

“Everyone is born to run... believe me!” is a phrase Albert Tan coined not too long ago when he embarked on his entrepreneurial venture. Humans, he says, were made to run, and they evolved because they needed to run long distances, whether to hunt for food or to escape from predators.

Although Tan does not have beastly predators after him, running — a pursuit he took up in 2012 — keeps him sane. “There are physical and mental benefits — not only do you stay fit and get a good workout but you also feel much better mentally. When you sweat, your body releases endorphins or happy chemicals.”

Running is also very much part of his psyche, and these days, not a week goes by without him putting in at least a 30-minute run. Apart from reaping the physical and psychological benefits of running, he also applies the traits required of a successful run — self-discipline, drive and steely determination — to his business.

A civil engineer by training, Kuching-based Tan was working at a consulting firm and a construction company when he and a few friends decided to venture into business together, specifically the business of running shoes and associated gear and paraphernalia. “We were running buddies and we jogged during the weekends. We talked about how a lot of what we wanted to buy, like running shoes and

Run for your life

Albert Tan believes that much like long-distance running, managing a business is about endurance and seeing through the tough times, and being a successful entrepreneur begins with the goals you have set

accessories, were not available in Kuching,” he says.

They saw an opportunity in the market for specialised running equipment and nutrition for serious runners. They also had a strong desire to do something good for the community by promoting a healthier lifestyle through running. And so, in 2013, the Revolution Running Co or RevRun was born.

A one-stop speciality running outlet, RevRun sells top-of-the-line footwear and equipment from brands such as Brooks, Hoka One One and Mizuno. It offers running event management services as well as practical advice to runners of all levels to suit their individual needs and styles. Since October 2014, RevRun has been Brooks’ Run Happy ambassador and main distributor in Sarawak.

From its humble start of selling shoes from home, RevRun was relaunched in 2017, moving from an 80 sq ft office space in Padungan to a 1,500 sq ft retail outlet at Green Heights Mall in Kuching. It now boasts a wide array of equipment for every type of runner, from a selection of the latest performance footwear to compression gear, hydration and nutrition products. In 2019, RevRun expanded to Miri.

Train hard and plan well

Although Tan — who manages the business and runs the day-to-day operations — had not nurtured an entrepreneurial spirit from a young age, he did have a drive to improve himself financially. There was an initial trepidation when the business opened its doors. “We didn’t know whether the people in Kuching would be receptive to what we were selling and would be willing to spend more on sports or running brands that they were unfamiliar with,” he says.

But being a long-distance runner had in many ways prepared him for the rigours of entrepreneurship. “There are similarities, for sure. It very much

depends on your aims and goals. For example, most can complete a half marathon (21km) or even a full marathon (42km), but at what expense and time? If you want to achieve a good result in your 42km run, you must really train hard and plan your race well,” he says, pointing out that not many can complete the race in under four or five hours, especially given Malaysia’s weather conditions.

“In the same way, that level of dedication, planning and training applies to all aspects of life, whether it’s a hobby, business or family. In business, if you don’t plan and market your products well, you will end up closing your shop. It’s all about marketing and customer service.”

He concedes that running a business is not without its challenges, especially having to compete with larger sports stores and the competitive prices and packages offered on online platforms. “But we’ve done that and we’ve grown by offering personal, one-on-one customer service. We ask customers about their needs, the kind of running they do, whether it is over short or long distances, and whether they have problems with their feet such as bunions or having wide feet. From there, we’re able to recommend the appropriate shoes,” he says.

Over the years, RevRun has assisted in organising many running events, from charity fun runs to ultra-marathons. It has also sponsored many running events in Kuching, including the Kuching Marathon, CMS Tribal and Kuching Run for Autism, establishing itself among the city’s running fraternity.

“The runner numbers have increased over the years as people in the local community get more health-conscious. We pride ourselves on being a family outlet where every runner can come and have a chat with our friendly team. We know that every runner is different, so we offer advice to beginners and more



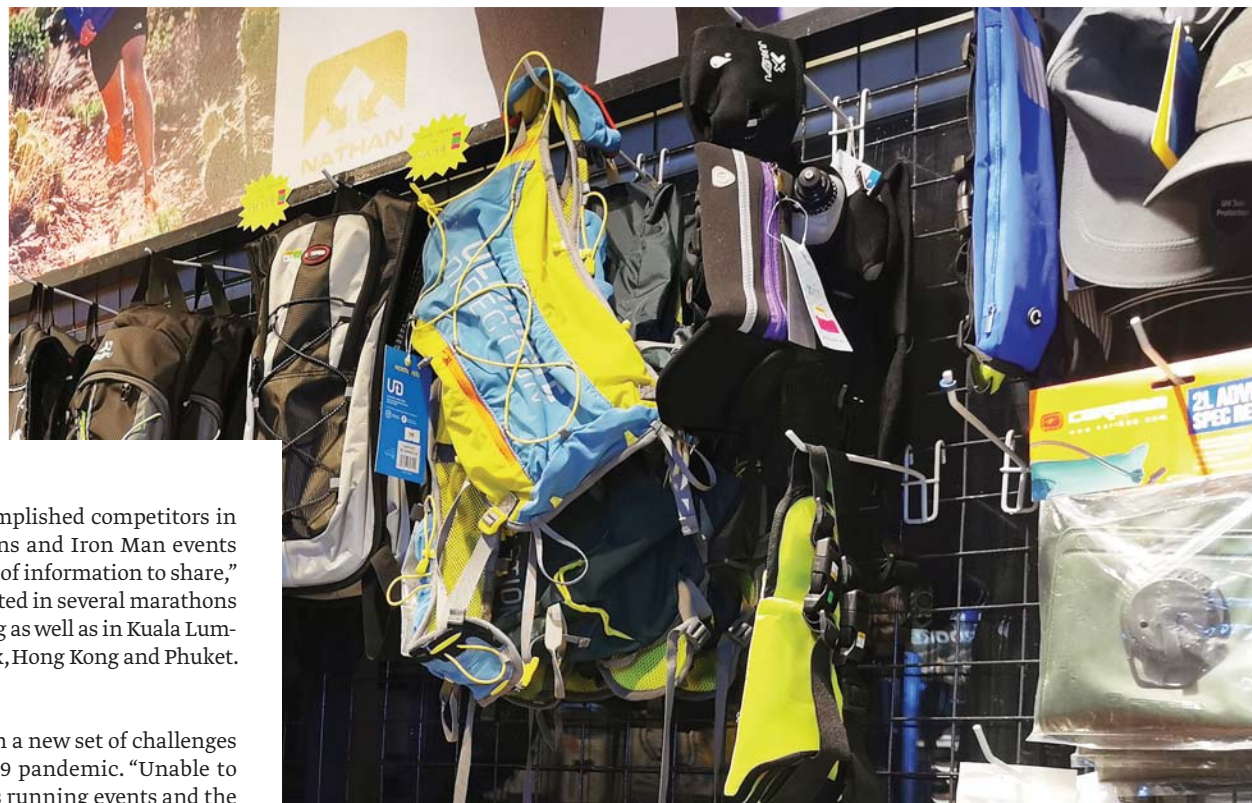
**SURVIVAL TIPS
FOR ENTREPRENEURS**



★ If your business is thriving, consider rewarding your staff more, so they are able to spend more and drive the economy.

★ **It is all about customer service, and how you deliver and offer solutions to your customers – for example, payment options.**

★ Social media marketing and online sales are a priority to promote the business.



seasoned runners. As accomplished competitors in marathons, ultra-marathons and Iron Man events ourselves, we have a wealth of information to share," says Tan, who has participated in several marathons in his hometown of Kuching as well as in Kuala Lumpur, Kota Kinabalu, Bangkok, Hong Kong and Phuket.

New challenges

Today, RevRun is faced with a new set of challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. "Unable to organise and conduct mass running events and the shift in consumer shopping attitudes, going from the retail to online experience, have been the biggest challenges caused by the pandemic ... our sales have dropped 50% to 70% compared with previous years. It's sad but true," says Tan.

But as with long-distance running, you do not give up when you encounter a hill. Instead, you keep going, digging deep into your reserves to get you over the crest. "You have to keep going, and not give up," he adds.

To keep afloat, RevRun has diversified into products such as face masks. It has also extended the same personalised customer service to those shopping on its website. As with the physical store, on the online platform, Tan and his team strive to answer customers' questions, serve and deliver as best they can. "So the hope is that they continue to shop and support Revolution Run, their local running store."

To keep the running buzz alive for enthusiasts, RevRun has organised a few virtual runs since the onset of the pandemic, to commemorate World Sight Day in September and the Mermaid Pink Run 2020 in conjunction with Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. "Our goal is also to motivate people to run and exercise," he says, adding that the creation of

more parks and green lungs will go towards encouraging more people to take up these healthy pursuits.

After eight years as an entrepreneur, the experience has taught him much about himself — revealing, for one, a never-say-die attitude, says Tan. "Being an entrepreneur is definitely not easy. It may be easy to start a business, but keeping it going is not easy. The pandemic has been tough, but everyone is in the same boat. We are thankful that people are still allowed to run during the lockdown, so there's some demand for running gear.

"I believe that new opportunities will come about. In our case, we may have started by selling shoes but over the years, we've been asked to manage runs, create T-shirts for companies ... so the opportunities are wider."

Although survival is very much on his mind these days, he hopes to grow the business over the longer term. "My dream for RevRun is to eventually become a one-stop swim, bike, run shop with a café for everyone to chill," he says, adding that he may even expand to other parts of Borneo. "Sibu, Miri and maybe even Brunei or Kota Kinabalu." — *By Sreerema Banoo* **E**

