

GNV GROUP – THE STORY BEHIND A DREAM OF WEDDING

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(CORPORATE MANAGEMENT)**

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UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN**

JANUARY 2023

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By

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A case study submitted to
Faculty of Business and Finance,
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Business Administration
(Corporate Management)
January 2023

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ABSTRACT

GNV Group Sdn Bhd (name as GNV Group) was founded by Edward, his wife and wife's sister in year 2011 at Johor Bahru, Malaysia. First establishment was R.O Memories where to start their 'garden wedding' concepts. By the initial intention, they wish to bring a new choice of wedding celebration to the market and create a good memories and enjoyable wedding moment for newlywed. During the transformation journey, they have met different challenges, but they never given up. With their persistence, they have successfully become one of the key players for in this industry. Today, under GNV Group have provided three wedding location (Winery Banquet, The Aurora, The Rome Garden). Also, they have built up their own food and beverage team and central kitchen called TastyBirds F&B. In fact, the successful always came from the organisation's belief which they hold since established [You say, "I do", We do the Rest].

Keywords: GNV Group, garden wedding, transformation, marriage

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

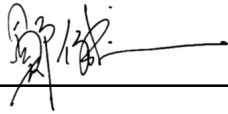
I would like to say thanks to my dear supervisor, Dr. Tee Chee Wee, for his valuable academic guidance and support throughout the whole case study. I have great gratitude and respect for the knowledge and experience that he shared and contributed to the completion of this case study.

Thank you.

APPROVAL SHEET

This case study entitled ‘GNV Group – The Story Behind a Dream of Wedding’ was prepared by OOI KEE SHEN and submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration (Corporate Management) at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

Approved by:



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Date: 8/3/2023

SUBMISSION OF CASE STUDY

It is hereby certified that OOI KEE SHEN (ID No: 22ABM02600) has completed this case study entitled 'GNV Group – The Story Behind a Dream of Wedding' under the supervision of Dr. TEE CHEE WEE from the Department of Business and Public Administration.

I understand that the University will upload softcopy of my thesis in pdf format into UTAR Institutional Repository, which may be made accessible to UTAR community and public.

Yours truly,



(Ooi Kee Shen)

DECLARATION

I OOI KEE SHEN hereby declare that the thesis/dissertation is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UTAR or other institutions.



(OOI KEE SHEN)

Date: 8/3/2023

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Introduction

Weddings are an important part of everyone's life, they are the starting point towards happiness and the beginning of another chapter in one's life. Everyone has a dream for their own wedding, within this modern era, there have been a lot of wedding theme ideas and style such as romantic, modern, traditional, garden wedding, holiday themed wedding and others wedding style (Donovan, 2018). Edward, the founder of GNV Group, is committed to making Johor Bahru, the southern capital of Malaysia, a preferred destination for weddings and internationalizing it, to help more couples achieve their dream weddings.

In 2011, Edward decided to leave his job from the finance industry and decided to enjoy the life while preparing his own wedding. During the preparing and researching process, he found that young people were longing for Western-style weddings nowadays especially for registration of marriage (R.O.M) and wedding dinner. At that moment, he had an idea: what if he could overturn the existing wedding tradition and hold an Eastern style but Western wedding? Thus, he came up with the idea of a garden wedding. From that time, the garden concept wedding and idea had been always lingering in his mind, and he started to discuss and pursued his family members about this idea. After got full support from his family members, he started to plan and move. After several months' workout in planning, finding a location, scratched a layout, and so on, Edward and his wife and wife's sister registered a company and started the business. The first company they are established was called R.O Memories which located at Tebrau City, Johor Bahru.

Research Methods

Both primary and secondary data were collected for the progress for this case study. Meanwhile, primary data have been obtained through the interview with GNV Group's founder, Mr Edward Lai Chee Yap and the secondary data have been collected from the websites, news

article, and other online sources. There is 3 hours of the interview been conducted at the GNV Group office. Edward has shared the features and transformation process done by GNV Group. The whole interview session has been recorded to make sure no information will be left out.

Initial Challenge

Garden wedding is a common wedding motif that may be seen in bridal publications, wedding planner websites, bridal shows and movies. This popularity might be attributed to the special ambience of a wedding hosted in gorgeous, architectural, and occasionally structural gardens (Krishnan, 2008). Meanwhile, according to Kiambi (2012) that garden wedding can be categorized into various style like east style and west style. But still the general concept of garden wedding can be developing the landscape of the garden with poetic charm via architecture, stones, plants, hangings on pillars in the east garden with a specific emphasis on the southern style, grass and couplet, and many more.

By 2011, the garden wedding, it still as a very new idea and unfamiliar concept in Malaysia. It is subversion concept from tradition concept or culture for the market in this industry. Its need time for market to absorb and accept it. According to Edward, during the early stage of establishment, they had met a lot of challenges, for example, youngster (newlyweds) having weddings that were heavily influenced by their parent's favourites and fettered by tradition thought. As such, when organize the wedding dinner among Malaysia's Chinese society, restaurants, banquet halls and school's hall are still the priority choices and like to invite as more as they can organize, normally was around 50-80 tables. Edward mentioned that during that period, most of the young couple, the wedding dinner invitation still depends on their parent's decision, one of the main reasons was the financial factor.

Besides, due to the garden wedding concept still not familiar and popularize during that time, it became very difficult for them to introduce and became as a choice in the market.

Furthermore, the traditional form for register of marriage (R.O.M) was mainly through associations, as it was economical and convenient. Additionally, another big challenge during that time what Edward recalled was they worried about some unpredictable and uncontrollable situation such as changes in weather and the environment may not be favourable by the inviting guests and most of the families tend to be given up on this garden wedding's option.

Fortunately, Edward said: "We have survived in first year, we had made around 15 cases during that year and let everything can be going on". He continued said that "as an entrepreneur and starting a new category of business which considered as blue ocean in Malaysia, that is very challenging. Thus, the only way we need to do was [going through], you will never know what will be faced until you were there" The experiences from first year allowed them (three original founders) to growth rapidly and become more confident, in continuing to move forward. Until today, they still adhere to their original beliefs: [You say "I do", We do the Rest].

After several years of fighting and struggling, in 2016, the market suddenly appearance few market players in garden-style wedding. It made garden-style weddings / registrations / ceremonies competitive and becoming one of the mainstream choice of newlyweds. Edward felt it was good news because when more competitors promote together, it is better than going alone. When there are more competitors within the same market, it can provide the opportunities for innovation in the changes of the external environment. According to Hou and Dong (2022) that increased of market competition can improve the business efficiency, because business will always try to reduce cost and enhance their operations to remain their market position. Despite that greater competition can also help to improve the accountability and transparency, which it can easily help to attract more customers.

Today, it has been proven for their persistence. They still firmly believe that garden wedding concept was one of the key competitiveness in the present and future.

Turning Mistakes into Opportunities

A good year doesn't mean a smooth year, in 2015 they faced a critical incident - the contract issue with the landholder. According to Edward, due to lack of experience and don't have in-depth understanding about the contract of leasing and all those terms in the contract which could create a possible risk for them. In fact, the owner raised up their rental fees frequently in short period. At first, due to financial stability and business growth, Edward and his team didn't feel that was an issue or burden. They still could cope and handle it. However, when it became too frequent until they feel uncomfortable which the rental fees had increased by 800% if compared to past two years. Thus, after a detailed assessment and discussion, the management unanimously decided to look for another suitable location for their contingency plan. Also, the worst plan was sacrificed everything included the building and the garden which they built brick by brick from nothing, and everything will do it all over again. This plan was kept in secret and put into the action quietly. As such like Albert Einstein have been famously stated, "In the middle of difficulty or crisis there will always underlying opportunity".

Begin Journey of Transformation

After few months of getting ideas through brainstorming, Edward and his team decided to have a theme for their next chapter. Thus, they started to workout with few ideas and concepts through collecting data, information and fieldwork, finally they decided on the theme of a red wine house which based on Australia's local cultural.

In order to make the total environment and the feel of the "Winery Theme" more realistic, the management team had done a lot of research and data collection. Thus, even the team flew to

Australia to conduct on-site inspections and direct experience it. Also, we had imported the wine barrel from Australia itself. The motivation and confidence level were increase when everything came as naturally and smoothly. During the preparing and build up this concept, they had been faced a lot of obstacles and challenges such as location, resources, construction, logistics, decoration, suppliers and et al, but with the unity team, all had overcome accordingly. Importantly, with past experiences in contract matters, the management team had highly cautious and aware in every single detail with fully advice from professional bodies like legal firms. The new place was located in Setia Tropika, Johor Bahru, and named as Geneva Winery Banquet. This new wedding venue was opened in 2015.



Source: GNV Group

Team for New Chapter

Before Geneva Winery Banquet was ready, another challenge was waiting for Edward – manpower arrangement. How to operate both venues simultaneously? Finally, they decided the R.O Memories (original venue) focuses on hosting small gatherings event, registration

ceremonies or simple weddings which targeted for those low budget newlyweds. Meanwhile, the new venue (Geneva Winery Banquet) will mainly focuses accommodate on weddings and events which targeted those newlyweds have moderate and high budget.

In further, due to the business growing, the management decided to enlarge the organisation, especially in increasing the numbers of full-time employees and wedding planners. According to Edward, organisation began emphasis on talent cultivation and development, they plan to transform the old model which mainly dependent on part-time workers for past few years to auto-pilot business structure where everyone can responsibility individually and make decision accordingly. Besides, they also plan to recruit more youngest who have a dream in their career to join them.

Geneva Winery Banquet, a new venue. Organisation prefer on-the job training (OJT) method to train their employees, they believed that OJT could easily help employees acquire new skills and knowledge as well as full process by providing them with hands-on experience and guidance from their supervisor. This was in line with Basariya and Sree, (2019) that OJT able to provide their employees to learn and adapt quickly different situations and job requirements. During the OJT, all the employees will work with an experienced supervisor who will provides instruction, feedback, guidance and support. Thus, employees may gradually take part and responsible tasks as they could become more proficient in their job. According to Edward, OJT method required more time and resources than other types of training, but employees can learn all the details and contexts through the actual work environment which can make overall process become relevant and effective. For example, all event / wedding planners learn through actual practice like taking on orders, accompany customers visit the venue, arranging all the importance date, brief the menu and provide some necessary advice to customer. All of them are the basic standards and details that could help the organisation continuing leading in the

market. Edward and his team believed that taking professionalism and detail could deliver perfect memories to their customers. From begin to end, they believed that how much effort you are putting in, and it will return for you in the same value.

According to Edward, to find the suitable person join in the team, was not an easy job, but when it formed up and became stronger and unity, the whole organisation will always be motivated. Due to this reason, Edward and his co-founders decided to gradually handover their responsibilities to the team and let them to be growth. In further, they planned to be expanding and transforming the GNV Group to another milestone. Like in Sun Zi Art of War, Sun Zi said, those who are not able to win must defend, those who are able to win must attack. Edward felt is a right timing for them to look for more opportunities and expand it. Thus, they started look and plan for the possibilities for their business.

Central Kitchen

To establishing a business ecosystem is a transformation plan for GNV group for next few years. The first piece of puzzle was to realize the thought for many years ago which they would like to build up their own central kitchen to support their food and beverage matters. Coincidentally, during that time, the developer (Ecoworld) had offered a good package for leasing and assistance for the preference location. According to Edward, they directly addicted and excited to make the decision. In year 2017, they move in to their new headquarters (Eco Business Park 1), mainly as a workspace execution team to meet up and receive the clients. Additionally, after organisation make a depth analysis for internally as well as externally which included market responses, market condition, company's capital flow, manpower and so on. Thus, they decided to open their central kitchen where to provide a food supply for all of their banquet halls under the name of TastyBirds F&B.



Source: GNV Group

At the same time, they invited a head of chef from Singapore who can strictly control and oversee all the foods specifications and quality in order to ensure all dishes will meet the customer requirements and guests' tastes. During the recruitment of the chef, Edward had highly preferring selective recruitment option where it will be beneficial when it comes right candidate who able to fulfil his different types of job requirements. Despite the chef necessary skills, experience and knowledge, one of the most important elements what Edward look for was whether the chef able to handle different culture and environments, it was because the wedding ceremony was not only just targeted on Chinese, which targeted for multi-racial of people with different background and culture. Thus, the right person in this position was very important. As Anwar & Abdullah (2021) indicated that to select a right person fit into right position was an essential step for organisation to go for right direction.

As the establishment of the central kitchen, most of the food preparation and supply for the events and ceremonies will be depended on it. However, Edward and his team still remain a good collaboration relationship with their previous catering servicing group (outsourcing party) after depth consideration. The core factor was to appreciate their support for past few

years, without them the company can't develop and continue growth until today. Besides, through the close relationship, they believed that organisation could reduce the risk by leveraging shared expertise and resource where can reciprocal from each other existing strength factors. Second, gaining access to new possibilities like diversify the business in the future. Next, sharing the financial risks during the high peak period which too rely on oneself. Fourth, increasing resilience to external disruptions while changes in regulations or market trends, accountable between both companies. Lastly, is to create mutual benefits in improving foods quality through the comparison and increase the effectiveness in operation process.

Other than that, with this establishment of central kitchen, can be easier to customize the dishes which can achieve customer's requirement and expectations if compared to previous where need to depend on third party's chef schedule. Thus, it was a good move for the company to become professionalism in this industry.

Small Details, Big Impact

From establishment until today, the core value for GNV Group never been change which is attention to detail. According to Edward, attention detail is crucial in this industry, you can't make any mistake in every single matter, because it could cause you in big trouble or risk if you miss it or make a mistake. Every piece undergoes a series of standardised procedures, from scheduling to location, dishes, design, decor, coordination, guests, performances, and more. Even retailers and suppliers are carefully selected to ensure that food and goods meet their company's standards. For example, a wedding dinner on Saturday, the central kitchen will hold a meeting on beginning of the week (Monday) with all relevant teams to go through each dish's details, ensuring that every ingredient's supply is sufficient, stable, and fresh. If any ingredient is in short supply, the person in charge will immediately contact the couple / newlywed to ask for whether the changes can be made? At the same time, invite

them or their family to try the new dishes. The event planners should ensure every aspect is prepared and arranged meticulously. Typically, they should have Plan B to solve if any unexpected matters happened.

Another value which organization was attach great importance to is problem solving skills. Edward recalled a very memorable incident, one of the event days, when everything was ready and approaching to event time, suddenly, the entire area was in water outage, the banquet hall out of water supply without any notification from authorities. As information, water is crucial for the event flows. Just a few minutes, the solutions were decided by the team, and everyone started to act. Those who have car and transportation, went around the nearest area to buy over all the bottled water especially from grocery shops and petrol stations as backup water for the event and kitchen used. Fortunately, it didn't create a big issue for preparing all the dishes and it very successfully organized in the end. Additionally, during the event, everyone was busy with their responsibility and tasks given, Edward recalled back that he was the only one without a specific task, and he had voluntary to distributed water and helped in cleaning the washrooms for entire event. Thus, problem solving, teamwork, cohesion and transcend hierarchy was essential in the organization.

Customer always in First Priority

Another core value for GNV Group was "Customer First". Edward highlighted that without customers support and continue promoted, they are nothing, they can't achieve anything. Therefore, since its established, they have been advocating the customers' priority. No matter how the problems or situations, they always try to find alternatives from the customer's perspective because GNV Group is a business mainly rely on service quality. Edward and his team believed that customers' feedbacks and the power of the word of mouth, it would bring some impact for overall organization direction and brand value, either good or

worst. If they can satisfy most of the customers and guests who are involved in the events, then through value of feedback, it could enhance organisation's reputation and at the same time motivate all their team members. Thus, they will not be unchangeable when facing unfriendly customer demands.

Edward remembered once, during the final settlement, the customer could not pay the balance due to insufficient funds and made some picky criticism to offset the payment. As usual practice, person in charge did not insist or force the customers to settle the bill immediately. After negotiation, the person in charge suggested to customer that they can pay the balance in instalments basis after discounting, and they agreed. In the end, they settled the balance in early and even recommended some of their friends to the company. Therefore, prioritize the customer can as a competitive advantage for the organisation and positive customer experience that sets apart from the competitors.

The Aurora

After the success of the first Australian wine cellar wedding venue (Geneva Winery Banquet) in Malaysia, they are thinking about how to replicate and create more wedding-themed venues. Why do they have this idea? It is because they had noticed that many couples longing for their wedding, perhaps it influenced by the marriages of actors or actresses. Hence, they aimed to create and provide the more choices for romantic wedding venues in southern of Malaysia. Thus, they started to collect the feedbacks and opinions from ground. During their analysis, most respondents expressed a desire to have a church-style wedding, which is synonymous with romance and fantasy. As a result, they decided to emulate the Balinese-style triangle church built in the Horizon Hills residential area of Johor Bahru. It opened in 2017, named as The Aurora.

The Aurora wedding chapel, full of modern beauty, has a unique design concept with a triangular roof where represent beautiful and romantic. The chapel was built with different materials on each side: the left side is broader and thicker, represents as a man, with strength, responsible and protected, mainly made with bricks and iron, while the right side is slenderer, represents a woman, designed with transparent glass as well as green plant elements, symbolizing the virginal, honesty and chaste. Imaginably, newlyweds' hand in hand step into the chapel and making a lifetime engagement with each other. Everyone giving their blessing along both side when newlyweds across the red carpet with rose petals. The mini dessert bar will be set in the garden, everyone can enjoy the western-style desserts and take the photos surrounding and shared with the world the most precious moment of happiness in their lifetime. This is a GNV Group promise and will continue to uphold their initial concept of "You say 'I do', We do the rest".

In addition, other than hosting church weddings and R.O.M ceremonies, they also accept private small-scale events and parties, such as outdoor birthday parties, baby full-moon celebrations, dance parties, wedding anniversaries, and so on. The church can accommodate 60-80 guests. Besides, the Aurora has an independent dressing room which allowed clients to do dressing purposes like make up or change the dresses. To make whole flow become convenience and avoid any inconsistence flow happened, GNV Group had provided stop service option for clients like MC hosting, sound systems, dessert bars, buffet, on-site decoration, bridal bouquets, registration officials, wedding invitations and etc.



Source: GNV Group

The ROME Garden

In the 2018, GNV group successfully presenting another garden wedding theme in the Southern city of Malaysia. They create an "Eternal City" of Rome, in Johor Bahru, name as “The ROME Garden”. The myths and romance of ancient Rome are the aspirations of many young girls. According to Edward, during the initial stage of proposal, they spent a lot of time in trimming the information, history and related knowledge as well as brainstorming for the overall design. GNV Group devoted to creating a ‘WOW’ place which newlyweds will feel romantic and happily.

The “The ROME Garden” was the importance milestone for GNV group. This is a first time, they built up a building for wedding themes more than 20,000 square feet place which estimated can accommodate more than 400 guests in an event and providing 250 free parking lot for guests. Also, they had simulated a lot of statues and classic scenes which similar at Rome. For example, when guests step in the main gate, two welcome Roman goddess was there

and led guests to mystery and romance journey when you are stepping on the cobblestones. The entire building was predominantly white where represent perfect and truthful. Additionally, the Roman-style wishing pool, Roman forum and Roman-style statues were surrounding the building to recreate a dreamy scene, making vows the best memories for all the guests.

Besides, the main banquet hall was supported by tall columns resembling the Pantheon in Rome, is grand and towering. Inside the hall was equipped an 80-foot glass walkway which decorating flowers surround symbolizing a great and happiness love journey of every couple. The whole design demonstrates sacred and solemn. It became one of the best wedding choices in southern of Malaysia as well as Singapore for young newlyweds.



Source: GNV Group

A Successful Transformation

Today, GNV Group has established themselves as one of the leading brands in garden-style wedding / banquet / marriage registration venues in the southern market of Malaysia. Transformation for industry wasn't an overnight effort, Edward and his team were grateful and appreciate that those parties who were supported them throughout this success journey. They promise will continue committed with their core principle [You say, "I do", We do the Rest] and provide more high quality and memorable wedding services to their clients. In the future, Edward and his team wishes to create a joy and happiness city in southern of Malaysia, Johor Bahru through the different wedding's themes.

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Appendix

Interview Question

1. Could you briefly introduce your company on how you established this company? And why you want to enter into this industry?
2. How you expand your business by using personal fund or find some investors to invest?
3. What are the challenges you or your company faced when trying to recruit workers?
4. Meanwhile, how you going to adjust and arrange your employees during the wedding events?
5. How you going to train your company's workers in order to perform the duties well during the wedding events?
6. After you established the second branch, do you think that your company have achieved a good results compared to the first one? And is possible to ask that how much is your revenue per month?
7. Will your company return the deposit if the customers felt that they are not satisfied with the progress?
8. Do you faced any problems that after the end of wedding events such as customers refused to settle the remaining payments? If the customers cannot afford to settle the payment, what will be your company actions to deal with this issue?
9. What will be your company selling point in order to attract the younger generation of customers to accept this new concept of wedding?
10. Did your company provide any additional services for the customers such as music band?
11. Why do you choose Johor Bahru as your strategic location to establish this company?
12. When you built up the central kitchen, do you still find new investors to invest?
13. After you set up the The Rome Garden, did the revenue from this location achieved your revenue expectation?
14. After the lockdown of MCO for those two years, how your company able to deal and overcome this problem?
15. During the MCO period, did your company dismiss any workers?
16. Did the investors keep asking for the return of the investments during that period?
17. After the end of MCO lockdown, do you recruit back the old employees?
18. After the end of MCO lockdown, what is your feelings toward the transformation of the whole company?