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Headline: 2 SMU Undergrads Think You're Paying Too Much For Subpar Jeans - Invested \$6k To Find Your Perfect Cut

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Jeans are a wardrobe staple for many Singaporeans, but other than how fitting (or functional, whatever rocks your boat) they are, the readymade options we get in stores are usually far from perfect.

Unless you've got the figure of a runway model, shopping for the most flattering pair of jeans for your body type can be tricky.

Either one inch too large, or one inch too small, the final decision on which pair of jeans usually turns out to be a choice between the lesser of two evils.

Customising your own jeans is also a typically expensive affair, some places charging up to a few hundreds for a pair.

But does that mean that we'll need to either suffer the consequences of a poorly fitting pair of jeans, or have to pay through the nose for a customised pair?

Not really, because thanks to these 2 SMU (Singapore Management University) undergrads, we can enjoy the perks of customised jeans without the hefty bill.

A Fateful Bus Route That Started It All

Made up of Lincoln Thong (24) and Lee Wei Chen (25), both third-going-on-final year students in SMU and pursuing degrees in Business Management, Journal Projects is an 8-month-old startup that specialises in creating customised jeans.

While one might venture the guess that the two met in some fashion-related course or event (given their startup's nature) they actually met when they joined SMU Caderas Latinas, the university's salsa performance team.

Through bus rides home together (both live in the West), their friendship was forged, and so was the foundation of their Journal Projects.

Conversations went from superficial to the sharing of ideas, and soon, the friends decided to start creating customised jeans "as [they] felt that there isn't anything doing it in Singapore at the moment".

"With customisation, we can make sure that you get the perfect pair and because we use quality fabric and good craftsmanship, it is made to last so you don't have to keep replacing them."

But why 'Journal Projects'?

"'Journal' is used because raw denim starts off as a very dark shade of indigo and fades and develops character with wear over time, creating a very personalised distressed jean after months of wear, hence it tells a story of your 'experiences' in the jean. 'Projects', because we wanted to treat each release of style or campaign like a focused project, which keeps us at task to develop a great product."

"We Definitely Didn't Learn All This In Business School"

While ideas came easily, the process of creating their very first pair was another issue altogether.

From sourcing to production to even media relations, they had to learn everything from scratch – even coming up with a size guide was something they needed to create themselves.

We had to just dive in head first and see how it goes from there because there isn't any guide to follow, and we definitely didn't learn all this in business school. Sometimes you just have to start and adapt to the problems along the way instead of planning for every eventuality such that nothing is started at all.

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Being the one who's had more interest in denim, even before Journal Projects started, Lincoln started sourcing for fabrics and manufacturers online, but that proved difficult.

"As it progressed, Lincoln had to head down to Japan to visit the denim mills there, while we headed down to Indonesia to visit our manufacturer."

But more than just being transactional clients for their supplies and manufacturers, Lincoln and Wei Chen wanted to do more.

"We needed to build a relationship, to actually understand how they live, and what are their constraints and even their hopes and aspirations. We tried their food, sat down and ate with them using our hands and ended the trip knowing that we further strengthened our relationship."

Journal Projects was officially launched in December 2016, and the duo have currently invested around S\$6,000 into their venture.

Still full-time students, they have also somehow managed to squeeze in 80 hours per week for the both of them since then.

Lessons From Their Internships At Large Local Retailers

To be the best, you sometimes got to learn from them, and that was exactly what both did – taking up internships at local retailers like Naisse and Talking Toes.

Expressed Wei Chen, "I think something that both Lincoln and I wanted through internships was the ability to not only see, but be given a chance to handle all aspects of a small business."

"If there was something to be done outside your job scope or expertise, you don't hire someone else to do it, you do it and learn along the way."

His internship at Naisse was also where he learnt entrepreneurship skills that no textbook could ever teach him.

"During that time working there I realised that a start up will naturally move towards having bureaucracy as it grows."

I used to baulk at why things took so long due to the many processes and clearances but while working at these start ups, I realised the need for them as without them, a lot of things can go wrong. So from the start, when you come with with business processes, you have to think future wise, are all these steps necessary, and how can I reduce the steps taken?

He also learnt that as a business, as tempting as it is, one should never compromise on the quality – be it for the product, or the process of delivering it to the customer.

"You have to take personal responsibility because there are many examples of people willing to sell a subpar product or experience to customers these days."

Pop-Up Store And Kickstarter As Platforms

While their website has been where customers have been getting their jeans, they also have a permanent pop-up store near the Kickstarter 'We The People' store at Millennia Walk.

"Sometimes people are convinced after seeing our goods online but others would actually want to try, feel the material and talk to us before making a purchase and that is where our permanent pop up store comes into play."

Admitting that initial response was "quite tepid for the first 2 months as it was hard to convince strangers to purchase the jeans", the problem solved itself over time as they talked to more customers and their social media channels grew.

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"We have had customers purchase from us just though looking at Instagram alone, just 3 weeks ago we even had our first American customer! So I feel if you slowly build your brand while maintaining quality and sincerity, people will be able to discern and be willing to make a purchase."

He reveals though, that convincing the mainstream consumer that they actually deserve better jeans is still a "continuous education process" they're working on.

Jeans have become something that has been cheapened in a sense. With retailers selling clothing that looks like denim or using subpar denim, people have grown accustomed to having jeans that don't really last.

To reach out to an even larger crowd, they have also launched a Kickstarter campaign last Saturday (5 Aug), aiming to raise around S\$10,000 to make 90 pairs of jeans.

On the day of launch itself, they hit over half their goal in a few hours, and currently, they're over 80% through to full funding.

With 26 days to go, it'll only be a matter of time that they hit and surpass their intended amount.

Going Into This Full-Time After Graduation?

Soon entering their final year of university, I asked if they intend to go into running Journal Projects full-time after graduation.

Regarding that, Wei Chen remains practical.

"There are several factors that will determine whether we will do this full-time, including receptiveness of the market, scalability, stability and so on. It really depends how well these factors play out for us before we can commit to a decision."

In spite of this, he offers very sound advice to those aspiring to bring their entrepreneurial ideas to reality:

"In life, there is a limit to how much planning you can do, you can make sure that you have done your SWOT analysis or ensured that everything is perfect, but something will go wrong both in life and in business. It is how we adapt to problems that arise that defines us."

"So plan to a certain extent, but don't let planning hinder you from moving."

Check out Journal Projects' Kickstarter campaign [here!](#)