



Liew Bin

Design Awards in the Bag

Bagman Corporation Sdn Bhd is much more than your regular bag maker and supplier. The award-winning company's CEO, founder and designer extraordinaire Liew Bin shares his success story with *Malaysia Retailer*.

By Lim Su Yee

If you ask Liew Bin, the CEO and founder of Bagman Corporation Sdn Bhd today, he would probably tell you that never in his wildest dreams had he thought of venturing into the bag business. A fitness aficionado, many do not know that this affable and well-spoken entrepreneur also does not consider himself a success story despite winning several international awards and gaining recognition for his Bagman line of tailor made bags throughout the years.

Liew is a picture of humility as he says that there are many more individuals in the retail line who are more deserving than him for this "success" title. He names several high-profile movers and shakers in the industry. "These people whom I have mentioned are coincidentally, all past presidents of MRCA. I believe they have achieved much more than me," he says modestly.

Passion for Bag Design

But one thing is for sure. Liew is extremely passionate about his bags. The mere mention of Bagman can make his eyes sparkle and light up. Liew is so enthusiastic when talking about his bags that he could go on and on energetically for hours. At Bagman Corporation's headquarters in Puchong, the company's extensive range of bags are neatly displayed for the viewing and perusing pleasure of all those who have the privilege of walking into the office.

Functionality Comes First

Each individual bag has a name and a special story, and is a masterpiece on its own. But more importantly each has a special purpose with unique form, functionality, design, price and aesthetics. Without hesitation, Liew pulls out and quickly demonstrates the functionality of a few of his stand-out bags to the *Malaysia Retailer* team. Among them is a bag that is specially created for the fairer sex, where the interior compartment lights up when it is opened. "It is made practical for ladies so that they do not have to fumble through the contents to retrieve a particular item in the dark. Another one which I would like to show you is a bag that not only acts as a travel luggage, but also doubles up as a clothes hanger hidden in the inside compartment. With this, one no longer needs to go through the hassle of removing and putting one's clothes in the wardrobe," Liew explains.

The Five Fs

An eye opener for sure is a trolley luggage, also the brainchild of Liew, that moves by itself like a robot with just a click of the remote control. With such creativity and innovation, Bagman's products are hard to match. But the most outstanding of the bags is Liew's pride and joy – the award-winning Terminus brand. It meets all of Liew's 5F requirements: function, form, feel, fashion and fun. "Take for example our bestselling Terminus new invisible urban roller. It is practical for those who are going for

short trips overseas while the patented wheeled backpack is just nice as it is the ideal size to carry. However, the most interesting part of the bag is the uniquely designed auto roller wheels, which extend out when the telescopic handle is pulled, but also retract just as easily,” says an elated Liew.

String of Awards

Since the inception of Bagman Corporation in 1994, the company has won several prestigious awards in the industry. Among them is the 2008 Golden Bull Award for being one of Malaysia’s 100 Outstanding SMEs. But one of the achievements that Liew is obviously proud of is the Red Dot Awards. “The Red Dot Award is similar to the Academy Awards for film and movies that most of us are familiar to, but only that it is for design. So far, Bagman has already won five awards from Red Dot starting from the years 2011, 2013 and 2014. We are proud to say that we are the only Malaysians to nab this award,” recalls a beaming Liew.

From Umbrellas to Bags

Those who are familiar with Liew’s earlier years will recall that this entrepreneur started off his career with a Singapore-owned umbrella business in Johor Bahru. “I left the umbrella business to



venture out on my own as there is nothing much that one can do with umbrellas in comparison to making a bag. When you talk about umbrellas, it’s all about price, price, price and nothing else. Even though one can still be creative in the umbrella business, the creativity is limited. To people, umbrellas are often viewed as being extremely dull and uninteresting. With bags, the sky’s the limit. Anything is possible,” exclaims Liew.

It’s Bagman, not Batman!

In 1994, Liew came out with Bagman Corporation and the rest is history. When asked why he named his company Bagman, Liew explained that it is a no brainer and easy to remember. “It is as simple as that. Basically I am a man and I am also selling bags at the same time. That’s how the name Bagman was created. But please do not associate me with the DC Comics fictional superhero, Batman. But I admit that both of the names can be quite a tongue twister,” Liew says with a chuckle. With this, Liew also reveals that his emphasis is more on his brand Terminus. “Bagman is actually a company. The one that I would like to talk more about is one of my bag labels, Terminus. The Terminus range of bags was born by being known as a combination of bag and travel. When you think of Terminus, you think of travelling around the world and you also think of bags. The name Terminus is also related to a terminal at the airport. Last but not least, it is also catchy and easy to remember like my company, Bagman,” he explains.

Embracing Challenges

Challenges in the business world is nothing new for most successful entrepreneurs. Even Liew has had his fair share of hardships when he first built his empire. He remembers a dark phase in his life when he hit rock bottom. “It was difficult during those days but due to my perseverance, I finally recovered,” he recalls with a tinge of sadness. To put the past aside, Liew shares that the current challenges that he is facing can be daunting too as he still considers his company a new bird in the industry. “The retail industry is like a chicken and egg. To succeed, we have to suit the culture around us. For example, challenges such as finding the right location to sell my products and also concerns on whether my product sales will be good or not,” he reveals. “Due to own retail space constraints, I’ve had to do consignment deals with the department stalls. There’s also limited capital for advertising,” he adds.

World-Class Aspirations

It is a fact that no credible entrepreneur will ever be satisfied with what he or she has achieved. The same goes for Liew, as he dreams of creating a world class brand in the retail industry. “For now, we are the new kid on the block but we hope that in another five years’ time, we will be able to establish ourselves successfully in Malaysia. Only then, can we penetrate other parts of the world. Currently, our strategy is to focus on the cheaper range of bags as they have received good response from the public and are also easy to sell,” he shares.



Competing on Creative Design

The retail market is extremely competitive that brands around will do whatever it takes to stay on top. Bagman Corporation is aware of this situation and to stay ahead of the competition, the company fully utilises the power of design to attract potential customers. "Our competitors and rivals are basically anybody in the premium industry. When it comes to pricing, everybody can fight to offer the best value to customers. However, when it comes to design and creativity, no one is our match. With this, we have an added edge over the rest," says Liew, who gains his design inspirations and ideas by observing the designs of other brands when travelling to countries such as those in Europe. Liew identifies his customers' inconveniences and attempts to overcome those by producing better designed bags, hence turning a negative subject into something positive.

Health Matters

Being the CEO of a successful SME is no easy task. As Bagman's founder and creator, Liew's daily schedule is packed to the brim.

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Besides overseeing his business so that it runs smoothly, Liew takes good care of his health. "In the morning, I will head to the gym followed by breakfast, then to the office, meeting clients, fulfilling appointments and the list goes on. You see, I am a very busy man. The amount of work is tedious. But all work and no play makes jack a dull boy. To pamper myself, I tend to indulge occasionally in sinful indulgences such as *bak kut teh*. Food aside, I take good care of myself, especially my health. To maintain my figure and wellbeing, I go for gym workouts or hit the badminton courts once in a while," he says.

What the Future Holds

The future might be uncertain for some, but Bagman Corporation has already envisioned a bright one for itself in the coming five to 10 years. Liew's biggest hope is to establish his brand locally by franchising, just like world-renowned fast food chain McDonald's. "Within five years, I will cross my fingers and hope that my brand will penetrate into the ASEAN countries. For your information, I have appointed an agent both in Japan and in Europe. However, they are still not very well established as our brand is still new. But what I can proudly say is that my company is one of the very few in the industry that has won the prestigious Red Dot Award. This proves that a Malaysian brand can still go international," he opines.

For aspiring retailers who are just stepping into the industry, the man himself has some words of wisdom. "Even though I do not think that I am the best example to emulate, just apply this tried-and-tested formula and you will do fine. The most important way for a product to succeed is to adapt to the trends and changes in the market. It doesn't matter if your creation is the most superb in the world. If nobody fancies it or if it does not meet the criteria of consumers, eventually the effort will be futile," he warns.

On a positive note, Liew says that for now, anything is possible for Bagman. "If you don't believe me, one day I will even invent a bag that can fly like Superman. Mark my words," he says with a steely determination in his eyes. Somehow, we believe that it might just come true! 🍀