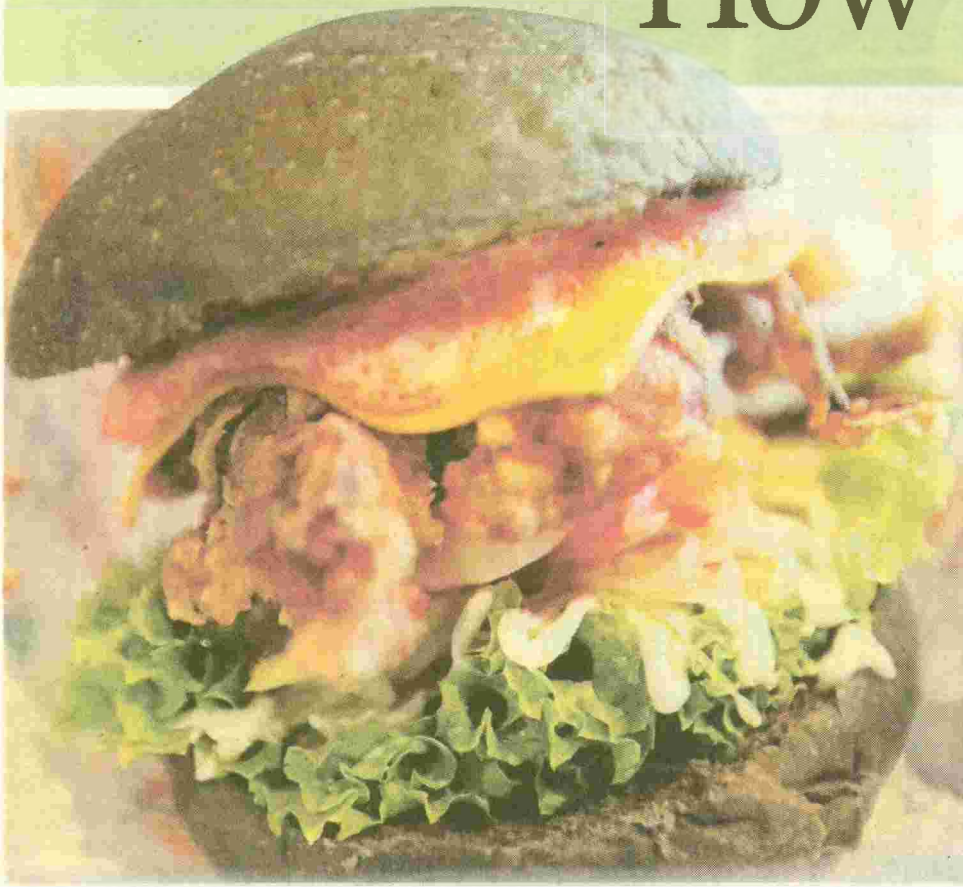


How to make it work



Almost everyone dreams of owning a business. Entrepreneur Nicholas Tan tells **Aneeta Sundararaj** it's wise to consider how you can reduce your financial risk

IF you're planning to start a business, you may get all kinds of advice, from researching your market and developing a business plan to seeking partners and suppliers.

However, Nicholas Tan Mun Leong, 30, feels the most important thing was to reduce his financial risks.

The owner of Big Hug Burger in Subang Jaya, Selangor, says this piece of advice made sense as, if he had not pursued his dreams in the food business, he would be in finance.

Nicholas, the son of a policewoman and

vegetable supplier, says: "I had trained as a chef, learnt to cook Chinese food and worked in a bakery and a Western restaurant. My dream was always to open my own restaurant, but I didn't have the money."

Not wanting to assume too much financial risk, he started by operating a food truck serving artisanal burgers. He explains: "That way, if business was not good in one place, we could move to another location."

Nevertheless, he soon discovered risks he hadn't anticipated such as licensing problems. Then there was the weather. "If it rained, people wouldn't come. Then restaurant owners complained because people would buy from us instead of going to their place."

SECOND STEP

Today, Nicholas has opened a permanent shop; the food truck is used for advertising and for fundraising activities organised by nearby colleges.

But running a restaurant presented new challenges that he had not anticipated. He says: "Two years ago, I concentrated on cooking in the kitchen. I allowed someone else to manage the restaurant for me."

Unfortunately, business suffered



"I want this place to be like a place where people come and have a good time."

Ryan Gan Fuk Tung

Burger entrepreneurs Nicholas Tan Mun Leong (left) and Ryan Gan Fuk Tung.



One of the **mouth-watering selections** of burgers served here.



Plenty of **options** for discerning **taste buds**.

PICTURES BY MOHD KHAIRUL HELMY

because of negative publicity that the employee generated. Finally, Nicholas decided it was time, in his words, "to come out of the kitchen". He fired the employee and started to manage his own business.

Today, Nicholas has a new business partner, Ryan Gan Fuk Tung, who has a diploma in multimedia design. Born and brought up in Sentul, KL, Ryan, 33, says: "I'm a designer but I have been working in the hospitality industry to pay the bills. After SPM, I didn't want to ask anyone for money so I worked to earn what I needed. Food is my number two passion as designing is what I love most."

The second of five children, Ryan didn't have an easy childhood. "When I was in Primary 2, the

only place that was 'happening' was McDonalds which had a playground. I loved going there. That's what I want this place to be like, a place where people come and have a good time."

Saying that he's learnt to read people very well, Ryan notices a couple at a nearby table and observes that they're bored. "They're waiting for their food," he says. The woman takes out her mobile phone and starts to fiddle with it but not for long as the food is served in the next few minutes.

Ryan explains some of the things they have done to help prevent customers becoming irritated when waiting for their food.

"See the wall?" he asks. "We have all sorts of things there. This is because many of our customers

are college students who like taking photographs and selfies."

He then points to one corner and says: "We also have some snacks there and you can help yourself to drinks for free."

Nicholas brings a basket to our table and shows us games inside it, like Uno.

ORIENTAL TOUCH

Ryan says Big Hug Burger has a secret ingredient in the sauce that accompanies the artisanal burgers.

While he will not divulge all the ingredients used, the fact that the sauce is yellow in colour indicates that one of the spices used is turmeric.

Why turmeric?

"I've always wanted to do something different," says Nicholas, who visited every burger joint in the Klang Valley before opening his restaurant.

He describes the burgers he serves as being in the 'oriental fusion' category. These include Satay Burger, one that tastes like nasi

lemak and his newest offer, Nacho Nachos Burger.

His idea works well because Big Hug Burger has a stream of regular customers, including a gym buff who comes daily for a high-protein, meat-packed burger and a Malay guy who brings his family every weekend.

Ryan says: "In the end, what makes a restaurant succeed is the food it serves, of course. But, a smile to greet customers is always a bonus."

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