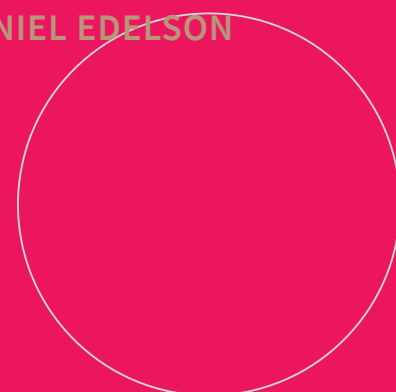


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# DISCOVERING LOCAL HIDDEN GEMS IN PUBLIC MARKETS

MARKETEER -  
DANIEL EDELSON



## BRINGING PUBLIC MARKET WISDOM OUT OF THE CHINESE-SPEAKING WORLD

Many markets around the globe are not only places where local people go in their daily lives, but also tourist attractions, such as the Tsukiji Market in Tokyo, the Nishiki Market in Kyoto, La Boqueria in Barcelona, and the floating markets in the suburbs of Bangkok. Hong Kong's public markets are in no way inferior. The CNNGo website has highlighted Hong Kong's public markets as tourist attractions, including the Graham Street Market, the oldest open-air market in Hong Kong with a history of nearly 160 years, as well as Chun Yeung Street, where trams go right through an operating market. Hong Kong's markets can be divided into three distinct phases: open-air markets set up before the opening of the port, practical covered markets with allocated stalls, and markets in municipal buildings; all of them sell both wet and dry goods, such as live poultry, fresh meat, seafood, vegetables and fruits. However, with the modernisation of the city, many public markets, especially open-air ones, have

been replaced by buildings constructed after urban planning. Markets play an important role in the development of a city; through them, we can see changes in the whole community, shifts in the focus of urban development, and the shopping habits of the residents.



“ In Hong Kong, there is always a public market nearby. There are over 180 public markets in total in the 18 districts of Hong Kong, which incorporate a lot of traditional street wisdom and local culinary customs. But as supermarket chains expand, how do local markets survive?

Daniel Edelson is one of the few expatriates who have fallen in love with Hong Kong’s public markets. He insists that public markets are a “hidden gem” of Hong Kong, and that was why he developed a mobile app called “Marketeer” to help non-Chinese people shop at public markets and learn about local produce.

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Daniel said that when he first arrived in Hong Kong, he thought that local public markets were dirty and unhygienic, and that he could only live on food from supermarkets. It was only four or five years later that he suddenly had the courage to go into a public market and realised that he had been wrong all along. “The freshest and cheapest food ingredients are in the public markets, but it is difficult for people who don’t know Chinese to shop there. At the same time, I saw that many public market businesses were struggling to survive because their regular customers were getting older and the younger generation might not like going to public markets — they were losing customers gradually.” So, Daniel felt the urge to do something.

**“Hong Kong’s public markets offer excellent prices and quality. They only need a little push to make these cool places more accessible, especially to foreigners.”**

He said that many of the ingredients in local markets are unfamiliar to foreigners, who might not even know their names, not to mention how to use them, but no one had the time to compile such information. “For example, ‘Chinese spinach’ is not the same as ‘spinach’. Sometimes, you can’t even find any

information on the Internet, and much of the information is copied and pasted without verification. If you don’t know the ingredients, how would you know their nutritional information?” Daniel pointed out that western countries are more concerned about the nutrition labels and ingredients of food, but Hong Kong people seem to be less concerned about it. “It turns out that too much vitamin A hurts the liver, but the vitamin A content of local produce is a mystery. This is even more problematic for people with special dietary needs.”

So, Daniel spent a whole year collecting information on local produce. He said that about 90% of local ingredients are not found in the United States, so he had to spend a lot of time checking the nutritional value and going to the market to take photos for each ingredient. “I’ve been locked up in a market overnight several times,” he said. Since Daniel often goes to the market for research, many stall owners recognise him and have set up a small corner for him to take photos of fresh food. “They have become my family. They would invite me to their homes for meals and give me mooncakes during festivals.” In addition to developing a software system to identify ingredients and collecting photos of ingredients, he also created recipes for each ingredient.





The most important part was to allow customisation in the app to let each user adjust the criteria for food recommendations, and this was also the most difficult part. “I’m the only full-time member working on this project. It feels ironic that I’m working on an app that promotes health, but I’m living an unhealthy life because of it.” Daniel received funding from Good Seed and met many of his teammates there, but most of them treated it as a school project; when the funding ended, everyone else went back to their own worlds, leaving him alone to continue the fight. “I never saw it as a competition. I think it is a need — there is a need for an app like this.”

Daniel said that he spends almost every day in a state of meltdown, as new problems arise every day, and the launch of the app has been postponed several

times. However, he pointed out that only the strongest can survive, and it was better to be late than never. He is determined to make the app work because he believes that it can fill a gap in the market and benefit foreigners living in Hong Kong. “Public markets offer the freshest ingredients at low prices. This app can help local markets expand their business and help foreigners live a healthy lifestyle at a low cost. It’s a competition, but it’s also a need. There’s really a need for this win-win situation.” Daniel has not thought about how the app could make money; he only imagines using it to live a healthy and affordable life.

**“I think all foreigners, like domestic helpers, can use my app to go shopping in the market, which will help them integrate into the local life and reduce the training time.”**

