

THE BUSINESS TIMES

theSME magazine

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2014



“EVERYONE (GOES ON ABOUT THE LABOUR ISSUE BUT)
I THINK IT’S ABOUT WHAT WE DO ABOUT IT.
BEING IN THIS SITUATION IS FORCING US TO BE CREATIVE.”

ELIZABETH TAN, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF HEATWAVE



Photography: Ching, Capsule Productions Styling: Dan Foo
Hair & Makeup: Graneil Loh, using Clinique Wardrobe: Jacket stylist's own

GETTING ROUND THE LABOUR CRUNCH

THE labour situation in Singapore forces local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to be “creative” – that is how Heatwave’s managing director, Elizabeth Tan, puts it. And that also aptly sums up what the SMEs that we spoke to say.

For footwear retailer Heatwave, it is about having an active corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme that is deeply rooted in the company’s culture. Its vision to be a part of women’s journeys does not just refer to the comfortable and affordable shoes that it rolls out, it also makes a reference to the ways in which it tries to touch the lives of its largely female staff pool, and its community service which also impacts communities of women and children who are unable to access medical care. Read more about Heatwave in the Towkay section.

In Budding Entrepreneurs, we feature a social enterprise that has built its entire business model around stay-at-home-mums and active seniors. Food Playground is a cooking school which offers cultural cooking classes, private cooking parties and corporate team-building. What makes it special is that you will not find a single celebrity chef or professional cook. All the culinary instructors and facilitators are local stay-at-home mums who cook regularly for their families and friends.

In addition to finding a untapped pool of talent, this has become one of Food Playground’s strengths. People who sign up for cooking classes

feel less intimidated by the trainers, and they get a fuller experience in terms of knowledge-sharing and home-stories that these mums share.

Others, such as food & beverage (F&B) chain Han’s, rely on persons with disabilities. About 16 per cent of its almost 500 employees are disabled. Meanwhile, local book publisher Epigram Books relies on flexi-working hours to maintain its staff strength. Read their stories in Cutting Edge.

Surely, I hear you say, SMEs cannot just be tapping “unconventional” sources for labour. What about the universities? While graduates used to shy away from working for an SME, now more are becoming aware of the benefits of being employed by one.

After all, a whopping 99 per cent of all enterprises in Singapore are SMEs, and they contribute to nearly half of our gross domestic product. More pertinently, they employ more than 60 per cent of the workforce.

In Top Story, we hear more about the flexible and creative ways in which SMEs are rewarding good performance, such as profit-sharing schemes, personal rewards, support for employees’ further studies and career development. We also talk to some of the banks to find out what innovative programmes they are pairing up with universities to offer.

Mindy Tan
EDITOR



ON THE COVER

Photography: Ching, Capsule Productions
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THE BUSINESS TIMES *theSME* magazine

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Circulation 35,000 copies ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES Tel: **6319-5381/6319-2193** Fax: **6319-8277**

Printed by KHL Printing Co Pte Ltd
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PRODUCED BY:

THE BUSINESS TIMES

A publication of **sph**

ENTREPRISE PARTNER:

SPRING
singapore