

The Sylvane.com Story

From an apartment in New York City to a basement in Marietta, GA to a 6,200+-square-foot. office in Roswell, GA, Sylvane.com's growth and success as a provider of healthy and comfortable living solutions has been nearly 10 years in the making. Here is how it all got started.

Tree Pollen Worries

You could say that Sylvane.com began as the result of a pesky tree pollen allergy. As a native of New Jersey, Sylvane.com President Steven Hong lived much of his childhood against a rolling backdrop of runny noses, sneezing, and itchy eyes. All of these symptoms stemmed from his encounters with the potent pollen of New Jersey's native cherry birches, sycamores, and white oak trees.

As Hong grew older, his allergy symptoms became so severe that he decided to see an allergist for professional advice on treatment. During Hong's visit, the allergist performed a basic scratch test to identify exactly which allergies he suffered from. "When my doctor looked at the results, all he could say was 'Wow,'" Hong recalls. "He couldn't believe how many different things I was allergic to and how severe my allergies were!" Also on the list – ragweed, multiple types of grass, dust particles, and dust mites. As an initial – but not complete – fix, Hong's allergist recommended immunotherapy and allergy medications for treatment. And thus began Hong's ongoing quest to manage his allergies.

A Seed is Planted

Alongside this quest, Hong went to college at the University of Pennsylvania and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Engineering. His forte was technology – computers and the Internet to be exact. During his senior year, Hong developed an interest in retail. "I've always been fascinated with the retail industry. I liked the idea of giving a customer a tangible product, a tangible solution," he explains.

Hong took this new interest and combined it with his love of computers, embarking on an ambitious senior project of designing and building a turnkey Internet retail store. During this time, eCommerce was still very much in its infancy. Hong built an eCommerce website that could accommodate any type of product or service. His work on the project ended when he received an "A" – and later, his degree. However, knowing that the idea was ripe for future use, Hong stored his blueprint safely in his mind.

Finding a Solution

After attending Penn, Hong moved to New York City and worked as a consultant for global consulting giant, Accenture, consulting for prestigious institutions such as JPMorgan Chase, AT&T, Marsh & McLennan, and others. He also began work on a Master's of Business Administration (MBA) degree at New York University's Stern School of Business, married his wife Valerie, and set his sights on starting a family. Life was busy – and that's when his allergies started acting up again.

"This time I did some of my own research into other treatment options you could combine with immunotherapy and medication," Hong explains. "I read a lot about the benefits of using an air purifier indoors to remove allergens from the air. So I researched the top brands in the air purifier industry, got some recommendations from friends who had used air purifiers, and decided to purchase one for myself."



His choice was an Austin Air Healthmate, one of the bestselling and most effective residential air cleaners on the market. The fairly quick and largely positive results surprised Hong. "Within just a few days of using my air purifier, I noticed a clear reduction in the severity of my symptoms. I was sneezing less, my nose wasn't runny, and my eyes didn't get as dry and itchy as before," he says. "I was really taken aback by its effectiveness."

A New Path

With a new level of control over his symptoms, Hong continued his work as a technology consultant. But the idea of pursuing another business – retail – started weighing heavily on his mind. "I was thinking a lot about my interest in retail and in selling tangible solutions to people. Specifically, I was interested in selling solutions that improved people's lives in some way," he says. "I wanted to do something different that made good use of my technology skills and fell into the realm of retail."

One day, Hong thought back to his recent air purifier purchase and recalled the hours he had spent researching air purifier models, brands, and prices. From a business angle, he thought, an air purifier was an effective product. The evidence of his reduction in symptoms had demonstrated that. His research told him that air purifiers were part of a successful niche market with an accessible group of customers. That was a plus. From a personal angle, air purifiers helped people manage their often debilitating allergy symptoms every day and improved their lives for the better. This was something Hong understood first-hand.

Creating Sylvane.com

In late 2000, Hong took his original eCommerce website blueprint and began transforming it into what would eventually be the first-generation Sylvane.com. He also started researching other high-quality air purifier brands, contacting their representatives, and setting up vendor relationships. At first, Hong sold his air purifiers in online marketplaces, such as eBay. In 2001, the Sylvane.com website was launched. Customers could purchase air purifier units from 3 well-known brands: Austin Air, IQAir, and Blueair. Hong also worked on adding new brands, products, and product categories that helped promote indoor health and comfort and didn't stray from that concept. Portable air conditioners and dehumidifiers were added soon after.

After receiving his MBA in 2004, Hong and his family relocated to metro Atlanta, Georgia. He ran Sylvane out of his basement with the help of a few employees. In mid-2005, the company relocated to a small office in Marietta, GA and continued adding to its staff. In 2007, the company moved to a multi-room office with a warehouse in Roswell, GA, where it now resides.

While Hong spends most of his time managing the day-to-day operations of Sylvane.com, he still makes time to speak with customers one-on-one. "It's very fulfilling when you take a call and the person on the other end has no idea what they need – they just know they have a problem that needs fixing. You then educate them and recommend effective solutions that fit into their budget. This is what our website and our sales staff strives to do every day. We want to be the answer to that customer's problem."

To put it simply, coping with a common tree pollen allergy inspired one person to create a successful, growing business that helps people maintain their indoor health and comfort every day.

That's how Sylvane.com got its start.