



Cooking up sweet success

Just as recipes are refreshed and adapted for new audiences, Kate's Catering is reworking its formula for future growth — with a little strategic help.

Established in 1986, Singapore-based food services provider Kate's Catering has built a strong heritage spanning more than three decades and two generations of leaders. With the tagline, "The Way You Want It", the company prides itself on offering customised catering solutions while balancing quality and taste. Over the years, it has cultivated a loyal customer base that appreciates its diverse range, including mini buffet and bento catering.

However, with competition in the catering industry intensifying, Kate's Catering has faced challenges in expanding its business, particularly in the corporate catering market. The company has found it difficult to resonate with corporate clients, who have increasingly high expectations and a growing number of competitors to choose from. Additionally, shifting consumer behaviour has driven demand for greater visual appeal and streamlined user experiences. These factors have highlighted the need for Kate's Catering to carve out a distinctive niche in an increasingly saturated market.

Sourcing the ingredients

To refine its strategic positioning, brand marketing and growth opportunities, Kate's Catering engaged the UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute (UOB-SMU AEI) SME Consulting Programme (SCP). The SCP's student-consultants were tasked with assessing the company's current challenges, exploring market opportunities and recommending strategic moves to strengthen the brand. The team was guided by an industry veteran as Project Advisor and a Project Manager from the Institute.

The student-consultants conducted a detailed market survey and brand audit using meticulous science-led surveys and data-based analysis with established models — hallmarks of the SCP approach. They utilised primary and secondary survey methodologies, including focus group discussions and an online questionnaire, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the industry landscape, competitor offerings and consumer behaviour.

Key tools used during the secondary survey included competitor analysis and online research into Singapore's catering industry. The team examined competitors' digital presence — websites, social media and customer reviews — while assessing menu offerings, pricing strategies and customer engagement tactics. This step was critical in identifying gaps and differentiation opportunities for Kate's Catering. Furthermore, trade publications and news reports were referenced to gather further context on the competitive landscape by identifying key players and their unique selling points.

Primary data collection was conducted to gain direct insights from existing and potential customers. A focus group discussion included participants from diverse ages and

backgrounds, all of whom had prior experience ordering food catering for personal or corporate events. They were tasked with navigating Kate's Catering website and participating in a food tasting session.

Separately, an online survey was distributed to both current customers and those who had never ordered from Kate's Catering. The survey examined consumer behaviour across six stages of the customer journey — awareness, consideration, evaluation, purchase, retention and advocacy — while also assessing the impact of visual appeal on willingness to pay.

Setting the table

The first step in a customer's journey is awareness of a company's services. The student-consultants found that 68 per cent of respondents typically learnt about catering services through word of mouth — recommendations from family, friends or colleagues. This highlights the importance of consistent, high-quality service to encourage positive referrals.

Findings from focus group discussions reinforced this, with five out of six participants stating that they engaged caterers based on recommendations. This aligned with the team's secondary survey, which referenced a 2021 report by global measurement and data analytics company Nielsen on trust in advertising. The survey showed that 88 per cent of participants trusted recommendations from people they know over other forms of advertising.

In terms of media consumption, survey respondents displayed a strong preference for short-form content, with 95 per cent of respondents favouring it. Social media platforms played a key role in content consumption, while online search engines also shaped initial perceptions — underscoring the importance of investing in search engine optimisation (SEO) and digital marketing strategies.

When it came to ordering preferences, ordering online ranked as the most popular method, with email and phone orders following closely. This trend highlights the need for a user-friendly and efficient website. Other primary survey insights revealed that food quality, consistency, pricing and value were crucial considerations for potential customers.

To assess Kate's Catering's standing in the market, the student-consultants applied the Brand Resonance Model, which evaluates brand awareness, performance, imagery, judgements, feelings and customer relationship. Additionally, they used Porter's Generic Strategies framework to compare Kate's Catering against its competitors. The findings indicated that the company was perceived as an affordable and casual option, making it popular for personal or social gatherings. However, there was a market gap for catering to corporate clients at a more affordable price point — an opportunity that Kate's Catering could seize by positioning itself as a cost-effective yet reliable corporate catering choice.

Serving suggestions

Based on their findings, the student-consultants proposed key recommendations to enhance the Kate's Catering's positioning.

Firstly, they suggested a rebranding initiative, starting with a refreshed mission and corporate positioning statement. This statement would serve as an internal guiding principle, keeping the company focused on its target market and ensuring its value proposition is clearly communicated across different channels. Other proposed updates included a redesign of Kate's Catering's logo, typography and brand voice — moving towards a friendly, warm and approachable tone to make customers feel welcomed and valued.

Website improvements were also a priority. The team recommended high-quality food imagery, an intuitive layout and a more prominent display of client reviews to enhance digital engagement.

To support the rebranding, the student-consultants suggested both internal and external brand activation initiatives. Internally, aligning employees with the brand's vision, culture and values would be key. Comprehensive training, regular evaluations and timely feedback would help ensure that issues would be identified early and rectified promptly.

Externally, Kate's Catering could harness the power of social media, which offers high engagement rates. On-platform advertising would further amplify reach and brand awareness. Additionally, other branding and marketing mechanisms with high return potential, such as a loyalty programme, could strengthen long-term customer relationships while also building a robust marketing database.

To prioritise these initiatives, the student-consultants used an impact-effort matrix to help guide Kate's Catering on the potential impact of their suggestions. Quick wins — such as streamlining the review process, improving product images and staff training — were identified as high-impact, low-effort actions to implement first. Major projects, including website enhancements, staff training and the customer loyalty programme, would require more time and resources but would yield substantial long-term benefits. The team also provided a suggested implementation timeline to guide execution.

A treasured recipe

The student-consultants' comprehensive investigations and proposals proved invaluable to Kate's Catering. General Manager ST Soh expressed the company's satisfaction with the project's findings and recommendations, stating, "The project was able to gather real information on customer feedback and responses" to guide the company's overall strategy. "The project is just the beginning of the process to improve our current situation."

For the student-consultants, working with an established small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) provided valuable real-world insights. For example, their initial enthusiasm for a creative idea was tempered by market realities when they realised, after further

consideration, that it would not have been suitable for Kate’s Catering after all. “This experience taught us the importance of grounding our ideas in client needs and market trends,” they shared. “Our survey results also confirmed that the idea wasn’t as attractive as we had assumed, underscoring the need for both creativity and relevance in our strategies.”

The team also gained a deeper understanding of SME challenges through direct engagement with the client. “Speaking with the client helped us refine our recommendations to ensure they were practical and aligned with the SME’s resources and capabilities,” they said.

Project Advisor Eugene Chen commended the team for their work. “Success is when the client gains valuable insights they may not have had before and gains clarity on the next steps needed to address any issues,” he said.

Project Manager Chen Shan Shan echoed this sentiment, calling the student-counsellors, along with their Project Advisor, a “dream team” that demonstrated “exceptional knowledge, a willingness to learn, self-discipline and quality work”.

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