The right blend of service and business

Adeline Tan's LINS Smoodees combines wellness with a strong business model. By EVE YEO

FROM weddings to desserts, education to smoothies, Adeline Tan has dallied in a good range of businesses. While an onlooker may find little in common between her many business ventures, Ms Tan sees them as different expressions of a common thread of "service concierges".

Tan arrived at this realisation after helping to organise a wedding at the age of 18 that the work she'd done compiling information and making contacts was marketable. Hence the birth of The Wedding Concierge, which she set up to provide wedding services, but to joint clients to those who do. That led to The Dessert Concierge, The Learning Concierge, and most recently The Healing Concierge.

Her current business, LINS Smoodees, is the first project of The Healing Concierge which promotes holistic and natural living. "The Healing Concierge is driven by the five senses and total wellness living. It is about natural healing, going back to how our ancestors healed themselves in ancient times," said the business management graduate from SMU, who plans to develop other arms of The Healing Concierge.

Ms Tan’s previous concierges still exist but she does not promote them, only becoming involved when she receives the occasional enquiry from clients.

Before LINS Smoodees, Ms Tan worked in SMU's business incubation development programme at the Business Innovations Generator for five years. It was during her work at SMU that Ms Tan prompted Ms Tan to start LINS Smoodees.

"One of the graduated student entrepreneurs told me of selling coconut shakes or something that could rival bubble tea and become as common as coffee and tea," explained Ms Tan.

She was also inspired by the green smoothies that her father was making at home during that time.

"About twelve years ago, my dad started becoming more concerned about his health, especially in old age. He attended a green smoothie-making class and has been blending his own green smoothies with organic produce ever since."

Eventually, Ms Tan conceptualised a green smoothie delivery business. A pilot project among family and friends was started and lasted three months before Ms Tan decided to expand her business.

"Orders just started increasing from there until I couldn’t handle both the business and a BBA job at SMU. Ms Tan left the institute in October 2010 to fully concentrate on LINS Smoodees."

Eventually, this was a product for which I found myself having the drive and passion to create every day."

"This is just one method of production but with the variety of fruits and vegetables, the smoothie variety is endless," said Ms Tan.

Ms Tan was encouraged by the feedback from the pilot project about how the green smoothies were aiding digestion and skin wellness, resolving constipation as well as raising general alertness.

"Blending "daw", which means good in Thai into the word "smoothies", she thus arrived at Smoodees — a nod to her Thai heritage. Lovingly Infused with Nature's Sweetness, or LINS for short, the delivery business soon expanded into "bar and showroom" in China Square Central in December 2010, offering healthy dining options like brown rice and porridge.

Customers, or affectionately known as "Smoodears" to Ms Tan, will have to purchase a starter kit consisting of two bottles and a cooler bag to leave at the delivery location.

From there, it is a daily one-for-one bottle exchange. Empty bottles returned to the delivery personnel as the next delivery of smoothies.

"Our business model is not capital-intensive. We just need the blender, water, ice, fruits and vegetables. Smoodears buy the bottles from us."

Natural fit

Ms Tan said that the business had a startup capital of about $3,000, which came from her savings during the pilot project. There were no overheads and manpower costs then as Ms Tan made the smoothies herself in the kitchen of a former caterer to save costs during her wedding planning days.

These days, smoothies are prepared by Ms Tan, her mother Mrs Tan and another in-store worker. Delivery is entirely outsourced.

Fruits and vegetables are ordered and received from suppliers daily. "Because customers make their orders in advance, we only order as much as we have orders so there is no wastage."

To prepare the first batch of smoothies for delivery at 6.15am, Ms Tan and her mother are up by 5.30am on weekday mornings. Delivery packages are for a minimum of two weeks from Monday to Friday.

Her biggest problem is in hiring staff. "The job scope is washing and cutting fruits and vegetables for blending. It's difficult to make that sound like an exciting job to sell to interviewees," explained Ms Tan.

Because her business is small, she is also unable to hire foreigners.

Currently, the store employs two workers, one of which is Ms Tan’s mother, Amin Tan. Mrs Tan, who enjoys experimenting with different ingredients in her cooking, prepares hot food like brown rice and porridge for sale in the store.

"My mum loves cooking with different items but there is no space for her to do that at home," said Ms Tan.

"She is happier here, with a bigger space to work in and making friends with my other employee and customers."

Through smoothie-making classes conducted by herself, Ms Tan hopes to share her knowledge of natural nutrition and the benefits of green smoothies. Classes are also conducted upon requests by organisations.

Most of the attendees of her smoothie-making classes are middle-aged ladies and elderly, retired women.

"Most of them come in around tea time in the late afternoon in small groups," said Ms Tan.

For customers who want the complete Smoodee experience, the special blenders and alkaline water filtration system are also for sale.

"These equipment are on the pricey side but we want to sell what we drink."

Ms Tan and her family use the filtration system and blender both for the business and when making smoothies at home.

For now, she is working on making hot food available for delivery through LINS Smoodees before further expanding The Healing Concierge.

"We hope to gradually drive up awareness of natural healing therapies in Singapore."