

BRINGING BACK DIGNITY WITH INCONTINENCE CARE

After a decade-long career in consumer brand MNCs, Nivedita Venkateish began her own business to help seniors tackle urinary incontinence.

AIRE, an adult diaper brand that began as a personal solution for founder Nivedita Venkateish to support her grandmother, has since grown into a leading senior care brand in Singapore. Today, AIRE is available at more than 100 points of sale nationwide and recently expanded into Malaysia. Speaking with Erin Lee from SMU's Office of Impact, Nivedita reflects on her entrepreneurial journey, the importance of taking a consumer-first approach and why the silver economy deserves far more attention than it currently receives.

What drove you to take a problem you noticed in your family and turn it into a business?

It stemmed from frustration with what was available on the market. The products were poorly designed: the materials were rough, absorption was inadequate and most were not tailored to Asian body sizes.

From a brand perspective, the brands on the market were almost farcical in how they spoke to seniors. Having worked in consumer-facing roles at companies such as Diageo and Kraft Heinz, and at an agency building brands for Unilever, I feel very passionately about brands and their role in how

consumers see themselves. There is a need to have choice and that is the basis of the consumer product goods industry. If we have a dozen choices of body wash or shampoo, why is it that something like incontinence, something so intimate and affects you every day, has so few choices? Why isn't there a product which really align with seniors as they are today?

Those two factors gave me the courage to give this a go, and as I was just laid off from Meta at the time, I decided to take a bet on myself.

I didn't think AIRE was going to become a full-fledged business. Over time, we see how our products make a genuine impact on our consumers, not just in function but in how they see themselves. Since launching in 2023, we have nearly 100 different points of sale across online and physical channels such as FairPrice and Sheng Siong. We have closed two rounds of funding led by DSG Consumer Partners,

with additional support from AngelCentral and Wing Vasiksari, and recently crossed seven figures in annual revenue. This year, our focus is on doubling down on that growth.

How did your experience in companies like Kraft Heinz and Diageo shape the way you develop your products and engage your customers?

I think my training in consumer goods helped me in the early days, especially in learning how to talk to customers and how important customer inputs are in product development.

During my time at an agency which served Unilever, there was an almost obsessive focus on understanding exactly who your customer is, what kind of messaging resonates with them and what they look for in a product. When we started AIRE—and because I was bootstrapping it from the outset—I wanted to be

certain there was a real, unmet need before launching anything.

This involved running multiple focus groups and interviews, as well as volunteering at senior community groups to better understand their lived realities. When it came to product development and branding, we were doing primary research and blind testing to see the features that were most important to them. What was it that resonated with them? What did they look out for in a product? Everything we have done has been consumer-first, and it is a very strong retail principle which shaped my earlier career that continues to guide me today.

On top of that, my background gave me a head start in understanding how supply chains and retailers operate. These are insights I would have arrived at eventually, but my experience at Kraft Heinz and Diageo allowed me to get there faster.

Having run AIRE for the past two years, what's something that people may find surprising about creating and marketing products for seniors?

There are many misconceptions around how people talk about seniors. Even the term itself is not very descriptive—age alone tells you very little. One thing that often surprises people is just how diverse this cohort is. There are seniors who have just retired, who enjoy travelling, who are active and who participate regularly in community groups. Lumping everyone together as “those over 65” flattens that diversity and misrepresents how varied their lives and needs actually are.

Another common misconception is that seniors do not have strong opinions about consumer products, or that they are simply coasting through their sunset years. I believe that to be entirely untrue. In Singapore, seniors are among the most affluent cohorts, with

disposable income they are actively choosing how to spend. Across Asia Pacific, and particularly in Singapore, the silver economy is estimated at US\$4.6 trillion: It's a sunrise industry.

Senior consumers are discerning and opinionated about what they want and do not want. Just recently, while collecting product feedback, we spoke with a 70-year-old wheelchair-bound customer who had brought along samples of products he had purchased in Japan. He walked me through what he liked about those brands, what he preferred about ours compared to the market leader and where he felt we could still improve. There is a level of involvement, a level of autonomy that people tend to gloss over.

A third surprise is how digitally engaged many seniors are. Not everyone over 65 is equally social media savvy, but the trend is apparent. Increasingly, seniors are using platforms such as TikTok and Shopee to research consumer products, and many are comfortable

being on camera. We recently partnered with a ‘granfluencer’, Grandma Chris, who is in her 80s and regularly does livestreams and affiliate videos on TikTok. She also attends AI classes three times a week. Seniors are not withdrawing from the world—they are learning, experimenting and engaging, including on social media.

Was it challenging to convince others, especially VCs and investors, that seniors had these very diverse needs and personalities?

Oh, absolutely. Since we launched AIRE, a recurring question was, “Why do we need another adult diaper? It's not like the market doesn't have any.” We even had investors saying things like, “No one in my family has incontinence, so I don't think it's a real problem.” That view overlooks the fact that this is the fastest-growing category within personal hygiene. Incontinence affects around 400 million people globally—more than the population of the United States. But when people do not encounter the issue in their own circles, there is a tendency to assume it does not exist.

With venture capital, we were able to demonstrate real growth. Today, we are the number two brand on Shopee in Singapore and one of the top-performing brands at NTUC, largely because we differentiated both our product and brand around what consumers actually want. I think investor perspectives are shifting as a result. Growth signals product-market fit, and with that comes a clearer recognition of both demand and opportunity.



How do you think AIRE has changed the conversation around adult incontinence?

It would be arrogant to claim that we have fundamentally shifted public discourse, but we have made a deliberate effort to help normalise the topic. I tend to think about this across three pillars.

The first is on a community level. We work with active ageing centres and community service organisations, as well as take part in events organised by the People's Association and NTUC Health to destigmatise incontinence. We highlight how common incontinence is and share exercises that can help manage your pelvic and bladder health. Through these interactions, we are able to get people to talk about incontinence,

ask questions and peel away this layer of shame around the topic. That is one thing we're very proud of, and even though it's very resource intensive, we will continue doing it.

The second pillar is on shelf. Having a physical presence at markets like FairPrice, along with being present online, was super important to us; being physically present means that you're going to where your consumers are shopping. It is expensive, especially for a D2C startup brand, but it was an area we really wanted to invest in and differentiate ourselves with. With a product like ours, it is often thought that the shelf would be very clinical, dated and dull. We wanted to inject a sense of energy, excitement and consumer delight,

such that our products weren't hidden away in the back shelf, but were pulling customers in. In doing this, we were also able to change the conversation around incontinence.

The third pillar is normalising the conversation online. We try to shine a spotlight on seniors and mirror their personalities using our social media and brand content. We have Gen Z kids and seniors doing TikTok reels together, and our brand material involves visuals like a skydiving grandma. All of this highlights the energy, curiosity and personality that seniors have. It shows that, even if a person has incontinence, it doesn't mean they are lesser; they are just as human and just as capable.

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You have to be willing to roll up your sleeves, and you have to have faith, because these things take time.



Does AIRE have plans to go beyond adult incontinence products? Are there other issues faced by seniors that you would like to help solve and bring awareness to through AIRE?

We have many ideas, whether it's skincare or functional food. But our focus right now is to make sure we are building based on our experience and expertise. We want to broaden our incontinence portfolio, because even though we have adult diapers and adult pull-up pants, there's a lot more we can do in that space. How can we innovate on the current incontinence solutions, in both what we have as well as what's available in the market? Can we bring a sustainability angle to our products? There is a whole world of things we could do, especially with our overall mission of being the most loved brand for senior consumers, but we have limited capital and resources, so we're just focusing on incontinence for now.

AIRE began as a way to support your grandmother. In your opinion, why do you think it's important for businesses to design products and solutions with silver consumers in mind?

It's primarily for two reasons. The first is social: it is simply the right thing to do. Seniors are a significant and relevant demographic, yet they are often overlooked. If we are willing to design brands in our own likeness, or for people who look like us, there is no reason we should not

do the same for our parents or grandparents.

The second, and arguably more important reason, is that it is good business. In Singapore, one in four people will soon be over the age of 65. Senior consumers are also highly loyal if you earn their trust. It is a market which is begging for innovation and ripe for disruption.

That said, it is not without its challenges. There are deeply ingrained perceptions around ageing and senior-focused products. But when you remove those blinders, you will find that there is a huge white space opportunity, one where innovation is going to be valued.

Currently, AIRE is growing its presence beyond Singapore into Malaysia. Could you tell us about your progress and the reasons behind expanding to Malaysia?

Yes, it's a very exciting phase for us! We have been fully set up in Malaysia since February. One reason why we prioritised Malaysia was strong inbound demand from consumers. We had customers purchasing our products in Singapore and bringing them back to Malaysia, as well as others reaching out directly via WhatsApp asking when we would be available locally. That demand made the decision more straightforward.

The second reason was the relative ease of expanding from Singapore into Malaysia. There are established cross-border processes, and Enterprise Singapore was instrumental in connecting us with partners who

could support our entry. We are also taking an omnichannel approach.

Our Shopee Malaysia store is already live, and we are seeing organic demand come through.

In addition, we will be launching with one of the largest retailers in Malaysia, alongside pharmacies and wellness stores. Given the scale of the Malaysian market, these retail partnerships give us a much broader footprint than when we first launched in Singapore.

What advice would you have for budding entrepreneurs, especially those that aim to tackle social issues with their innovations?

The first is to take it to market. When I speak to people about starting something, many spend a long time in the idea phase. My biggest learning has been that once you put something out into the world, you gain far more information—real learning and genuine feedback—from consumers and partners.

The second thing is that, especially if you come from a corporate background, you have to be comfortable with a high degree of day-to-day uncertainty. You have to find creative ways to do more things with fewer resources and support. You have to be willing to roll up your sleeves, and you have to have faith, because these things take time. [AM](#)