



Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation

THE ACCIDENTAL ENTREPRENEUR Over and over again....

Having started out his career in advertising, Spencer Wing is still very much into advertising today as well as his other businesses.

Spencer Wing

In 1998, Spencer Wing decided that he was rich and “old” enough to deserve going into semiretirement. After all, he was comfortable enough. In fact, he was more than comfortable! However, being the person that he was, Spencer was back on the saddle within six months with yet another new venture! And he repeatedly added new businesses to his list. His latest was network marketing, since he found leveraging on people simply irresistible.

The old thoughts of “This is not for me, this is not my sort of business” gave way to the excitement of “new possibilities” to work the very workable business model behind this new venture. How exhilarating, how stimulating, and most of all, how wonderful! A new opportunity to spin some money and to get another totally new set of friends.

For Spencer Wing, this was just his latest business that was brewing. He already had a name for his new venture, “Deep Roots, Green Leaves” – Building Wealth through Relationship Marketing. Spencer marketed his new venture with a booklet explaining why anyone should seriously consider this as a business as he has done.

Could his going into network marketing be accidental? Spencer’s string of businesses normally started from scratch and evolved until a CEO (a new jockey) took over the reins and managed the business for him, freeing him to move on to another venture.

This case was written by Ms. Ho Yean of ACTION International, West Malaysia as a contribution to the Project entitled “Innovation in Entrepreneur Development in APEC”, conducted under the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Human Resources Development – Capacity Building Network (CBN). The case was developed with the cooperation of Mr. Spencer Wing solely for the purpose of class discussion. The cases are neither designed nor intended to illustrate the correct or incorrect management of the situation or issues contained in the case. No part of this case can be reproduced, stored or used without the written permission of the author(s) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation.

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An Early Start...

Spencer Wing recalled how his mother started the family's Chee Cheong Fun (Noodles) hawker stall, when his carpenter father could not bring home enough money to feed his small family of three. At the tender age of 11, young Spencer had to get the additional supply of noodles for his mother, if the supply ran short on a good business day. Unfortunately, the business had to come to an abrupt end when his mother became a victim of gangsterism in their area.

After witnessing first-hand how his mother's business could be transacted so simply and yet so successfully, while still a teenager, Spencer started his very own "home-grown" business with just 30 cans of young bean shoots grown from green mung beans in empty milk cans. He decorated each can with cut-out patterned red paper pasted onto the sides of the cans (his natural born artistry at work). He sold each of them for RM1.50 at a particular Chinese festival at the market square. From just this little venture, he made a handsome profit with virtually no capital outlay and was touched by the generosity of a lady who actually gave him RM3.00 instead.

Inspired by his milk can project, Spencer designed red *Ang Pow* envelopes and greeting cards for Chinese New Year. He printed 5,000 pieces of each kind but sold only 50! "Yes, based purely on my technician instinct with some fresh ideas, like many others...I failed miserably. I had no clue whatsoever on the need for a business plan to start with!" This did not deter Spencer, however. "Even in-between employment in later years, I started several ventures wherever the opportunity arose and simply did it!"

Streetwise Intuition...

It is hard to imagine, but I got into advertising by accident. I could not have planned my career any better or made a better choice, even if I tried.

Spencer left school after completing his Secondary Five education in 1967 and took to the streets looking for a job. He started out as a school librarian for RM50.00 a month, and very quickly moved on to be a clerk with the Police Cooperative for another few months.

The 1960s was the era when teenagers worldwide started getting into the Hippie Movement with their "flower power", "groovy baby", "make love not war" signs and messages. Spencer was no exception and he soon became preoccupied with the hippie culture. Queuing up to request for songs played over the air with Radio TV Malaysia was his favorite pastime.

To get noticed, he would often send in his song request slips with elaborate drawings on them. His drawings soon caught the eyes of a very special lady, Vicky Skelchy, a top and notable disc jockey at that time. She took the trouble to call him and suggested that Spencer show some of his drawings to a friend of hers who was in the advertising industry.

The doors of advertising were thus opened for Spencer. No formal art school, no examinations and what a stroke of luck! Or was it really luck? If so, could he have sustained being in the business for long?

The Hands-on Mentoring Lessons began...

I was really blessed to have two great mentors at the very beginning of my advertising career: one who taught me how to do things, and learning by observation, and the other who taught me how to develop the arty stuff, and most of all, the importance of being a wide reader. Reading was a source of inspiration that gave me invaluable insights into many, new and creative ideas that had profound impact on me for life. In my later years, I met my third mentor who taught me to push myself to the limits.

His first mentor was Hans Lindberg, the Creative Director of Grant Advertising (now Bozell Advertising), a man with a soft heart and fiery temper. As a new apprentice, Spencer learned to quietly observe all that was happening around him and enjoyed “the far out” experiences when Hans, who led the regional pitch for International Accounts, used to produce and commission the most astounding photography and advertising themes of that time. The experiences left very lasting impressions on the young Spencer, and taught him to always search and explore borderless creativity in his advertising career.

Spencer’s second mentor, Prakash, taught him practical hands-on skills: how to be a great technician, acquiring photography skills, designing logos, typography and even handling cameras. All these skills gave him the confidence to ultimately achieve his career goal as a Creative Director.

One of Spencer’s earliest achievements was when at the age of 22, his logo designs were accepted and used by a local bank, Pacific Bank Bhd.

In 1982, Bruce Bendry, also a Creative Director, became Spencer’s third mentor from whom he learned that “If one were to fall off a cliff, one might then learn to fly.” Until he met Bruce, Spencer was afraid to make presentations to clients. He would do anything to avoid being the presenter at meetings. One day, Bruce arranged for Spencer to try out a mock presentation, assuring him that he, Bruce, would do the actual presentation himself. However, on the day itself, Bruce called up excusing himself from the occasion and requested that Spencer take over the show. That was indeed a memorable day for Spencer, the day he learned to fly, not just overcoming the fear, but confronting any fears head on.

An Eye-Opening Experience... a trip to London

In June 1970, a most unusual thing happened. A friend gave Spencer a free return ticket to London. Without much thought, Spencer immediately requested Hans, his superior, for a 6-month posting at their London office. Hans granted his request and Spencer was given the rare opportunity to experience work as a freelancer at Top Drawers, a London Agency.

I not only earned my Malaysian salary, I also got paid in British pounds (£) for all the work that I did in Top Drawers - really cool! And to top it all, I managed to get a part-time job with a travel agency... that took me all over the city of London with an additional £120 a month. By the end of the stay, I had saved enough money to take a holiday in Paris and buy myself a fine suit from London. No one could be any wiser!

His time abroad was an experience that Spencer not only enjoyed and treasured, but also taught him to be open, to be adventurous, and try out new things. The philosophy that he had embraced until today is: “*Never try, never uncover...*”

The People One Crosses Path with...

After five years at Grant Advertising, Spencer Wing moved to Clover Advertising, a local agency, for a brief stint of six months, where he had to apply all that he had learned. His stint there was an invaluable experience that prepared him well for the bigger steps in later years. He learned how to have foresight and what outcomes to expect.

Thereafter, he moved on to Ted Bates. “Just the right agency to develop and grow up. Good clients and great people to work with – easy going and fun loving. It was at Ted Bates, that I got to know two men, one of whom later became my partner. The other was Michael Tang, who was then the Account Director and later took over the helm as the CEO of my company, SpencerAzizul Advertising Sdn Bhd. Azizul Kallahan and I had exchanged brief hellos as I was leaving Ted Bates since he was the new incoming account service man. Little did I know that we would be spending many years together in the same boat in the future.”

At Last, Getting into Business...

Advertising is one of the rare businesses where you can make your mark by just being aware of the world we live in. If you can understand the fear and aspirations of the marketplace, half the battle is already won.

I have also learned that there was no substitute for hard work.. I put in crazy hours in all the agencies that I worked for and doubled my experience against those who kept the 9 to 5 routine. All these cultivated habits came to be of good use when I had to put up my own money.

In 1985, Spencer decided it was time to have a go at his very own business. It started out as a fun, one-year project after taking up a challenge from Peter Campbell, his Managing Director at McCann, to venture out on his own. The challenge was to strike out on his own for a year, with a promise of doubling his salary upon his eventual return (with the very first four hours of his time bought by McCann), as an incentive to get him started. It was indeed an irresistible dream package. Spencer was just the right candidate to take on the challenge, as he was ready to be out on his own.

My very own 400 square feet office was located at the ground floor of Wisma Central, Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur. I had it painted black and set it off with maroon colored blinds. I had the office lit to create an intimate home ambience effect. Without any fanfare I hung up my signboard, “Spencer Wing Advertising,” and I was in business.

Spencer quickly learned that the glamour of a business owner was to be a generalist, to do all things - meeting clients, dealing with suppliers, typing up quotes and not forgetting to take out the garbage at the end of the day.

The mid-80s was a time of recession, bad for some but good for Spencer. Rental was low and human resource was affordable. His very first client, Mr. Tang of Primal Time, the sole agent for Orient watches in Malaysia was a perfect client – he agreed to everything that was proposed and paid promptly. Spencer noted that, “I was fortunate enough to have many friends who extended helping hands. From small jobs, the accounts soon blossomed into half million dollar accounts.”

From a one-man operation, Spencer Wing Advertising grew quickly to become a 10 man outfit within the first year, and the thought of returning to McCann was soon forgotten. He quickly learned to manage and leverage on people’s time wisely. “Not sure how I did it, but I certainly had the ability to inspire myself and the full team to work 15 hours a day, 7 days a week. Perhaps it was the nagging fear of the ‘either swim or sink situation’ that got us to work our butts off.”

Next, entering into Partnership that lasts...

On April Fool’s Day 1987, SpencerAzizul Advertising was born out of Spencer’s innocent lunch with Azizul, which led to their partnership. Strangely enough, they had the wisdom to start their partnership with an “Agreement to Agree” policy, and that magic formula has worked for them all these years. It means that when Azizul made a decision without consulting Spencer, Spencer would stand by him, no matter what and vice-versa. “Sometimes he wins, sometimes I win.” That understanding has bonded their strong partnership for the past 18 years.

Azizul is the direct opposite of me in many ways. He is well-educated, has poise, is articulate, charming and knowledgeable about the ways of the world.

As a matter of fact, we complement each other rather well. He is the outside man, the one pitching for new accounts and presenting to a prospect or client. As for me, I’m the inside man, who takes care of operations, making sure we can deliver. Over the years, our lives have intertwined together. Apart from being partners and friends, we have great mutual admiration and respect for each other.

Both Spencer and Azizul have firm beliefs that their company should strive to grow and nurture a whole industry of brilliant Malaysian creative teams and commercial art directors.

SpencerAzizul Advertising had to work really hard to prove itself. It was to be based on a merit system, to be in a position to deliver not just advertising, but GOOD advertising, with faster turnaround, while being attentive and responsive to clients' needs.

We've been fortunate because the clients we've had, have been good to us, understanding as well as supportive. Names like Orient, Bonia and Sapura have been with us for many years. I think the pleasure comes from being able to work with most of our clients to formulate goals and objectives, and help them develop good and strong brands.

The Way Spencer Azizul grew...

After spending four years, working in the business and burying himself in work as the technician, Spencer realized that he should get out and vacate his Creative Director position for someone else. He moved on to focus his time on developing good clients, winning their trust and growing along with them.

In advertising, there are certain basic principles like:

Why are you advertising?

To tell people about something they would like to have.

And, most of all, how do we get that message to the targeted audience in a fashion they would understand.

In 1988, SpencerAzizul Advertising moved to larger premises since the company had grown to 22 people. That year, it became one of the first agencies to embrace McIntosh for digital artwork. This resulted in clinching the Apple account and subsequently, the Sapura account. A year later, they were invited to become an associate agency of a fairly large international agency to assist in the servicing of their Procter & Gamble account.

There was a great lesson to be learned. Taking time off from the business to think was absolutely crucial. We could have celebrated, thinking that our company had at last arrived to be now associated with an international agency, servicing P&G accounts.....well done! Many would have envied us. However, it dawned on us that before long, that singular account could also break the company, being overly dependent and indebted to our associate.

Quietly, I informed Azizul that our strategic plan for the next 12 months was to utilize this strength to desperately canvass for new accounts, working profusely as if the company's survival was at stake. And sure enough, the day came when our associate asked for a majority stake in SpencerAzizul Advertising and was caught totally off guard when we smugly informed them that the P&G accounts constituted only twenty percent (20%), not over fifty percent (50%) of our total revenue. So, after a short sweet 18 months association, we parted ways. Later, we learned that they had indeed bought into

another Malaysian agency since this was something they had always intended to do.

In 1990, SpencerAzizul Advertising moved into their very own premises at Damai Complex, off Jalan Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur. Unlike the big international advertising agencies situated downtown with their glitzy, snazzy interiors, SpencerAzizul Advertising's office was simply a working office with nothing fanciful.

In 1995, Azizul took on the role of Executive Chairman and later, Michael Tang was appointed as CEO. After surviving the tremendous shocks of the Asian economic crisis, the company emerged on an even better footing than before. Billings had dropped to RM18 million in 1998 but recovered and soared to RM30 million in 1999 with new clients like Telekom Malaysia and Tourism Malaysia.

Spencer realized that in order for the company to grow, he needed better qualified team members. However, to be able to attract such talents, there had to be a "better clients" portfolio. For any advertising business, the key to success is to invest in the right people. He worked at it and attained the objective of getting the right mixture of "better clients" portfolio and "better team".

I am proud that SpencerAzizul Advertising is today, the largest wholly Malaysian owned advertising agency in the country.

I was very mindful not to grow it too fast. We need to build in better resources and structures before we expand further. That's why it's only after 12 years in the business that we get into the RM5 million accounts. We maintained the magical figure of 25 people for a whole year until we were very convinced that we were ready to scale the next bar. We climbed it, and today we have 55 staff and are looking at a potential income of RM40 million *for this year 2003*.

Moving on to New Ventures, ... other Multiple Businesses

"As we grew our business, new businesses grew around us. Apart from four other related advertising companies, I started an Art Gallery, a Herbal Based Medicine business, became a stockist in a Network Marketing company and there are other ventures brewing in the pipe line..." From his original advertising agency, Spencer first took a horizontal approach to spin off four other companies, also in the advertising industry. Two of such companies' business was to duplicate Spencer's existing and proven system for a different target market such as the mandarin speaking sector in the country. "It was like a premature birth as I later found out that the market was not ready or sophisticated enough for us."

The third company was a niche recruitment agency for the advertising industry, built on a poor business model that simply could not sustain operations after a while.

The fourth company, SA One was an advertising design house managed by a multi-talented lady who had been with Spencer for the past seven years. SA One provided the full spectrum of advertising services and has proven to be a very profitable business.

In 1992, Art Salon, a gallery that promoted and specialized in the artworks of Malaysian born artists was started as the brainchild of Celia, Spencer's wife. Celia resigned from her long years of service in the government sector to venture out and realize her dream to own a retail business, whether it was a shoe shop, a gift shop or whatever would be suitable for her with her hard-earned savings.

It was timely that a Singaporean friend called and showed Celia her new, profitable art studio selling replicas of famous paintings in Singapore, and suggested that she set up another branch in Kuala Lumpur.

We did exactly that, but in just under six months, we realized that we would not be able to pull through unless something changed. Pondering what to do, I walked into a bookshop and got a book entitled "Second Chance" that attracted me. That book cited the story of Coca Cola and of Kotex. Excitedly, I discussed with my wife that all we needed was to look for the second chance for our business to work. We did and our business took off. We found out that the prospective buyers who walked into our shop had repeatedly asked for Malaysian artworks, and we started to provide that!

Next, Spencer got into a ground breaking herbal product from China which had effective remedial effects for people who suffered from epilepsy – "potentially a goldmine and has yet to be fully exploited in the marketplace."

On a trip to India, Spencer accidentally ventured into the mango trading business that lasted only one season. He recalled that he "learned many rewarding lessons - from laborious work, to logistics and planning; met many new friends along the way, such as coffee shop owners, hawkers and so forth; and had heaps of fun, transacting 60 tons of mango within a period of two months!"

Spencer's latest venture was Network Marketing oxygenated water. It was a totally new ball game altogether. This business was about providing a second income for those still in employment and an option for them to take on full-time employment in the future. In the meantime, they could acquire a new set of skills while working part-time on the product. Despite his success in the advertising industry and comfortable lifestyle, Spencer was excited about the oxygenated water product and having a big impact on Network Marketing. Isn't this superb – to be in a position to offer new opportunities to almost all sorts of people, from professionals to hawkers as well as sales persons, at an affordable capital investment!"

And, What's next?

As of April 2004, Spencer has been appointed as the Malaysian Country Stockist for Nature's Sunshine Products Synergy, one of the world's leading MLM company. Nature's Sunshine Products is based in Salt Lake City, Utah and is the world's largest encapsulator of herbs. He has also set up SpencerWing Publishing and has published the company's first book, THOU SHALT PROSPER, by evangelist Dr. Samuel Mohanraj, of Showers of Blessing, India.

It has not always been a bed of roses, but every venture had certainly been interesting and worthwhile. "No experience is ever useless or wasted."

Will the tireless Spencer Wing ever try to retire? Or will he stumble upon yet another venture that would be too irresistible for him not to have a go of it?

ANNEX 1

The Reluctant MLM'er

This latest venture of Spencer, as a stockist for SITO, a company involved in the manufacturing and marketing of oxygenated water, has inspired him to pen down his thoughts in a booklet.

Hi, I'm Spencer Wing. For years I have avoided MLM. I would always manage some outrageous replies when confronted with yet another MLM recruiter...”, “I'm busy” or “This kind of work is not for me” I once told a hopeful man that I don't need the money!

The booklet titled: **Deep Roots, Green Leaves**

(7 Quick Lessons on business, an extract version by *Spencer Wing*)

First Lesson: Be Enthusiastic

Be fully knowledgeable about the product and about the benefits in order to take on all the objections that others will hurl at you.

Second Lesson: Be swift in your actions

Do your follow up immediately, don't wait or procrastinate.

Third Lesson: Be smart to see the potential

There's so much to learn from this smart business model, one that's not just building for ourselves, but building it for those after us.

Fourth Lesson: Be teachable and change for the better

Great opportunity to learn and unlearn as well as teach and train others later. Be prepared to leave your comfort zone and venture forth... continue to acquire and share new skills to fast track your personal development.

Fifth Lesson: Be persevering and committed

In a war, all those who perish, no matter how capable, will not be in a position to come to power. The idea is to survive.

Sixth Lesson:

No man is an island. There are no bosses in this business, and no subordinates, and yet everyone is a partner. So leverage well on people; both up-line and down-line.

Seventh Lesson: Be patient , get organized and do it!

Nobody ever won a war by chance. Nobody ever became wealthy by chance. It is possible, but rare. Planning allows you to idealize your world, visualize the way you want to live and verbalize your desires. An Action Plan will certainly help you to succeed better...and Do it!