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PR firm to set up KL technology practice office

Shahriman Johari

IN ANTICIPATION of businesses which will be created through the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), international public relations company Hill & Knowlton Pte Ltd will be investing in a technology practice office in Kuala Lumpur which will provide a higher level of consultancy to its clients.

The company's regional director for Asia Pacific, Mr Bob Raggett, will be the technology practice director in Kuala Lumpur as well.

"With the MSC, we believe that there is still going to be business here and in fact greater communication challenges. Local companies or multinational corporations will look to communicating their position, changes and focuses within the country," Hill & Knowlton senior vice president for Asia Pacific Brian J. West said in an interview with Business Times.

The MSC, envisioned by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is a concept based on information technology (IT) in anticipation of globalisation.

As IT is expected to take centre stage with the coming of the new millennium, the MSC is Malaysia's stepping stone to the new information era which will operate in a borderless world.

West shares the view that the current economic downturn is just a short-term hiccup for Malaysia.

"Historically, there have been strong growth rates for Malaysia. There have also been wise investments in infrastructure not just in tourism or sports but in areas that are far more significant than that.

"We are an investor and we have a very strong operation in Singapore. The big area that excites us is the MSC. We applaud the Government's decision to stick with the MSC and that is why we are positioning ourselves here," he said.

West said each region will have practice directors and the technology practice director in Kuala Lumpur will be working with his counterparts in Europe, West Asia and the Americas to drive the company's business.

A practice director is the pivot point for a particular practice area.

"We do not have practice directors in every practice area. Only in areas which are thought to be significant for our business," he said.

A practice is an area of specialty. Hill & Knowlton has a number of practices, from healthcare to marketing communications as well as crisis management.

West said companies today want to hire the best practice regardless of where they are in the world. "Hill & Knowlton, a truly global company with 53 offices in 28 countries, will be able to provide the best practice through transfer of knowledge. This is done via information transfers, for example, from the US or Britain to Malaysia or vice versa."

Through this, the practice director in Kuala Lumpur can interface with other regional directors in the world to provide best practice to its customers.

The firm's investment, West said, is partly its own initiative and partly a reflection of views concerning the technology sector within Malaysia.

"We are hearing from our clients as well as from other countries in the region who are holding positive views on Malaysia's technology sector," he said.

With the technology office in Kuala Lumpur, Hill & Knowlton will bring a higher level of expertise in technology to its clients, said West. "A new office will be set up here and we will be recruiting and buliding up the practice."

Hill & Knowlton hopes that with the edge provided by the practice director, it will be able to offer a more advanced level of consultancy.

Public relations will subsequently be more focused on offering consultancy aside from continuously engaging in promotions and holding events, West said, adding that this trend has already started in markets such as Singapore, Australia and Hong Kong.

"We are pretty clear about wanting to invest in Malaysia and this will be the key strategic initiative for us," he stressed.

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