



Brothers (from left) Randy, Roger and Elson Tan decided to go into business together as they saw the potential in the interior design industry. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

**Image Creative Design's director Elson Tan believes in changing things up for the business to move ahead with the times and stay relevant**

MARY LIM

"WHEN fighting a tiger, rely on your brothers; when fighting a war, rely on your father and sons." — this Chinese saying about the importance of family and unity encapsulates the success of Image Creative Design.

The interior design firm's director Elson Tan, 55, recalls catching up with his brothers Randy, 49, and Roger, 57, over a Chinese New Year reunion dinner at their parents' home, when the idea of collaborating in a business venture came up.

"They were already in the industry, and the more we discussed its potential, the more we knew we wanted to go into business together. You can call it a leap of faith," he adds.

With a loan of \$10,000 from their parents, the siblings set up Image Creative Design in 1995.

Their roles were clearly defined — with Elson overseeing the sales and accounts departments, Randy managing operations and partnerships, and Roger leading the commercial and design team.

Today, 22 years on, they have grown the business, expanding their three-men team to include more than 100 employees — from designers to sales consultants and project managers — at an 8,000 sq ft showroom-cum-office in Ubi Crescent.

The company also has a notable portfolio of commercial and residential projects with clients such as Calvin Klein Jeans, Tod's, SembCorp Group of Companies, Shell Eastern Petroleum, Spa Botanica, and the Fei Siong Group of eateries.

#### Changing mindsets

Winning the Established Brand award at this year's Singapore Prestige Brand Award marks another milestone for Image Creative Design.

Being a first-time winner at SPBA is an honour; to be recognised for the company's efforts in building the brand will encourage clients to have greater confidence in its work, says

Mr Elson Tan.

By embracing this year's theme of digital transformation, the company has taken the step to rise to the challenge to do things differently.

Technology figures significantly in its work processes, with relevant software and gadgets to boost efficiency in myriad functions such as rendering realistic views, presenting photographs of previous projects, and managing progress and budgets.

He says that going digital was an important learning curve, one in which he had to lead by example.

"When we introduced these changes, there was resistance. But after going through training, our staff realised the software could help increase productivity and they became more receptive to it," he adds.

He believes that technology will continue to grow in importance in the interior design industry. In fact, firms in some countries have begun using software that allows customers and designers to work on the same page without having to meet physically.

Images of furniture can even be dragged and placed into the

drawing to help customers visualise the results better, he says.

#### Branding efforts

Image Creative Design has developed its presence in social media in recent years. It has a website with a blog featuring interviews with its staff and articles about the design process, and a Facebook page with 34,000 followers — and counting.

Now, the company is also able to define its target audience more effectively and spend its marketing dollar more efficiently.

As customers become more well-informed and thus, discerning, they demand to play a more active role in the design process.

"For example, they come to discussions with photos they have pulled off websites. As such, our designers must keep up with trends and skills," says Mr Tan.

"We need to evolve with the market to stay relevant to its needs. So we must be where our customers are, and be equipped with what they are familiar with," he adds.

Thus he believes that branding is crucial, going beyond merely differentiating the company from others.

"Our brand also reflects our values and commitment, and our promise to our clients," he says.

In fact, the first word of the company's name "Image" is the acronym for "Innovative, Meticulous, Authentic, Gutsy and Excellence", he adds.

Plans are in the pipeline to boost marketing strategies, particularly in the digital arena. Articles, videos and giveaways are being planned to create buzz on its social media platforms.

An external consultant has been engaged for a brand audit too.

Strengthening itself as a reliable brand will contribute greatly to Image Creative Design's vision of going global, he says.

There are plans to establish partnerships in Malaysia, Thailand and China to cater to clients who are based, or have invested in properties, there.

Such overseas initiatives will expose its staff to new ideas and help them gain knowledge, thus giving a boost to their professional development.

In the long run, all these developments will help the company to stand out from the competition, he says.