



Executive Feature: Adrian Leong

General Manager
PappaRich Group Singapore Pte Ltd

About PappaRich

Founded by Rich Tan, PappaRich is a popular Malaysian restaurant chain that serves authentic Malaysian cuisine. Using only quality ingredients sourced from all over Malaysia, PappaRich brings the taste of Malaysia's famous traditional delights to the world. Today, with over 100 outlets in Asia Pacific and beyond, PappaRich has now hit shores as far as New York and is poised to give Malaysians living aboard a taste of home, and the rest of us an authentic cuisine rich in heritage.

With a storied history in re-creating authentic Malaysian cuisine that's born from age old traditions and recipes, the PappaRich brand today is synonymous with bringing the Malaysian experience all over the world through the enjoyment of its carefully-crafted food and homely ambience. Currently, with 6 outlets in Singapore and bigger expansion plans in the pipeline, we have the pleasure to hear from Adrian Leong to share about his leadership experience as the General Manager of the popular F&B chain as part of PappaRich Group in Singapore.



Adrian Leong, General Manager

Being one of Malaysia's most successful franchises, PappaRich is a well-known F&B brand name across 11 countries. Now with 6 Singapore outlets, what do you think contributed most to PappaRich's success in Singapore?

Differentiating through product quality

"Much of PappaRich's success comes from the quality of its food, strong branding and providing an authentic Malaysian dining experience with a good ambience. The company takes product quality very seriously and goes to great lengths to source for the best ingredients all over Malaysia," Adrian shared.

New dishes go through intensive recipe and taste testing before they appear in the menu, explains Adrian. PappaRich's management team travels all over Malaysia to scout for hidden culinary gems and outstanding chefs to join them. For example, the juicy fried chicken thigh is the signature dish of a former Nasi Padang chef whom they had specifically hired for his speciality.

Another good example would be the Hainan Steamed Bread with Half Boiled Egg served with Homemade Kaya (coconut jam spread). It may seem like an ordinary dish served at common coffee shops, but diners can taste the difference from the first bite. The PappaRich's version is undoubtedly far more superior. In fact, when its founder, Rich Tan, first came across it in Malaysia, he loved it so much that he bought the entire Hainanese bread-making factory, just to ensure that PappaRich keeps the food quality consistent!

Besides a great product line, what other factors do you think are critical to a successful F&B business? Is it any different for Singapore when compared to other markets?

Paying attention to the details

PappaRich lifts the dining experience to the next level by taking a hands-on approach to source for the best ingredients all over Malaysia, putting great efforts into the restaurant décor and even commissioned a research & development team to create new signature dishes on top of setting up a central kitchen in Malaysia for training and quality control.

Every PappaRich restaurant shares similar design elements that evoke the historical décor of restaurants that existed during the colonial days of Malaysia. Distinctive features such as meranti wood finishings, pale green leather booths and exposed red brick walls can be found in all the outlets worldwide.

“For the Singapore market, we find that local diners are willing to pay for quality and a good dining experience. Hence, at PappaRich, we go the extra mile to ensure that we recreate a dining ambience that is close to home and culturally rooted, extruding the charms of old Malaysia. In this regard, we have commissioned artists to specially produce paintings that showcase the ordinary lives of parent and child, in this case, father and son, in a bid to create the perfect family dining experience.” says Adrian.



What do you find most challenging in your line of business?

Product positioning and competitors

It was a lot of hard work when PappaRich first started out, as the company had to start from scratch in Singapore. In addition, the restaurant also met with initial resistance from local diners in paying higher prices for traditional Malaysian food in a more premium setting. It was not easy persuading local diners to change their perspectives on paying for quality “coffee shop food”.

“In the beginning, we launched aggressive marketing campaigns in the first two years through various media platforms, especially food bloggers and mass media. We received good response through promotions and we find that word-of-mouth referrals work pretty well in the local market too.” says Adrian.

For PappaRich, Singapore is the most challenging market to establish: “The local manpower shortage is a constant challenge in meeting the foreign worker quota. The rental is a high cost factor in F&B operations and product-wise, competition is very stiff with new, innovative menus being introduced frequently. But PappaRich is confident that once these challenges are overcome locally, the company can make it anywhere as Singapore is one of the toughest F&B markets.” Adrian explained.



Can you share with us some key qualities or character traits that you think potential leaders should possess?

Believe in the brand

"Branding is very important, as well as staying true to the brand promise. As such, it is essential that we do our very best to keep the quality of our food consistent across all our outlets as much as possible," Adrian pointed out. In a nutshell, PappaRich's success can be attributed to quality food, great ambience and good marketing. "In my opinion, a leader must also believe in the brand – know what the brand stands for, how are we different and how we can compete. It makes a lot of difference if a leader internalises the brand values and assimilates it into his everyday work, reinforcing the same brand promise to our customers." says Adrian.

"Branding is very important, as well as staying true to the brand promise."

Hands-on, can-do attitude

"I find that leaders who are willing to walk the talk and do what's needed to be done, especially during crunch time, very commendable. For instance, previously, due to an acute manpower shortage in a particular restaurant, the leaders had to literally roll up their sleeves to help out in the kitchen. We persevered till everything was done and at the end of the day, everyone was exhausted but happy - morale was lifted when the leaders led by example." says Adrian. In this sense, leaders possessing a hands-on, can-do attitude, demonstrates a sense of flexibility and humility which are desirable leadership traits.

Given your vast experience, what advice would you give to entrepreneurs?

Unique selling points

Besides understanding the competition landscape well, creating and articulating your brand's unique selling points well is critical to business success. "Be extremely clear on what sets your brand apart. In the sea of competition where consumers are presented with many similar options, we have to do a good job to differentiate ourselves. Being a perfectionist when it comes to food is how the company differentiates itself from other similar dining concepts out there. For example, we never compromise on our food, be it the ingredients or the sauces that we use." points out Adrian.

For instance, the pepper that PappaRich uses is from Sarawak, an area famous for the product. "Every single store uses the same type of pepper as we don't compromise on these details. For some countries, where there are ingredient shortages or if the ingredients don't meet our quality standards, we will fly the necessary ingredients over to ensure that we have a consistent food quality. PappaRich pays attention to these tiny details." Adrian explains.

Staff Welfare is important

Over at PappaRich, it is clear that the company believes in building great relationships with its employees. Besides company events, there are also various informal gatherings over meals and barbeque parties. "Over here, we place great emphasis in building great relationships with the people we work with. Furthermore, I feel that employees are more productive in an environment where everybody is familiar with one another. Hence, it is important to take care of your employees. Focus on building great relationships and do not forget to have fun." Adrian shares his secret recipe to a productive workforce.

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