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Multi-level marketing draws more people above 40

Many turn to selling health products; scheme requires low start-up and serves as back-up plan in case of retrenchment

By Serene Goh

MADAM M. Nadarajan, 53, found that her work as a nurse was exacting a heavy physical toll on her as she grew older. So she quit her job two months ago.



She has now embarked on a new career in multi-level marketing (MLM) and earns about \$1,500 a month.

She's part of a growing number of people in their 40s and 50s who are engaged mainly in the direct selling of supplementary health products.

A former nurse, Madam Nadarajan (lying down) now earns about \$1,500 a month selling supplementary health products, such as this massage machine, which she shows a customer, Madam Yeo Gek Neo, how to use. - AZIZ HUSSIN

Last year, an estimated 100,000 Singapore residents made up the MLM sales force, up dramatically from 40,000 a year ago.

The health product sector raked in \$244.8 million last year - 48 per cent of all the money made by MLM schemes here,

according to figures from the Direct Selling Association of Singapore (DSAS).

Industry leaders estimate that 25 to 30 per cent of the sales staff in MLM here are above 40, who are attracted to it for several reasons.

Compared to franchises, which typically require more than \$10,000 to start up, MLM commitments are minimal, costing between \$50 and \$500.

With potential monthly returns of several thousand dollars, marketing health products can be lucrative.

Many start off as users of these pills and potions, then move on to selling them to their friends and relatives.

Others view MLM as a source of supplementary income, or a back-up plan should they get retrenched.

The chairman of DSAS, Mr Benjamin Tan, 63, said more exact data is being collated based on surveys within the 20-member organisation.

As chief executive officer of Omegatrends, he said that the majority of his sales staff are above 35, with many in their 40s and 50s.

'People in their 40s or 50s are very nervous... about getting retrenched. They

make fall-back plans because if you have no job in your 50s, what are you going to do?'

Well, former nurse Madam Nadarajan has turned to selling the Sun Ancon Chi Machine, an apparatus to massage tired muscles. 'So far I've sold about 20 sets,' she said. Each set costs \$688. She made \$83 for each of the first 10 sets she sold, and \$150 for subsequent ones.

Others like Madam Serene Lee, 48, have been in MLM for many years. The full-time distributor for Best World Lifestyle's health supplements makes up to \$8,000 a month, plus she has the added incentive of recruiting friends to work with.

'The majority of my 'gang' are over 40. And nowadays a lot of my new recruits are mature women,' she said.

Currently, six of the DSAS-listed companies specialise in supplementary health products.

Among them, Unicity Singapore has an estimated 30 per cent of its network in the 40- to 50-something age group. Even more of them buy its products.

Mr Danny Here, 45, the company's general manager, notes that seniors attract better buyers because 'once these buyers find what they want, they are very committed and loyal'.

In the case of Best World Lifestyle, 10 per cent of the distributors are over 50. The company's chief executive, Ms Dora Hoan, 50, said 'they are more mature and know how to deal with people'.

The perception that MLM sellers are mainly bored housewives is changing.

Many are professionals, like Madam Pamela Sahai, 49, a water aerobics instructor. She sells Infinity2's enzyme-based nutrients to a wide range of buyers, from her peers to tertiary students, and even athletes.

'Initially, I got into it because I wanted to drink it for free. In a good month, I make about \$1,000 or more.

'One of the top guys... actually got a car as a reward. That's not impossible if you do it full time.'

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