

# Manoeuvring through the Dilemma of Marketing Positioning In the Frozen Food Business

**Authors:** Hazriah Hasan, Farah Hanan Muhamad and Mohd Zulkifli Muhammad.

## Prologue

Mrs Ruzi wiped her face with her bare hands, whispering her gratitude to God. The official offer letter received by her eldest daughter stated that she was appointed as a government teacher in the western region of Peninsular Malaysia. After the challenging times, tears, and tremendous challenges in providing the best for her children, she witnessed her first victory in raising them. Life is not easy, to be frank. The vicissitudes mingle in the environment, scattering thorns and blades in her heart. She might seem strong from the tremendous support from her family. Her siblings, parents, and relatives are the angels in her life. Her tears begin to fall again on her hollow cheeks. She breathed deeply and murmured her late husband's name. She had lost her beloved spouse after the birth of her third daughter. After a long, diverted, and lonely journey of 11 years being a single mother raising three daughters, Mrs Ruzi received a blessing in disguise. Manoeuvring through life was challenging, but she gained a wealth of experience dealing with her family business. She lost and gained a life. Despite the success of raising children, she thought of committing to several other new business ventures. Mrs Ruzi endeavoured towards sustaining her legacy in the running business. She knew that her time was not like her younger days, but can she make it now? She thought about her children, their employment success and further education, and how to sustain the business. She believed that a new aspect should be done immediately. She heard about the usefulness of social media for marketing and the impact of technological branding but questioned whether she could do it. Would she be able to manage a new challenge in the business?

**“No pain, no gain”.**

The trust of her family is well protected. Securing frozen food production is a serious business. She gambled her well-being and her remaining wealth to start a new small business without the knowledge to operate food processors and machinery. She baked dough and cooked the fillings with full-hearted energy.

She successfully produced her first ever baked product after a year of trial. She believed in no shortcut towards success in life. Mrs Ruzi needs a means to live,

## THE AUTHORS

Hazriah Hasan, Farah Hanan Muhamad and Mohd Zulkifli Muhammad are based in the Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Kelantan, Malaysia.

Corresponded email:  
[hazriah.h@umk.edu.my](mailto:hazriah.h@umk.edu.my)

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therefore she embraced the challenge that made her stronger surely and eventually. Many entrepreneurs start businesses in 'rough situations'. Some have abandoned families who do not fit with any part of the business. Contrarily, Mrs Ruzi was practically smothered by parental involvement, support, and caring. She had lost her husband to illness, lived in poverty, and was exposed to hunger and destitution. Her children lived in all kinds of conditions and were thought to 'set up for failure' from the start. Nevertheless, her children succeeded despite initial circumstances and achieved great success in life. Some part of the experience drove the children to succeed, they learned the value of hard work and gained a stronger character.

### **A humble twitch**

Mrs Ruzi started her business not ideally – with an unhealthy ageing mother, an absent husband, and three children to raise. Life was hard. Occasionally, her family had no money. The family struggled around the hometown almost yearly. The replacement of 'father figures' migrated through their home. Mrs Ruzi was mature beyond her years by the time her husband left but she grew up too quickly, gaining habits of not being able to handle all the challenges.

She did not excel as quickly as others due to having to divide her time and loyalty between her daughters and her future. A balance had to be attained, which older people often lack. She had a business goal but was careful about the objective. She learned to budget, plan, and react. When she finally completed her business startup, she later became a certified food producer, able to find a better job for her fellow villagers with benefits and a salary that provided sufficiently.

### **Company overview**



Before establishing the company, Mrs Ruzi encountered a difficult situation in her life. At that time, her family income depended on her husband and she was a full-time housewife. Her day-to-day job involved looking after her three children and performing house chores. The situation changed after her husband passed away and she lost the only source of income, causing her family to struggle to survive. She began to obsess over the idea of opening her own business in frozen food production. Coincidentally, her mother was an instant food maker, where she took the opportunity to learn from. She started to

gradually produce at a small scale of 500 packs a day and the demand kept increasing. Subsequently, her mother became ill and she received approval from her siblings to continue her mother's legacy.

If success produces a good feeling due to natural stirring endorphins, then a failure in life should feel bad. Most people believe that the concept of failure cause sadness, regret, anger or negative emotions. Mrs Ruzi went through the feelings once she lost her husband but she needed to wake up for her daughters. In evolutionary terms, the negative feelings around failure are part of human survival instincts. Nonetheless, although feeling bad is a natural compulsion, overcoming the basic instincts is needed to turn failure from a negative experience into a feeling-less void or even a positive experience.

Her dream came true when on 1 January 2009 she formed a company and named it after her name, RUZI'S FOOD. Despite her composed expression, the indescribable feeling was apparent for owning a business. On that significant date, she established a physical workplace at 1893 Panchor, Pengkalan Chepa, 16100 Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Based on the company structure, Mrs Ruzi is a very strong and visionary person. With her capacity, the company managed to survive until today, even after continuously facing several sets of business hurdles.

Mrs Ruzi initiated the smart step of developing her empire on her land and building without obtaining any risky loan. Nonetheless, she is considered lucky to receive continuous assistance in the form of financial resources, particularly from Jabatan Pertanian Negeri Kelantan, Pejabat FAMA Negeri Kelantan, and the Institute of Small and Medium Enterprise in University Malaysia Kelantan (UMK). The initial cost was estimated at approximately RM 200,000 including construction and operating costs. She felt grateful that despite not having permanent staff, Mrs Sharifah Fatimah Binti Syed Mohammad had assisted her in preparing financial reporting. She currently handles her business by herself without hiring any staff, unlike a few years back when she had around 10 staff hired among villagers to assist in production.

Her constant interest in instilling new skills and expertise in frozen food production involved participating in several courses to improve and acquire the innovation to adapt to her business. The courses include the Basic Accounting Course (organised by MARA), the Walk-in Seminar (organised by JAKIM), the RTC Entrepreneurship Course (MARA – based Organisation for Human Resource and Business Management), the Seminar on Strategy in Business Partnership with Entrepreneurs-SIRM, Marketing Kit Course (organised by MARA), and the Packaging Seminar 2018 (organised by UMK).

## **Progression of making the product**

The process of making frozen food varies based on the type of product being produced. For products with fillings, such as Sardin Roll, Karipap, Vade, and Roti Goreng, the process begins with preparing the flour, kneading, and shaping the dough. Usually, the fillings were made earlier by Mrs Ruzi, and her employees will prepare the process of inserting the fillings. Mrs Ruzi cares for the quality of the product to ensure its consistency to the taste. Meanwhile, the process of making Roti Canai and Donuts begins with blending and mixing the flour, weighing the dough, waiting for the flour to form, and shaping the dough into pieces. Subsequently, the pieces will be fried and greased. The last step involves the packing and distribution process.

## **Success is in the hand of those who make an effort to try**

After almost 11 years of becoming an entrepreneur, Mrs Ruzi was not excluded from being bombarded by obstacles of various facets. Firstly, she had to familiarise herself with the current technology. As a conservative entrepreneur, she felt burdened to accommodate her business in the recent revolution. She knew that today, information could easily be found at your fingertips. Thus, people are using the internet as a medium of communication to make transactions faster and more cost-effective. She thought of how to compete given that she remained isolated in the business recent development challenge.

*“Failure only occurs when you actually quit and I will never quit”.*

To date, the company has successfully remained in a direct offline-marketing strategy where she placed Ruzi's Food products at hypermarkets, supermarkets, groceries store, schools, government and private agencies, and Islamic Religious School. As of today, her products are accessible to her customers at Mydin (Kubang Kerian), Aneka Retail Sdn Bhd (Tanah Merah), KS Chu (Tanah Merah), Berkah Mart (Kota Bharu), Jia Yu Paduka (Jalan Wakaf Stan), Koperasi USM (Kubang Kerian), ABBE Mini Mart (Pengkalan Chepa), Kedai runcit Dinar (Pengkalan Chepa), Kedai Runcit TG and Kedai Telok (Panji), Kedai Pulai Chondong (Pasir Mas), Kedai Full One (Nilam Puri), Nazri Frozen (RTC, Pasir Puteh and Kok Lanas), and Kooperasi Ummah.

The previous sole proprietorship company is known by sizeable segments in Kelantan with the ability to meet customer demand for various products. Mrs Ruzi always believed that to move to the next level, she needs to consider the quality and attractive products that meet customer preferences. The popular products are Roti Goreng filled with Chocolate, Red Beans, Sardines, Anchovies, Coconut, and Corn. Additionally, products

such as Karipap, Vade, Sardin Roll, Roti Canai, and Donut have received tremendous responses from consumers.

### **In dire need of marketing strategy**

Although she has worked hard to expand the company, she still struggles to bring her product forward to the utmost standard. Due to a lack of knowledge in marketing strategies, the company profitability is less impressive. She is concerned about the financial health of the company, which often suffered from losses due to her weakness in delivery channels. Considering that the products are limited to supermarkets and groceries stores, the products could not penetrate markets outside Kelantan. The situation has caused the loss of potential customers interested in buying the type of product. In terms of product features, frozen food is easy to cook and durable.

Ruzi's Food already managed to acquire all sets of food processing certifications and controlling standards. Halal certification and Good Practice in manufacturing certification were inserted in the production value-added. Ruzi's Food also has maintained its recipes and quality of taste and ingredients to upgrade its market demand. Good taste and good standards are its core business, hence Mrs Ruzi stressed personally cooking the filling to ensure the food product quality can be maintained.

*"I prepare the fillings by myself since I want to ensure the quality of the foods can be maintained".*

Managing the company by herself is becoming more challenging as many businesses are based on frozen foods, such as NA Frozen Food, SK Frozen & Trading, and OneKip Frozen Food, leading to intense competition among the businesses. Consequently, Mrs Ruzi has fewer customers and need to overlap the business with other side income to support her family. Currently, the average profitability of the company is only RM200 to RM300 a day compared to the profit earned during the early days of the business. Subjected to low demand, she has to wait longer to reproduce the products, which are occasionally unsold as it gets closer to the expired date. Mrs Ruzi believed that the business foundation has the potential to grow, but the instability in the current economy has impeded sales. She hopes her company will recover in the future similar to the past.

## **The disturbance by the digitalisation of the food industry**

Ruzi's Food had encountered a dynamic challenge from digital and technological advancement. Initially, the demand dropped to almost zero due to the worldly digital era scenario. Hence, Ruzi's Food has answered the technological change as much as possible. The major outcome of digital disturbance on Ruzi's Food production is on market positioning. The existence of a website and page on online sources has nearly buried Ruzi's Food. The buying power of frozen food by offline channels is gradually shrinking and is transferred to the newly vibrant and intelligent use of digital food service on the go, on smart-phone, and tablets.

The fourth Industrial Revolution entrance into the market demands an overhaul from Ruzi's Food. Remaining static with the old practices and offerings could collapse Ruzi's Food. Fortunately, the quick changes in developing Facebook page and Instagram keeps Ruzi's Food on track and respond well to the changing demand for its products.

*"I have difficulty to cope with current innovation since today's situation is no longer similar as before"*

## **Epilogue**

She knocked on the desk as the clock ticked in the calm evening. No one was beside her right now, the girl at the administration table had just left the office. She stood still in the dim and dreary light, fully determined to keep the business progressing despite many obstacles. She took her car keys. Something needs to be completed and ought to be resolved quickly. She will drive towards her dream to realise it.

Looking back in hindsight, a possible failure can be viewed as a success. In a crude example, people that have talked themselves out of a poisonous or destructive relationship may feel rotten at the time and think that they have failed. Nonetheless, over time, the person that walked out may see the relationship for the destructive mess that it was and hence see the breakup as a success.

The idea of success is often associated with some an achievement, a correct statement, except that success, should involve effort. Thus, one also assumes that the effort is challenging enough to create a hit of endorphins once it passes. As long as the endorphins are not released due to artificial stimulation, then one can assume that success has occurred. Some people enjoy the process enough for a substantial release of endorphins but arguably, the process is as much part of the success as the outcome.

Mrs Ruzi's story could have been different, she could have looked at her circumstances and said, "It is hopeless." She could have lost patience and pursued an easier path by taking any paid job. Nevertheless, she did not. Surely, all of her family, especially the daughter will thank her for it once she has grown. Her courage is commendable in the dilemma.

A manager is someone that follows the rules and does a job. The job may be 'to lead' at its core, but in effect, a manager is simply there to follow a set of rules and make judgments based on training. A manager does not possess much control over the business outcome due to merely following the rules decided by the people who run the company. They are the ones that determine how the manager should spend the day and how they should make decisions.

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### **Keywords**

Entrepreneurship, Family Business, Frozen Food, Food Industry

