

SPECIAL Singapore Promising Brand Award 2006



Ms Teo (right) tries out all the routines herself to gauge their safety and effectiveness.

PHOTO: AMORE

Amore

Heading in a new DIRECTION

FITNESS chain Amore is 21 years old this year. "We are all grown-up," says founder and chief operating officer Jasmine Teo with a laugh. And the two-time winner of the Singapore Promising Brand Award is ready to spread its wings — it will open its first overseas branch in Shanghai next year.

The company, which pioneered the concept of women-only gyms here, has come a long way since 1985, when Ms Teo, a 43-year-old mother of three, opened the first Amore outlet in Bukit Timah.

A few years later, Mr Lim Keng Meng, her husband and now chief executive officer of the company, joined the business and the couple embarked on an expansion path, targeting locations near MRT stations. "Conve-

nience was our strategy," explains Ms Teo.

Around 1998, Amore dipped its toe in the spa business, setting up two beds for facials in its Bugis Junction outlet. It now has seven day spas, in addition to seven fitness centres. Its spas have received a Category One spa licence, which requires that at least half of its therapists be professionally certified.

In recent months, the business has started branding itself as "Amore Fitness, Boutique Spa", instead of simply "Amore Fitness". "This is not a new brand direction," emphasises its marketing manager Christine Lau. "It is just a natural progression, to better represent our overall product."

The image that Amore projects is

very much the vision of its founder. Ms Teo provides the direction for everything from the company's marketing and communications efforts to the interior decor of its outlets.

It reaches out to its target customers mainly through print advertisements and on-ground activities such as Women's Day Out, an annual event encouraging women to keep fit that Amore has been organising in partnership with the Singapore Sports Council since 2003. "We go for programmes and platforms that are of specific interest to women," says Ms Lau.

About 3 to 5 per cent of its turnover each year is spent on marketing. Its sales turnover last year was over \$10 million. — Lynn Swah

Banquet

Earning customer LOYALTY

WHILE many firms have expensive branding consultants behind them, Banquet, one of the winners of the Singapore Promising Brand Award, has a youngster to thank for coming up the name that is now a household name among Singaporeans.

"A friend's 10-year-old daughter toyed with the name 'Banquet'. She says it was a 'gathering of good food'. It sounded good and meaningful, so

we used it," says Mr Alan Lee, 55, its founder and managing director.

This was in 2000. Banquet has since grown to 29 outlets including 19 food courts and 10 cafes. It manages and operates halal-certified food courts and outlets offering Chinese and international cuisine. Its striking geometric blue and white logo can be seen in the financial district, shopping malls and in the heartlands. Smart,



PHOTO: JAMIE KOH

Thanks to Mr Lee, the Muslim community can now sample more varieties of Chinese food.

contemporary in style, it has won a loyal following, particularly among Muslims.

The road to success was an uncertain one. After a failed venture in the construction business, he decided to go into a business that was based on cash transactions. The food court business came to mind.

With encouragement from friends, he came up with the concept of a halal food court and he went to learn about halal food — directly from Nuis and in Malaysia.

The concept of a halal food court serving Chinese and international food became "an instant success".

Behind the business is a belief in providing food in an atmosphere conducive to all races and religions,

promoting greater integration among Muslims and non-Muslims especially during mealtimes.

As a brand, it distinguishes itself as a value-for-money enterprise, and keeps prices 5 to 15 per cent lower than in the general market.

To maintain the branding, he spends about \$50,000 a year on promotional efforts, particularly among the Malay media. He also spends at least \$150,000 annually on charities among the Muslim community.

"What gives me the greatest satisfaction is helping people get out of poverty by giving them a job, or helping them set up a stall. I've failed in business before so I believe in giving people a lift in life," he says. — Sim Ee Wain

Atlas Sound & Vision

VISION of excellence

THINK of audio-visual or home entertainment systems, and the names Bose, Loewe and ad-notam come to mind. Add one more name to that list: Atlas Sound & Vision, a 44-year-old homegrown company that is aiming to capture the consumer's interest.

Atlas Sound & Vision is a far cry from what it was when it began in 1962. Originally a record library, the company grew out of a love of music and soon began offering advice in setting up sound systems, and then branched out to provide equipment for enjoying audio experiences. Over the years, it became a distributor of big brand names like Bose, Loewe and ad-notam.

Today, the company is helmed by Mr Michael Tien, son of the late founder Mr A.B. Tien, who supervised the company's rebranding from Atlas Hi-Fi to Atlas Sound & Vision — a name that acknowledges that the home entertainment experience is no longer about hearing, but about seeing as well.

Under Mr Michael Tien, the company actively pursued new ground by reaching out to segments like hospitality and retail as well as places of worship. The company also began to expand into the heartlands.

It has also developed a new store concept called the Atlas Experience, in MillenniaWalk. It showcases the best the company has to offer through the use of themed spaces and structured demonstrations — to show customers what a home entertainment system can be. — Noel Hidalgo Lim