

Forum tackles health and beauty industry

Izah Azahari

Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam (BIBD) continued its 10-part SME360 series virtual forum recently with a discussion on Brunei's health, fitness and beauty industry.

The February 8-9 event saw discussions on the market overview during the restriction measures and current transition phase, reflecting on market sentiments and challenges faced by the industry players.

The first session saw a panel of speakers which included founder of Cantik Spa Farah binti Abdullah; General Manager of Guardian Jennifer Yang; and owner of Aman Optimum Fitness Centre Sherry Abdul Karim. Also joining the panel was Credit Analyst at BIBD Securities and Asset Management Farah binti Amer Hishamuddin who discussed the beauty and fitness industry from a consumer's perspective.

Speakers during the discussion acknowledged initial hesitancy from customers during the early re-opening period but highlighted the importance of adhering to the government's precautionary measures and standard operating procedures (SOPs).

The virtual forum also covered a topic on strategies for the 'New Normal' discussed by industry players including General Manager of Conquest Gaurav Shrotriya; owner of Denise Wellness, Kimchi Restaurant and Deseo Denise Chai; Kids Coach and Founder of Project Wonders, Coach and Co-owner of The Cardio Club and Coach at GetFit Brunei Rachael Lee.

The discussion focussed on how business owners in the industry had to pivot to adapt to changing conditions, with some conducting on-line classes where possible, and others reaching their customers through social media.

The first day's last session of the forum focussed on caring for the community participated by founder and instructor of Brunei Swimming Club Isabel Keasberry; founder of Fera Health and Nursing Care Lailatul Zubaidah binti Haji Mohd Hussin; and senior hairdresser at Moore's Hairstylist Moore Iman.



Panellists and officials participate in the forum. PHOTOS: BIBD



The speakers highlighted the importance of using their business platform to give back to the community, not just during the COVID-19 outbreak. The panel spoke of their experiences in working with the special needs community, and how to use their business network to connect different

groups together to make an impact.

The second day of the virtual forum saw founder of Omni Sports Ken Han; co-owner and Coach of 673 Jerudong Liyana Sidek; and Founder of Hood Chops Barbershop Fakhru Islam, who spoke on how they adapted their businesses during the second wave to tailor to the

current situation and their customers' needs, with many choosing to upskill and use social media to keep their customers engaged.

In the following session titled 'Protecting Your Employees in the High Touch Industry', the importance of cleanliness and maintaining a safe environment at fitness centres to ensure premises are secure for customers were highlighted by panellists including Jab Gym Manager Marilyn Yap and As Salwaa Beauty Spa General Manager Edy Zurina binti Awang.

The forum's final session was participated by founder of The Obs Session Enterprise Raymond Chin; founder of SWM Enterprise and head coach at LaGree Fitness Maria Taha; and fitness instructor at ELITE Piloxing SSP, Piloxing Booty, Zumba & KpopX Fitness Tiffany Lai, who discussed about trends, use of social media platforms and virtual sessions in the health and fitness business during the transition period of COVID-19.

All topics discussed were in line with BIBD's effort to help small and medium enterprises (SMEs) recover sustainably amid the COVID-19 outbreak. Over 100 participants from the health and fitness industries attended the sessions.

The SME360 series, which runs from January to May 2022, features two industry highlights every month. The series of virtual forums aim to gather thought leaders and industry experts from 10 main business sectors across Brunei in engagement sessions with business owners and stakeholders to discuss the challenges, best practices, perspectives and opportunities to come back stronger.

The programme is organised by BIBD with DARE (Darussalam Enterprise) as strategic partner, co-curated by Firelight Sdn Bhd and Curious Mind. It is jointly supported by 10 of Brunei's major trade association partners and key market players - the National, Brunei Malay, Chinese and Indian chambers of commerce and industry, LiveWIRE Brunei, BIMP-EAGA, Young Entrepreneurs Association of Brunei (YEAB), Royal Brunei Catering (RBC), McDonald's Brunei, Serikandi Group, GoMamam, Ghanim International Corporation (bruneihalalfoods), Jab Gym, Hua Ho and Soon Lee.