A synthesis of point-of-sales and software

Tech company DCS helps clients, from standalone retail outlets to large shopping malls, become more efficient and effective. BY BRYAN TAN KE-WA, BEATRICE HO HUI LUN, SARAH LOW YAN YEE AND WONG JAYVINN

IN Singapore's highly competitive retail environment, retailers have to step up their game – and DCS Synthesis aims to be their partner of choice. The homegrown technology company's solutions and services help clients become more efficient and effective, whether they are standalone retail outlets or large shopping malls.

From its early years offering everyday point-of-sale (POS) terminals for retail as well as food and beverage (F&B) businesses, DCS has evolved to providing software solutions, including an integrated tenant sales management system for malls and a unified electronic POS system for retailers.

The company now has over 100 staff, with operations in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and China, and more than 1,000 clients. In Singapore, it has established a formidable presence with an 80 per cent market share for POS and mall-tenant integration systems, with retail clients including Capita-Land, Changi Airport Group, and MapleTree Investments.

Starting small, going global

An avid shopper who has enjoyed visiting department stores since his youth, DCS chief executive officer Jimmy Teo – a software engineer by training – decided to focus on POS systems when he set up his software house in 2003.

The company learned on the fly, tapping the expertise of software partners and gathering feedback from clients to improve its offerings. Its first working product was a retail POS system for one of Singapore's largest department stores for children.

Following its successful implementation, Teo saw the opportunity to provide centralised data systems for mall operators. He built up DCS's data capabilities and entered the retail mall sector in the mid-2000s, at a time when malls were springing up across the city.

Through many cycles of research and development, DCS raised its profile in Singapore's shopping mall management scene. After establishing itself as a one-stop retail solutions provider, DCS expanded to China in 2012, Malaysia in 2013, and Vietnam and Thailand in 2016.

The regional expansion paid off, especially in Malaysia. In just 5 years, DCS secured over 60 per cent of the market share for POS and mall-tenant integration in Malaysia, with services ranging from sales consolidation to a centralised loyalty management system which captures shoppers' spending behaviour.

Its clients include major malls and mall owners such as Suria KLCC and the Genting Group. DCS was also given the opportunity to support the international expansion efforts of Singapore real estate giant CapitaLand, and now runs the tenant management system for 6 CapitaLand malls across Malaysia.

Getting through tough times

But the journey has not always been smooth sailing, particularly in DCS's early years. As operations were largely self-funded, there were occasions when credit lines were exhausted.

At times, Teo had to go without a salary for months to ensure that employees were paid. When his business partner made the decision to pull out, Teo bought over his stake, as he was convinced of DCS's potential. Today, he attributes the company's success to his core team, who "have been there since the start".

Of course, becoming an established market leader does not mark the end of all challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic decimated the retail industry, with malls among the hardest hit. Strict restrictions on public gatherings and dining-in caused sales to plummet for brick-and-mortar retailers and F&B outlets.

DCS rose to the occasion by lending support to its retail clients. Early in the pandemic, it set up an internal taskforce to identify and mitigate Covid-19 risks. This later allowed it to roll out support measures for its retail partners during the "circuit breaker" from April to June 2020, such as equipping malls with the necessary resources for online-to-offline commerce – that is, drawing online customers to physical stores.

DCS also helped malls to create a safe shopping environment in line with pandemic requirements, providing them with mobile POS terminals and installing applications to help them manage human traffic flow.

Teo believes the current setback is temporary and brick-and-mortar retail operations will remain a staple in the lives of Singaporeans, with F&B dining-in also being deeply entrenched in Singaporean culture. But for now, offline businesses will have to leverage on technology and transform – and DCS has upgraded its capabilities in big data and analytics to meet the demand.

Though Covid-19 has thrown a curveball, DCS continues to forge ahead with expansion plans to Europe, Australia, Cambodia and the Philippines. Even as the company looks abroad, it is staying local, with plans to progressively hire Singaporeans to lead the expansion efforts.

The pandemic has also added greater urgency to another core focus for DCS: giving back to society via its corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes.

For more than 5 years, DCS has partnered Ren Ci Hospital, its main CSR beneficiary, by helping to organise fundraisers and other activities. The company also donates a percentage of its POS system sales revenue to charity, and has started raising funds through JeriPay, its flagship unified payment terminal system.

Teo, himself an active volunteer, said: "You can make that one billion dollars, but if you can help one million people in your life before you pass, I think that is more meaningful."

DCS Synthesis has an 80 per cent market share for point-of-sales and mall-tenant integration systems in Singapore. PHOTO: BT FILE