

**Publication: Vulcan Post Online**

**Date: 27 November 2020**

**Headline: These 2 SMU Grads Invested S\$50K Into A Mushroom Snack Biz - Sold Over 10K Packs In 4 Months**

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Crystal Cheng, 26, and Joshua Chan, 29, both studied at the Singapore Management University (SMU).

They were classmates, but became very good friends due to the shared interest in startups.

Prior to starting up Edens Chips together, both of them were startup founders themselves.

Crystal is the founder of churros startup Loco Loco (but she has since sold away the company shares), while Joshua is currently the co-founder of standing desk company ErgoEdge.

After graduating from university, Crystal wanted to embark on another business venture but suppressed it due to family commitments and “typical Asian parents’ pressure”.

She felt that she needed to get a “proper job” and ended up working as a Strategic Operations Specialist at GrabFood Singapore.

She loved her job, but also took on a side hustle centred around corporate food gifts, where she puts together healthy snacks in sample packs for companies.

“When lockdown started, working from home gave me a lot more flexibility and when the government announced (support measures during) the Budget, I felt that the (grants) was a really good opportunity to start working on my side hustle full-time,” said Crystal.

She roped in Joshua and both wasted no time in launching the business to the mass consumer market with their most popular food item: shiitake chips.

**Sold Over 100 Packets In An Hour**

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Crystal and Joshua are both self-professed mushroom lovers.

The duo felt that mushroom is always commonly found in Asian dishes like braised mushroom and steamboat. They wanted to make it more accessible by turning it into a snack so consumers can munch on it anytime, anywhere.

Particularly, a healthy snack that is guilt-free.

“I am not someone who has the discipline to go to the gym to workout, or have that determination to (eat) salad on a daily basis. I want to stay healthy with minimal effort, and the right choice of snacks helps a lot,” Crystal said with a laugh.

She explained that with the right choice of snacks, it can help prevent overeating during meals (which also means you won’t suffer from food coma later), and it keeps you productive during work (because snacking keeps you awake).

According to Crystal, their Shiitake Chips are “at least 30 per cent lesser in calories” compared to popular Mala or Salted Egg Fish Skin.

Furthermore, their chips are vacuum fried (fried in low heat) so it helps to preserve the core nutrients, she added.

At launch, many of Crystal’s ex-colleagues at GrabFood lended their support and they quickly sold over 100 packets in the first hour alone.

### **A Business Born During COVID-19**

Despite the tremendous support, many also questioned if it was the right move to start a new business amid this uncertain economic conditions.

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Crystal acknowledged that COVID-19 did pose them with business challenges.

*With COVID-19 restriction, the lack of offline presence is the biggest challenge for us. After all, the best way to promote or sell food products is by providing free samples.*

*With COVID-19, there are no atrium events or expo fairs, and the personal touch between us and the consumer is missing at the moment. Supply chain logistics prices have also gone up, (so) local and cross-border logistics is one of our biggest cost factors.*

– Crystal Cheng, co-founder of Edens Chips

However, she also felt that the pandemic presented them with opportunities.

For one, the government Budget gave them financial support and thanks to the SGUnited scheme, they were able to hire a small team to grow the business.

Furthermore, the e-commerce boom during the circuit breaker helped propel their sales. To date, they have sold over 10,000 packets of Shiitake Chips.

Both Crystal and Joshua had pumped in an initial capital of S\$50,000 into the business, and every single cent they earned have since been reinvested to spend on incoming stocks and research and development for new flavours.

It's only been four months since inception, but Crystal is confident that they will be able to break even in early 2021.

Regardless, cashflow still remains a pertinent problem for them.

*For any product businesses, cashflow is always the biggest issue, unless cashflow is never an issue to begin with.*

*The nature of having to purchase stocks in advance and ensuring that our supply meets the demand is the challenge that we're facing now.*

– Crystal Cheng, co-founder of Edens Chips

### **Shiitake Chips Are Not Common In The Market**

Despite the competitive snack market, Crystal is confident that they will thrive because their concept is "relatively fresh".

"We see a lot of potato chips and fish skin in the supermarket, but rarely shiitake chips."



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Moreover, they have interesting flavours such as Himalayan Sea Salt Shiitake Chips and Black Summer Truffle Shiitake Chips.

According to Crystal, coming up with a flavour takes at least three months.

"We source our seasoning from all over the world. Finding that right combination of flavour and ensuring that it is healthier than the products in the market with lab testing is a tedious and costly process," she said.



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Regardless, she is happy to announce that they are looking to launch two new flavours next month: Szechuan Mala Shiitake Chips with lotus root and chilli, as well as Garlic Shiitake Chips that comes with actual garlic bits.

While they work on expanding their flavours, Edens Chips is also trying hard to drive down their pricing.

Apparently, one common feedback that they receive is that their price point is a little steep (it costs from S\$16.90 for a bundle of two packs). This is why they are working on optimising their processes to allow them to be able to offer their products at a more competitive price.

### **Business With A Heart**

Commenting on the retail landscape today, Crystal pointed out that consumerism has evolved.

“We have so many choices (and) we can literally buy from anywhere in the world. (However), consumers today are not just seeking for a product or a solution, but rather a vision.”

This includes what the brand stands for, what the business is doing that positively impacts the world, and how consumers can be a part of that positive contribution by purchasing that particular brand's products.



On that end, Edens Chips is working with the Movement of Intellectually Disabled School (MINDS) to help with storage needs and fulfil their online orders.

*In each parcel, we insert a note to let customers know that their purchase of our Shiitake Chips is beyond just a packet of snacks.*

*It's a win-win situation because one party gets employed, we have our fulfilment managed by a reliable organisation, and customers receive their products fast. It is one of the better decisions we made unknowingly.*

– Crystal Cheng, co-founder of Edens Chips

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Sharing her grand vision for Edens Chips, Crystal said that they purely want to make healthy snacking an easy and enjoyable experience.

They plan to keep their product line niche and enter the offline markets in Singapore, before expanding to Southeast Asia and other parts of the world.

Looking back at her entrepreneurial journey thus far, Crystal is fully aware that entrepreneurship is a gamble — you never know if it's ever going to work out.

Regardless, Crystal jumped into the deep waters with both feet in because she doesn't want to regret not doing something.

“(If) you never try, you never know. If you don't know if the idea would be feasible, then try it.”

“If it fails, you didn't waste any time. The time spent (on working on the idea) gave you the answer you were looking for — it's all about perspective,” she mused.