

Grads turn in-school start-ups into careers

Challenge of F&B sector not too daunting for these fresh NUS graduates, as they evolve and modify their businesses to survive and thrive

✓ SERENEHO

With the food and beverage (F&B) sector becoming one of the most challenging to work in amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Mr Auston Quek and Mr Zames Chua wanted to extend a helping hand to the industry.

The pair started Waffle Technologies in May last year, a start-up that assists off-line F&B outlets in serving their customers better by providing an integrated point of sale and loyalty platform.

Mr Quek, 27, graduated from the National University of Singapore on Sunday with a Bachelor of Arts, while Mr Chua, 26, will be graduating with a Bachelor of Computing (Computer Science) today.

Having spent a year in Silicon Valley from 2018 to 2019 as part of the entrepreneurship curriculum in the NUS Overseas College (NOC) programme, they were immersed and inspired by the vibrant start-up scene in the US.

The duo pitched their first idea, Buzzbee, during the NOC programme and were awarded \$10,000 to test it in the real world.



Mr Auston Quek (far left) and Mr Zames Chua spent a year in Silicon Valley, where the vibrant start-up scene inspired them to start Waffle Technologies, while Miss Charis Low and Miss Tan Zhen Ying (far right) co-founded their bubble tea business during their third year of studies at NUS. PHOTOS: WAFFLE TECHNOLOGIES, THE HANGOVER

Mr Quek told *The New Paper*: “After positive validation from a select group of F&B brands, we knew that we were onto something.”

That eventually turned into Waffle Technologies, which the pair have been working full-time on, alongside three others.

“The F&B industry is definitely a tough space to be in, especially now, but it is also now that it is evolving quickly and is the most exciting,” Mr Quek said.



Similarly, Miss Tan Zhen Ying, 25, and Miss Charis Low, 24, who will graduate on Saturday with a Bachelor of Business Administration and Bachelor of Business Administration and Arts degrees respectively, also began their start-up dreams while at NUS.

In 2018, the pair co-founded The Hangover, a bubble tea business that offers catering and live stations, among other services.

Miss Tan told TNP: “With the huge

popularity of bubble tea and the novelty of having a live station at events, we believed our service would stand out.”

Applying what they learnt at NUS, especially in accounting and business law classes, they embarked on their business venture during their third year.

In the beginning, The Hangover experienced sweet success, consistently hitting five-figure sales in the first five months. Business dipped, however, when the pandemic struck, as large-scale events were cancelled.

The women pivoted to offering profitable bubble tea do-it-yourself kits, and pushed on with new offerings such as virtual bubble tea-making workshops and bottled bubble tea and party boxes.

The pair are currently working full-time at The Hangover.

Miss Tan said: “Being able to see how much difference we could make to the business by constantly innovating and executing every new idea was satisfying.

“We enjoyed the process of adapting and staying relevant in this industry.”

sereneho@sph.com.sg