



Ya Kun Kaya Toast  
Coffeestall since 1944



COVER STORY

## The Man behind the Signature Kaya Toast

An entrepreneur's journey is full of obstacles and complications. Rarely would one describe one's entrepreneurial journey as simply blessed.

Yet, this is exactly what Executive Chairman of Ya Kun International, Mr Adrin Loi, described his entrepreneurial journey to be.

As the youngest member in his family, Mr Loi, spent most of his younger days helping out in his late father, Mr Loi Ah Koon's humble coffee stall, known as Ya Kun Coffee Stall then. Mr Loi Ah Koon or more popularly identified as Ya Kun, had set up a store serving customers

with his famous kaya toast and coffee for over 40 years.

### Passing the torch

However, when Ya Kun fell ill, Mr Loi thought it would be a waste if the family business of over four decades simply vanish. There was a passionate drive in him to keep the business alive. With that in mind, he and his elder brother Algie, plucked up the courage and asked their father if they could take over the reins of the business.

His father gave a nod of approval and since then, there was no turning back.

In 1998, Mr Loi, together with his brother, relocated the outlet in Telok Ayer and officially opened their first outlet in Far East Square, renaming the store Ya Kun Kaya Toast. When the outlet shifted, the customers followed suite and within two weeks, the new stall broke even. It was then Mr Loi realised that his father's efforts to build up a name for himself has paid off, and Ya Kun was not just a regular coffee stall but one with infinite potential.

With no business education background, Mr Loi ran the business from the experience he garnered over the years while helping his late father.

Yet deep down, Mr Loi had the desire to do more.

**"I wanted to make Ya Kun's food affordable and accessible to everyone, and to make the Ya Kun brand a household name, one that resonates among Singaporeans," said the 59 year old.**

### A toast to branding

Having witness the positive results of the Ya Kun brand name his father had developed, Mr Loi firmly believed in the significance of branding. As such, he started his own branding exercise with the help of his wife, Mrs Jennifer Loi.

**"In the initial years, we noted that the walls of our outlets were empty and so, my wife decided to put her talent to creative use by writing about Ya Kun's history and coming up with posters to brighten the walls. Being a member of the family, she wrote from this perspective and made the story of Ya Kun more authentic, real and alive," Mr Loi expressed.**

When the Ya Kun brand won the Singapore Prestige Brand Award both in 2006 and 2008, they knew their efforts had paid off.

**"We had started off right with the intention of doing a wholesome and friendly business providing local food and drinks. Never would I have imagined that over the years, Ya Kun could have grown so manifold into what it is today," Mr Loi said gratefully.**

Today, Mr Loi deploys his 28 year old son, Jeshier, to oversee some of the branding and marketing initiatives.

However, with a multitude of food and beverage outlets opening in Singapore recently, Mr Loi recognises that the key challenge now is to stay true to Ya Kun's brand, vision and mission, expressing that it is much more difficult running a business in this industry now compared to a decade ago.

Competition is high and despite being a cautious and conservative family-owned business, constant innovation is necessary to cater to the ever-changing needs of Ya Kun's customers. Instead of selling only the traditional kaya toast, new innovations are constantly being introduced such as the Kaya Butter Steamed Bread and Tom Yam Seafood Sandwich.

**"The future is going to be tough in this trade and modernisation is inevitable. If we do not shape up, we will be shipped out. We have to constantly ensure that our products remain relevant to our customers' tastes and preferences," Mr Loi said.**

### Kinship, Friendship, Partnership

This year, Ya Kun celebrates its 70th Anniversary, yet the entrepreneurial spirit within Mr Loi has not diminished a single bit.



When asked why he felt his entrepreneurial journey has been a blessed one, Mr Loi humbly believed that it is because of his big heart for people that eventually leads to kinship, friendship and partnership. ■

**"I have staffs who work for many years in the company and have gone through thick and thin with me. I have people who are close to me like my family and relatives, and people whom I mix with like my friends. I make sure that I treat them with the utmost respect and dignity and now, these are the people who have never stopped giving me support," said Mr Loi.**

**"My life as an entrepreneur has truly been a blessed one," he added.**

