



STAY THE COURSE
CDL Trading's Mr Cheong attributes the company's stayability to its lean workforce

STAYING AHEAD OF THE PACK

The Rug Maker and CDL Trading are two Singaporean businesses that are taking changing consumer tastes and technological advancements respectively in their stride. Despite adjusting to different operating environments, both businesses have also managed to stay true to their roots.

TEAM SPIRIT

DESKTOP hardware distributor CDL Trading is looking at ways to run its business more efficiently and Andrew Cheong, who is in charge of the company's sales and marketing, is counting on the company's "lean workforce" to achieve that goal.

The local company, which is based at Mapletree Industrial's Tanglin Halt cluster, has a current headcount of 10 – up from just three when it first started in 1988.

No small feat considering mobile technology gadgets are eating into the desktop market.

When owner Tan Teck Li established CDL Trading – which distributes assorted computer parts from motherboards to graphics cards – with two sleeping partners, he did so in a bid to cash in on a computer-buying craze.

"Those were the crazy days where everyone was trying to buy a computer," recounts Mr Cheong, who joined the company in 2013. "The company was trying to cater to consumers' needs and along the way, we managed to represent some brands in Singapore."

CDL Trading today still represents brands such as GeIL (Golden Emperor International Limited), Gigabyte, Zyxel and Seventeam Electronics, which are all Taiwan-based.

Aside from the business' own efforts, it has also been lucky to have supportive vendors that fund promotional activities such as lucky draws and free gifts, as well as marketing initiatives.

They also help the company by providing "price adjustments", so that CDL Trading can better compete in the market and generate more sales.

To have stayed in business for over three decades in Singapore, the company also counts on its quality of service to



retain loyalty in both existing and new customers.

"Our service covers pre-sales, sales to post-sales support," Mr Cheong says.

CDL Trading delivers its products to customers on time and provides a warranty service to customers, and its website lists 22 authorised dealers across the island.

The company also runs newsletters and social media profiles, and has regular meetings with customers to keep them updated on the latest products and product developments.

"Happy customers are loyal customers, and this is the success story of CDL Trading being around for so many years," Mr Cheong quips. ■



CHANGING HANDS

FROM new leadership to changing consumer tastes, The Rug Maker has seen it all.

Melvyn Khong, the co-founders' son, took over the reins in 2009 when his parents wanted to retire.

His father, Freddy Khong, now teaches aikido while Lee Foong Yoke, his mother, still does some administrative work for the business.

The older Mr Khong and Ms Lee met in 1978 while working for Hong Kong textiles company Taiping in Singapore.

In 1983, the pair started TC Carpets & Rugs, catering carpets and rugs to players in the hospitality industry.

In 2004, they shuttered the company to set up The Rug Maker, which mainly produces bespoke, hand-tufted rugs for homeowners and showflat projects.

Since the younger Mr Khong took over the helm, he has injected fresh ideas into The Rug Maker's operations and offerings. This included a move to merge the sales and design departments.

"Previously, the sales team would meet clients, understand their needs and return to explain the design requirements to the design team – however, this sometimes results in miscommunication," explains Mr Khong, who got his feet wet by helping out with the company's administration.

To resolve this, designers were made to meet clients as well, so as to hear clients' thoughts firsthand. The sales team would facilitate the discussion with clients and work with them to brainstorm.

This change was not easy to implement, according to Mr Khong, as the senior designers were not used to attending external meetings with clients.

It took about two years for the teams to adapt, but the effort appears to have paid off.



TAKING REQUESTS

The Rug Maker prides itself on its highly customised service that it started out with

“The process is much faster, less changes are made to the designs, and dissatisfaction is lower because the designers now know immediately what the clients are looking for,” he says.

Over time, The Rug Maker also found its clients’ tastes becoming more sophisticated. “They know what they want, and they want to learn more about our work as well,” says Mr Khong.

To cater to customers who have become more discerning and knowledgeable, the bespoke rug maker has expanded its

offerings. For example, when it previously used mainly New Zealand wool for its rugs, it now offers several different types of fibre, including bamboo silk.

“We have to upgrade ourselves at all times to know what’s new in production,” says the second-generation boss, whose company now operates out of Mapletree industrial cluster, Tiong Bahru 2.

For the last three years, the company has also participated in Maison & Objet Paris, an international trade fair, to showcase its work and learn about new trends.

During those exhibitions, the company collaborated with local designers and design houses, such as Tiffany Loy and WOHA’s wohabeing, to create special collections.

But not everything has changed with the new guard. The Rug Maker still prides itself on the highly customised service that it started out with.

This is also the reason why the company has lasted till today, says Mr Khong, who has seen clients approach them with inspiration from Peranakan porcelain vases to artwork.

“We listen, we guide, we provide solutions and our service is very personalised,” he quips. That’s because only when a customer is fully satisfied, then The Rug Maker considers it a “good job done”. ■

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