

# Gaining a footing in footwear industry

Pazzion taps into the senses of savvy women with fine craftsmanship and attention to details.  
BY BENJAMIN LAY WEIJIE, DAPHNE CHEONG HUAI MIN, NG SIEW LING AND RENA LIM ZHI NING

**T**HE Pazzion outlet in Jewel Changi Airport has taken buying shoes up several notches. After you are done with finding the right fit, you can head for the café, find a spot facing the waterfall, sink into the comfy chair and relax over a good cup of coffee.

Opened in 2019, the café is Pazzion's first foray into food and beverage (F&B), part of its holistic shopping experience for the discerning customer.

Founded by Tom Ng in 2005, Pazzion offers chic shoes and bags – from statement heels to casual sneakers, dressy clutches to handy wallets – for the contemporary woman.

From one retail outlet in 2005, the homegrown label now has 10 outlets in shopping malls, with franchise retail presence in 9 other countries across the Asia-Pacific.

## Behind the name

From the brand name, it is quite obvious what Ng, founder and director of the Pazzion Group, feels about his brand and his profession.

He followed his passion when the opportunity arose and built it to what it is today.

A trained mechanical engineer, Mr Ng has always had a soft spot for shoes. In his undergraduate years, while his peers squandered their pocket money on the latest video games, he would splurge his spare cash on sneakers.

When the opportunity to manage the business operations in a local footwear retailer availed itself, he seized it even though he had no prior working experience.

While engineering and shoe making may seem to be worlds apart, Mr Ng saw the link between the two.

Like engineering, shoe-making requires precision to achieve the best end results.

There are many technical considerations involved – the fit, level of comfort and support, and aesthetics – in producing comfortable and well-made shoes.

He found his true calling, and after a couple of years learning the inner workings of the footwear business, he ventured out to launch his own brand of men's shoes called Barcode.

While Barcode gained traction with its fresh design and feel, Ng soon realised the bigger market potential of ladies' shoes.

As his limited resources meant that he could focus on just one market segment, he decided to pivot his business from Barcode to Pazzion.

Ng recalls: "It was a tough decision, as sentimentally, Barcode was the first product line that I created."

The well-considered choice was integral to the progress of his business and his growth as an entrepreneur.

## Overseas expansion

In expanding overseas Mr Ng identified franchising as the most feasible model to bring the company forward. Its first overseas market was Thailand.

Pazzion entered into an agreement with the Thai partner to set up retail stores in accordance with its specifications and sales focus.

The team in Singapore also provided merchandise, marketing and operational support.

Today, apart from Singapore and Thailand, Pazzion is also found in



Pazzion's Tom Ng says the company is learning as it navigates these uncertain times, especially when there is no past history to serve as a reference. PHOTO: PAZZION

Cambodia, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, India, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei.

To tap the vast China market, the company opted to sell directly to cus-

tomers using e-commerce channels. Pazzion's success overseas is due in part to the management team's understanding of different consumer preferences.

"In Vietnam, our high heels sell more compared to flats, while in Japan our low heels and flats are very much sought-after due to different lifestyle preferences," Mr Ng notes.

## Navigating the new normal

Many curve balls have been thrown at the Pazzion Group since the onset of Covid-19.

Demand for its statement heels has dipped due to global lockdowns, there is a drop in footfall at shopping malls and Jewel Changi Airport where Pazzion café is housed was closed to the public for a month in 2020 as part of Singapore's efforts to control a growing cluster of Covid-19 cases.

Its outlets at once-bustling tourist spots, such as Marina Bay Sands and Jewel Changi Airport, are also facing reduced customer traffic due to travel restrictions.

Yet, Pazzion's "fail fast, learn faster" attitude shines through amid the challenges.

Ng acknowledges that the company is learning as it navigates these uncertain times, especially when there is no past history to serve as a reference.

Pazzion's response to the pandemic is simply to try its best and seek out the best option.

With the exponential growth in online sales in the changed retail landscape, Pazzion is strengthening its online presence to cushion the decline in sales in its physical retail stores.

## Bringing life to footwear

Pazzion continues to press forward to provide customers with the best experience.

In 2019, it opened its first café at Jewel Changi Airport to connect more intimately with its customers.

This unusual diversification into F&B is part of its efforts to distinguish itself in the footwear industry.

In 2021, Pazzion also launched its first lifestyle collection to better meet the needs of customers in this new normal.

Its budding lifestyle collection now includes sustainable homeware, scented soy candles, scented soaps and sanitisers, drip coffee and collapsible cups aimed at elevating customers' work-from-home experiences.

Looking back on his 20-year journey as an entrepreneur, Ng is convinced he would not be the person he is today without the ups and downs in business.

"Pazzion's values have remained unchanged since its inception. We use only good-quality materials to create trendy footwear with exceptional craftsmanship, and at the same time, ensure that our products are affordable and accessible," says Ng.

Borne out of passion, Pazzion will endure, withstanding the test of time and market turbulence.



**ENTERPRISE 50**  
Celebrating Singapore's  
Enterprising Spirit 2020

This series is part of the Enterprise 50 Educational Project between the ESO partners and the NUS Business School. Pazzion was among the winners in 2019. The annual ESO ranking is co-organised by The Business Times and KPMG, sponsored by OCB Bank, and supported by Enterprise Singapore, Singapore Exchange and Singapore Business Federation.