

## News

# Online personal shoppers

**Middleman companies help customers in Singapore shop on China e-commerce websites**

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ONE customer wanted a 3-D printer and the other wanted home furnishings. Another wanted a special talisman to prevent her husband from straying.

And they all shopped at the same place – China-based online shopping portal Taobao Marketplace.

According to a CNBC report last December, Taobao is China's largest consumer-oriented e-commerce platform, commanding an estimated market share of more than 70 per cent.

The website, which is entirely in Chinese, has grown in popularity with Singaporeans despite its merchants not delivering outside China.

Even its latest collaboration with DBS Bank has failed to encourage its merchants from taking up international delivery.

This is where middleman companies like 65Daigou and Peekka come in.

These websites, which are in English, act as e-shoppers for customers in Singapore and have collection centres in China for the merchants to deliver the orders to.

They then bring the goods to Singapore and deliver them to the shoppers' addresses.

"Taobao is getting more popular here because it is much cheaper than shopping at local brick and mortar stores," said Ms Liu Wen Yu, 28, co-founder of 65Daigou.

65Daigou was founded by a team of Chinese former electronics engineers who thought they could leverage on their knowledge of their home country to help shoppers in Singapore purchase items from Taobao.

Both 65Daigou and Peekka also offer e-shopping services for other small China e-commerce websites, but about 95 per cent of their customers are Taobao shoppers.

And business has never been better.

65Daigou processes an average of 3,000 orders or about 2,000kg of orders per day.

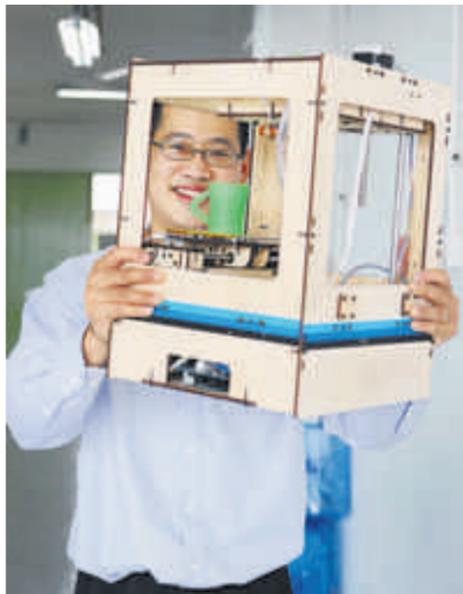
Customers are charged based on the weight of their orders and delivery time ranges from a week for express service to a month for regular shipping.

Mr Ron Tan, a 35-year-old Singaporean, is a



**ONLINE SHOPPERS:** 65Daigou founders (above, from left) Liu Wen Yu, Qiao Li Zhi and Xue Bin of at their warehouse in Jurong.

(Left) Mrs Kelly Kho and her husband Mr Kho Thong Lek checking out their new bathroom fittings that she bought on Taobao through 65Daigou.



**MIDDLE-MAN:** Mr Ron Tan (above), co-founder of Peekka, with the 3-D printer he helped broker.

co-founder of Peekka, which was started four years ago.

Before taking up the middleman role, he was a distributor for Chinese educational products and stationary.

He discovered Taobao while shopping online for some clothes and toys for his newborn back in 2009.

His friends started approaching him to share shipping for their online shopping, making him realise there's a market here.

One of the more unusual items Mr Tan helped broker was a 3-D printer – that could fabricate items after being fed with schematics – for Mr Xie Er.

## Cheaper

The 37-year-old IT consultant never thought of buying such devices initially as similar US-made devices are too expensive. But after he found the 3-D printers selling at about \$800 on Taobao – half the price of a US-made one – he bought two of them through Peekka.

He said: "As a hobbyist and gadget lover, these China-made kits are good enough for me, although the quality might not be comparable with those US-made ones."

Mrs Kelly Kho, 33, bought chandeliers and bathroom fittings for her new condominium unit through 65Daigou.

The project administrator said: "There is a huge variety on Taobao and the descriptions are clearly stated on merchants' sites."

"Some merchants even have videos to show the actual product, so shoppers like us will know exactly what we are buying."

The \$500 price tag did not bother her for she has been getting good service so far.

"I think most importantly, shoppers must learn how to gauge a merchant's credibility by looking at their feedback pages," she said.

"I would buy only from merchants with more than 50 positive feedback comments."

Both 65Daigou and Peekka have employees in China who will do basic quality checks on products they receive before sending them out to Singapore.

For items that fall through the cracks – both firms put the number at less than 1 per cent for disputes – agents would either re-order the items, or give shoppers refunds.

And what of that female shopper who wanted the talisman to prevent her husband from straying?

Said Ms Liu with a smile: "We brought it in for the female shopper eventually, but we don't know if it really worked."