

Cutting Edge Connectivity with IX Telecom

A business that started with RM30,000 in capital in 2008 has today established its presence in 200 locations around the world

Noor Helmi, founder and CEO of IX Telecom Sdn Bhd, had always wanted to be an entrepreneur and his dream was to own a telecommunications business. A telecommunications engineering graduate of Multimedia University, he started working life with a start-up telecommunications company and later joined Air Asia, a start-up airline. His stint with Air Asia proved to be an important one as it was there he acquired precious practical knowledge and experience, and most importantly for an aspiring entrepreneur, the can-do-never-say-no attitude of the airline's boss, Tan Sri Tony Fernandes.

In 2008, the 29-year-old Noor Helmi left his job to pursue his dream with the establishment of IX Telecom Sdn Bhd with his partner, funded only by a capital of RM30,000.

IX Telecom is a global virtual network operator with services that include global internet access, IP VPN, point-to-point connection, hosting, machine-to-machine, IT outsourcing, business process outsourcing and knowledge process outsourcing. It has established partnerships with service providers in over 200 countries. Currently, it has six offices in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong and USA (San Francisco and Washington DC). It is also servicing major telecommunication companies in Malaysia as well as multinational corporations (MNCs) which have branches abroad.

Noor Helmi said, "I believe there is no direct competitor with the same business model like ours in Malaysia. Though we are small, IX Telecom is global in character with nationals from ASEAN and Europe working for us. We even hosted MBA interns from the renowned



Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan who provided strategic recommendations on how to take this company to another level."

But it was not all smooth sailing in the early days of the company. Gaining acceptance on home ground was an uphill struggle. It was only after the company had established its credentials internationally that it found acceptance locally. The company's major local clients are telecommunications companies, with Telekom Malaysia being the main one. Air Asia is also one of its customers.

Noor Helmi said, "The Malaysian market was more receptive to our products only after we had proven ourselves internationally. I suppose it's a question of credibility. We have established our presence among the bigger companies and some small ones as well but there is still a long road ahead to achieve the recognition we want for our brand."

"We are essentially a B2B business and, of course, networking is essential for growth. As part of our promotion strategy, we participated in industry-related conferences and events such as communications and service providers' exhibitions. This also helps in networking with industry counterparts.



With the rapid developments taking place in the digital world, how would IX Telecom realign itself to meet the challenges emerging from Industry 4.0 and the Megatrends?

"Industry 4.0 is essentially about automation and data exchange. IX Telecom will always be aligned with disruptive technology, which comes with an innovative company culture. Platform-based developments will further accelerate the evolution of existing services and we will be there to ride along with the emerging trends. Right now we are working on big data and business analytics, software defined networking and Internet of Things (IoT). We strongly believe that all these developments will holistically boost the growth of our business."

What are the challenges he encounter since becoming an entrepreneur?

"Funding is always a challenge. We are financially stable now but funding will always be a challenge as financing needs get increasingly bigger in tandem with business growth. Another challenge is finding talents. The quality of the people we hire is crucial to the company's success. Getting talents who can fit into our company culture is not easy. However, right now, I can say we have the best team on board."

Has the current economic situation affected business?

"Yes, but it wasn't as bad as it was in the previous year because our overseas business has helped to cushion the impact."

IX Telecom, which currently has a workforce of thirty, was a recipient of the Market Development Grant (MDG) from MATRADE and recently secured first place in the Enterprise 50 (E50) Award 2016 by SME Corp. Malaysia.

Noor Helmi said it was a surprise for the company to have won the award as it was the first time they were participating in it. "There



was strong competition from other companies who had been nominated year after year. Maybe it was our business concept that made the difference."

Asked about his expectations ten years from now, Noor Helmi said he would surely want to see his business expanding further.

"We are already a global company but it's not enough. We want to go into other areas, build bigger teams, carve out a bigger market share. Right now our challenge is limited resources in finance and human capital but that won't deter us from pursuing our dream. We look up to successful global businesses like Grab, Agoda and Facebook as our role models."

What does it take to succeed in business?

"It's all about hard work and determination as well as having a positive attitude. We believe in continuous improvement in performance and growth. We aim for a consistent upward trend in our growth path. People management is also crucial while the culture of the company will attract the right talents. For example, in IX Telecom, we blend work with the fun element."

How do you keep going in the midst of challenges?

"I am not one who gives up easily. Be positive and you impart that positive attitude to people around you. Look at what Tan Sri Tony Fernandes has achieved with that kind of attitude. Believe, learn from experience and mistakes. Believe you can, and you can."

