



SME Diaries: Going Fully Digital Helped Our Creative Agency Ride Through Covid-19

Description

In this instalment, Mr Kimming Yap, 36, who runs a brand and design consultancy, recalls how work suddenly dried up when the pandemic struck and his clients' priorities shifted. Worried about sustaining the business at first, the company made a swift pivot from face-to-face interactions to an entirely online operation, which resulted in a surprising uptick in business.

Small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form 99 per cent of businesses in Singapore, have felt the impact of Covid-19 keenly. TODAY's Voices section is publishing [first-hand accounts from SME owners](#) and managers on the highs and lows of running a business in the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic was the first major crisis in my 10-year entrepreneurial journey.

Running a creative consultancy offering branding and design services means that we depend significantly on our clients' priorities.

Many of our ongoing projects were suspended during the circuit breaker period in 2020 as our clients battled their own challenges. The sudden lack of work worried my team, and I was unsure of whether we could sustain the business.

Thankfully, the Government's Jobs Support Scheme helped us retain our 12 employees, which provided us with enough time and runway to make significant changes to our business.

Our work revolves around face-to-face interactions. Forced by the crisis, we quickly began to digitalise how our team comes up with ideas, conducts presentations, and collaborates with clients. Now, our creative process can be implemented entirely online.

With the reduction in in-person interactions, we also ventured more aggressively into digital marketing. Surprisingly, going digital (especially on social media) generated five times more sales leads for our company than before the pandemic.

We also observed significant changes in how consumers interact with brands as we conducted our transformation.

More companies now recognise the need to have a digital presence and the importance of digital touchpoints to engage with their customers.

We started to offer more digital-related solutions such as UI/UX (user interface/user experience) design, sonic branding, and virtual brand design to our clients. As a result, our business expanded, and we now have clients from emerging industries such as fintech, foodtech and even electric vehicles.

Though our rapid transformation was successful, other factors such as the talent crunch impede our growth.

As our services are highly specialised, finding candidates with the right skills has been challenging. Thus, I am grateful to have a capable core team with a learner's mindset. We also organised and sent our employees for multiple courses in UI/UX design, animation, and digital marketing.

Since the pandemic started, the team and I also feel more strongly about the importance of our work. We have deeper connections with the brands we transform as we understand we can help save their business and livelihoods.

We also learnt to live and do business more sustainably. We are trying to do this with SustainableSG, a social enterprise we founded in 2020 to advocate sustainable living. We collaborate with designers and manufacturers to produce environmentally friendly home living products, such as reusable beeswax food wraps.

As we emerge from Covid-19, we have one eye on overseas expansion while working on our business continuity plan. Uncertain about when the next crisis may occur, it is crucial to be ready and have the resources to adapt to change quickly.

This quote from organisational management guru Price Pritchett sums up nicely what Covid-19 has taught me:

“Organisations can’t stop the world from changing. The best they can do is adapt. The smart ones change before they have to. The lucky ones manage to scramble and adjust, when push comes to shove. The rest are losers, and they become history.”

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Kimming Yap, 36, is the managing director of Creativeans, an interdisciplinary brand and design consultancy.

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