

Beat the queues with WhyQ



Varun Saraf and Rishabh Singhvi's company delivers hawker food to CBD workers

AMRITA KAUR

THEY left their cushy jobs in banking out of their love for Singaporean hawker food. It's a decision they do not regret.

Mr Varun Saraf and Mr Rishabh Singhvi are from India, and have lived here for nine years.

"We can easily compare Singaporeans' love for hawker food to the craziness we have in India for street food", said Mr Singhvi.

Mr Saraf used to work for Credit Suisse and Mr Singhvi for JP Morgan in the Central Business District. Though they loved hawker food, they often found it difficult to enjoy their meal during their lunch hour.

"There are always long queues and people often choke seats with tissue packets so we had to walk around for some time to find seats for me and my colleagues," said Mr Singhvi, who is from Kolkata.

"This was a widespread problem we saw when we went out for lunches at the hawker centres in the CBD area."

Mr Saraf, who was born in Pune, faced the same problem.

That was when they realised the potential for a low-cost model of food delivery service from hawker centres. In February 2014, they pooled \$60,000 of their savings to start WhyQ, a delivery service for

meals from Singapore's favourite hawker centres and food courts.

While holding their corporate jobs, the duo, who are permanent residents here, carried out research and conducted a closed beta (a version that is released to a restricted group of individuals for a user test by invitation) in the Changi Business Park area over four months.

They carried out surveys with people who queued up at the hawker stalls in the area and also reached out to their colleagues at JP Morgan and Credit Suisse both of which have offices at Changi Business Park.

Said Mr Singhvi: "We spoke to them and found out the hawker centres and particular stalls they like and also identified the delivery fee they would pay to get the food sent to them. When we realised there was a market for it, we decided to take the plunge of quitting our jobs in August 2016 to work on WhyQ full-time."

WhyQ now operates in the Raffles Place, Tanjong Pagar and Chinatown area during lunchtime. It has partnered with seven hawker centres such as Maxwell Food Centre, Amoy Street Food Centre, Hong Lim Food Centre and Chinatown Complex to deliver during three lunch time slots.

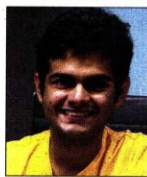
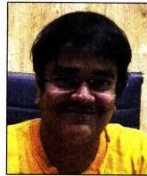
Customers have to order by 11am for noon delivery, 11.30am for 12.30pm or noon for 1pm delivery every weekday.

Mr Saraf said a mobile app for users is in the making and will likely be launched next month.

For now, users go on to www.whyq.sg, enter their delivery loca-

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For the love of hawker food... (Top) one of the delivery riders collecting food at Lau Pa Sat. The founders of WhyQ, Mr Saraf (above left) and (left) Mr Singhvi. PHOTOS: WHYQ

extend their delivery times, as well as reach out to residents in HDB flats and condominiums.

The piping hot hawker food is delivered by a pool of 22 delivery riders who work during the three time slots.

"They go to the hawker centres, directly place orders at the stalls, collect the food and deliver them to the customers. We have an agreement with the hawkers that our delivery personnel won't have to queue up for the food and the order will be prioritised," shared Mr Saraf.

The delivery riders, who either cycle or walk to the destinations, are paid \$8 to \$12, based on their performance, attendance and punctuality.

"They get the orders on their rider web dashboards. All of them have their own login details and all of them have pickups and deliveries," explained Mr Singhvi.

The founders, who moved to Singapore in 2008 to do their degree in Finance and Information Systems at the Singapore Management University, make money from the \$1.50 delivery fee customers are charged and

via a 10 to 15 per cent commission from the stalls on the price of the order.

The friends-turned-business partners initially found it hard to break the ice with hawkers, as neither of them speaks vernacular languages, and they needed to find a good business development team to help build relations with the hawkers.

But they have found a way around it by tapping on the delivery riders, who act as WhyQ's ambassadors to engage hawkers who do not speak English well.

"We found that these guys were the best people to form a relationship with the hawkers because they see them on a day to day basis so we identified those who were good at speaking and formed the business development team from our riders," shared Mr Saraf.

Another challenge they faced was to hire delivery staff to work for a period of just three hours a day, five days a week, which they were able to overcome with the help of social media and a recruitment company.

Said Mr Singhvi: "Besides the learning experience of a little bit of everything a business requires from legal to tech to ops to finance, the most rewarding part has to be the fact that we are doing something that makes lives a little bit easier and fun for those who love eating hawker food."

amritak@sph.com.sg