With more than three decades of experience as a food distributor and trading house, Sinhua Hock Kee (SHHK) has shown it is adept at changing with the times.

In its early days in the 1950s, founder Goh Peng Hock, now 84, made and sold traditional peanut cakes. Mr Goh, who was originally from China, only had a start-up capital of $10 then, while his distribution logistics involved just his bicycle. Gradually, as his business grew and he hired more than 30 workers over the next few years, his product range widened.

As Singapore’s economy prospered and labour costs began rising in the early 1970s, he started importing and exporting food items instead of just manufacturing them — and expanded his market reach and network in the Asia-Pacific region.

In 1975, SHHK, which also stands for Sincerity, Honesty, Hard work and Keenness, set up its first overseas branch in Thailand, followed by Malaysia in 1985. By 1995, the company, now equipped with a well-established distribution system, returned to making its own products, setting up a plant in China. Today, SHHK has logistics assets and factories across most of Asia.

Keeping up with the times

The brand’s lasting contribution in the daily lives of Singaporeans has led the company to win the Heritage Brand award at this year’s Singapore Prestige Brand Award.

As the company transitions into the age of digital commerce, second-generation family member, business development and marketing executive Albert Goh, 37, says its operations are now more complicated — so being familiar with all aspects of the business is essential.

He says: “In a fragmented marketplace, marketing and sales initiatives have become more challenging. The pace of change has also intensified, and most importantly, we have to understand the evolving consumption habits of Generation X and millennial customers.”

Since its inception, SHHK has been able to maintain a robust performance despite intense competition by continuously improving its products.

Mr Albert Goh says: “Keeping up with the new generation of consumers is not just about producing products by ensuring that they are free from preservatives and other additives, without compromising on their quality and taste.

“Our guiding principle is that we would only sell what we love to eat,” says Mr Albert Goh.

Aside from maintaining the HACCP and ISO22000 certifications, which are the highest standards in food manufacturing, a key ingredient of success is hard work, he adds.

Reaching new audiences

To engage younger consumers, SHHK established a presence on Facebook several years ago. It also hosts consumer fairs to cater to older generations.

It has its own research and development department, which enables the company to explore and innovate new food items and create new products.

“As third-generation family members join the business, we expect to adopt newer ideas,” Mr Albert Goh says.

With each generation bringing new market know-how and skills to the table, SHHK will continue its quest to conquer new markets.

The company plans to continually grow its business through acquisitions and by diversifying into related industries while adapting to modern management methods.