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## M'SIAN FIRMS TAKE CHALLENGES IN THEIR STRIDE AT CEBIT 98

By: Yong Soo Heong

HANNOVER, March 26 (Bernama) -- Amidst the mega publicity blitz and fiery media hype by the industry majors at the just concluded CeBit 98, the world's biggest information technology and telecommunications trade fair, the 12 Malaysian participating companies had taken challenges in their stride here.

Although their budgets did not allow them to make huge publicity splashes like chartering aeroplanes to fly their company banners around the city, hoisting giant advertising balloons or engaging acrobats or magicians to put on "live" shows, the Malaysian stands have managed to attract a steady flow of visitors.

Although it would be rather difficult to expect them to have grabbed the lion's share of attention from the more than 600,000 visitors, they had expressed satisfaction that their presence had been worth their while despite competing against 7,200 other exhibitors, including household names like Sony and industry giants like Intel, from 60 countries.

One Malaysian exhibitor, when asked about the response, ventured to say that "the volume may be small, but the enquiries are quality ones."

Which means to say that the prospects of clinching a sale is rather high.

Being here was most important. Take M.C. Yong, managing director of Computer Protocol (M) Sdn Bhd, for instance: he was here for the second time around.

"It's good to be here. It allows you to compare against the others," he told Bernama. "In the computing and communications world, this is where the action is besides the COMDEX show at Las Vegas in the United States."

For Yong, he was trying to enhance his market share in the export market. Since his company's participation in last year's CeBit, it has been able to increase its export sales of data communications and networking products over the last few months.

"We are pleased that the economic crisis had not affected us in any way in the export markets outside South East Asia," said Yong, who is now evaluating more than 200 serious enquiries from the fair alone.

Besides Computer Protocol, the other Malaysian participants were Ricomac Corporation Sdn Bhd (photocopiers reconditioning), BRG Interactive Digital Media Sdn Bhd (multimedia development), Sapura Group (telecommunications products), Unico Technology Bhd (multimedia computers), Iris Technologies, Thundercom Holdings Sdn Bhd (modems), Sri Tahana Sdn Bhd (phone accessories), Technitone (M) Sdn Bhd (toner cartridges), AMP & Volt (M) Sdn Bhd (uninterrupted power supply devices), TCP Electronics Sdn Bhd (computers) and DST DataStream Technologies Sdn Bhd (anti-virus protection).

An official from a Malaysian telecommunications firm said besides promoting one's products, CeBit was also about observing what others were doing. "Trends are being set here. You have to take a long term view in order to be able to survive in the future," he said.

For Ang Beng Gee, a design engineer with DST DataStream Technologies, his company's anti virus products had been gaining considerable attention.

DST, whose clients for its anti-virus "Diskguard" hard disk protection device include various institutions of higher learning in Malaysia, was taking part for the first time at CeBit.

"We want to show the world what we can offer," said Ang, adding that a

number of enquiries have started to flow in."We feel that what we have is really useful as it helps to avoid loss of time, manpower and money when files are exposed to the threat of viruses and unauthorised deletion."

The outlook for Faisal Ismail, managing director of TCP Electronics Sdn Bhd, the manufacturer of the "Made-in-Malaysia" Matahari computers, is also bright."We have got a few serious enquiries from the Middle East and North Africa," said Faisal, whose products are being used by many government agencies in Malaysia.

In view of the current emphasis on buying local goods and services, his company has catapulted into the forefront in terms of governmental contracts since close to 90 percent of its components are locally made.

For Stephen Lopez, managing editor at BRG Interactive, it was a proud moment for him at CeBit 98 when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad came to launch the Internet version of the Malaysian Development Corporation's magazine, MSC.comm last Saturday. BRG Interactive is producing the Internet version on behalf of MDC.

BRG, which is already an MSC status company, was here for a number of reasons, including advancing its multimedia development services like content development, especially in the converging telecommunications, information technology, broadcasting and media-based industries.

As for global players like Microsoft, Compaq, Xircom, Siemens, Philips Acer, Samsung and Toshiba to name a few, they had spared no efforts to drum up attention to their leading edge capabilities and products. Equipped with eye-catching audio visual displays and armed with tonnes of promotional material, the big companies were the major draws.

Some of the more interesting items include flat screen computers which take up very little space, computers with "voice recognition commands", computers with DVD-ROM formats instead of CD-ROM, computers with increased video-conferencing capabilities and handphones with increased interactive features.

In terms of size, almost everything at CeBit 98, which was located in the Hannover Fair ground was big. To start with, the catalogue for CeBit 98 was the size of a RM50 dictionary! Those who did not want to risk aching muscles or sprained backs could opt for a CD-ROM version.

The 26 halls in the fair ground are not really halls in the true sense of the word. These huge columnless structures are more like aeroplane hangars. Which means to say that one hall, give and take a few metres here and there, is about thrice the exhibiting capacity of the Putra World Trade Centre!

To be fair, the Hannover fair grounds date back to as long as 1947. It began as an Allied initiative after the Second World War to establish Germany's first export fair. This effort gradually led Hannover to rank as the world's leading trade fair venue.

The officials of Deutsche Messe AG, the organisers of the fairs at the Hannover fairground, the city council and police have over the years honed their skills to ensure that everything at the fair works like clockwork precision.

Despite the fact that about 50,000 cars from all over Europe streamed into the various free parking lots near the fairground daily, there was no bedlam during the opening or closing times. Good co-ordination among the officials seemed to be the key towards the efficient operation of the fairs, which are the lifeblood of Hannover throughout the year.

Hannover takes the organising of fairs seriously. The first thing that greets the visitor at the airport is "Welcome to Hannover, the city of international fairs."

Such fairs are a significant contribution to the city's revenue while its residents also benefit indirectly. Besides the 8,000 beds in hotels in

the city centre, another 22,000 rooms are available from various boarding houses located in the suburbs, villages and farms.

As for the 10,000 journalists, their communication needs were taken care up to the hilt. Deutsche Messe even has computer wizards like Oscar A. Mojica among its staff to sort out transmission problems ranging from faulty modems to incompatible power plugs.

All in all, officials at Deutsche Messe expect a revenue of DM424 million from the various fairs for the whole of this year.

But they are not resting on their laurels. Demonstrating that planning is the key to success, they are already now working feverishly on EXPO 2000, a world exposition to be held in two years' time. -- BERNAMA

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