

AS TOLD TO **RACHEL MUI**

LIVING A LUXE LIFE FOR LESS

A pioneer of the entertainment packages concept, EatPlayLive's managing director Julie Renyard, 48, is keeping up with the times by turning her business around from the paper form (vouchers) to the digital (app). The company has set its sights on the Singapore market, and hopes to expand further within South-east Asia.



COULD YOU DESCRIBE EATPLAYLIVE AND WHAT IT'S ABOUT?

EatPlayLive, as our tagline says, is Asia's premier lifestyle app. It's about giving the consumer the opportunity to live a luxe life for less. In this day and age, everyone knows they don't have to pay full price at the best places. You've got things from Groupon and vouchers. But we don't use the word discount, ours is a VIP pass on your phone that gives you an opportunity to eat, play and live at the best places in the region.

HOW DID THE NAME COME ABOUT?

We were actually inspired by *Eat, Pray, Love*. My business partner James Greaves came up with this idea, and we went with it.

WHAT'S YOUR JOB SCOPE?

I'm the managing director, so I'm the face and voice of the company. What I do is reach out to the marketing teams, chief executive officers and general managers of the places I'd like to register onto my app. We started the company in July 2016, but we didn't have anything to show until November. It took me four months from being incorporated to getting the clients. By the end of this year, all the countries including Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines and South Korea will be up. My business partner has a sales force and marketing team in all those countries, so as soon as the merchants are on board, the team will be on the ground marketing.

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO SINGAPORE?

Coming over to Singapore was supposed to be a three-month stint, but it has been six years. I was here originally to launch SimplyGiving.com, so I've worked with charities, but my expertise lies in business development, putting together marketing campaigns, and customer acquisition.

WHICH ASIAN MARKET WAS EATPLAYLIVE FIRST LAUNCHED?

Singapore was the first Asian market, and for a few reasons. One is because I'm based here. I also believe that Singapore

is the hub of South-east Asia, and everybody looks to Singapore as the example. We certainly do have – in my opinion – the best places: the beautiful hotels, restaurants and spas. So I figured if I can make it work in Singapore, it's going to work in South-east Asia.

A lot of my clients have come on in Bali and Hong Kong by default because their affiliates are my clients in Singapore. If I have one brand, the rest will follow suit, but Singapore was always going to be my focus. From a business perspective, I love the region. I could live anywhere but I choose to live here. It's safe, it's great, it's gorgeous. With the Singapore market, you've got more choices at a high level of experience, specifically your super yachts, spas and celebrity chefs. I think you live once, so live well.

WHAT MAKES EATPLAYLIVE STAND OUT?

With EatPlayLive, once a member purchases the app, they have access throughout the region for 12 months from the date of purchase, not just the calendar year. It's 20-50 per cent off the total bill, and that's our main drawcard.

At the moment we've got Singapore, Hong Kong and Bali. So I pay one price and I've got access to all areas. What we are is a user-pay model, and we give members the 3Ps – the best perks, privileges and promotions. What that does for my clients and for us is another 2Ps – it brings them more people and obviously at the end of the day one makes more profit.

WHAT WERE SOME CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED?

I think the biggest challenge was that I was doing it on my own. You can have a business partner, and we can have the funding. But to do it on my own was a bit overwhelming at times, and I soon realised that I needed an assistant. Getting the offers surprisingly wasn't difficult. So the biggest thing for me was my own time management. And that's still a challenge, but I love it – don't get me wrong.

HOW HAS THE UPTAKE FOR THE APP BEEN?

We started a Facebook page and within the first month we hit 10,000 friends that were 90 per cent Singapore users. Interestingly enough, it comprised of 90 per cent professional women, so we thought wow, we've got to reach out to the men as well!

We've now got 5,000 downloads and just over 1,000 active users, which are people who have used the app over the last 30 days. Members we've got 3,500 and we want to get to 10,000 as soon as possible.

HOW MUCH WAS INVESTED INTO THE BUSINESS, AND HOW WAS THIS RAISED?

It's been self-funded, myself and my business partner James have worked together for 23 years. So we said let's put up S\$500,000 and see where we go. But we're spending fast, because building the app is the most expensive. The initial build is where majority of the funds go.

WHAT'S THE NEXT BIG THING FOR EATPLAYLIVE?

I think the next big thing is opening up the new countries. Singapore we've got sorted, Hong Kong we need to finish up, and Bali we want to reach full capacity. For me, it's just making sure that by the end of the year, we've got South-east Asia onboard. Eventually I'll be looking for someone to take over my role here and I'll head back to Australia. So that's another good 18 months to two years of getting the business to where it needs to be.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY?

My business philosophy has always been that people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care. I like to treat people as how I would like to be treated.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ASPIRING ENTREPRENEURS?

Find a mentor. I will not be where I am without my mentors. You've also got to have passion and be enthusiastic. Running your own business takes risk. And I've always said, who better to take a risk than on yourself. A supportive network also helps. I don't know anyone who has become successful overnight. It's like that iceberg thing – you see the tip of the iceberg but underneath it, is a lot of hard work and focus. Believe in yourself, work with great people, have a great concept and off you go. ■

