

Working to earn trust of clients

It's not easy but GrandWork is able to achieve this by emphasising timely delivery of high quality goods and great after-sales service



By LI XIANAN GLORIA, ONG SHI YUAN SHANNON and YEUNG CHI KI NIKKI

IF THE duplex stores of Dolce & Gabbana, Giorgio Armani, Tods and Emporio Armani renovated by GrandWork along Orchard Road are any indication, the future does seem brighter for Jay Chiu, the founder of GrandWork.

GrandWork offers customised interior fit-out works, restoration and custom-made furniture for a plethora of local and overseas customers including Prada, Valentino, Marina Rinaldi, Miu Miu and Bvlgari. The latest additions on the list are Max Mara, Hugo Boss, Salvatore Ferragamo, Prada and Miu Miu at the new Marina Bay Sands.

The man in charge

Mr Chiu, who won Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2007, strongly believes in the concept of a family unit – where all stakeholders are part of the GrandWork family. In this aspect, he is dedicated to the well-being of his clients just like he would his family.

An important virtue that he has always preached to the GrandWork family is that one should not rest on one's laurels but should always strive to improve. His business development director, Lim Teck Heng, is currently in Japan in search of new product offerings to import into Singapore to improve solutions for GrandWork's clients.

Despite the growing international presence of GrandWork, Fion Ng, assistant general manager of GrandWork, said that the company has no plans to shift production overseas to places with lower labour costs such as China. The higher productivity of local workers is a major reason to continue production at its production facility in Ang Mo Kio.

"Mr Chiu believes that we should preach the Singaporean brand name. Why locate overseas when we, Singaporeans, can do it here."

Inside the space builder

Founded in 1996, GrandWork is the essence of Jay Chiu's hardworking and forward-looking plans. Delighted with the company's professionalism, Kinokuniya then entrusted GrandWork to handle a series of local and overseas projects for them.

In 2004, Kinokuniya approached Mr Chiu with a deal to handle 11 new bookstores in different parts of Japan. In this breakthrough project, GrandWork acquired the F-four-stars certification, the highest quality certification awarded by the Japan Plywood Inspection Corporation. Along with this deal, GrandWork was able to improve its capabilities and expand its operation through increased capacity.

Building trust and professionalism is GrandWork's motto in client management. While business trust is hard-earned, it is crucial.

The first step to achieve this is to emphasise timely delivery of high quality goods. The second step is to surpass customer expectations. GrandWork does this through continuous improvement and its after-sales service. This may sound easy but the devil is in the implementation. This is what sets GrandWork apart from its competitors and allows it to continuously expand its clientele. This is also why Mr Chiu continues to lead his company in winning prestigious awards such as the Singapore Enterprise 50 Award, Singapore Prestige Brand Award, Singapore Promising Brand Award, Interior Builder Award and the Singapore Quality Class Award.

The SME challenge

It is no secret that SMEs constantly face a shortage of talent. Undergraduates in Singapore are keener on working with Multinational Corporations (MNCs) rather than SMEs.

However, Ms Ng, who graduated from the National University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Science in Building from the NUS School of Design and Environment, is an excellent example of someone who defied the "norm". Immediately after graduation in 2002, she joined the GrandWork family of 10 members. Growing with the GrandWork family for the past eight years, she now manages a staff force of 220.

Ms Ng has proven that this was a good decision. GrandWork is heading for listing to propel itself forward in the long run.

Mr Chiu: *Strongly believes in the concept of a family unit – where all stakeholders are part of the GrandWork family*

Moving ahead

To house the growing capacity of GrandWork, the management is currently scouting for bigger premises that are about three times the size of its current production facility of 25,000 sq ft. This will help it expand overseas. It currently has branches in Malaysia, Thailand, Jakarta and Japan and is now eyeing the India market.

In contrast to China, Ms Ng feels that India is a largely untapped market where GrandWork will be able to make a mark in the future.

If the past decade was about surviving the competition for GrandWork, then the next decade would be about surpassing the competitors. As Ms Ng said: "Our revenue in 2008 was \$34 million ... With the economy recovering and opportunities blooming, our turnover for 2010 is targeted at \$40 million."

Last year, revenues may have dropped due to the global economic crisis. However, that is only a one-off drawback as GrandWork's financial health has been consistently strong over the years. When the market sentiment brightens, GrandWork could jump in with its Initial Public Offering (IPO).

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