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SME Spotlight

Teaming up to cut down packaging waste



From left: Leica service engineer Dave Wong, with the company's head of global transportation and logistics Yip Ban Keat, and Fagerdala's executive director Raymond Chee and the company's key account manager Marvin Low. The firms' collaboration managed to reduce the packaging size for the Leica Spider microscope by half. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

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Microscope maker Leica Instruments and local foam manufacturer Fagerdala Singapore were recently awarded the Most Green Collaboration by the Singapore International Chamber of Commerce for working to cut packaging waste. Leica's head of global transportation and logistics Yip Ban Keat, Fagerdala executive director Raymond Chee and key account manager Marvin Low speak to Marissa Lee.



Marissa Lee (mailto:marilee@sph.com.sg)

Q What prompted the collaboration?

Yip It all began as part of a corporate social responsibility initiative at Leica. We looked at the data on climate change, which is irreversible. Global temperatures are increasing by 0.8 deg C each year and land ice is melting.

So we asked ourselves, in our Leica packaging, do we really need all this plastic tape, air pouches and overpack cartons? That's when we approached Fagerdala in May 2015.

Q *What was the goal here?*

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Yip The challenge was: How can we pack three different models of our Cats series of microscopes into one common redefined packaging?

So instead of having three different kinds of packaging, we wanted to have just one.

And for each of our Cats, Spider, and Dragon series of microscopes, our design goal was to optimise the transportation cost by reducing volumetric weight as well as materials cost, and improve workflow productivity.

Q *Why partner with Fagerdala?*

Yip Fagerdala is our supplier. We are the experts in microscopes, they are the experts in packaging. Chee We started in 1983 as a foam manufacturer, but we have since taken on this model of total packaging solutions. Low We are committed to minimising our environmental impact by introducing sustainable products in the market.

We are constantly doing research on new environmentally friendly material. We actually have a team of scientists exploring things like non-oil-based materials.

We have a robust recycling process - we collect post-industrial waste and grind it into smaller pieces to make recycled foam.

And we are always challenging ourselves to come up with designs that reduce the volumetrics, the cube metrics of the packaging, which helps our customers to reduce freight charges and transport costs.

Q *Was the project a success?*

Yip We officially launched all the new packaging solutions in April last year and, so far, there have been no complaints from customers.

We changed our highly glossy laminated boxes to brown boxes to avoid bleaching, which is not very healthy for the workers involved in the bleaching process.

We use 100 per cent recycled foam now, no longer virgin foam.

For the Cats series of microscopes, we reduced the total packaging weight from 4.5kg to 3kg.

GREEN PRACTICES

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MR MARVIN LOW, Fagerdala's key account manager, on his company's emphasis on going green.

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For the Spider series, we reduced the box size by half. We now use 11 pieces of foam for each microscope instead of 23, and that has not compromised the product quality.

The packer also benefits. It used to take 178 seconds to pack a Spider microscope, but with the new design, it takes only 40 seconds. The packer can also pack everything at the same work bench, at the same height with no need to bend his back.

For customers, there is less waste for them to dispose of.

Q *What do you think was key to your success?*

Yip Fagerdala and Leica have two different work cultures, priorities and business missions, so a critical step that we took at the very start was to get the Fagerdala team to be trained in our Danaher Business System.

It's basically a quality lean tool, and we did a workshop back in May 2015 to calibrate and make sure we were all on the frequency, and that we understood one another's terminology and expectations.

The training was conducted by Leica staff for free.

Q *Any plans for further collaboration?*

Yip We're arranging for Fagerdala to meet our boss to talk about other stuff. There will be opportunities.

This is just the beginning of the whole transformation journey. Chee We don't just look at it as one single project but as a partnership with Leica for the long term, and ultimately to extend that collaboration to other countries - we are in seven countries.