

# Laminating Success



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Laminates can combine the attractiveness of wood with the durability of marble. TAK Products & Services have done well with their laminates in Southeast Asia and are looking further afield to Europe and the US.

Inspiring lifestyles indeed," says the TAK tagline. A recent exuberant, fashion-conscious gala event earlier this year kick-started the ambitious re-branding exercise of leading Singapore laminate company TAK Products & Services.



Positioning itself as a world-class lifestyle solutions provider, the home-grown laminate maker offers a complementary array of brands holistically instead of just individual products.

This year, the group has projected an expected turnover of some S\$30 million (\$21.6 million) for Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. As to be expected, there is a variance in the estimated percentage increase in the different markets in tandem with the results garnered in 2009.

TAK's turnover for this year has been pegged at an expectant rise of 20%, 35% and 40% in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand respectively. Singapore, TAK adds, still remains its biggest market.

Helming the regional growth and expansion is executive director Geraldine Tan, 39. "TAK has come a long way since its founding. The company underwent a major brand overhaul in 2009, which we are now communicating to our target markets," explains Ms Tan.

Being the second generation of this family business, we will continue to excite our markets with interesting and premium high-pressure laminate designs. TAK is all about the inspiration of spaces, and learning about the exciting and fascinating possibilities our products create," she says.

At the forefront are TAK's far-reaching plans to complete the regional re-branding strategy across all offices and distributors, with appropriate heraldry in tandem with the unveiling of its new logos. A show-stopping party in Singapore earlier in April, for instance, was held at the iconic Red Dot Museum in the Singapore's Central Business District, with party guests a cool mix of prominent design and business types.

The gala re-branding showcase also highlighted the latest laminates collection of Lamitak, TAK's central business that creates high-pressure laminates with over 400 choices of stylized surfaces. The striking palette of textured surfaces encompass solid colors, engaging wood grains, concrete surfaces and innovative patterns to help interior designers and architects achieve specifically targeted looks.

The collection was unveiled via an increasingly dramatic staging of various room settings, complete with snazzy furniture, props and cool dancer and musician types enacting cool scenarios and diverse moods inspired by the cutting edge laminates.

First established in 1989, TAK has since garnered numerous accolades, like the distinction of being awarded the title

of Singapore Mozaic Ambassador in 2008. A strong regional presence as well, about 30% of TAK's business comes from its steadily growing overseas market. It now has offices in Thailand, Malaysia and China. TAK has also made noteworthy inroads in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Hong Kong.

In Indonesia, TAK has a visible presence too. Its Indonesian distributor for the past few years has been the well-known Jakarta-based interior decorator Serba Antik. "It does wonderful work," enthuses Tan. From intricate carvings on laminate surfaces to inventive pairings with designers and architects, Serba Antik melds progressive design statements with a sensitive infusion of traditional Indonesian detailing.

In Singapore itself, some of its high-profile projects include the glittering Formula 1 (F1) Night Race as well as the Youth Olympics. For F1, TAK worked on the deluxe hospitality suites, and for the Youth Olympics, the hostels. Other high-profile clients include the Crowne Plaza Hotel and McDonald's.

### **A versatile product**

With the recent expansion in the region, we saw that TAK was able to fill in the gaps of the laminates industry sector. With strong support from our business partners and consumers, we were able to drive the brand and its product offerings," says Andrew Tan, chairman of TAK and father of Geraldine.

"With ever-changing moving market trends and our desire to continue to be the market leader, TAK needs to be able to meet the needs of our business partners and consumers."

Indeed, the TAK mission statement is two-fold, one mantra being "to draw on our decade of experience to deliver inspiration solution and set new benchmarks for quality, design, innovation and services." Bolstering that in equal measure is "our promise to our customers is to educate, excite and inspire them to make the most of their spaces."

The chairman of TAK recalls the challenges in the early days of the company when it just represented brands and distributors, many of whom were American. Walnut, cherry wood and other hardwood choices prevailed while bamboo and other more Asian-centric looks were in short supply. Yet requests for the latter looks by designers and architects were increasing, and so a solution had to be found for the long term.

We had no choice but to follow what our distributors had initially. So eventually, out of need, we came up with our own products," he explains. It was obviously the right thing to do, because in less than five years, rather than its initial role of being a supplier of patterned laminates, some 90% of its products were of its own design and creation.

Andrew's eloquent daughter points out that today, TAK now offers a comprehensive and complementary product stable including Lamitak, Newedge, Nevamar and Alpikord. Lamitak, a TAK brand since 2001, showcases diverse choice options that range from the ubiquitous to more daring, adventurous designs, like bold patterns and silky-looking finishes. Coupled with all this is affordable durability and strong fire and abrasion resistance.

Lamitak's veritable laminate wonderland seems much favored by leading lights within the Singapore design fraternity and regionally as well. Certainly, its 2010 collection bears this out with textural and visual perspectives gleaned from thematic musings like Boogie Wonderland and Eclectic Attic.

Then there are the progressive finishes like suede, textured and glossy. Geraldine Tan also highlights TAK's new gem – Dri-Matt, essentially a snazzy laminate finish exclusive to the company that features a streamlined surface with zero reflectivity.

Keeping it all in the family, TAK also has its very own edge band solution aptly branded Newedge, which offers a keen complement to the Lamitak family in terms of exacting color, design and surface finish. The home-grown laminate giant also holds the exclusive distribution rights for Nevamar decorative surfaces and Alpikord pre-finished veneers.

The truth of the matter is, not all wood is readily accessible, and some species may not be available," she says,

adding that it is important to be environmentally conscious too. “Laminates can regurgitate the touch and feel of the different woods. They are homogenous, offer a strong consistency in the look as well. Not just woods, but exacting replications in marble and even denim.” Her personal favorite? “Carbon fiber – the kind typically found in car interiors, pens and watches.”

Certainly, this elegant dynamo brings a distinctively feminine perspective to what can often be a masculine environment. “I suppose when I first joined my dad, it was an industry dominated by male customers like architects and designers,” she remembers with a smile. Not that this has ever posed a problem as her clear crisp style, echoed in everything from her precise enunciation to chic dress sense, conveys a compelling thoroughness to every situation.

When she first joined, her concerted aim to promote and expand the Lamitak™ brand beyond home ground saw a rigorous revving up of the export and sales divisions to heighten the company’s premium-brand positioning. She is obviously very much in her element when talking about fine-tuning core competencies and brand alignment.

Geraldine Tan’s marketing savvy was already set in motion even before she joined TAK in 1999 as its director of business development. Before that, she honed her marketing and corporate relations savvy for two years with a local non-profit organization, the National Kidney Foundation.

For the future, the keen strategist and mother of two young children is very clear about the company’s future direction. In the next two to three years, TAK intends to further develop local and regional markets. And in five year’s time, it plans to take on the world, making concerted inroads into the European and US markets as well. **GA**