

# Striking

## Go Noodle goes big

Popular noodle joint, Go Noodle House, has expanded exponentially since its inception but has more up its sleeve for the coming year

By **Susanna Lim**

susannamenonlim@malaysiasme.com.my

Pics by **Chu YC**

chuyc@malaysiasme.com.my

**G**o Noodle House, a hot-spot for affordable noodles, has the office lunch crowds flocking to their establishment. With an approximate 700 bowls served at each branch daily and a whopping 10,000 served daily across all branches, it's no question how the restaurant's business is doing.

Founders Lee Hon Wai, Alvin Tan and Mok Wai Peun met over the span of high school and university and arrived at the idea of Go Noodle through a memorable meal prepared by Tan's mother.

"One day, at Alvin's house, his mom prepared a dinner for us consisting of the Zhaozhou style of rice and soup. We were so impressed and proceeded to think of ways to bring this style of cooking to the market. Over the next year, we experimented with various noodles, chilli and dry sauce recipes. And while most Chinese cooking uses white rice wine, we opted with yellow rice wine instead," recalled Go Noodle managing director Lee.

According to Tan, the less common 'mi xian' which is now a clear favourite at the restaurant, was backed up on the menu by the more familiar pan mee and mee-hoon for Go Noodle's customisable noodle dishes.

"Almost everyone orders our signature bursting meat balls. The number of customers choosing to

add extra wine to their noodles is increasing. They love to customise their bowls of noodles, adding accompaniments like meat balls, fish balls and beef slices," said Tan.

### Pricing strategy

The office lunch crowd, according to Mok, is a big proportion of the restaurant's target market. And with consumers becoming increasingly price sensitive and seeking more value for their ringgit, Lee says the restaurant is especially careful with the pricing of its menu.

"In 3 years of operations, we have only revised our prices once, and that was done to include GST. It is true that the depreciation of ringgit has affected our margins, but we have made a conscious decision to not raise our prices. In the interest of our customers, we will try our best to manage the costs. Of course, the ringgit has dipped about 30% and with half of our raw materials imported we may not be able to continue absorbing the cost," said Lee.

The mi xian and rice wine used at Go Noodle are both imported from China. Some seafood is sourced locally and the rest from Thailand and Indonesia.

"We use high quality ingredients to make every item on the menu. Our signature mi xian and rice win is meticulously sourced from China. Our meat and vegetables are sourced locally - over the years, we have filtered out many suppliers and only accept A-grade supplies," Lee added.



(left to right) Mok, Tan and Lee

**In 3 years of operations, we have only revised our prices once, and that was done to include GST. It is true that the depreciation of the ringgit has affected our margins, but we have made a conscious decision to not raise our prices."**

— Lee

getting Asian customers. The locals there are also well exposed to Chinese cuisine and we believe they will love our brand of noodles. We have also received inquiries from potential partners in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, the Philippines and Indonesia. We are open to proposals to open more outlets outside Malaysia if we can identify foreign partners who have deep local knowledge of their respective markets," said Mok.

At the rate of the restaurant's expansion, and with a staff totalling 400 persons, the team credits a well-run central kitchen and thorough staff training to smooth operation and quality control across branches.

"Training takes about one month. We put them through the whole process, from washing dishes to preparing food before allowing them to cook. The training to cook our food items only take one week as we have simplified the process - the key ingredients such as sauces and stock have already been prepared by the central kitchen," said Tan.

He added: "Our new central kitchen will be able to cope with the demand. However, we are considering setting up warehouses - probably one up north in Penang and another down south in Johor."

Go Noodle's first central kitchen is currently located in Shah Alam with 3,000 sq ft but will soon be moving operations to its new central kitchen in Bukit Serdang this month, which is more than 3 times bigger at 10,000 sq ft. **MSME**

He added that despite the portions at Go Noodle being 40% larger than portions at hawker stalls, customers still ask for more.

"We want to give our customers value for their money. It's not just about quantity for us but rather quality," said Lee.

### Future plans

Expansion of the chain has been rapid since the opening of its first branch in 2014. Just last year there were a total of 7 branches and this year, the total number of Go Noodle branches in Malaysia already amounts to 14. According to Mok, they aim to expand to a total of 20 outlets by the end of 2017 and 40-50 by 2020.

In terms of international expansion, Go Noodle is hoping to extend its reach overseas with a new outlet opening in Melbourne, Australia in early 2018.

"We chose Melbourne as it has a sizeable Asian population. This does not mean we are only tar-

