



O&L CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Your Business Expansion Partner

Feature article extracted from International Enterprise (IE) Singapore's website

Helping EtonHouse make an informed decision

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Planning to expand overseas is a daunting task. Deciphering new laws and regulations, conducting market feasibility studies, finding a suitable location, and even deciding on which country to expand into is a very tedious and complex process. There are many instances where promising businesses and entrepreneurs just give up at the first hurdle.

To guide businesses along, IE Singapore set up its very own Advisory Centre on 14 May 2008. Like a convenience store, the one-year-old Advisory Centre is a one-stop solution for Singapore-based companies looking to take their business overseas.

Businesses can expect to receive personalized, face-to-face advisory support by IE Singapore and private sector partner consultants on issues pertaining to internationalization and various IE assistance programmes.

In addition, through its collection of print and online resources, companies can also get access to business intelligence on overseas markets, industries, business contacts, trade statistics, and more.

The Advisory Centre supports seminars, events, and has even played host to several foreign delegations.

Leveraging on IE Singapore's Expertise

One company that has engaged the services of the Centre, is EtonHouse. EtonHouse runs pre-schools, international schools, and teacher education courses in Singapore and the region. Founded in 1995, EtonHouse was always keen to expand into China. It established its first overseas branch on its own in Suzhou, China in 2003.

As EtonHouse began to venture further into the China market, it leveraged on IE Singapore's in-depth market knowledge of the country as well as tapped on some of IE's financing schemes and grants to aid expansion. Being the lead agency under the Ministry of Trade and Industry spearheading Singapore's external economic wing, one of IE Singapore's main objective is to help local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) expand overseas.

Mrs Ng Gim Choo, Founder and Group Managing Director for EtonHouse International Holdings, said, "IE Singapore has specifically supported us in reaching out to some countries with regards to business exposure, establishing relationships and creating opportunities for us to meet with potential partners.

"IE Singapore has also significantly helped us conduct market feasibility studies through business consultants, to ascertain the potential of certain markets before setting up schools."

In November 2008, EtonHouse applied and obtained a grant under IE Singapore's Internationalisation Capability Development Programme (iCDP). The iCDP supports the costs of engaging a 3rd party consultant to develop strategies for internationalisation, such as market feasibility study, branding, franchising, amongst others.

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Referred to O&L Consultancy Services

Through a referral by their account manager in IE Singapore, EtonHouse engaged O&L Consultancy Services Pte Ltd (O&L) - a regular partner of IE Singapore's Advisory Centre, to conduct a market feasibility study on Changzhou, one of the cities it had planned to expand into.

O&L is headquartered in Singapore, and offers services such as customised market research, distribution channel analysis, sourcing for overseas partners, amongst others.

Using several independent groups of surveyors on the ground, O&L analysed Changzhou's education sector and compiled reports about the size of the market, consumer behaviour, competition and the ease of setting up a business there.

It also conducted several interviews with high ranking government officials, expatriate business owners and public service bodies to gain a clearer picture of the market. Ms Ong Lay Bin, O&L's Director, said, "The second and third tier cities of China are the next frontiers of growth; however a meticulous understanding of every city and how to profit from opportunities is where the challenge is."

Through the feasibility study, EtonHouse realised that their own initial assessment had been proven otherwise, and that Changzhou was not a suitable market for their business.

A 'win-win' experience

Commenting on the work done by O&L, Mrs Ng said, "We've had a very good experience working with them and have benefited much from the study conducted by them."

She was also delighted by the level of service provided by IE Singapore and the professionalism shown by its staff. She said, "The IE Singapore officers went beyond the call of duty and our expectations to assist us to understand the market demand, identify suitable partners, navigate through government relations and get in touch with people who could assist and support us."

"It is more than a 'win-win' situation for us. IE Singapore does not charge us for all the networking, counsel and services we receive from them. EtonHouse would not be able to venture out to so many places overseas without the invaluable assistance from IE Singapore."

On this, Ms Chung Lai Thoe, Deputy Director for Enterprise Services Group at IE Singapore, said, "The set-up of the Advisory Centre was our response to customer feedback for greater face-to-face interaction and increased guided assistance. We are glad to know that EtonHouse benefitted not just from the advisory support, but also other forms of assistance provided by IE Singapore in Singapore and China. We look forward to continue to provide a comprehensive range of services to businesses eager to expand into overseas markets."

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