



Hygienically Yours: FAFC (Singapore) Pte Ltd

For many people, oral hygiene tends to centre around a routine of teeth flossing and brushing, gargling with mouthwash and biannual visits to the dentist. An oral care products manufacturer, however, wants to introduce an additional level of hygiene with the company's innovative new product – a toothbrush steriliser. It taps on the power of ultra-violet (UV) light radiation to reduce the microbial load on the toothbrush, sanitising it and making it cleaner for use. The innovation was the brainchild of FAFC's inhouse research and development (R&D) division, which is largely responsible for the concepts and products in the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME)'s range of oral care merchandise.

FAFC also works closely with international brands to develop practical, appealing and fun premium products with the aim to achieve lifelong healthy oral habits among the community. Since it secured exclusive licensing rights for some popular children's cartoon characters – Pororo the Little Penguin, Robocar Poli, Katuri Little Pheasants, to name a few – which feature regularly on its collection of kids' oral care items, the SME has captured a niche market segment that is integral to its scalability and sustainability.

To ascertain if its latest innovation (toothbrush steriliser) would be well received among consumers in Singapore, the SME turned to the UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute to conduct a study, as well as determine the requisite factors to create an impact among its target audience, to drive demand and achieve sustainability. Through the Institute's SME Consulting Programme (SCP), a team of student-consultants, supervised by an industry veteran as Project Advisor and a Project Manager from the Institute, undertook the feasibility study project.

Grinding the facts

The hallmark of the SCP is the use of scientific methodologies for research and analysis. To this end, the student-consultants embarked on the project by first seeking an understanding of the oral care industry in Singapore. They conducted primary and secondary research, garnering a mix of qualitative and quantitative data.

The primary research comprised an online survey and focus group discussions to directly engage with the consumers, with the key objective to discover their purchase considerations, especially pertaining to a relatively unfamiliar product which, in this case, was the SME's innovation.

For the secondary research, the student-consultants turned to established business frameworks and analytical tools to elicit the essential information. The SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis affirmed existing advantages that could be leveraged to support the new product – for example, the popularity of the brand's merchandise among kids, and the heightened awareness of good hygiene practices due to the pandemic – as well as the areas that might require special attention – for example,

FAFC's lack of social media marketing activities, and competition from the more prominent brands and big players. To further enhance the robustness of the primary and secondary research, the student team used the VRIO (valuable, rare, inimitable, organisation) framework to determine the competitive potential of the toothbrush steriliser.



Smart UV toothbrush sterilisers printed with cute cartoon characters

Everything in alignment

Significantly, the findings pointed to the feasibility of the toothbrush steriliser, supported largely by the belief among consumers in the efficacy and usefulness of UV sterilisation.

The student-consultants proceeded to craft an effective marketing strategy to spearhead the product launch, bolstered by the SME's comparative strengths. For instance, COVID-19 had brought good health into sharp focus among the citizenry. People were aware that masks were being sterilised using UV technology and thus, would draw the conclusion that UV sterilisation was an efficient way to kill microbiological contaminants such as viruses. Citing robust and credible evidence, to demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of a toothbrush steriliser to deep-clean a toothbrush, would be compelling to persuade consumers to add this innovation to their cache of oral care products. Endorsements from people of influence, such as dental health professionals, social media influencers or other credible product reviewers, could also positively impact the consumers' purchase decisions.

The primary research informed the student-consultants which features the consumers deemed important in a toothbrush steriliser, including a compact design, safety seal, status

of sterilisation, battery level indicator and more. FAFC might want to add these features to the product to encourage product uptake.

In addition to the comprehensive list of recommendations for the SME, the final report featured an evaluation of the recommendations, where the student-consultants listed the potential benefits and risks of each proposed plan of action, for the SME's risk-reward evaluation.

A polished veneer

FAFC Founder Tan Meng Soon declared himself "very satisfied" with the overall project, mentioning, in particular, the relevant research insights such as the identification of the specific target audience, and the recommended strategies and action plans. He described the whole process as "organised", with tasks that "ran smoothly with incredible results". If and when the opportunity presented itself, he would have no qualms working with the same team again to resolve his business issues. His comments bore testimony to the value he placed on the SCP, and his confidence in the project team.

The student-consultants had signed up for the SCP as they wanted to "directly interact with a real-world organisation that was facing a business issue, and come up with viable solutions for the company". They achieved their objective and, in the process, picked up new competencies including how to design and carry out a survey, and conduct focus group sessions to elicit meaningful insights. "We sharpened our critical thinking and analytical skill sets too," they shared.

As self-confessed "greenhorns in consulting", the student-consultants were guided by the expertise of Project Advisor Sriramagopalan Desikan and Project Manager Lina Lee to help them in the more "technical" aspects of the project. They also took "extra measures and put in a lot of effort to deliver the best possible outcomes", revealed the undergraduates. As for their takeaways from the SCP, they learnt "hard skills and gained many soft skills, for instance, an improvement in time management, ability to work as a team and more confidence to pitch our points".

To ensure a smooth-flowing project, "as a group, we paid a lot of attention to defining the project objectives and aligning them with the SME's requirements", informed Mr Desikan. "Then, at every stage, we continued to stay true to the originally stated project objectives. After that, there was minimal handholding and the students worked independently."

Mr Desikan enjoyed the experience of working with his young charges. Crediting them with "delightfully fresh perspectives", he said they "uncovered new possibilities in the product usage I did not expect". On the overall project management, "the team delivered spectacularly – the findings were spot on, and there were new possibilities and modifications which were practical suggestions".



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For Ms Lee, there were several memorable moments. Besides this being her first project foray into the oral care industry, it was a cross-border project as the SME was based in Malaysia, so all meetings were virtual in nature with no possibility of on-site interactions. She also valued the opportunity to “observe and learn from an experienced Project Advisor who is skilful in guiding the students to think critically, and to prepare and present a compelling story pitch”.

Project Advisor	Sriramagopalan Desikan
Project Manager	Lina Lee
Student-Consultants	Leo Edwin Paul Jeswin Bachelor of Accountancy / 2019
	Janani d/o Nadarajan Bachelor of Science (Economics) / 20
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