

[The Star Online](#) > Lifefocus

Monday July 11, 2005

## Providing the Asian touch in New Zealand

By JACKSON TEO

**Need something from Malaysia? A marketing company in Auckland will source the product for you, writes JACKSON TEO.**

### **Fact file**

**Name:** Christine Chang

**Age:** 42

**Hometown:** Ipoh, Perak

**Education:** Main Convent Ipoh, Perak; St Columba High School, Toronto, Canada; University of Auckland, New Zealand

**Occupation:** Marketing director

**Years abroad:** 24

**Current base:** Auckland, New Zealand



Today, Christine Chang's company D&A Marketing (NZ) has an annual turnover of NZ\$8mil (RM20.8mil). Not bad for a company that was started on a capital of NZ\$800 (RM2,080). In fact, for someone who never aspired to go into business, Chang is doing great.

Establishing her leading distribution and manufacturing company in Auckland has been a long journey in the making and it all started the day Chang left home as a young teenage girl. In 1980, she left Ipoh at 17 to further her studies in Toronto, Canada at St Columba High School. Then, she travelled half way across the globe to embark on her

commerce degree at University of Auckland, New Zealand.

"I never wanted to be a businesswoman. I wanted to go overseas simply because everyone I knew wanted to go overseas. It was the trend then," says Chang, who is the marketing director of D&A.

After graduating, she headed back to Malaysia to find herself in sales, a field she never really liked. "In 1986, many graduates couldn't find jobs in Malaysia. Those who did had a starting



pay of something miserable like RM\$300 a month. I decided to join Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) instead as it seemed like a fairly good company to launch my career then."

Chang became a management trainee with KFC and underwent training for a year. After completing her training, she moved to New Zealand because the economy was "just so bad". "I became a buyer with Sheridan Linen & Laura Ashley (then owned by Australian Textiles) and was in charge of buying and stock control," she explains.

Learning all that she could in the three years she was with Sheridan Line, she decided to move on to Turner and Growers, one of New Zealand's largest and oldest produce marketers. When the company wanted to set up an international marketing division, Chang jumped at the opportunity. She picked up valuable marketing skills and precious product knowledge along the way, and after four years, she left to join an Asian importer for Gum Sarns Provision to establish their wholesale side of business.

That's when she first met Stan Gregory. It led to the conception of D&A Marketing and later, their marriage. Today, Gregory is her partner in love and business. "That was 12 years ago. It was a lot of hard work but we believed that if we are going to do it (business), we should do it with passion. Our first container of products was Palm Island Coconut cream which came from Samoa. Stan and I were so excited! We had 60 days credit for a container of products worth over NZ\$30,000 (RM78,000). But I had no doubt in my mind that we were going to make it," says Chang in a matter-of-factly tone. "Currently, we are selected brand leaders. We are importers, as well as manufacturers and wholesalers, and our customers are mainstream supermarkets."

Among the leading products that D&A Marketing distributes for Malaysian manufacturers in New Zealand include Lam Soon Group's Soy Fresh soya milk and its Fruitale and Antabax soap lines, as well as chips from Mamee produced by the Pacific Foods Group.

In the process of developing their business, D & A offers over 200 types of goods. Chang says her company is also venturing into other aspects of marketing such as helping customers source for products internationally.

"If they need something, a particular product, we'll get it for them," explains Chang.

"No doubt there were moments when things got tough but I've learnt from having my own business and in life that when one door closes, another door opens," Chang adds.

She's proud to be Malaysian and says with a grin: "I'm proud I have not lost my Malaysian slang."

However, she has one regret – being so far from home, "that I'm not closer to my family, especially my mother."

Chang says her mother has prayed really hard for her all these years and every time her mother said a prayer, they have had success with the contracts they were bidding for. At the end of the interview, she thanked her mother for all her wonderful prayers – and she jokes: "Mum, just give God a rest for a while! He needs a break!"