



Journeying Online Together: Chia Siang Heng Pte Ltd

Generations of business owners, from Singapore and beyond, have turned to Chia Siang Heng (CSH) for quality dried goods and general provisions. Established in 1958, CSH started as a stall within the old Beach Road market. Today, this importer, wholesaler and distributor is helmed by its third generation, who are ready to bring the company further to new audiences in the digital age.

Traditionally, CSH worked mainly with business-to-business (B2B) customers, such as wet market stallholders, restaurants, hotels and others. In 2015, CSH began to set up retail stores in the heartlands. Three years later, aware of the ever-increasing use of technology, the company launched its website, which mainly serves as an informative platform.



CSH employees load and unload food materials promptly to ensure the seamless and timely delivery of orders.

Now, CSH wants to target younger business owners, aged between 30 and 40, in the food and beverage (F&B) sector, such as cafe owners, cloud kitchen operators and caterers. The CSH management also acknowledged that the company needs to prepare itself for an increasingly competitive digital business environment. This is imperative for the growth and sustainability of the business.

With these needs and goals in mind, CSH approached UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute (UOB-SMU AEI) for guidance on digital marketing implementation. A team of three student-consultants undertook the task of gathering market insights and developing suitable digital strategies to generate greater awareness of CSH's brand and products among the key target audience. As part of UOB-SMU AEI's SME Consulting Programme Plus (SCP+), the student-

consultants also conducted initial implementation work of the strategy. The student team was supervised by an industry veteran as Project Advisor and supported by a Project Manager from the institute.

Setting the scene

To identify the issues and better understand the current landscape, the student-consultants conducted in-depth market research to identify the behaviour and needs of the target audience. Business-to-consumer (B2C) Qualtrics surveys were conducted among those aged between 30 and 55 who cook at least three times a week and have purchased dried foods. The surveys helped the student-consultants discover this segment's preferences, needs and behaviours.

Separately, in-depth B2B interviews were conducted online with key decision-makers or purchasers within the F&B industry. The intention was to understand the target audience's typical supplier search and dried food supplies purchase journey while looking into the key factors affecting their choice of suppliers and current attitudes towards digital marketing efforts. In addition, they also conducted a digital assets review. Finally, a competitor analysis was also performed to gain a contextual understanding of CSH's digital solutions and identify competitive opportunities.



Food products, such as onions, ginger and garlic, are stored in cold rooms to retain their freshness and quality.

Bringing customers on a digital journey

The team garnered valuable and interesting insights from the research interviews. One of the most critical points was how traditional brick-and-mortar stores remain the preferred modes of purchase – among both F&B veterans and younger entrepreneurs – for dried food

and ingredients. However, when researching new ingredients and trends and receiving the latest information and promotions, most respondents prefer to do so on a company's website. Overall, the top factors affecting the choice of supplier include price, reliability, service and rapport.

Based on their findings, the student-consultants proposed a coordinated and multi-phase offline-to-online strategy. In the short term, this strategy would tackle the main challenge of bringing customers online. In the long run, it would help lay the foundation for the continued digitisation of the business.

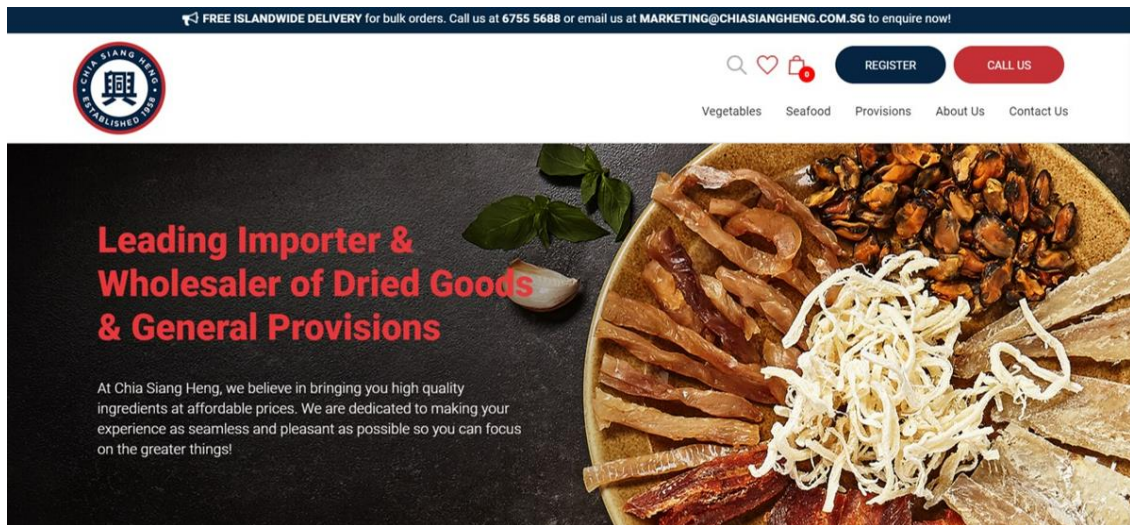
At the start of the three-pronged journey, the main driver was the display and implementation of QR-coded posters at physical stores. QR codes have become ubiquitous in Singapore's retail landscape, and there is almost no barrier to their usage. As such, QR codes offer a way to drive offline traffic to CSH's website, where information on the company and its products can be disseminated, customer relationships may be cultivated, and ultimately, sales conversions may take place in the future. The student-consultants focused mainly on disseminating and monitoring the QR-coded posters during the project's implementation phase.

Building upon the initial success

Monitoring via Google Analytics showed that the project successfully brought traffic to the CSH website while customers dwelled longer. However, there needed to be more conversions in terms of sales. The team attributed this to two main reasons: that the crowds at CSH stores were not the right fit – they were B2C customers who bought small quantities of dried foods and ingredients for everyday use – and that the posters and the website could be further improved.

All was not lost, as the insights gained can help improve future iterations of the effort. The team also shared recommendations on how CSH can improve its website content and its search engine results page ranking – using search engine optimisation (SEO) techniques, for instance – which will make the CSH website and content more discoverable online.

Ultimately, CSH's progress to digitisation would depend significantly on how the company can influence the mindset of the younger customers it wants to cultivate. Implementing QR-coded posters in its stores was the first step in this omnichannel strategy.



After incorporating suggestions from the student-consultants, CSH's website now sports a fresh new look. An improved site can help to disseminate information on a company and its products, cultivate customer relationships and boost future sales conversions.

An eye on a phased strategy with longevity

CSH's Director of Business Development Lester Chia was very satisfied with the student-consulting team's bite-sized digital marketing implementation work. "The bite-sized campaign is very doable and expandable. I will be able to pass this on to my marketing team for them to implement upon project handover," he shared. Project Manager Lina Lee agreed. "Even though the implemented strategies were small changes, they made a measurable difference for the company, and other suggestions can be carried out by the company in the long term."

Mr Chia also thought the student-consulting team's "methodological approach in addressing the problem statement" helped devise a relevant and effective strategy. "They have also come up with a well-defined data gathering plan that provides good customer insights," he added.

Indeed, the team worked hard and thoughtfully on the research and approach. The student-consultants acknowledged the guidance from their Project Advisor, Mr Kenneth Oh. They said, "He played a pivotal role in ensuring that our proposed solutions, research methodologies and client presentation were in the right direction. Being highly skilled in digital marketing, he provided feedback on the right B2B and B2C strategies and tips on optimising SEO and creating a seamless offline-to-online strategy."

Mr Oh recalled, "As the team expressed uncertainty over how to conduct an interview, we did a mock interview session together, where I role-played as the interviewee. This allowed the team members to gain confidence and get critical feedback. I believe this contributed to the students getting good insights for CSH."

For the student-consultants, they relished the real-life opportunity to apply topics and concepts learnt in the classroom, such as SEO, primary research techniques and B2B marketing strategies. They shared, "It also allowed us to understand the intricacies of

creating a successful business. A business owner must manage every aspect of his or her business, from marketing to operations to sales and human resources. All these aspects must be optimised with the goal of doing the best for its business. We had a glimpse of what it means to be an entrepreneur.”

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