

Striking

Making laundry services 'ezi'

eziPOD which aims to have 200 lockers in the Klang Valley in the next three years offers convenient and hassle free laundry services for busy urbanites



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You may have seen this peculiar locker before: black with white signs and logos with a yellow trim. The name eziPOD stencilled on one side, and perhaps even a horizontal bunting next to it, giving you a general idea of what the lockers are for.

These lockers, located in 31 locations across the Klang Valley can be described as 'magical boxes' where dirty laundry is transformed into clean ones in less than 48 hours.

Ezipod Sdn Bhd co-founder Venon Tian describes the magic as a multi-purpose smart locker solution which currently offers laundry pick-up and drop-off services which include dry cleaning, laundry and ironing, ironing only, wash and fold as well as shoe cleaning.

This service caters to busy urbanites who don't have the time to handle their own laundry, providing an experience that is convenient and hassle free.

Tian recounts that his journey began in 2013 when he stumbled into the laundry industry. "I have always wanted to digitalise the laundry industry and I started LaundryHero in 2014. LaundryHero offered an on-demand laundry service akin to a concierge service by collecting clothes from the custom-

er's doorstep, cleaning the items and sending them back after fresh and clean," he shares.

However, he soon found that the business was not sustainable and even worse, he was under-pricing himself. Ultimately, it indicated that people were not prepared to pay for a concierge service to do their laundry.

But Tian's passion to digitalise the laundry industry was something he could not shelve and in 2017, he came back stronger working on the eziPOD app which was backed by a private investment holding company.

The business kicked into gear in November 2017, when Tian along with co-founder Tan Swee Yeong, who is also an angel investor, introduced the lockers to the Klang Valley.

While there are a number of coin operated laundromats available for urban dwellers who barely have time to do their laundry, Tian says that these laundromats only offer washing and drying.

"Our eziPOD services include dry cleaning and ironing segments which are considered traditional laundry segments.

"We realised there's a huge problem in the traditional laundry industry in terms of the retail hours that customers can avail of the services, and receipts that you have to keep for collection," says Tian.

The system that the service uti-

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— Tian

lises reflects the name: 'ezi'. Using an app on a phone, users need to only go up to a smart locker, select the service they want to use and the number of clothes they are depositing before a QR code is generated.

"Scan the code at the scanner and an available locker will open for customers to place their clothes into. Once their laundry is cleaned, users will be notified via the eziPOD app and need to only scan the provided QR code at the smart locker," he explains.

Tian says that eziPOD does not plan to compete in terms of price with traditional laundry businesses. As far as pricing goes, eziPOD offers laundry and ironing services starting from RM2.50 per piece. Meanwhile, dry cleaning costs RM6 per garment and ironing costs RM2 per garment.

He admits that the cost is slightly more but still cheaper than some

premium laundry services. "We are all about providing premium services at a reasonable price," he says.

While eziPOD does not own a facility to clean the collected laundry, Tian explains that they outsource that task to a facility in KL that cleans laundry from hotels. A typical turnaround time for a load of laundry is at least two working days.

He describes the outlets as proper laundry and dry-cleaning facilities with the means to cater to high volumes of laundry and that the processes are handled professionally, using high-grade detergents.

Rocky road to success

Going forward, Tian foresees that there will be high demand for the services that eziPOD offers. "More lockers mean more convenience for our customers as they are able to find us almost anywhere.

"At the same time, it will encour-

age customers and potential customers to utilise our services," he says, adding that with urban professionals in the Klang Valley becoming busier, the service will definitely help.

While eziPOD began as a business-to-customer (B2C) service, Tian has begun offering the company's services to other businesses.

"As we grow, we are able to take in more capacity. We recently rolled out eziPOD4biz where businesses can use the lockers to drop off things that require cleaning. We basically target Airbnb business, restaurants or cafes as well as budget hotels," he says.

"Instead of waiting for someone to pick up the laundry, they can drop it off at our lockers anytime at their convenience. These are usually smaller businesses, and we are still able to provide them a reasonable price," adds Tian.

The new service has been positively received by the smaller businesses as it provides them the flexibility to drop off and pick-up their laundry rather than waiting for collection according to Tian.

Looking back, running eziPOD hasn't always been a bed of roses for Tian and rejection became one of the main issues the start-up faced.

"We received negative feedback that the business won't work. The residential buildings will not allow us to set up business, while consumers on the other hand were sceptical that the eziPOD model will work. We also faced rejection when it came to financing. After all, our business is laundry. The prospects are not as bright as big data or fintech start-up," says Tian.

However these problems were alleviated as more and more of eziPOD lockers began popping up in high-end locations such as Bangsar South and KLCC, a catalyst which showed consumers that the laundry industry can be lucrative.

"We have been doing this for a year and a half and people are realising the value and convenience that we bring, and they want to see us in more locations," says Tian.

Tian intends to take eziPOD to Penang and Johor when the time is right, after ensuring the operations in the Klang Valley are sustainable.

"For now my vision is to have at least 200 lockers in the Klang Valley by the end of 2021 before exploring areas outside of KL," he explains.

Tian adds that he also intends to expand eziPOD's capabilities beyond the laundry services to use the lockers as collection points for e-commerce parcels. He also intends to generate some revenue from advertising by offering the lockers as advertising space. **MSME**