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SME INC

Hang up your ads - in closets

Two entrepreneurs dream up a novel and eco-friendly platform for marketers in the humble clothes hanger, reports JAMIE LEE

FOR advertisers hung up over new ways to push products, two young entrepreneurs may have found an answer in the humble clothes hanger.

Known as bloomerHang, the paper hangers created by the duo provide space for marketers to showcase their products.

'With the recession hanging over us, we think marketers are looking for novel and effective ways to reach consumers,' said Wong Joon Ian, who thought up the hangers with his business partner Thian Zhiwen last year.

The two former classmates pooled \$10,000 to design and produce the hangers, which are strong enough to take a man's jacket. The birth of bloomerHang was difficult, said Mr Wong. The pair went through 'countless redesigns' and 'stalked furniture stores, friends' wardrobes and laundry vans' before settling on the final design.

Dry-cleaners and laundromats

The duo will sell the hangers to dry-cleaners and laundromats, which in turn will distribute them to clients with clean clothes.

'We think of bloomerHang as a hybrid of traditional out-of-home advertising and direct mail, except better,' Mr Wong, 27, told BT. 'For a start, unlike direct mail, we are invited into your home through our targeted distribution network. And bloomerHang is a fully functional garment hanger, so you have a reason to be exposed to it and to keep it in your home. That's a point an out-of-home billboard cannot claim.'

Although bloomerHang is three to five times more expensive to produce than a wire or plastic hanger, advertisement sales subsidise the production cost.

Mr Wong and Mr Thian have begun to distribute 5,000 hangers through four laundry businesses.

Sixty per cent of the hangers will go to the Central zone, including parts of Tanglin, Orchard, the Central Business District, Bukit Merah and Holland, where the target crowd can be assumed to be relatively affluent.

BloomerHangs are also kind to the environment, as they are made of recycled corrugated cardboard and artpaper.

Mr Wong said: 'Our distributors tell us that eight out of 10 garments sent in for washing are men's business shirts. So we are looking at marketers who want to reach affluent, well-educated, professionals, mainly males, who are receptive to an eco-friendly concept. Our own doorstep surveys tell us most consumers are happy to use an environmentally friendly

alternative to current hangers.'

Advertising campaign

Mr Wong and Mr Thian are looking to expand distribution to hotels, gyms, country clubs and spas.

They have signed up a shoe retailer as their first advertiser. Earthsoul distributes Terra Plana shoes - footwear made of eco-friendly materials such as chrome-free leather, pure latex, recycled rubber and recycled foam.

The 10-week advertising campaign will run from the end of March. 5,000 bloomerHangs will be distributed with Earthsoul's advertising message, and each will come with a coupon entitling the user to 30 per cent or more off Terra Plana products.

'We are putting our money where our mouth is,' said Mr Wong, explaining that Earthsoul will pay 60 per cent upfront and the remaining 40 per cent only if the campaign generates a certain number of sales.

'We believe our targeted, novel and eco-friendly platform will help us achieve that target,' he said.

The duo expect to break even after signing on more than two advertisers, which they hope will happen by the end of this quarter.

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