

BLU-SKY THINKING

Consumerism is here to stay, and with Singapore's e-commerce industry set to be worth S\$7.45 billion by 2025 according to a study by Google and Temasek, it seems that Prashant Dadlani, 26, CEO of retail logistics company blu, is headed in the right direction. **AS TOLD TO RACHEL MUI**

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT BLU AND THE SERVICES THAT IT PROVIDES?

blu is a retail logistics company, it provides end-to-end logistics solutions for retailers and brands in Singapore. This encompasses services such as order management, warehousing and last mile logistics. A lot of SMEs don't have the capabilities to scale in these areas, either because it requires too much infrastructure or in-house expertise. So it's really about putting the whole ecosystem together, connecting the sellers with the buyers and being an extension of their brands.

The company started in 2015, but due to technology adoption at various stages, we became operational only in the second half of 2016. We work with both retailers and logistic companies. DHL, for example, is one of our biggest clients; and they make use of our bluPort parcel terminal network for last mile deliveries.

For retailers, we integrate directly with their websites. As orders are received online, they automatically get transferred to our back-end systems. From the moment a person confirms an order to the moment an item is being picked and packed, theoretically it could be as short as two to three minutes depending on the situation. Thereafter it gets staged for delivery.

WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION BEHIND BLU?

This is a tough question because everyone thinks it's some glamorous story, but it's really the process of problem identification and problem solution. A lot of brands these days are going directly to the consumers, so the middleman is increasingly being cut out. When it comes to B2C (business to consumer), the whole value chain is highly fragmented, and there's an underserved market. You have small players performing different roles which may not sync, so the idea is to help grow a domestic e-commerce industry and turn it away from transactional to experiential.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE AS A YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR?

While it is often said that age is just a number, age undeniably gives experience too. As a young entrepreneur, one faces scepticism from the people around you, who – with good intentions – try to draw caution around big ideas. Therefore, it's down to the entrepreneur to overcome that perceived lack of experience with as much knowledge, effort and determination as possible to turn the odds in your favour.

ANY INTERESTING COLLABORATIONS OR PROJECTS?

It has been an interesting journey working with DHL. Working with MNCs (multinational

corporations) opens a lot of windows in terms of the challenges that they face, and these give us insight into how we can position ourselves to be vertically integrated with them, instead of competing.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE SOME FACTORS THAT SET BLU APART FROM ITS COMPETITORS?

There's speed, convenience and flexibility. There's also cost efficiency because you're not paying a premium for it. The way the brand is positioned is very consumer engaging. There's a personality around the brand, and it's meant to be your retail buddy. On our Facebook page, there are different activities each month. These may not be logistically related, but we're interested in forming an emotional bond with consumers. Over a period of time when you build that relationship with customers, that's when you'll have more value-adding opportunities.

WHAT CHANGES DO YOU FORESEE IN THIS INDUSTRY?

Our view is that retailers these days can't be a pure play online or pure play offline business. You have to be across both channels, and our focus is that we want to support them in both. Retailers use their prime real estate as mini warehouses – which isn't the most efficient use of space. They are restricted in providing omnichannel services because they have sitting inventory which is capital locked in.

Therefore, retailers should reformat their store experience – allocate more space to consumer engagement and product trial, leveraging technology to share more about the

brand. Keep a small amount of stock; and if you need replenishment, this can be done quickly to a retail touchpoint.

Or you could offer an in-store sale but provide an online fulfilment mechanism. If you're going to the gym or a movie for instance, you could get a same-day delivery to a bluPort near you. That may be more convenient than a cash and carry sometimes. For us, bluPort is the primary mechanism to fulfil orders, and home delivery is secondary. For others it's the opposite.

WHAT'S IN THE PIPELINE FOR BLU?

Thus far, we've been in the B2C space, and we're excited about opening up new verticals in that area and at the same time, focus on innovations in the C2C (customer to customer) arena. Building an ecosystem that connects different parties which face different challenges is the core of harnessing the power of blu.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ASPIRING ENTREPRENEURS?

A lot of people say that entrepreneurship is about doing, but some people forget that in the process of doing, you stop learning as well. This is a danger because what you're doing is based on a certain assumption. Granted, you may have full confidence in this idea, but it may not be true. So entrepreneurship is not only about doing, but continuous learning as well – I don't think that's emphasised enough. ■

