All in the family

Two SMU undergrads and their elder sister find their niche in printing guide books. DANIEL BUENAS reports

UNITED we stand, divided we fall — a cliche it may be, but Alvina Teh, Lester Chee and Melani Teh, three siblings who have recently set up their own printing company, can certainly hold true.

Their company, MultiNine Corporation Pte Ltd, was started in 2004 by the two SMU students, but was initially helmed by their sister, Melani, who studied English and Literature at the National University of Singapore and graduated in 2003.

"I was actually Melani who was doing most of the work, and Trevor and I helped out when we could," says Alvina.

Since they started the company, the three siblings have since published a number of different books on a variety of topics.

Their first book was on where to find the best desserts in Singapore. Their most recent book is called From Boys to Men — a recruit's guide to basic military training (BMT) in the Singapore army. It aims to provide all the answers to any questions about BMT that a new recruit may have. The book was written by Trevor and two other undergraduates — Lester Chee and Tan Jun Da, both 23.

After a full year of research, interviews and raking up of BMT memories (both pleasant and the challenges of BMT, so that their new recruits with the knowledge and hints and tips to make any BMT stint will be worthwhile, successful and memorable," says Trevor.

The book has only been on the shelves for about two weeks, but has already sold around 500 copies, with some bookshops already placing orders.

"I think that’s pretty good considering it’s a brand new title, and has only been on sale for about two weeks," said Alvina.

When asked about why the three siblings decided to go into the publishing business, Alvina credits her father, who was in a "related business", for instilling in her a "sense of responsibility" and a "given that has been imbued in us since young.'

In fact, Alvina says that one of her company’s mission is to introduce titles that add value, not just for publishers, but for consumers.

"All of us really enjoy starting things out when we see a need. Publishing right now, for us, is a very good base to build capital to do bigger things in the future," she says.

Indeed, Alvina is no stranger to entrepreneurial ventures — about two years ago, she and some fellow undergraduates helped to start SMU’s first campus radio station.

Although the three siblings may not fall back on each other, they can always fall back on each other, and even as we work with each other, we know that there is no hidden agenda between us."