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Silver Generation, Golden Age: Vanessa Keng

Meet **Vanessa Keng**, 30, co-founder of The Golden Concepts,¹ an e-tailer of innovative eldercare products designed to keep seniors independent and safe. Offering a wide catalogue of items sourced from international suppliers, you will find everything from wheelchairs and walking canes, to car accessories and doorknob grips. **NURIN NAZIFA BINTE MOHD YUSOFF** catches up with Vanessa to learn more about “heart ware”, and her mission to leverage technology for social good.

What were you doing before you started The Golden Concepts?

I started the company in 2011 with my co-founder Chang Xi right after we graduated from the National University of Singapore. The idea of us starting an online store selling home assistive devices and mobility aids came about when we observed, during an exchange programme in Denmark, how Danish seniors were unencumbered by their mobility challenges and lived full and active lives. This inspired us to introduce the culture of active ageing and independent living to the elderly population in Singapore.

We saw how Danish seniors were unencumbered by their mobility challenges and lived full and active lives, and were inspired to introduce the culture of active ageing and independent living to the elderly population in Singapore.

Tell us more about The Golden Concepts and what sets it apart from other businesses specialising in products for the elderly.

Observing the market, we noticed that the industry has primarily focused on the medical and rehabilitative aspects of eldercare. We therefore saw an opportunity to introduce another category of products that would encourage “ageing well”—assistive devices that would enable seniors to go about their day with more convenience and ease.



Vanessa (right) and her co-founder, Chang Xi

As such, we don't just sell your typical eldercare products, but those that have been consciously designed to promote independence and mobility. For instance, we have foldable and adjustable walking canes,² seat assist cushions,³ car accessories that help users stand or sit safely when getting in and out of their vehicles,⁴ and even hiking and trekking poles⁵ for the more adventurous seniors.

Out of all the items you carry, which is your personal favourite?

I'm particularly fond of the EZ Fold-N-Go Walker.⁶ This device does not require any lifting with every step, and its foldable design makes it portable and user-friendly. I'm hopeful that it will soon replace the traditional, clunkier walkers that we're so familiar with.

What sort of challenges did you and Chang Xi face in The Golden Concepts' early days?

All the typical challenges any start-up owner would face,



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mostly to do with learning how to do many things from scratch. These included figuring out how to build a website, manage inventory, go about online marketing and finding a suitable office space. We had to pick up all of these new skills in addition to managing a tight budget.

A “tight budget” can be relative. Just how tight was yours? Well, Chang Xi and I invested S\$5,000 each to start this business, so we had a combined capital of \$10,000. These were earnings from part-time job stints during our undergrad years.

There are many “tech-for-good” businesses out there hoping to harness technology for positive social outcomes. What are your thoughts on this whole idea of “social tech” and “heart ware”?

The Golden Concepts’ customer base comprises primarily elderly folk and caregivers, and they are not your typical tech-savvy users or necessarily people who embrace tech advancements with open arms. But I do think that where “social tech” is concerned, more emphasis should be on the “heart ware” rather than the hardware.

At the end of the day, what matters is the user experience, not so much the technology that went into the product. Therefore, before I bring in any new technologies or innovative products, I always consider the points of view of both end-users (seniors) as well as their caregivers. Will these new ideas and innovations help them achieve lives of dignity and independence? If so, then it rightfully puts the “social” in “social tech”.

When was the first time you realised you’d made a positive social impact with your business?

That was back in 2012. I was at the market having my breakfast when I spotted a lady using our walker. She was walking around independently, stopping to buy items from a shop, taking her

time and hanging her purchases on the walker. I observed her for almost two hours before I mustered the courage to ask her for a photo. I just couldn’t pass up the opportunity to capture the first moment when I realised my work had made a difference in someone else’s life!

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You have many positive customer reviews on your website, by the way. Are you proud of what you’ve accomplished?

Thank you. I feel glad every time customers share how our products changed their lives, or that of their loved ones, and whenever I see people on the streets using our items.

Would you say that your social enterprise has changed you as a person, and if so, in what way?

Yes. It has opened my eyes to the many experiences that both caregivers and seniors undergo, and made me re-examine concepts of personal dignity and the kind of quality of life we’d all like to have now, as well as in the future.

Who or what inspires you to do what you do?

My parents. They are the reason I am so determined to make “ageing well” not just a possibility, but also a norm in Singapore.



What’s your personal motto?

Done is better than perfect.

Finally, what do you think the world could use more of?

Driven and passionate people who want to create a positive impact on society and change the world for the better.



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Notes

- 1 The Golden Concepts e-store, at <https://www.thegoldenconcepts.com/>
- 2 Complete range of foldable and adjustable walking canes, at <https://www.thegoldenconcepts.com/collections/walking-canes/Foldable-&-Adjustable>
- 3 The Seat Assist Cushion is a portable and lightweight lifting cushion that transforms any chair into an automatic lifting chair, aiding users in getting up from a sitting position. See <https://www.thegoldenconcepts.com/collections/daily-living/products/seat-assist-cushion>
- 4 The Metro Car Handle Plus helps you stand and sit safely when getting in and out of a car. It also comes with a handy integrated torchlight. See <https://www.thegoldenconcepts.com/collections/mobility/products/metro-car-handle-plus>
- 5 Complete range of hiking and trekking poles, at <https://www.thegoldenconcepts.com/collections/daily-living/hiking-trekking-poles>
- 6 Designed in the USA, the EZ Fold-N-Go Walker gives a spin to the traditional walking frame by being more portable and user-friendly. Swivel or non-swivel wheel options are available. See <https://www.thegoldenconcepts.com/products/ez-foldngo-walker>