

PrimeTime Member Spotlight

February 2008

Each month *Connections* talks to a PrimeTime member to find out more about who they are, what they do, and their association with PrimeTime.



This month we spotlight

Charlotte Abe
COO, The Ploh Group Pte Ltd

Personal talk ...

Connections: Where are you from originally?

Charlotte: I'm from the US - born and raised in sunny Southern California. Prior to arriving in Singapore 8 years ago, I was living and working in Chicago.

Connections: What brought you to Singapore?

Charlotte: I came with my employer, Tower Perrin, an HR consulting firm, for a 6-month project in Singapore. Like many others, I ended up staying longer than originally planned and am still here 8 years later!

Connections: What do you enjoy most about living here?

Charlotte: Business, social and lifestyle opportunities are more accessible. It's an excellent base for travelling in Asia and I'm constantly meeting interesting people from around the world.

Connections: What are your interests and hobbies?

Charlotte: I always saw food as bringing people together while I was growing up, and I discovered at a young age that I enjoyed cooking and baking for friends and family. I admit though that these days I rely a lot more on restaurants, catering and take-out.

I enjoy the performing arts and can often be found at the Esplanade or Singapore Repertory Theatre.

Most people don't know that I'm also a certified masseuse and trained aromatherapist. Although I don't practice professionally, they're both great skills to have.

I've also started learning QiGong – it looks easy but it's actually difficult to move so slowly.

Connections: Which are your favourite restaurants/shops/places to go?

Charlotte: Garibaldi and Pasta Brava are my favourites for Italian food – different environments and food to suit my mood preference. Mezza9 never fails to please no matter what I order from the menu – their Sunday champagne brunch is my favourite. The absolute best Mexican restaurant in Singapore is Margarita's at Dempsey Road.

Connections: What one thing would you like to accomplish in your lifetime?

Charlotte: I'm feeling the need to check off Sky Diving from my list of things to do ... and someday really travel the world – for pleasure only.

Professional talk ...

Connections: What did you do before you started your own business?

Charlotte: Before starting my business, I had worked for a couple of international consulting firms and also a major entertainment company.

Connections: Tell us about your business.

Charlotte: Ploh is a luxury bedding company, started just over 5 years ago. We focus on making premium down & feather pillows, duvets and featherbeds, and we also offer high thread-count Egyptian cotton bed linens.

We do some retail and our internet orders have shipped globally since our first week in business. We enjoy working with designers on high-end residential projects or with individuals who are setting up home or outfitting their holiday villas.

We've also substantially grown a client base of luxury and boutique hotels, and now offer our hospitality clients towels, robes and slippers to help complete a luxurious "high-touch" guest experience.

Connections: How did you get started?

Charlotte: My business partner and I started the company with our own investment and very little office space. We had a clear business model from the start and we knew that in this day and age it was very important to have an excellent website that reflected who we were as a company and brand.

At the time we weren't too concerned about how much business would be generated by our site - we just knew that without one we could potentially miss out on lots of opportunities. As it turned out, our internet orders are responsible for getting our products to individuals around the world and many potential clients contact us because of the positive impression they get from our website.

The business has continued to grow steadily and experienced a growth spurt just before turning five years old, so there was much to celebrate and reflect upon. We are also pleased that Ploh has become the brand standard for a few hotel groups,

Connections: What were the toughest challenges you've faced as an entrepreneur?

Charlotte: You really have to be smart about your time. That can be a real challenge. Being your own boss might mean that you can be as flexible as you want with your time, but having your own business also means that you have the tendency to work all the time. And that doesn't necessarily mean you're always productive!

I try to maintain non-related work contacts/activities just to keep a little balance. It's important to make time for yourself to regain your energy and motivation and also to invest time in your personal relationships outside of work. The support of your friends and family is invaluable!

Connections: What do you enjoy most about having your own business?

Charlotte: Having ownership in every way. Celebrating the wins and learning from the challenges. I'd always heard that having your own business is like caring for a child and watching it grow. I now know why they say that – it brings a lot of joy, although it's not always easy!

Connections: Have any of the PrimeTime programs helped you in starting or growing your business?

Charlotte: There are some great resources within PrimeTime and I have attended several subgroup meetings, particularly Marketing. The diversity of the members and their varied professional backgrounds constantly provides inspiration.

Connections: Any advice for those thinking of starting their own businesses in Singapore?

Charlotte: If you've always wanted to start a business, Singapore is a good place to do it. There are still official steps you have to take, but there is a lot less red tape to deal with and Singapore's networking opportunities are much more accessible than in other countries.

PrimeTime talk ...

Connections: How have you been involved with PrimeTime?

Charlotte: I served on the PrimeTime Board as Membership Officer in 2004 and 2005 and then as 2nd VP in 2006.

Connections: What are the main benefits you get out of your PrimeTime membership?

Charlotte: I've made some great friendships through PrimeTime. I also appreciate that PrimeTime is a very well run, well-respected volunteer organization in a community of women's organizations. Each year the Board relooks at where we are and where we're going, how to improve and where to focus so that the organisation grows with the needs of its membership.

Connections: What has inspired you most about PrimeTime ?

Charlotte: I've been very impressed by the PrimeTime-TIAW Village Bank Program. I think it's wonderful that PrimeTime, as an organization of professional women, are helping other, less fortunate women create a sense of security for themselves and their families through their own small businesses. These women have little means, yet they still have the strength, heart and smarts to take on and manage an opportunity that may help lift them out of poverty and change their lives forever.