

# Beating the competition an art for caterer

WHEN Rasel Catering was set up back in 1999, it was only the second catering firm in Singapore to be halal-certified.

Today, about 100 catering firms have halal certification.

Despite this proliferation, the two co-founders of Rasel, managing director Alan Tan and creative director Chris Loh, have managed to carve out a niche for themselves and stay ahead of the competition by using their flair for creativity and innovation.

Rasel started out as Rasa Selera Food Service. In 2001, it underwent a rebranding exercise, changing its name to Rasel Food Fusion.

“At the time, there was a fusion fad in the food and beverage industry, people were fusing Western and Asian cuisines,” said Ms Loh. “But this fad faded away... and our menus evolved as well, so there came a time when people became confused by our name and we realised it was time to reconsider our market positioning.”

Rasel was also now serving a more sophisticated and high-end clientele, having penetrated the corporate events market.

So earlier this year, Rasel updated itself again with new moniker Rasel Catering and the tagline, “artisans of joy”. “It signifies that we bring artistry to everything we do, from our service to our food and our settings,” said Ms Loh.

The firm showcases its artistic flair by creating new dishes, putting new twists on traditional menu items, and coming up with unique table settings and venue decorations. Ms Loh herself has been known to sew diamante beads by hand onto tablecloths to create a glamorous dinner set-up.

Recently, Rasel even started us-



**Rasel Catering managing director Alan Tan and creative director Chris Loh with a buffet set-up that has snakeskin leather as a design centrepiece. The firm aims to showcase its artistic flair with its unique set-ups. PHOTO: RASEL CATERING**

ing unusual textures like leather and fur in its table settings.

To create a name and logo encompassing this spirit of innovation and artistry, Rasel tapped Spring Singapore’s Capability Development Grant. This gave partial funding for Rasel to hire a consultant to help craft a branding strategy for the next decade.

This process helped the firm figure out not only how to shape its external image, but also how to ensure that its internal workings would uphold its brand promise.

“In the kitchen, we have to make sure food is prepared at a high quality. In operations, set-ups must be up to the mark or go beyond expectations,” Ms Loh said. “The sales team has to act as the company’s eyes... And marketing should know what the market trends are. These are all essential to building your brand and fulfilling your brand promise.”

Once the consultancy was completed, Rasel hired designers to redesign its logo and everything from its van exteriors to napkins.

Mr Tan is confident the investment will reap financial returns.

He said he already sees many intangible benefits, the most rewarding of which is the staff morale boost. “They are taking more pride in their work now... If they see that the napkins are not arranged just right, they will do it without being asked,” he said.

Ms Loh added: “The staff feel proud that they are now working for a premium brand. It’s like working in a mass-market boutique and then moving up to work for Chanel... They feel appreciated by both the firm and clients.”

Clients have also responded positively, she said, as they feel the new brand and logo better represent what Rasel does.

And Rasel’s productivity journey is not ending here. It is implementing a customer resource management system to help it manage and stay in touch with clients, and an electronic resource planning system that Mr Tan said will act as “the brains of the company”.

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