

Cold storage firm that warms to customer service

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THE next time you savour a juicy steak, you may wish to ponder: how do such perishables retain freshness and quality – from production to your dining plate?

This is where Jurong Cold Store (JCS) value-adds, offering innovative logistical solutions.

JCS's offerings have been meticulously designed to preserve the value of their clients' produce at every stage of the supply chain.

At JCS, customers enjoy tailored logistics service from customs clearance to point-of-sale, with a human touch.

Founded in 1996 by former butchers, Mr and Mrs Lee Weng Wah, JCS emerged following the nipah virus outbreak that affected both Malaysia and Singapore.

The couple decided to make a switch, shifting their business focus from pork imports to the provision of cold storage for food.

On a 30,480-square metre plot in the western region of Singapore, JCS built a single-storey warehouse with a capacity for 500 pallets.

In 2010, JCS's current director Darren Lee Wei Jie took over the reins from his father.

Six years after assuming management, the young Mr Lee embarked on a bold expansion plan to construct a second warehouse. Towering 50m high, it was one of Asia's tallest fully automated, temperature-controlled facilities when completed in 2016, increasing JCS's total warehouse capacity to 15,000 pallets.

The investment paid off. Today, JCS is a leading third-party cold chain logistics provider with a cutting-edge facility, catering to the special requirements of food importers, restaurants, individuals and even animal caretakers.

Last year, JCS clinched the Enterprise 50 Award for its operational excellence.

It has also received the Chain of Custody Certificates from both the Marine Stewardship Council and the Aquaculture Stewardship Council for operating its business in a sustainable and environmentally responsible manner.

The "A" grade certification it received from the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (now Singapore Food Agency) is further proof of its adherence to food safety.

Mr Lee attributed these accolades to JCS's willingness to embrace automation in its warehouse operations and the commitment of its staff towards service excellence and food quality.

Transitioning to automation

While many cold stores choose to continue operating their warehouse manually, JCS's management foresaw the impending labour crunch within the industry and was a pioneer in adopting advanced automation systems, such as the Automated Storage and Retrieval System (ASRS).

At its new 12,000-pallet warehouse, JCS has installed a more modern version of the ASRS with improved throughput rate.

Extending 40 metres high, the Vectura cranes of the ASRS can handle multiple retrievals from different pallet locations simultaneously, ideal for the storage and retrieval of fast-moving stock-keeping units (SKUs).

Within the facility, there are also zones for slow-moving, single and mixed SKUs.

The presence of a digital log in the system has also helped to increase traceability of cartons, facilitating convenient tracking when the need arises.

By investing in the ASRS, standard



JCS's director Darren Lee (fourth from far left) succeeded his father, Lee Weng Wah, in the family business, and is today focused on bringing JCS to greater heights.

PHOTO: JURONG COLD STORE

operating procedures in JCS are streamlined and staffing is less of an issue as no one is required to work in harsh, sub-zero temperatures for extended periods of time.

JCS is also able to achieve 100 per cent inventory accuracy with customers having full visibility of their inventory stored with the company.

Service excellence

Apart from building up capabilities in its warehouse, JCS believes in providing excellent service for its stakeholders.

"The push for service excellence can take a lot of effort and commitment, but it's important to stay differentiated. If we simply position ourselves as a warehouse, we will be no different from other warehouses in Singapore. However, if we offer customised services with a human touch, then customers will see added value in us," said Mr Lee.

The company prides itself on being flexible in meeting customers' needs such as dealing with urgent

picking up and delivery when unexpected circumstances arise in the shortest time possible.

"As a family business, we have to be more agile, flexible and efficient. We want to load the goods onto the customer's truck or the customer's restaurant chain in the shortest period and at the lowest cost," Mr Lee added.

Its commitment in providing excellent customer service has made customers feel comfortable and at ease in putting their goods in his warehouse.

People as its greatest asset

The secret of the company's success, Mr Lee believes, lies in the way he manages his team.

A former human resource executive, he sees human capital as the most valuable asset for his company, especially with a relatively young workforce.

The company devotes considerable resources to upgrade the skills of employees working through part-

nerships with reputable institutions such as KPMG Singapore and the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM).

Attendance at training programmes, courses and seminars conducted by industry experts has sharpened staff knowledge of the latest technologies and emerging industry trends.

JCS, however, goes a step beyond providing training for its employees. Employees are given autonomy in decision-making in their day-to-day functions, from dealing with urgent customers' requests to purchasing equipment for operational improvement.

Further, they are encouraged to give feedback to management. With employees empowered, they have a stronger sense of ownership and would go above and beyond to ensure customer satisfaction.

Mr Lee said: "When you treat the business like your own, then the decisions you make, however small, will be in the best interest of the company."

Much effort is required to communicate this mindset to them.

Maintaining quality service

Moving forward, there are plans under way for JCS to collaborate with an information technology vendor to effectively integrate and streamline its systems to optimise its warehouse operations flow and provide better services through insights generated.

While its warehouse operation can be automated by systems, the personal interaction with its customers remains a key differentiating factor for its success, and that starts with effective internal management and leadership.

"We are all service providers. Customers wish to get the most value out of each dollar. We can differentiate ourselves by raising technical capabilities but at the end of the day, for customers to feel the difference, it must come from the company's strong internal core," Mr Lee said.

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This series is part of the Enterprise 50 Educational Project between the E50 partners and the NUS Business School. Jurong Cold Store Pte Ltd was among the winners in 2018. The annual E50 ranking is co-organised by The Business Times and KPMG, sponsored by OCBC Bank, and supported by Enterprise Singapore, Singapore Exchange and Singapore Business Federation.