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Laying the foundation for the future of cleaning

LionsBot co-founder Dylan Ng is a firm believer in the use of robots to alleviate the cleaning sector's labour crunch.



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LionsBot has a full line-up of floor cleaning robots, each designed with a specific cleaning function.

Emerging Enterprise Award +

THE cleaning sector has been grappling with a worsening labour crunch over the years, but the demand for cleaning services has been steadily increasing.

Homegrown robotics company LionsBot International is aiming to empower cleaning professionals and upgrade their job scopes -all with a fleet of innovative cleaning robots.

The company's chief executive Dylan Ng recalls how the idea first surfaced when he founded SuperSteam Asia Pacific, a cleaning supplies distributor, together with Michelle Seow.

The duo, however, ran into some problems finding a suitable cleaning robot.

"(The robots available) were either too big, too expensive or too difficult to use. We realised there was a need for better and more powerful cleaning robots than what the global market had to offer," said Ng.

They also recognised that there was a growing need for the cleaning industry to "transit towards automation" amid a worsening labour shortage.

They believed that robotic fleet deployment would allow them to empower the cleaning professionals and upgrade their job scope to more rewarding work in supervisory capacities.

In 2018, the pair teamed up with robotics professor Mohan Rajesh Elara, who is currently with the Singapore University of Technology and Design, and built their first cleaning robot from scratch.

Today, LionsBot has a full line-up of floor cleaning robots, each designed with a specific cleaning function. These machines are devised to clean large business-to-business public areas, including malls, museums, and hospitals.

The company has a network of distributors in 22 countries around the world.

LionsBot's robots can be found at local landmarks such as the National Gallery and Esplanade.

Outside of Singapore, the robots are used in various National Health Service-run hospitals in the United Kingdom, and RMIT University in Australia.

Challenging industry

Although LionsBot has grown considerably over the years, Ng said that the cleaning industry is a "highly competitive market" with 3 particular pain points.

Firstly, Ng identified the ageing workforce that encompass a good portion of the cleaning industry in Singapore. He said the industry is now looking at "increasing workplace and in-job training" for the next generation of cleaning professionals.

"Despite manpower shortages during the pandemic and an expected pay hike for cleaners in 2023, Singapore is still facing a labour crunch and we are unable to hire younger employees in the cleaning sector," said Ng.

However, this labour shortage problem is not unique to Singapore, but is felt across the entire developed world, he added.

The industry is also facing a rising focus on sustainability, and the increase in demand for sustainable cleaning practices. In the wake of this, the use of smart cleaning robots will provide users with better time efficiency and resource management.

For instance, smart floor cleaning robots with energy-conserving water systems will allow companies to adopt an eco-friendlier approach to commercial cleaning, explained Ng.

Lastly, he noted that companies are turning towards technology to clean high-foot-traffic public areas.

Innovation in the forms of artificial intelligence, cloud connectivity and real-time tracking interfaces can help optimise cleaning efficiency and better performance, he said.

Lessons from the pandemic

Like many other companies around the world, LionsBot was hit by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Ng said the company was initially confronted with "several operational challenges", but was fortunate enough to have navigated them.

One significant problem the company faced was navigating the various lockdown measures without affecting productivity.

The shortage of semiconductor chips also led to longer waiting times and freight durations, which the team sidestepped by switching to parallel and concurrent product development for multiple projects.

But Ng believes that LionsBot has learnt a fair deal from the pandemic. One of his main takeaways was learning to be adaptive as a company, while keeping pace with the broader objectives.

Looking after the company's employees was also important, stressed Ng.

"The pandemic has introduced significant levels of uncertainties and worries to all our lives, and as the leadership team, we saw it as our duty to provide the safest and a stress-free work environment for our members."

The pandemic also appears to have accelerated the cleaning industry's shift towards automation, said Ng, adding that it is not uncommon now to see smart cleaning robots in international airports and popular shopping malls.

Innovation and experimentation

Looking beyond the pandemic, Ng said the company will continue to innovate and experiment with hardware technology to capitalise on an industry that is "exponentially growing".

The company's efforts to innovate have already started and the results are evident, he said.

Cleaners can use the LionsClean app to control a fleet of LionsBot's robots, and receive real-time notifications and updates on the cleaning progress, as well as detailed analytics.

With one app, a cleaner can control 10 robots at the same time. LionsBot robots also have a running time of 10 hours, versus competitors' time of 4 hours, said Ng.

LionsBot robots also only use 0.6 litres of water per hour, versus other competitors that use as much as 48 litres per hour.

LionsBot is also actively exploring markets for expansion opportunities. The European and United States markets are the current focus points for expansion, said Ng, adding that he believes there is "a lot of scope for organic growth".


The company is in the process of raising its Series A funding round, and is currently in due diligence with its lead investor.

Ng added that LionsBot is looking to be a "unicorn" company, and eventually be listed on a tech-heavy exchange like the Nasdaq in New York.

"Our vision is a Lionsbot for every cleaning professional," said Ng. "We are not only constantly innovating to better serve and empower the global cleaning workforce, but also laying the foundation for the future of cleaning."

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