

Friendly waters

Patrick Tan has grown his water tank supply company by treating staff members like family and suppliers like friends.

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With clients across Singapore's extensive condominium market and footholds in the construction of residential buildings, shopping malls and factories, Hydro Dynamic Engineering has made its name supplying water tanks. It has become known for its reliability, cost-effectiveness and ability to provide environmentally sound water storage solutions. It also offers extensive after-sales service such as cleaning and inspections.

Managing Director Patrick Tan started the company after a series of frustrations. "I went into a Japanese trading company but, a couple of years later, the economic crisis happened and they decided to wind up, so I was retrenched," he recalls. He joined another company, but again they parted ways due to circumstances out of his control, in this case mismanagement at senior levels.

Deciding to take his fate into his own hands, he established Hydro Dynamic Engineering in 2004, initially focusing on water tanks for domestic use and fire-fighting applications. The early years of being self-employed were marked by hard graft. "When I started the company, it was a one-man show," Patrick explains. "I was covering everything: sales, delivery, administration, paper work, invoicing customers. It saw me working every day to 2am or 3am." »



After two and a half years of this grueling workload, Patrick reached out to a connection from the trading company where he had worked. “I asked my friend whether she’d found another job, and she said she hadn’t started looking yet, so I asked her if she’d like to join me,” he says.

“When I started the company, it was a one-man show, I was covering everything.”

Patrick and his friend worked out of his home for another year, then moved into an office where they brought in a third employee. Another step forward followed in 2007 when they rented a 500-square metre property, where they could house water tanks and storage units alongside the office space. Along the way, the company branched out into high-density polyethylene (HDPE) tanks for chemical storage as well as rain water tanks.

Relationships with customers and suppliers

Patrick says Hydro Dynamic’s willingness to put themselves in the end user’s position is a selling point. “In business, it’s more an interrelationship. I was in this industry before I started my own business, so I already had a pool of regular customers who trusted me to deliver the product. When they came to know that I was starting my own

business, they all supported me. I still believe the main difference I offer is the personal

connection and the responsibility I have to my company.

“We have a big storage place now to hold stock and that lets us offer instant supply. Also, I believe our commitment to after-sales service and customer support is a major reason why customers still prefer to work with us.”

Patrick also believes face time is invaluable; he makes a point of visiting each supplier once a year and hosting them when they come to Singapore. He also keeps them up to date about the constantly evolving regulations set by Singapore’s Public Utilities Board. “If something has to be certified or something has to be changed to a new standard,



we will discuss this with our manufacturers and request them to change the product to meet with the Singapore standard.”

In addition to meeting these regulatory standards, securing green certification is important to Hydro Dynamic. In 2005, Singapore launched a Green Mark Scheme to raise awareness of sustainability and to incentivise environmentally-friendly construction through rebates. This is something that Patrick says aligns with the aims of his company.

“We are transitioning towards using Green Mark-certified products, that is something we are currently discussing with our manufacturers. The certification is based around using less water and using recyclable products and this is what we have always sought to do. In fact, when we replace a water tank, we also bring the whole tank to scrap. When we dispose of a fibreglass tank, we do that with a proper plan, and they are made with Green Mark certification as well.”

A friendly management style

Patrick now has 10 staff, many of whom he was acquainted with before they joined Hydro Dynamic. His main supervisor, for instance, is someone he knew from construction sites the company supplied tanks to. “I’ve been working with him for a couple of years and I like his attitude, so I invited him to join me.”

Patrick has instilled a cooperative, collegial style in the company which, he says, made the transition to delegating work easy after

he had initially worked across every aspect of the business. “I like to be friendly, approachable and responsive to my colleagues. I try to understand their needs. What I always do with my staff is treat them like a family, then they will stay longer.”

Employee loyalty is repaid with company dinners and even an annual company-sponsored holiday for all employees, who are off to Bangkok this year. “I’m fortunate that my staff are all as motivated as I am and that they’re very friendly and approachable,” Patrick reflects. “They’re very open, we’re like a family.”

As a small company, Patrick believes Hydro Dynamic can offer more personalised service than larger competitors. This personal touch should encourage loyalty as the company moves into new areas; it is currently exploring adding to its product range to remain competitive in the domestic market as well as selling water treatment systems and cooling power systems. “I believe the customer follows the salesperson rather than the company,” Patrick says.

“When my customers introduce my company to their friends, they always say ‘If you need a water tank, ask Patrick’. They never say: ‘If you need a water tank, go to Hydro Dynamic’. A company can be any company, but it’s your relationship with the customer that will always be with you wherever you go.” ■

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