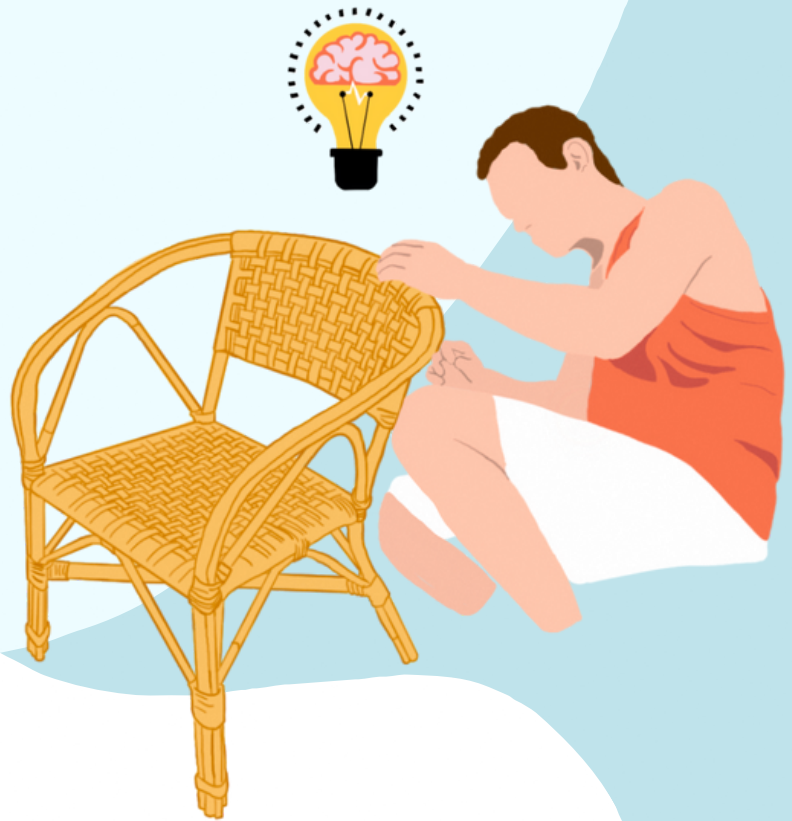


ORGANISATION TRANSFORMATION GRANT



**Case studies:
Pilot Projects**

NANYANG SAUCE



Third-generation owner, Ken Koh, joined the family business in 2017 and has since helped to rebrand and innovate Nanyang Sauce for the future.

Founded in 1959, Nanyang Sauce is one of Singapore's last breweries still producing soya sauce and other related products by hand. Third-generation owner, Ken Koh, who returned to help the family business in 2017 after more than a decade in the field of business development, has been hard at work developing ideas and working with new partners to enhance the business' viability. He has been doing this on top of ensuring that the fundamentals and quality of his soya sauce brewing, which requires a nine-month fermentation process, remains at the heart of his family business.

As a pilot recipient of the Organisation Transformation Grant, Nanyang Sauce created 'Secret Umami', a new line of dipping sauces targeted at youths to pair with some meals such as Hot Pot, BBQs and Mookata (grilled meat dish on a skillet from Thailand). Using soya sauce as a base, the dipping sauces which are inspired by the elements of 'Air', 'Earth', 'Water' and 'Fire', are infused with a blend of spices, aromatics and other ingredients to enhance the dining experience in a quick and easy fashion.

Here's what Ken had to say about Nanyang Sauce's journey in the creation of Secret Umami.

Why is transformation and innovation important for Nanyang Sauce?

Nanyang Sauce has been around since 1959 and we have progressed thus far with a belief of innovation and rejuvenation whilst keeping to our heritage roots. What we have kept is our traditional recipe of artisan soy sauce using natural fermentation and what we have innovated is the reinterpreting the meaning of sauce for the future generations.



Ken, together with his mum Mdm Tan, showcasing the vats that they continue to use to produce their handmade soya sauce

How does Nanyang Sauce approach innovation while retaining the heritage component of the business?

We approach innovation from a customer driven perspective. From the changing needs and habits of consumers, we maintain a close ear to the ground through our unique and direct touch points with our consumers. We understand what they like about our sauces, we understand what problems they face and through this we try to forecast and anticipate their needs before they realize they need something. Through the years, we retain the traditional, natural artisan methods of fermentation and this is a key pillar of our brand history through the years.

Tell us more about Secret Umami, together with the inspiration and process in its development.

Secret Umami is the latest brainchild of Nanyang Sauce, a set of designer dipping sauces for the next generation of consumers who don't cook. The inspiration came from observing how teenagers and young families don't cook as much as before but love to gather for hotpots, BBQs and mookata. Is there a sauce that would taste good with anything? Would there be a sauce that can turn alternative plant-based protein tasty? That is how we came up with EARTH, FIRE, WATER and AIR sauces, each crafted for a particular taste and applied to a genre of cook.

How has the reception to Secret Umami been, and what's next for Nanyang Sauce?

The reception to Secret Umami has been positive. We exceeded our Kickstarter target within 30 days and since then there has been numerous online purchases and repeat orders. It is also getting popular as a gift for celebrations and house parties and the virality of the word-of-mouth Secret Umami is getting is beyond our expectation.

Nanyang Sauce hopes to continue to make sauces relevant and bring more sauces combining innovation and tradition to serve the people.

How has the Organisation Transformation Grant helped Nanyang Sauce achieve its goals of transformation and innovation?

The grant has enabled us to embark on this journey with the proper resources and support to do Research & Development, get our product nicely packaged and launched with proper marketing. Without the grant, we would never have had this transformation.



Secret Umami is a series of designer dipping sauces inspired by the elements of Earth, Fire, Water and Air

What advice do you have to give to other heritage businesses looking to transform and innovate their business?

Get started, don't be afraid, take the first step to reach out to NHB and the Organisation Transformation Grant might just be the platform to help your transform and rejuvenate your brand heritage for the future.

About the Organisation Transformation Grant

The Organisation Transformation Grant (OTG) provides up to \$40,000 in funding to heritage businesses and organisations to develop new projects centred on transformation and innovation efforts, with the objective of contributing to the sustainability and long-term viability of their business.



Find out more about the grant by visiting www.go.gov.sg/otg-nhb or through the QR code here

Say Tian Hng Buddha Shop

For over a century, Say Tian Hng Buddha Shop has been crafting wooden effigies of Taoist and Buddhist deities found in temples, altars and homes in Singapore and the world. While there remains a healthy demand for the making of effigies, Ng Tze Yong, Say Tian Hng's fourth-generation owner and apprentice craftsman, acknowledges the importance of business innovation, and has been working on various initiatives to help take his family business into the future.

As a recipient of the pilot run of the Organisation Transformation Grant, Tze Yong embarked on two projects. The first, titled 'Digitalisation of Chinese Cultural Products' centred around the creation of a digital database of sketches, text and photos through the use of 3-D scanning technology, to replace the existing manual-based system.

For his second project, Tze Yong embarked on a 'Children's Cultural Education Programme', a series of educational and experiential programmes inspired by the myths and fables of deities like the Monkey God. This programme aims to engage children to not only learn the legends passed down over generations, but also the universal life values they embody such as perseverance, integrity, loyalty, courage and compassion.

Why is transformation and innovation important for Say Tian Hng?

That's an important question with an answer that may be surprising.

Although it is a heritage business, Say Tian Hng has a good business model. The needs it serves are recession-proof, there is little capital expenditure, the barriers of entry for competitors are high, and of course, a vintage brand matters a lot in this type of work.

As a fourth-generation owner and apprentice craftsman, the potential for innovation excites me. If we are able to innovate, we can become a portal for the public (local and international) to learn about this rich cultural heritage and help them connect it and therefore with themselves.



Fourth-generation owner, Ng Tze Yong, conducting a tour of Say Tian Hng Buddha Shop (image by Joseph Nair)



While Say Tian Hng has embraced the use of technology, it still ensures that important processes such as the threading onto the effigies are still masterfully done by hand. (image by Joseph Nair)

The preservation of the craft is fundamental, but there is so much we can also do on top of that. It starts with looking at the shop as not a shop, but a platform, and the statues not as statues, but as stories. Then, we have a fascinating combination. Through this, we can connect with not only the religious customer base, but also a secular, international audience. The world of Chinese mythology is like a Marvel universe, with equally memorable characters, not created by Hollywood.

How do you approach innovation while retaining the heritage components of the business?

I'd learnt that you have to be extremely careful how you go about it. Because with heritage businesses, what you change, you can't unchange.

This is because often, there isn't anything wrong with a heritage business - not its products, not its branding. They've survived so long for a reason. They may be disappearing simply because there is no manpower. Tomorrow, if you find another warm body, put him or her there, the business may well be able to continue for another 20-30 years without having to change a single thing.

So I'd say focus on that first. Find out who you envision picking up the skills, how much time they would need to attain mastery, why they would want to do it from a career perspective, how they would do so - before working on the exciting things like branding, social media and design. The manpower is the hard part, but it is the most important part. Because the heritage business will still collapse, regardless of how many followers it has on Instagram.



Codification of the effigies' traditional designs used to be done via ink and pencil sketches and later, photos. Although photos are an improvement from sketches, they do not enable 3D printing and machine carving as 3D scans do. (image courtesy of Say Tian Hng Buddha Shop)

Tell us more about why you decided to venture in 3-D scanning and what was the process like.

Our shop is filled from floor to ceiling with statues, made and collected over the decades we have been around. When a customer comes in and buys a statue, the statue is gone forever.

Of course, we can make it again. But that process will be far easier if we have a digital copy.

With that, we can 3D print a replica and use it as a template for future apprentices. The 3D scans also give us an insurance plan to use machine-carving for the initial stages of the manufacturing process in future. It allows us to carve an effigy within hours where it would otherwise take up to two weeks to do so. Of course, the remaining 80% of the work - like the painting, gilding and thread sculpture - will still have to be painstakingly done by hand. We can also 3D print quickly, cheaply, and experiment with new designs, or groupings of deities to evoke different narratives from the ancient legends. We can also change the scale. Turn an iPhone-size effigy into the size of a chair, or vice versa.

The children’s workshop seems to have garnered a good response. What are your plans for the future?

We are going to try and scale it up a little so we can have operational stability from some critical mass. This means increasing the frequency of the workshops, the number of workshop themes, and the number of educators.

After that, I’d like to look into developing a B2B (business-to-business) track, where we conduct these sessions in preschools, primary schools, international schools and enrichment centres as a specialist service provider. This will allow us to do more at lower cost and reach more children.

I also hope that one day, we can provide these workshops to kids from under-privileged backgrounds. The stories of perseverance, courage, integrity and compassion that the Chinese legends such as ‘Journey To The West’ and ‘Romance Of The Three Kingdoms’ embody so memorably will resonate with them, and hopefully inspire and anchor them in their life’s challenges, like it did for the characters in these legends.



Participants at the Children’s Cultural Education Programme taking part in a larger-than-life Chinese Chess activity. (image courtesy of Say Tian Hng Buddha Shop)

How has the Organisation Transformation Grant helped Say Tian Hng achieve its goals of transformation and innovation?

As a fourth-generation owner and apprentice, I aim to be self-sufficient. My 91-year-old grandma’s still involved in the business and I can “apply” to her for funding, but I’d rather make it happen on my own, the same way she and my grandfather did. That’s why I source for external resources. So really, without the OTG, these two projects would not have happened.

What advice do you have to give to other heritage businesses looking to transform and innovate their business?

Now that we are a first-world country, it's perhaps time to reclaim our soul. We have lost much, even as we gained much. Without a soul – which I'd describe as a sense of identity and inner vitality – we will never be as confident as we can be as a people.

Where can one look to reclaim this soul? There are many places, and heritage businesses are one of them. There is something about a craft, a craftsman, a craft studio, that represents this soulfulness in a special way, because it is not curated, it is alive.

After the Cultural Revolution, a lot of Chinese heritage survived and thrived only outside of China in the Chinese diaspora, in places such as Singapore. So if you look at it from an international point of view, say tourism, heritage businesses are a precious asset of Singapore which I'm sure can be monetised.

From a domestic point of view, we often talk about how our Pioneer and Merdeka Generations are resilient, but I think what we don't recognise enough is that for many of them, their resilience stemmed from religion.

Religion, whichever it was, gave them strength, hope and peace, even until today. We fail to recognise that the effigies, rituals and places of worship were the source of our loved ones' strength, without which we wouldn't be here. So I think honouring that, regardless of one's beliefs, is important.

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