower-related data, and see their marketing efforts “in action” at various supermarkets, without having to be on site.

This business model served Elitez well until 2013, which would turn out to be a watershed year. “We could not collect on a large project which involved almost 600 people over three weeks. The client was going to file for bankruptcy,” he relates. “Luckily, we managed to collect most of what was owed to us, after nine months.” It was the company’s worst business crisis. Coupled with the saturation of the FMCG manpower market by then, the founders knew it was time to do some deep soul searching. The pertinent question was, “What next?”

“Our expertise lay in managing manpower, which is many companies’ bugbear, so we decided to provide it as a professional service,” says Derrick. “We established our vision, determined our business direction, and developed our brand and strategies.” Subsidiaries were set up for different HR specialisations, and the Elitez Group took off from there.

### **Minding our business, and yours too**

“Branding ourselves correctly” was one of the key priorities of Elitez, says the CEO. Failure was not an option as “we are responsible for the livelihood and progress potential of every one of our staff”. They began putting in the structures, procedures and processes. The management team – comprising Derrick, Wayne and Chief Financial Officer Lin Rong Jie, now 35, who joined them in late 2013 – set about building the second level of management with the aim to groom future leaders of Elitez; those who showed potential would be promoted to Heads of Departments (HoDs), to helm business units.



*Elitez regional management team during a conference held at its Singapore office in November 2019*

Business was good. The group, which had been registering consistent growth since its inception, recorded 25% to 40% year-on-year figures in the last few years, thanks to the “dynamism and tenacity of our HoDs”, acknowledges Derrick. “A lot of the forward direction was the result of our regular

brainstorming sessions with the HoDs and management teams of our subsidiaries. We would discuss where we were headed, risks to the business, technology and automation, and innovations, and adapt where necessary.” Task forces were formed to experiment with new ideas, and these have “consistently proven to evolve the business”, including the introduction of new business lines. As the group expanded, the co-founders held firm to their mantra from their early years – “run faster, think better, react more rigorously” – to keep ahead of the competition.



*Christmas celebration for 2019; the company promotes a family culture and believes in work-life integration*

In 2020, life as we know it, was irreparably altered by the Covid-19 pandemic. As Derrick tells it, in Singapore, “by March, things were turning ugly and we were bracing ourselves for the impact”. It was back to survival mode once again. At the virtual townhall sessions with staff, what came through was that “everyone was committed to push ahead together”. They examined their value propositions and crafted new strategies.

When the circuit-breaker measures were implemented in April, Elitez’s SkillsFuture-approved training academy was ready to commence training via video-conferencing platform Zoom. The courses were very well received as they were timely, customised to the clients’ specific needs, and eligible for government funding. When there was a sudden spike for contract staff and healthcare manpower arising from the pandemic, Elitez was ready to fulfil the demand. After all, it specialises in recruitment for the healthcare sector and has a proven track record for managing contract staff as well as in project management. “After the initial uncertainty, we became more confident that we could ride out the storm,” reveals Derrick. While Q2 was “business as usual”, Q3 also pivoted to help clients tap on technology for sustainability; the group “onboarded a few new clients” for its IT recruitment services.

Many companies faltered in 2020, but Elitez’s underlying philosophy to “run faster, think better, react more rigorously” enabled it to thrive. Townhall sessions were now a monthly affair, compared to bi-annually pre-Covid-19 and, instead of the typical two keynote projects annually, the group launched five new ones that year.

A new project was Auntie Sam, a vending machine which dispenses free samples of FMCG goods to consumers. “We’ve built a community around job creation” and the name, “Auntie Sam”, pays tribute to the aunty brigade which helped kickstart the business, Derrick muses. By his reckoning, the aunty brigade now numbers around 5,000 regulars, after 10 years. On a weekly basis, Elitez continues to engage 200 of them for projects, including standing by the vending machines to render assistance.

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Another new project was a security guards agency, which Elitez started in August 2020. By end-October, it was “performing beyond expectations”. While security is traditionally a “restricted” sector – it is heavily regulated by the police and tends to be dominated by former military and policemen – he lists the group’s qualifications: “We are an HR company with experience in the whole range of HR services, such as recruitment, outsource management of daily-rated workers as well as contract staff. In addition to being adaptable and flexible, we have also onboarded a partner who has deep experience in running a security outfit. All these fuel our confidence to be part of the sector.”

### **Solving problems**

The people business is a good business to be in, conveys the business owner as he contemplates his own journey. “Elitez’s young hires can climb the corporate ladder to HoD in three years or so, and they will soon hold options in the company. The future is in their hands.” He surmises that the top management team would step aside in fewer than 10 years.

To aspiring entrepreneurs and young people, Derrick points out that the real value they should deliver lies in “providing solutions”. For enterprises, this means addressing and eliminating clients’ pain points; for employees, this means solving problems. The group’s success underscores the wisdom of his words.

Amid the challenges of a bleak economy wreaked by Covid-19, Elitez continues to “run faster, think better, react more rigorously”, pushing ahead with its HR solutions. “We need good people to do the job effectively, and we are hiring!” he announces. Spoken by someone truly steeped in the people business.