

The Ayang Cafe: From Crew to Kopitiam Owner

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Prologue

From modest beginnings, Mrs. Hazelizan fought to make a name in the cutthroat F&B industry. Every day, when she opened the doors of Ayang Café, she was reminded that success was not how she began or what she learned but how she persevered to move ahead. With every challenge, she grew stronger, making Ayang Café more than just a place to dine. It was a beacon of hard work, creativity, and the courage to chase one's dreams. There were doubting voices, naysayers who questioned her ability, doubted her vision, and whispered words of discouragement. But instead of allowing negativity to slow her down, she used it as a filter to refine her business vision.

"Instead of listening to others' doubts, I should focus on improving and expanding the business," she often reminded herself.

Demand was growing, customers were asking for more, and she knew Ayang Café could become something more. But with growth came new issues, the search for a larger location, managing greater operational costs, and the right individuals to maintain the quality of the café. The fear of her ability to grow Ayang Café business was still lingering in her mind. Now poised at the doorstep of something larger, Mrs. Hazelizan was confronted with the biggest challenge so far – business expansion.

Ayang Café Journey

Ayang Café started as a dream, driven by the sheer passion of its owner, Mrs. Nor Hazelizan Mamat. Having come from a family of businesspeople who had a small restaurant, she spent her life watching her parents toil hard, making business choices, and riding the ups and downs of business ownership. She would rush back from school every day, dump her bag, and dash to her parents' restaurant to help out with customer service. She still vividly remembers her father's booming voice calling out, "Teh Tarik, Teh Tarik!" to beckon and entertain customers. These were the seeds of entrepreneurialism planted in her.

Her passion for business only grew stronger with the passage of time. At the age of 18, she was ready to plunge headlong into the world of entrepreneurship. She did not pursue further education after high school like the majority of her peers. She chose to acquire hands-on experience in the business of jewelry and Bonia bags, never once letting go of her dream of opening

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her own restaurant. She waited for more than a decade, patiently waiting to develop her knowledge and expertise, waiting for the day she could make her dream come true.

That day came in April 2018. Based on her past working experience at Kopitiam Kita and Pelangi Mall, Mrs. Hazelizan opened Ayang Café, where she could direct her creativity towards developing innovative menus and business processes. She knew that breakfast was not just the most important meal of the day but also a good business. Understanding that most families skipped breakfast because of time, ideas, or plain indifference, she recognized a niche. Ayang Café would occupy it—serving filling, no-frills breakfast food for busy people. It specialized in bread-based breakfast meals with a local twist, and Ayang Café soon became a breakfast staple. Mrs. Hazelizan poured her heart and soul into designing the interior of the café, making it a beautiful pink-colored interior that was warm and cozy. "Ayang Café" was a name derived from suggestions posted by customers and friends on social media, which matched the communal ambiance she was aiming for.



Figure 1: The Ayang Café Branding

Apart from serving good food, Mrs. Hazelizan was also strongly devoted to sharing. She believed in sharing was caring and would often provide discounted prices to her customers so that good food could be accessed by everyone. Her commitment to service was motivated by no other than the Permaisuri Agong's generous spirit and local food businessman Khairul Aming's entrepreneurial skill. With their influence in mind, she began searching for new avenues of business growth, like the potential of venturing into retort food production. Step into Ayang Café and one steps into a space that is simultaneously nostalgic and contemporary. The incorporation of natural rattan furniture and wood elements lends a cozy, homey feel, while hints of modernity add a touch of sophistication. Every detail of the café reflects Mrs. Hazelizan's deep passion and her relentless quest to innovate.



Figure 2: Mrs. Hazelizan with Roti Titab

From modest starts to increasing popularity, Ayang Café stands as proof of how determination, imagination, and human interaction can transform a plain dream into a successful enterprise. As the café keeps innovating, it stays as a beacon of how small businesses can keep pace with the times without losing sight of where they started.

Downtown Morning Café in Malaysia

The food and beverage (F&B) sector in Malaysia plays an important role in contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and offers vast employment opportunities. The F&B sector prepares, serves, and retails food and drinks to the consumers, and the sector is responsive to the evolving consumer trends. This responsiveness and creativity are paramount if companies are to remain in business. Kota Bharu has experienced extensive activity in the F&B sector with many growing cafe structures recorded. One such business is Ayang Café, a contemporary kopitiam, which is famous for blending old and new cuisine.



Figure 3: Ayang Café Customers

A kopitiam is a kind of coffee shop that one would most commonly locate in Malaysia, as well as other Southeast Asian nations. 'Kopitiam' is a word derived from the Indonesian and Malay word for coffee, "kopi," and Hokkien or Hakka word for shop, "tiam." Traditional kopitiams serve plain menus of eggs, toast, kaya, coffee, and tea. Contemporary kopitiams now have several food stalls with a variety of dishes. Ayang Café provides the perfect blend of local and international cuisine to suit various customer tastes. As the proprietor of Ayang Café, Mrs. Hazelizan used her culinary skill to develop a varied menu combining traditional Malaysian dishes with modern twists, enticing a variety of customer tastes and preferences.

Ayang Café is a small-scale business carrying limited stocks, selling quick-serve food at relatively low prices. Ayang Café gets a mix of customers, particularly breakfast patrons. Ayang Café typically possesses clean dining areas where traditional local coffee is brewed and bread-based breakfast items like 'Roti Ayang', the charcoal-toasted bread with kaya and butter, and soft-boiled eggs are prepared and taken immediately. The menu is also complemented with Malaysia's most loved dish 'Nasi Lemak' and 'Nasi Kerabu', the blue-colored rice made from the flower of the butterfly pea plants and is accompanied by fish, eggs, chicken, or pickles. The Kelantan kitchen, where the Ayang Café is

situated, is renowned for its bold flavors. One such example is Pulut Lepa, a sticky rice charcoal-grilled, wrapped in palm leaves, and typically stuffed with fish, peppers, and onions.



Figure 4: Menus at the Ayang Café



Figure 5: 'Nasi Lemak' and 'Nasi Kerabu' Dishes

Mrs. Hazelizan, the brain behind Ayang Café, gained much experience from her employment at 'Kopitiam Kita'. She is also the one behind the popular 'Roti Titab' on the menu. She experiments with new flavors constantly and according to customer preferences; she makes significant modifications to her menus. She recently launched 'Roti Kari Daging and Ayam' and developed new products under the Ayang Café brand name, including 'Fresh Life' mineral water, Ayang Coffee, and Ayang Chocolate. These new and innovative products have succeeded in raising the popularity and loyalty of the café's customers. In addition, Ayang Café's evolving product lines reflect the entrepreneurial orientation of the owner and her capability to remain consistent with the latest developments in the market.

Ayang Café's triumph underlines the value of adaptability and innovation. Through its blending of traditional tastes with modern twists, Ayang Café not only helps keep Malaysia's rich food legacy alive but also addresses the changing needs of today's consumers. As Kota Bharu gets more F&B establishments, businesses such as Ayang Café show how commitment and creativity can spell success in the long run for a competitive business landscape.

Ayang Cafe Battle for Business

In the modern business era, artificial intelligence and information technology innovations have revolutionized operational efficiency across various industries, including customer service, human resources, marketing, and logistics. Ayang Café adopted such technological innovations to enhance operations, customer experience, and business growth. One such technological adaptation is adopting a Point-of-Sale system.

The perceived ease of use has made cash payments at restaurants of paramount importance. Ayang Café adapted by embracing electronic payment systems, such as scannable QR codes, to serve dine-in, self-pick-up, and delivery clients. Not only is it more convenient, but it also minimizes physical contact, thus making it safer. Ayang Café also used the Grab app to optimize its menus so that customers can see appealing photos, brief descriptions, and customizable add-ons. This feature minimizes customer, waiter, and chef error, allowing customers to make more informed choices regarding food. This convenience is further provided by the GrabFood home delivery feature for customers who opt for home delivery.

Ayang Café, managed to effectively utilize social media to market the café and connect with customers. Through live streaming, commenting back, posting photos of customers who had visited the café, and posting notices of the operating hours of the café, she had high online visibility. Posting pictures of celebrities who had visited the café assisted in increasing the followers of the café. Media coverage via news outlets like "Sinar Harian" and "Utusan Malaysia" also helped promote the café. Through online marketing, Ayang Café managed to reach more people from its physical location in Kota Bharu. Although the Instagram updates of the café news on the business received fewer likes and comments, sharing news on ongoing events or going-viral stories received more attention.

Based on Mrs. Hazelizan, word-of-mouth communication and rebroadcasting trending issues enabled the café's popularity to grow. This is evidence of how responsive the café is in adjusting its marketing strategy to align with the behavior and interests of social media users. She used online community sites and social media networks like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. The incorporation of technology has indeed been the key to Ayang Café's success.

Digital innovations were incorporated to enhance smooth operations of the café, improvement of customer experience, and increasing its brand presence effectively. Additionally, Mrs. Hazelizan was able to make people aware of the café through promotional and marketing activities. Such platforms provided easy ways of disseminating information about the products offered by the café to improve its reputation and attract customers. By implementing these online tools, Ayang Café also improved its market position and enhanced the customer experience. It also allowed visitors who came from

neighboring countries like Singapore, Brunei, and Indonesia to find the social media accounts of the Ayang Café indirectly.



Figure 6: Mrs. Hazelizan's TikTok Promotion

Technology Hits in Business Momentum

Along a peaceful street, in the midst of the bustling cityscape, was Ayang Café, a quaint eatery that blended tradition seamlessly with modernity. At the heart of it was Mrs. Hazelizan, a strong-willed entrepreneur with a keen eye for innovation. She was determined to stay ahead of the fast-paced business landscape and embraced technology to streamline processes and enhance customer experience.

One night, while Mrs. Hazelizan was manning the counter, she noticed a young couple rummaging for cash to settle their bill. The hassle sparked an idea. "There must be a better way," she told herself. In no time, Ayang Café launched electronic payment options, including scannable QR codes. Whether patrons dined in, took out, or had their food delivered, payments were quick and easy. The launch of contactless payments not only added efficiency but also provided a safer and more hygienic experience for dining.

Technology did not stop there. As much as she wanted to get customers more involved, Mrs. Hazelizan turned to the Grab app, where she painstakingly developed an interactive digital menu. Each dish was accompanied by great photos, tantalizing descriptions, and customization options. Say goodbye to customers relying on verbal descriptions from frazzled servers. Mistakes in orders declined, and customer satisfaction went through the roof. Additionally, with the GrabFood delivery service, Ayang Café was also able to reach beyond its four walls, delivering its tasty products right to customers' doorsteps.

But Mrs. Hazelizan knew that an amazing menu and smooth transactions were just half the battle. For Ayang Café to really take off, it needed to be visible. She turned to social media, where she was

already very active with customers via live streaming, customer satisfaction reports, and business operational hours and promotions. Among all the tactics, one stood out—uploading photos of celebrities who visited the café. The practice caught on like wildfire and instantly put Ayang Café on the map.

Not every post went viral despite her efforts. Posts related to business garnered fewer likes and comments compared to posts about issues of the day. Seeing the trend, Mrs. Hazelizan shifted gears. She incorporated current news and affairs subtly into her updates, generating topics and spurring activity. Soon, news of Ayang Café had traveled beyond Malaysia's borders. Foodie adventurers from Singapore, Brunei, and Indonesia discovered the café's social media accounts, itching to visit and give it a try. New dishes, ongoing promos, upcoming events—she shared them all with the world in real time. They kept coming back, and fresh faces kept popping up each day, drawn by the commotion she was causing. Mrs. Hazelizan had this to say,

"I remember how we made the most out of social media—Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, you name it. We did not post for the sake of posting; there was a reason behind each post. We need to keep people hyped, and believe me, it worked!"

With her flawless incorporation of technology and creative marketing, Mrs. Hazelizan turned Ayang Café into more than just a local restaurant—it became a brand. By utilizing digital payment platforms, taking advantage of food delivery applications, and utilizing social media, not only did she make operations more efficient, but she was also able to build good customer relations. And with all the innovation, she never forgot the original kopitiam culture that made Ayang Café unique. As the café kept innovating, Mrs. Hazelizan beamed with pride behind the counter as satisfied customers savored their meals. Ayang Café was now a proof that small businesses could adapt to technology without losing their soul. And as she poured a fresh cup of kopi for a waiting customer, she knew this was only the start of an even bigger journey.



Figure 7: The Ayang Café Staff



Figure 8: The Ayang Café Official Facebook

Epilogue

As Mrs. Hazelizan observes the rush hour at Ayang Café, she cannot help but feel overwhelming pride. The café has become more than a business—a point of destination where people meet, exchange stories, and savor familiar tastes. But deep inside, she knows that the time has come to dream even bigger. She needs to take the next step, enlarging her café without sacrificing its distinct charm. The idea is exhilarating and terrifying. Growth implies new sites, a more extensive network, and more responsibility. Yet Mrs. Hazelizan is undaunted. Her background, expertise, and calm resolve have groomed her for this challenge. Taking a deep breath, she plunges in, set to convert her business expansion plans into action. Would she be able to make this jump without sacrificing what she had established? Mrs. Hazelizan took a deep breath, gazing at her bustling café. She turned to her manager and asked,

"If we expand, will it be a success? Or will it weaken everything we've built?"

Wiping her hands on her apron, she knew what to do next. Mrs. Hazelizan realized her choice had influenced the future of Ayang Café as she observed patrons pouring in. Growing was about legacy as much as it was about business. Her vision became clearer with every new outlet. She accepted the decision because she knew that Ayang Café's journey was just getting started. Opening a new location was a strategic decision to fortify the brand, increase its viability, expand into new markets, and guarantee sustainability, it wasn't just a matter of growth. She with assurance embraced the journey, shaping the future of Ayang Café.