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Practising empathy

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Practising *Empathy*



Kate Low of Perk by Kate talks about how prioritising customer relationships has kept her at the forefront of Singapore's lingerie scene.



Back when the only places to shop for lingerie in Singapore were Triumph, La Senza, and typical department stores, Kate Low decided to buck the trend by starting the store she never had: Perk by Kate. Today, the online lingerie store specialises in padded bralettes — a model combining modesty and comfort — but Kate confesses she had no idea if her signature style would ever take off. “I wasn’t quite sure if the product would work, but I didn’t want to design something super mainstream either. When it first launched, it was a bit alien to customers so I started sending out free pieces for customers to try. That was the turning point: after that week of sending out the free pieces, our customers all came back and we sold out our first batch.”

With a background in digital marketing for a leading luxury retail group, Kate is bold, ambitious, and strategic. But she is also humble and hardworking, recognising that the strength of every business lies in its customers. In Perk’s formative years, Kate — then still working full-time — would travel to potential customers’ homes for fitting sessions after work or over weekends. While the brand has since grown to occupy a 1,900 sq. ft. studio, Kate’s vision for Perk remains the same: “We just want our customers to feel good — that’s how our name came about. Surprising customers and perking up someone’s day is the guiding principle of what we do. And when you want to make someone’s day, it means you have to give back, be empathetic, and solution-focused.”



Kate, what's your story?

Perk by Kate began as a typical story of someone sick of corporate culture and wanting to do something more meaningful. But on hindsight, it worked out really well! If I didn't bring in those brands, I wouldn't have discovered bralettes and developed my signature style now: the padded bralette.

I chose lingerie because I love it — I've always bought more lingerie than clothes.

Six years ago, there was only Triumph and La Senza; Victoria Secret wasn't even in town, and everything else in department stores was just really expensive. I began by bringing in other brands as a way for me to test the market. It was a stroke of luck that Eberjey and Honeydew intimates — popular bralette brands from overseas — were willing to supply small quantities.

Can you share more about how you developed this signature?

Many of my customers told me they liked the bralettes I offered, but didn't find it practical to wear daily because they didn't offer enough coverage. That wasn't something I wanted to hear! I also noticed I was only wearing unlined bralettes when I had baggy clothes on, and knew it was the right time to develop this new product.

How have you designed your customer journey so customers are comfortable purchasing something so intimate online?

We know online shopping for intimates can be a hassle and our customers have taken a



leap of faith when they shop with us, so the way we talk to customers is always as a friend and not a business. In all of our communication, we stay away from corporate wording — for example, our refund and exchange policy begins with “if for some reason you don't love your new lingerie, don't fret, for there's always a way.” We always try to write with empathy.

We also handle customer service enquiries, returns, and exchanges every day. If customers return something because of fit issues, then we need to address these issues immediately because they will affect the business. If it's a quality issue, we also have to quickly make changes. If it's a style issue or if it the design doesn't fit, then we have to find out why so we can take those pointers and implement them in our next collection. Because going online cuts down on human interaction, we amp up the human connection element and try replicate as much of the offline retail experience as possible. Unlike clothing, subtle nuances can really affect the fit, so we ask open-ended questions for customers to more easily share their concerns.

We also introduced an alteration service to prolong the life cycle of our bralettes. Some customers buy their lingerie when they are pregnant or nursing, and the pieces become too loose for wear post-nursing. Other customers have simply worn out their pieces and aren't ready to let them go just yet, so we make alterations to restore them to their best fit. We also alter new pieces to get them to their optimal fit.

You do a lot for your customers.

I think it's important because they have been supporting me for so long and it's only right to give back. In my previous role at Club21, I learned the value of a strong customer relationship management programme and try to implement that at Perk. During Chinese New Year and Christmas for example, I always include a little something extra for my customers, especially my long-time clients.

We try to work with partners to do giveaways and events for our customers. For example, this year we did a launch event where we



invited customers to come down free-of-charge, sit in on model presentations, experience massages, and sent them off with a goodie bag. For these types of events, we take the buying pressure off because we don't sell onsite. It's a chance for us to just do something nice for the customers.

We also have an ongoing discount programme. If customers spend \$300 with us, they will receive a promo code they can use for the rest of their lives. If they spend \$1000, the discount is bumped up to 15% and they can also send a unique referral code to their friends. This code allows them to feel happier about promoting Perk.



Speaking of which, your brand is Perk by Kate. How do you intend to grow it while still retaining that signature Kate touch?

I'm actually planning to open my own retail space! The idea came about because I'm at the studio every Saturday since I get so many customers visiting every week. So I think having a retail space is a natural progression. I want my retail space to be set up like a lounge, like you're stepping into someone's home. I will serve you coffee or tea, and the dressing room will also be equipped with a buzzer so customers can easily get the help they need.

If I had wanted to focus only on numbers, I wouldn't have chosen something so intimate, but I think the era has gone for nasty terms and conditions and inflexible exchanges. I'm surprised that so many brands in Singapore are still doing that, especially since competition is so tough. I believe the service experience you provide is what sets you apart from your competitors, and I think incorporating a more intimate approach to service is something a lot of brands can do. 🍷

"...we amp up the human connection element and try to imitate as much of the offline retail experience..."