

Betel Leaf Recipe for Success

Nik Juzailah binti Juhairi's entry into entrepreneurship was prompted by sheer gut instinct

In 2002, the Universiti Malaya business studies graduate came across a struggling herbal products company in Penang. Nik Juzailah saw potential in the business and subsequently bought over the company. Thus began her entrepreneurial journey as the owner of Sireh Emas Marketing Sdn Bhd.

The initial period of her business life was 'hectic' as she put it.

"I had to revamp the entire operation, upgraded the production lines, re-strategise marketing and re-look at all the various aspects of business operation. It was time-consuming but necessary in order to build a firm foundation for the business.'

The company then was operating from a shop lot factory and its products consisted of a herbal body lotion and feminine hygiene wash made from natural ingredients, primarily from betel leaves. Today, Sireh Emas Marketing produces 48 skin and body care products – not counting its international brands – and employs 38 workers.

In the beginning, Sireh Emas products were sold mostly through herbal product outlets. In 2016, it gained access into supermarkets like Tesco. It will be available in Giant from August 2017. Nik Juzailah said the company hopes to be in Aeon outlets soon as the latter is interested in her Miusuki brand, the company's export product line.

Asked about the challenges she encountered in the business, she said, "Sometimes sourcing for quality ingredients can be a problem. For example, at one time, we needed the herb *temu lawak*, a few hundred tons of it, but only

one hundred kilogrammes were available. We searched all over in vain and only finally managed to contract with FAMA to supply us."



Another challenge was funds for marketing.

"With our limited financial resources, we were torn between focusing on advertising or expanding production facilities. Fortunately, we received financial assistance, about RM200,000 under SME Corp. Malaysia's Business Accelerator Programme (BAP), for packaging and for advertising on billboards along highways. We also obtained another RM200,000 to purchase bottling machinery."

In 2006, the company collaborated with SIRIM as the research agency to commercialise its research results in skincare. The project advanced to the pre-commercialisation stage based on the discovery and research by SIRIM. As large funding is needed at this stage – which takes three years before actual commercialisation – Sireh Emas collaborated with SIRIM for funding.

Nik Juzailah said Sireh Emas obtained its "first pre-commercialisation funding from the



Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI). Fortunately, the application process was made much easier as we were already collaborating with SIRIM which is an agency under MOSTI."

Nik Juzailah is grateful that the Government is implementing many programmes to assist SMEs like hers, however, she hopes that it can also help SMEs to increase their exposure to the market by, for example, organising more trade expos for entrepreneurs to showcase their products.

In a competitive body and skin care market, how does Sireh Emas' products stand out from that of its competitors?

"Quality is a great differentiator. Our body and skin care products have nanostructured lipid carrier which is a bioactive carrier system that facilitates the absorption of active ingredients. Furthermore, to ensure the quality of the betel leaf extract, which is our main ingredient, we only source from one supplier."

An achievement Nik Juzailah is particularly proud of is being the winner of the Halal High Tech Challenge in 2016 with its feminine hygiene wash product. That win resulted in the company receiving a RM500,000 grant to develop a dual-function antimicrobial feminine product – feminine hygiene wash and hand sanitizer. The company was given eighteen months to develop the product. The concept and research have been completed and approved, and product development is on-going.

The company is also planning to go international.

"We expect to launch internationally in November 2017. Currently we have received an order for one Xanzwhite product line from Cambodia. We are also planning to export to Indonesia and Myanmar. The product line to be distributed in Myanmar is Miusuki Skin Care which consists of seven SKUs. Indonesia is also a target market because of its huge



population and we are aiming for a niche market. Our international strategy is to focus on countries within approximately three hours flight time to ensure better management of our products in these markets."

How does Sireh Emas apply technology to promote its business?

"In 2009, we started to market our Xanzwhite product line fully online. This is to connect directly with customers. We even have one-on-one sessions with customers to gain feedback on our product. We also use media social as marketing tools. There is also our SirehEmas2You website for customers to make orders for our products and to pay online."

"We also use IT tools in our company's administration, for example, storing documents using iCloud. This makes filing faster and easier for tracking anywhere and anytime. We also use special technology in screening the active ingredients in our products."

Nik Juzailah's journey as an entrepreneur so far has been challenging but rewarding. She is, however, not by any means sitting on her laurels. She has already formulated plans for the next phase of growth such as having her own sireh extraction plant, more product lines including a cosmetics line.

As a word of advice to aspiring entrepreneurs, she said, "Build networking, whether with Government or in the marketplace. Feel the pulse of the market. You cannot afford to sit in the office only."

