

Joining a Tradeshow, Building One's Network

Kim Guan Guan shares the benefits of joining an SBF-led tradeshow.

Founded by Jason Soon, Kim Guan Guan is a heritage coffee brand in Singapore known for its traditional kopi blends. With over 30 years of experience, it supplies coffee to cafes, hotels, and supermarkets. In 2021, it launched Kim's Duet to expand into the B2C market.

With assistance from the SBF, Kim Guan Guan successfully entered the Chinese market through international trade shows such as CIIE, bringing Singapore's 'kopi' culture globally.

How did Kim Guan Guan shift from a largely B2B model to include B2C?

Nigel: The shift to expand into B2C was gradual. In 2021, we set the foundation when we started Kim's Duet, our consumer brand. That gave us the opportunity to market directly to consumers and go into hospitality. We also put more focus on branding — our logo got an update, for example.

How did this lead to further expansion, eventually into the Chinese market?

Nigel: Once we had this solid foundation and corporate brand, we started going to local trade shows before going overseas to international trade shows. We ramped up our participation in 2023 and 2024, when we went to at least five a year, including trade shows in Melbourne, Thailand, London, and Paris. We gained a lot of exposure for the brand, and one of our big turning points was at the China International Import Expo (CIIE).

Jason: We found our distributor for China at CIIE. CIIE and SBF were our matchmakers; our distributor was a vendor at the trade show. Thanks to our distributor, we now have clients in Chongqing, Suzhou, Shanghai, and Fuzhou. We supply our coffee to local coffee shops, supermarkets, and hotels. Our products are also available online, on Chinese shopping platforms like TMall and Pinduoduo.

What did you learn from these experiences at CIIE?

Jason: We saw the importance of expanding our network. We learned a lot from other companies at CIIE, and it opened many doors for us.

Nigel: We spoke with other companies that were part of the Singapore Pavilion at CIIE and learnt about overseas trading and working with distributors. The export market is new to us, and hearing from experienced vendors was very helpful. We also received advice from SBF about important things like required documents, as well as little details like carton size when shipping our products.

CIIE also opened our eyes to how much people appreciate the story behind a product. Beyond organisation and logistics, SBF gave us a rundown on the dos and don'ts at an international trade show. One of these tips was on how to profile our products. Following their advice, we shared more about Singapore's coffee culture, a point of interest for a foreign market. We gained a lot of exposure from CIIE, from the livestreams with key opinion leaders arranged by SBF, to coverage from Singapore and Chinese media outlets due to how big an event the CIIE is.

What does the future look like for Kim Guan Guan?

Jason: I hope for Kim Guan Guan to go global. Before that, however, we have plans to expand to more cities in China.

Nigel: We would also like to venture further into the food and beverage industry in Southeast Asia. To do that, we are on the lookout for more distributors who are aligned with our brand and vision.

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We gained exposure, connected with many established brands, and even found our distributor at CIIE. We plan to continue going for as long as we can.



Jason Soon (Left)
Founder

Nigel Soon (Right)
Brand Partnerships and Growth Manager