

# Entrepreneurs' businesses linked to childhood

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**PETALING JAYA:** While the entrepreneurial instinct is to be outstanding, a contrarian in a sea of ordinary, business inspirations are usually derived from the familiar comforts of the home.

For two of the 20 Alliance Bank SME Innovation Challenge finalists, Josh Lee and Eric Hung, their respective forays into the perfumery and food business are closely linked to their childhood.

"My dad has a bakery ingredients business and he uses cologne. When I was growing up, he would sometimes spray me with his

cologne too," Lee said, putting him on a journey for the love of scents.

For Hung, his food and beverages venture started in June 2013 with the set-up of a coffee shop in Sibu, Sarawak which he had dreamed would become a franchise. The coffee shop served recipes from his mother's kitchen.

"We realised there were too many challenges running the shop but the business took a turn when a customer wanted to pack our *kampung* noodles one day," Hung said.

When another customer requested for 10 packets of noodles to be taken to Perth, Hung





**Alliance Bank SME Innovation Challenge finalists Josh Lee (left) and Eric Hung.**

knew there was a business potential and decided to post his product on Facebook.

What started at 30kg of dry noodles a day become a production of 500kg per day provided the weather was sunny.

Hung's target in the next two years is to have his noodles on the shelves of supermarkets nationwide. He is already selling 800 to 1,200 packets of noodles per day.

On the other hand, Lee has conceptualised and concocted a fragrance inspired by sea water and local spices called *Georgetown* under his own brand. His vision is to create a range of fragrances to reflect the culture and scents of Malaysia.

"My customers are largely tourists who visit Penang. Repeat foreign customers are now ordering online, although the Penang international airport is still where my fragrance is best sold, at about 100 bottles per month," he said. He will be launching a new fragrance next month.

Lee, who did a chemistry degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia and then a postgraduate in European Fragrance & Cosmetic Master in France, is also selling in select

perfume shops in Penang and Kuala Lumpur. His aim is to export to Singapore and the United States, as well as offer bespoke fragrances.

He won the Top 40 under 40 Young Achievement Award by Prestige Malaysia magazine in 2013.

Both entrepreneurs felt they needed the business savvy they could learn in the course of the competition.

Now in its second year running, Alliance Bank has tweaked in the competition based on the feedback from last year's finalists who believed there needed more focus on real issues entrepreneurs face like talent management, leadership, financing and marketing.

The 20 finalists selected will go through a structured learning programme and CEO Chatroom series with top business leaders like Eco World Development Bhd director Tan Sri Liew Kee Sin (who is also chief judge for this challenge) and Datuk Ameer Ali Mydin of Mydin Mohamed Holdings Sdn Bhd.

The bank has also wooed SMEs from outside the Klang Valley this year.