



Singapore Safety Glass: Where Clear Vision Shapes Success

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From towering skyscrapers to intricately designed facades, glass is an indispensable material that serves multiple functions with its versatility. Singapore Safety Glass (SSG) is one of the leading glass fabricating companies in Singapore with a mission to provide trusted glass solutions to local and international markets.

Beginning as a local start-up in 1989 with a product-driven focus to provide tempered glass for buildings, SSG has undergone significant expansion and diversification on its product and service offerings. Today, the company offers a wide range of glass products and has successfully undertaken 1,300 projects across more than 20 different countries. The company is also one of the region's first architectural glass manufacturer to receive an ISO 9001 certification and to be conferred the AS/NZS (Australian Standard / New Zealand Standard) 2208 for safety glass¹.

Aside from gaining a foothold in markets closer to home, SSG's portfolio of projects also spans further afield into the regions of North Asia, Oceania and the western hemisphere. Their customised glass solutions have adorned illustrious projects worldwide, including the Forbes Tower in the Philippines² and Ironbank in New Zealand³, a testament to its global presence.

Feature No. 12 of the SBF Company Case Study Series looks at how Singapore Safety Glass navigated the challenges of entrepreneurship by strategically laying the groundwork for value creation, building up brand premium and establishing a network of trusted partners.

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Many thanks to Mr. Gan Geok Chua (CEO) for making this publication possible. For more information, kindly contact research@sbf.org.sg

¹ <https://ssg.com.sg/about-us/>

² <https://ssg.com.sg/projects/international-projects/>

³ Ibid

Creating the Groundwork for a Growing Business

“You have to be humble and learn.”

When SSG first began, it had to navigate the intricacies of difficulties in entering the glass market, which presented them with a series of challenges that required the adoption of a ‘humble and learning-oriented’ approach.

Gaining a comprehensive understanding of both the manufacturing process and the art of effective selling were some of the initial hurdles. Basic aspects like accounting were learned along the way, through courses and seminars, to bridge knowledge gaps and acquire the necessary know-how essential for operations.

Despite the CEO’s extensive experience in the export industry, and the company’s adoption of an outward-looking and export-oriented approach, it did not result in quick success for the business. SSG’s first overseas contract served as a ‘wake-up’ call, revealing critical loopholes that required immediate improvements to enhance overall operational efficiency and consistent delivery of high-quality products.

Taking a leaf out of this invaluable experience, SSG further refined its strategic approach, re-integrating lessons learnt into their business model. The change catapulted them onto a trajectory of growth and long-term success.

A. *Foremost, Brand Profiling – Building Identity and Premium Value*

Was it SSG’s price or product offering that differentiated them from other industry players? In essence, it was brand profiling.

“Over the years, we build a brand that is trustworthy.”

SSG has meticulously built a reputation centred on trust, quality, and integrity. The organisation’s commitment to uphold these values and maintain its reputation as a trustworthy brand is one of the many factors for its continued success in the export markets.

In this regard and corollary to its unique brand profile, what does it mean to be a Singapore company operating in international markets? What does being a 'Singapore company' embody and how does it reinforce SSG's branding proposition?

As a 'Singapore company', SSG capitalises on the trust premium associated with the Singapore brand, giving it a competitive advantage, particularly in international markets where the Singapore brand and the values that it entails are widely recognised and acknowledged. This advantage is rooted in Singapore's strict adherence to quality standards and efficient business practices, bolstering, deepening and reinforcing the company's brand premium and assurances of quality. These elements of trust and credibility resonate with customers' concomitant demand for reliability, in part helping SSG to extend its reach internationally.

Moreover, SSG also distinguishes itself by actively seeking out innovative solutions and expanding their product lines; it is this proactive approach that sets them apart from the competition. SSG understands the significance of exploring new avenues and identifying untapped opportunities, akin to the 'blue ocean' business strategy that involves creating new market spaces yet to be charted. This strategic mindset has enabled SSG to establish a distinctive position in the industry, reinforcing a certain uniqueness that sustains its competitive edge.

B. Next, Establishing Connections

While branding is undeniably crucial, its extensive network also played a vital role in its achievements where a significant portion of its overseas business stemmed from established connections.

The brand that SSG has diligently built over the years, as well as the trust and goodwill that have grown among its business network, further strengthened its reputation within the industry. The company's proactive approach and active participation in trade exhibitions have allowed them to seize and capitalise on every business opportunity. When opportunities do arise, SSG is often mentioned as a potential partner, owing to its strong reputation established over the years.

This intangible goodwill that the company has built over time continues to manifest itself through business networks and contributes to its success within the international landscape.

C. Navigating the International Market alongside Trusted Partners

Having strong partnerships with overseas associates and business partners allows SSG to strategically navigate the challenging international environment by tapping on the local expertise of its partners. Though challenging, the ability to find suitable business partners is one key ingredient that contributed to the company's success.

SSG invests time to build, sustain and grow its business relationships and networks. Its goal is to understand and evaluate suitable partners possessing strong business capabilities and are in alignment with SSG's core philosophies and values. This strong focus on relationship building has facilitated the forming of strong connections and partnerships.

Notwithstanding, SSG recognises challenges when attempting to gain entry into certain overseas markets where there may be a predominant belief and appeal amongst local players that collaborations between native players, vis-à-vis foreign counterparts, are seen as inherently more sustaining and promising. In navigating such dynamics, SSG relies on referrals and introductions from its network to prospect potential partnerships. Doing so paves a tenable way for market participation and greatly enhances the probability of securing enduring collaborations.

D. Learning to Incorporate the Principles of Agility and Resilience through Adversity

“At that time, I just had to do whatever I could to help the company.”

In the wake of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the most immediate and evident challenge for SSG was to resolve manpower issues when its employees, mostly Malaysians, were subjected to Malaysia's imposition of national quarantine measures that came in the form of Movement Control Orders (MCO).

SSG anticipated the possibility of a wider lockdown and the knock-on impact this would create.

A company-wide scenario planning exercise was conducted, identifying employees who were impacted by MCO and gauging their willingness to continue residing in Singapore, away from their families. Aside from attending to the needs of the affected workers (lodging and work arrangements) on the manpower front, alternative forms of logistical coordination and compromises needed to be made in the face of an exceptionally challenging landscape made worse by major disruptions to the global supply chain where the shipping process experienced significant delays, which extended to months on end.

The cost of container shipping skyrocketed, exceeding tenfold the usual rates. Glass products, supplied to the building and construction industry, were directly and severely affected by the pandemic. Demand headed southward sharply and rapidly as construction slowed drastically and grinded to a halt across most regions.

Improvisation was the order of the day.

Despite being dealt a bad hand, SSG's leadership remained steadfast. Enterprise, agility and resilience prevailed. Lessons incorporated.

Riding the Next Wave

A. Embracing Transformation through Digitalisation

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the company had applied for an Enterprise Development Grant (EDG), having long recognised the importance and need for automation and digitalisation in upskilling. This move allowed the company to accelerate the introduction of new machinery and enabled it to promptly automate its glass processing operations during the COVID-19 period, mitigating the impact brought on by manpower shortages. Despite a decline in output due to its smaller pool of workers, overall productivity rose. This was one example where SSG was able to effectively leverage automation in sustaining its productive capacity.

The company's employees also participated in courses such as the 'Internet of Things (IoT)' that contributed to the enhancement of overall digital capabilities. The newly acquired know-how enabled them to harness insights through the use of big data and dashboards, resulting in measurable improvements in management practices and more streamlined operational processes.

Looking ahead, SSG remains attuned to the growing prominence of artificial intelligence (AI) and its potential to revolutionise operations. In this regard, the company enrolled their managers into AI courses to explore the possibilities of integrating AI into its operational processes. Given the appreciable rise in productivity, the company has continued its investment in automation.

B. Unleashing Potential through Green Solutions

In the sustainability space, SSG has pursued eco-friendly and green solutions, seeking partnerships with universities and institutions to foster collective efforts in discovering innovative green solutions. In so doing, SSG explores products that align with its sustainability goals across the regions.

Product development aside, SSG is also focused on enabling a more environmentally friendly operational environment even as it continues to refine its sustainability metrics. By adhering to the principles⁴ laid down by the United Nations Global Compact, SSG aims to cultivate sustainable practices across its global operations. One example is by providing clients with transparent information on carbon emissions of its products. By embracing this vision, SSG hopes to foster a culture of environmental responsibility and empower their customers to make better and more informed sustainable choices.

Epilogue

From brand building and the establishment of partnerships to riding the wave of adversity with fortitude and enterprise, SSG has consistently embraced an action-oriented approach.

⁴ <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>

While layering on its growth foundation through brand building and partnerships, SSG is also cognizant of another key value required to ride the next wave.

Receptivity.

The company has embraced new technologies and transformative processes to continue creating sustainable glass products prior to the pandemic.

Looking ahead, SSG also recognises that harmonising and integrating sustainable practices that align with both personal and corporate values have become increasingly important. It sees the need to adopt sustainable practices amidst an increasing trend and demand for greener packaging, processes and practices.

“I think it is something necessary; without it, the world is in trouble.”

Amidst the inevitable shift towards green energy, sustainability is no longer a mere option, but a necessity. Clearly, one critical factor to the future success for SSG.

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