

Growing acceptance of online grocery shopping



online grocery shopping seemed a novel idea five years ago, the Covid-19 pandemic and Movement Control Order (MCO) are a testament that not only is it here to stay, there is also potential for growth.

For online delivery service HappyFresh, which offers handpicked items from supermarkets and speciality stores, the onset of the pandemic and the MCO imposed by the government have led to an increase in orders, new subscribers and active users, says managing director Hu Hun Hui.

“This trend is evident not only in Malaysia but also the other countries in which we operate such as Thailand and Indonesia. Online grocery shopping has evolved into a go-to service, particularly during the MCO as people saw it as a safer option than going to physical stores. Initially, we were taken aback by the sheer number of orders, but we managed to cope as time went on,” he says.

Recruiting talent with a passion for the grocery delivery industry and e-commerce has been a top priority, he adds. “We were able to adapt quickly on our various platforms, thanks to our in-house tech team, who have been prompt in addressing urgent tech concerns, removing bugs and optimising the user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) for a seamless grocery shopping experience.”

Launched in 2015 — with a website, mobile site and app — Happy Fresh has since partnered more than 250 stores, from large grocery chains to speciality stores selling pet food, health and beauty products as well as organic produce, among others.

It has also partnered e-wallet solution providers such as Boost, whose customers not only get cashback rewards with their e-wallet payments but also various payment options. The latter is an essential consideration for potential customers, says Hu.

“We learnt that it is essential to work with our retailers to ensure that our stock levels are aligned so as to live up to our motto — freshly handpicked. And we aim to build the best team for this,” he adds.

Apart from the relationship with its partners and the team, Hu also credits Happy Fresh’s success to the company being agile in improving its back-end infrastructure through the use of the latest technology. “The efforts include improving our API (application programming interface) integration with our partners. And with their help,

our dedicated team maintains and troubleshoots app-related issues. Our tech team has constantly improved our UI/UX on our various platforms. These have undergone revamps in the hope of continuously providing our customers with a seamless online grocery shopping experience.

“We have also improved our landing pages, making sure that our desktop



HappyFresh, which offers handpicked items from supermarkets and speciality stores, saw an increase in orders, new subscribers and active users during the MCO



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and mobile websites and app are easy on the eyes and provide smooth transitions between pages,” he says.

These have kept the platform at the forefront of the industry over the years, he adds. “But nothing would have been possible without our audience, who

have not only responded positively to the idea of online grocery shopping but have also been understanding when it comes to the challenges we face, such as long queues in stores and delayed delivery due to rain or thunderstorms.”

In the years since Happy Fresh’s

launch, competition has been increasing, more so during the MCO. “There are many companies that have skewed their businesses toward online grocery shopping recently. This not only means more competition for us but also growth of the industry. We view competition as a healthy factor to stay motivated to improve our partners, content and payment method to stay ahead,” says Hu.

He adds that despite the greater acceptance of online grocery shopping, maintaining the momentum is crucial. “At this point, the challenge is to instil a habit of doing grocery shopping online. We hope that these efforts will help our customers realise that this service empowers them with more freedom, convenience and benefits that meet the eye. At the same time, we have to be clear that our platforms are not meant to compete but rather act as an extension of physical stores. There are subsets in society who view grocery shopping as a burdensome chore. So, online grocery shopping acts as a solution to that hassle.

“In turn, we help local retailers reach these market segments through an online platform, where customers can shop at their fingertips and get their groceries delivered to their homes.” — By Sreerema Banoo ■

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