

Client Profile

Learn how real businesses achieved success in their industries through innovative strategies such as expansion into new markets, new and differentiated product and service offerings, enhancing operations and cash flow management.

Forward motion

Toronto brothers make signs their business

Philip and Simon Ho have a formula for what it takes to run a successful business. Aside from diligence, there must be passion, persistence and innovation. Without passion, Philip Ho says, work is a burden. Persistence is essential, he adds, “because it sometimes takes a long time to achieve your objective.” Perhaps most important of all, innovation allows a company to stay one step ahead of the pack — to, he says, “become the pioneer.”

That formula has been the foundation of Forward Signs, a signage company established in 1986 serving small businesses in Toronto. Under the direction of the Ho brothers, it has grown to a full-service sign solution provider across Canada and the United States, serving the needs of many businesses, industries and governments. Over the years, the product lines and services have expanded from a simple sign box to way-finding signs, digital signs, metal cladding and more. The company now has a team of 100 dedicated employees and a 50,000-square-foot facility.

Early on, as the Ho brothers prepared to enter the mainstream market, they pounded the pavement. “We made a lot of cold calls because we had no relationships; we didn’t have any contacts,” says Ho. “At that time, there was a lot of construction happening. We’d go to the sites to see if they needed any signs.” The effort paid off, and Forward Signs started to pick up business. “Sometimes people don’t have the persistence and they fail after a very short time,” he adds. To get one particular customer, Ho says, “It took me three years of knocking on their door.”

In 2010, the company moved to its current home in Scarborough. “We can handle much bigger signs because of the floor space,” Ho explains. “In our type of manufacturing, aside from the skilled people, the size of the facility and the machinery are just as important.” He now invites prospective customers to come see the space for themselves. “Seeing is believing,” he explains. “We show them our facilities, our ISO 9001-2015 certified processes, COR-registered operation and introduce them to our teams and their expertise.”



Philip Ho and his brother, Simon, have grown their dynamic sign business and now serve clients including Bell and the LCBO.



As a growing business, Forward Signs is also involved in the community, supporting and sponsoring a variety of charities, events and industry associations throughout the GTA.

Forward's client and end-user list proves that the company has been making all the right moves. It includes the LCBO's province-wide signage; Bell Canada nationwide; Smart Centre; numerous hospitals, including Women's College in Toronto, Joseph Brant in Burlington and Providence Care Hospital in Kingston; a design and build for Saskatoon Civic Centre; eight pylon signs, each 36 feet high, for the Shops at Don Mills in Toronto ("They've become a landmark," says Ho, "especially in the night time"); Roots; and H&M stores, among many others.

As the company grows, Ho says, he will continue looking for ways to improve his process and procedures. "The only constant in the whole world is change," he says, "and if you don't change yourself, you are not going to survive."

CIBC Tips – What Makes a Business Successful

Passion: Let passion be a cornerstone of your business. Build your business on what interests and motivates you. Concentrate on your and your company's strengths and keep the client top of mind with every decision.

Persistence: It takes hard work to start a business and it takes persistence to make it successful. Through good and bad times, you have to fight and keep fighting until you make it.

Innovation: To ensure long-term success and growth, it is important that you maintain a focus on innovation. Not strictly limited to technology, innovation can span across all aspects of your business from introducing a new product to fine tuning existing processes to enhance the client and employee experience.

For more business tips from CIBC, visit cibc.com/businessadvice

Published Oct 24, 2017

Content created by Star Metro Media

