

A fresh take on traditional medicated oil

How Tai Tong Ah and Senses International teamed up to launch YnL, a range of botanic aromatherapy medicated oils targeted at younger generations. BY BRYAN KOW

MEDICATED oil has been given a modern spin with scents such as magnolia or bergamot and lime, as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) manufacturer Tai Tong Ah Company seeks to reach younger customers.

The company is known for its Double Prawn Brand Herbal Oil, produced since the 1950s. But a few years ago, they sought to create a "trendy and modern" product – and found a like-minded partner in homegrown fragrance manufacturer Senses International.

The collaboration resulted in YnL, a range of botanic aromatherapy medicated oils.

Short for "Yuanlin" – meaning "origin of forests" in Mandarin – the range comprises four fragrance profiles: "fresh", with bergamot and lime; "energy", a sea spray scent; "calm", a magnolia fragrance; and "lush", containing patchouli and cedarwood.

"We combined our experience in traditional medicine, modern manufacturing methods, and quality control with the fragrance expertise of Senses," said Karol Tong, general manager at Tai Tong Ah.

When old meets new

Established in 2009, Senses supplies fragrances that are used in the manufacturing of products such as shampoo and household cleaners.

When Covid-19 hit in 2020, the Senses team was unable to travel and meet potential clients overseas. With more time for their own research and development, they sought to come up with an innovative product – and landed on the idea of combining their fragrances with medicated oil.

"We thought we could potentially incorporate aromatherapy into very traditional products, to actually modernise them," said Jayden Ang, director of business development.

Around this time, Tai Tong Ah

was looking to develop a product for the younger generation, said Tong: "Something they can use to uplift their mood, relieve stress, and combat fatigue."

As Tong put it, "the stars aligned". Both companies approached Enterprise Singapore (EnterpriseSG) separately and were then connected.

Ang added that both companies shared a common goal of taking the product overseas: "Both of our companies want to fly the Singapore flag high."

In the product development stage, Senses supported in the "creative" aspect: coming up with fragrances and ensuring that the scents blended in with the medical oil base.

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Karol Tong, Tai Tong Ah



Karol Tong (left), general manager at Tai Tong Ah, with Jayden Ang, director of business development at Senses International. Both companies approached Enterprise Singapore separately and were then connected. PHOTO: BRYAN KOW, BT

After finalising the formulations, Tai Tong Ah now manufactures and distributes the product range.

Getting help to go further

Playing matchmaker is not the only support provided by EnterpriseSG. Its Centre of Innovation for Complementary Health Products also had to be tweaked to meet the different regulatory requirements of overseas markets.

This is important if companies want to take their products overseas, said Tong: "Data from such analyses is needed to fulfil the regulatory requirements to enter these markets."

EnterpriseSG's Centres of Innovation were set up in partnership with selected polytechnics and research institutes to help small and medium-sized enterprises develop and test projects.

There are 11 such centres, each specialising in a different industry. The product range was launched on YnL's e-commerce site in December 2021.

Since then, it has been made available on e-commerce platforms such as Shopee and Lazada, and is carried by physical drugstores, healthcare chain Watsons, and Singapore outlets of Chinese department store chain Yue Hwa

Chinese Products.

Tai Tong Ah is exploring overseas markets for YnL, such as Hong Kong, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Qatar, added Tong.

To help with branding and marketing, an external consultant was brought in, with funding from EnterpriseSG.

Since YnL targets a younger demographic, Tai Tong Ah uses digital marketing platforms such as Instagram to reach them, and has also sponsored university events to create visibility for the brand.

"So far, we have been receiving positive feedback about the product in terms of quality, design ap-

pearance, and efficacy," said Tong. There are plans to expand the YnL range, added Ang: "You cannot have one favourite that everybody likes, you need to cater to a group of different clients."

Two more fragrances will be released by the fourth quarter of this year: "summer", a vibrant fragrance based on berries, and "classic", a nostalgic combination of Swiss herbs.

Tong also hopes to experiment with other product types in the YnL line, such as medicated balms or gels.

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ENTERPRISE 50

Search and deploy

By Siti Aisyah bte Mohd Jeffri, Sabiqah Shahirah bte Noordin and Michelle Chua Xiao Juan

DURING the pandemic, safe distancing ambassadors (SDAs) spread out across Singapore to ensure that Covid guidelines were being followed – and behind many of these ubiquitous lanyard-wearing agents was local firm MCI Outsourcing.

The company secured a \$56 million project from Enterprise Singapore to deploy SDAs, followed by another contract with the Singapore Food Agency for nearly 1,000 SDAs.

MCI Outsourcing is one of three companies under MCI Investment Holding, alongside MCI Career Services and MCI Consulting Services. As Singapore now emerges from the pandemic, the group is reviving its overseas ambitions, including expansion plans in China.

Apart from acquiring a recruitment agency in Qingdao, MCI Group intends to set up more local offices in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, said Ryan Ng, chief executive officer of MCI Career Services and MCI Outsourcing.

Within China, the group will focus both on meeting domestic demand and sending manpower abroad, with new operations to be set up by early 2024, he added.

An unexpected start

MCI's founder and group chairman, Ong Boon Huat, had not always intended to run his own business. From 1992 to 1995, he was a sales executive in a multinational manufacturing company. But after returning from a fortnight of medical leave, he found that his major sales accounts had been reassigned to others.

Ong, then 29, decided to become his own boss. He set up his first company, Sogo – an acronym for "small organisation, great output" – which he later sold.

After a few business ventures in



From far left: Ryan Ng, chief executive officer of MCI Career Services and MCI Outsourcing; Ong Boon Huat, chairman of MCI Investment Holding; Jo Ong, regional director of MCI Investment Holding; and Eunice Tan, business development manager of MCI Career Services. PHOTO: MCI GROUP

other fields, he started recruitment firm MCI Career Services in 2007. This time, the acronym stood for "making companies interesting".

From six employees at the start, MCI Career Services has grown to a staff strength of 90. Ong later founded MCI Consulting Services in 2013 and MCI Outsourcing in 2016.

At the Enterprise 50 Awards 2021, MCI Career Services was a second-time winner, while MCI Outsourcing won for the first time.

MCI Outsourcing provides a third-party solution for its clients' staffing and human resource management needs. It has more than 2,500 staff who are directly deployed to clients' premises.

Revenue has grown almost tenfold since the company was founded, from \$5.2 million in 2016 to \$52.7 million in 2021. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, profits grew 20 per cent each year.

Ong believes in nurturing talent and encouraging innovation. Experienced employees are encouraged to closely guide new hires, to ensure a smooth transition into the company. Regular feedback sessions ensure that employees' voices are respected and that the group

improves collectively.

Ong added: "Benefits such as overseas expenses and extended holiday leave not only serve as a motivation to work harder but are to encourage the employees to go see what the world offers."

Heading overseas

The MCI Group itself began venturing overseas in 2009, with a partnership agreement in India. In the following decade, it expanded into Bangladesh, mainland China, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Taiwan.

These partnerships serve mainly as channels for bringing foreign talent to Singapore, though workers are also recruited for other destinations such as Australia and Japan.

Closer to home, MCI Group set up MCI Career Agensi Pekerjaan in Malaysia in 2021. There, the aim is to both serve the domestic market and recruit Malaysian talent who can be sent abroad.

MCI Group itself intends to shift some of its Singapore operations to Malaysia this year, as it can hire sales consultants and payroll staff there at a significantly lower cost.

The group has also set up TCF Global Placement India, which is

expected to be fully operational by early 2024. This unit will focus on the information technology industry, recruiting talent from India for various countries.

With its steady revenue and scalable operations, MCI Group has been exploring ways to raise funds for further expansion. The aim is to go further in markets such as China, India, Malaysia, and the Philippines.



At the SPBA launch on Apr 12, Ling Huat Sing (left) and Peh Yi Han (right) – representatives of former winners Four Star Industries and Global Eduhub respectively – speak about their companies' experience of participating in the Award. PHOTO: LEE JIANWEI, ZB

Singapore Prestige Brand Award 2023 to celebrate 'creativity, courage and confidence'

By Natalie Chen HM
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This year's Singapore Prestige Brand Award (SPBA) was launched on Wednesday (Apr 12), kickstarting the search for the country's most inspiring brands.

SPBA seeks to recognise deserving local brands for their success, and to help them achieve growth at home and abroad.

This year's theme, "Celebrating Creativity, Courage & Confidence", was chosen as it takes creativity to innovate, courage to act, and confidence to keep pushing the boundaries and stay on course, said Chew Lee Ching, chairman of the SPBA 2023 organising committee, in a press release.

In a speech at the launch event, she praised brands that have overcome the hardships and uncertainty in the last three years of the pandemic-induced economic downturn.

"This creativity and ingenuity have become crucial in today's business landscape, where digital disruption and economic restructuring

are the new norm", noted Goh Sin Hwee, co-chairman of the organising committee in the release.

There are four Award categories – promising brands (for firms established for three to eight years), established brands (more than five years), heritage brands (more than 25 years), and special merit.

The latter category, by invitation only, is awarded to government agencies and not-for-profit organisations that have made significant efforts in branding.

The panel of judges comprises representatives from various statutory boards and multinational corporations as well as brand consultants.

Over the years, SPBA has honoured over 470 unique local brands.

The Award is jointly organised by the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (ASME) and Chinese-language daily *Lianhe Zhaobao*.

SPBA is also supported by Enterprise Singapore and the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore.