Simax Materials Solutions enters a new market by working with a Business Advisor to develop a branding and marketing strategy for its new range of lighting products.

When it comes to entering an unfamiliar market, getting the right advice is one of the keys to success. Just ask Mr Simon Tiong (right), Managing Director of Simax Materials Solutions, who doubled the sales of his eco-friendly lighting products after participating in SPRING’s Business Advisors Programme (BAP).

Simax has been doing well in its core business of providing industrial pallets and packaging solutions to multinational companies. However, Mr Tiong realised that the company could not depend solely on a single revenue stream for long-term growth. He decided to broaden his product offerings to include green lighting solutions such as solar and LED lights in 2010.

“The packaging industry is getting competitive. We supply most of our products to MNCs but they have been moving out to cheaper countries such as China and Thailand. In order to grow, we needed to enter emerging industries such as clean tech,” says Mr Tiong. “The Business Advisor we were matched with helped us develop a branding and marketing strategy for our new products.”

Access to professional advice
The BAP, which matches companies with seasoned professionals on short-term advisory projects lasting up to six months, enables SMEs to draw on the experience and expertise of the Business Advisors to improve their businesses and processes.

Ms Chan Wai Yee, who has a wealth of global experience in business development and marketing, was matched with Simax. She works closely with Mr Tiong to suggest new strategic directions as well as develop new processes and practices to add value to the business. “Simax used to serve industrial customers. With their new lighting products, the target audience is different. I’ve been working with them to understand the customers, market and competitive forces – how to position, price and promote the product,” explains Ms Chan.

“I support the business owner by clarifying his objectives and prioritising efforts on the value-add activities to achieve measurable results. Our joint efforts and different perspectives enhance creativity and broaden the options generated. It helps that the team is eager to learn and thrives on changes and new challenges too,” says Ms Chan.

Venturing into new markets
To carve a new niche, Simax embarked on a new branding and marketing strategy. This entails developing a new corporate identity, Greenmax lighting, which is tailored to the target audience and adopting the appropriate product positioning and marketing strategy. “The new corporate brand, logo, tagline and website are just one facet of our strategy to reach out to our customers. We are also developing new marketing channels, measures and tools that would give us a bigger return on our dollars invested,” adds Mr Tiong. Besides developing the branding and marketing strategy, Ms Chan also trains staff from Simax’s sales and marketing team to ensure the research and marketing practices can be continued after the BAP project has ended. Ms Chan says that her role as a Business Advisor goes beyond improving existing performance to include “setting up systems that will last”.

“It is about focusing on measurable outcomes, enabling the people and putting systems in place. Now the team only collects minimal yet critical information that aids sound business decisions. They also engage in marketing activities that deliver tangible results,” says Ms Chan.

Optimistic outlook
Despite the gloomy global economic outlook, Mr Tiong remains confident that the demand for environmentally friendly lighting will grow. “Although sales have been quite flat, it doesn’t mean that we should cut down on marketing. This is the best time for us to prepare ourselves for the upturn,” says Mr Tiong, who is not planning to cut the budget for marketing and branding.

Commenting on the BAP experience, Mr Tiong points out that while a Business Advisor can suggest ways to improve the business, the success of the company depends on the management and its team to be committed to implementing the changes. “These marketing and branding efforts mean extra work. As the results are often not immediate, it takes commitment to see through these changes, which need to be driven by the leadership,” says Mr Tiong.

A Business Advisor can help SME owners by providing recommendations on the strategic development, management and operational aspects of running a company. Find out how you can tap the expertise of a business advisor under SPRING’s Business Advisors Programme (BAP) at http://bap.sim.edu.sg/bap/index.asp

BUSINESS ADVISOR PROFILE
Chan Wai Yee
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Ms Chan has 20 years of business development experience spanning Asia, Europe and USA. Currently she heads OgS, a boutique talent development firm specialising in talent assessment, leadership development and executive coaching for Fortune 500 companies. Before returning to Singapore, she was in the UK, leading mergers and acquisitions at the Group Strategic Director at Domino Sciences, a FTSE250 firm. She was instrumental in Domino’s breakthrough in new technologies and markets. Prior to that, Ms Chan was a pioneer with Mars China, contributing to their market leadership. She built up the National Sales Training Academy and successfully established their regional sales and distribution network.

Ms Chan has an MBA from the University of Warwick in UK, an Upper Honours B SocSc in Psychology and a BA in Economics from the National University of Singapore.