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HITECHNIAGA

HITECHNIAGA MAKES EARLY HEADWAY IN DIGITAL ECONOMY

By: Muammar Kamaruddin

KUALA LUMPUR, July 10 (Bernama) -- Since the inception of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1997, it had attracted several leading IT (information technology) companies like Microsoft Inc and Lucent Technologies as well as local companies.

However, not many had realised that even before the MSC came into existence, a local IT-based company, Hitechniaga Sdn Bhd, had already made headway in the electronic commerce (e-commerce) business.

Its chief executive officer, Cheong Yuk Wai, said: "We embarked on electronic commerce in 1996 when we built the first Internet store called iBuy."

He told Bernama recently that the MSC, the brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, had paved the way for Malaysian companies to do business in the so-called digital economy.

"MSC provides a test-bed for technopreneurs like Hitechniaga to dare to lead... to try new ideas or concepts that can be developed into prototypes and fully operational working models," he said.

Hitechniaga is an MSC status company and was part of the Borderless Marketing Concept team formed by the Multimedia Development Corporation Sdn Bhd and the Technical Sub-committee for the Digital Signature Act 1997.

It was also the only Asian company on the Mastercard International advisory board for Electronic Commerce.

Through the years, Hitechniaga had evolved and successfully developed Internet application software like Synapse, a full function Business-to-Business (B2B) Electronic Commerce System for a multiple buyer and multiple seller trading environment.

The company also developed the first cyber mall in Malaysia called Jaring's Mall of Malaysia in March 1997, a virtual shopping mall that offers consumers the convenience of armchair shopping.

Cheong said that Hitechniaga also gained international confidence when it successfully developed an Internet-based application called PurchaseStream, a single buyer, multiple supplier e-commerce B2B system for a Silicon Valley-based company, Connect Inc.

More importantly, the ambition of Hitechniaga to bring all locally developed websites back to Malaysia led to the development of a host website called e-My which is tailored for Malaysians.

Currently, most of the websites developed by Malaysians are placed in a foreign host site such as Geocities, a website in the US, he said.

Hitechniaga repeated its success story when the company's Internet-based application software MyBiz was handpicked by Bill Gates, chairman and CEO of Microsoft Inc, to be showcased at the Microsoft Asian Executive Summit in Hong Kong in March this year, said Cheong.

In fact, he added, Microsoft invested RM1.2 million in the MyBiz project which was launched here by Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz in April this year.

Apart from Microsoft, the project also received funding through the Perdana Demonstrator Application Grant that was awarded by the government, Cheong said.

This project also involves the Malaysian government, Small and Medium Industries Development Corporation (SMIDEC) and Arthur Andersen.

MyBiz is an Internet-based platform which allows Malaysian companies, especially small and medium sized industries, to join forces and promote

their products collectively to increase market share on a global scale.

When asked what makes MyBiz different from other locally developed websites that provide a directory of Malaysian exporters with the same aim of promoting Malaysian goods and services abroad, he replied: "It looks the same but there are differences."

Cheong said that MyBiz was capable of allowing buyers to make orders for goods that include specifications and pricing simultaneously.

He explained that if a buyer wants to order shirts from a Malaysian manufacturer, he or she can choose the specifications of the shirt/blouse, from the type of collar to the material and price variation.

Through MyBiz, Malaysian companies can also help each other in the export process, Cheong added.

For example, when a buyer wants to purchase instant food, he or she can choose the types of packaging provided by packaging companies listed in MyBiz.

This platform (MyBiz) also have financial transaction capabilities built into it that will allow buyers and sellers to settle the sum agreed upon through trade financing facilities, like letters of credit, telegraphic transfers and demand drafts, Cheong said.

At the moment, he added, Hitechniaga is in the midst of negotiations with several banks to be the provider of trade financing services which may be finalised by August.

Through MyBiz, the importer or exporter can also fill up the form for trade financing facilities online.

On the response to MyBiz among Malaysian companies, he said that since its April launch, the number of participating companies had grown from 50 to more than 100 to date and this is well on track to its projection of 300 member companies by year-end.

With these companies pooled under Mybiz, he said it will ease the task of marketing their products physically abroad.

For example, MyBiz is participating in the trade and investment mission to Japan and Taiwan, from July 7 to 17, which is headed by Rafidah.

By using multimedia technology, it is easy to promote the products and services of the 116 member companies as these companies need not have to be physically there to showcase their respective products.

In fact, Hitechniaga sent only its chief operating officer, Hoh Han Keyat, to do the promotional job for the participating companies under MyBiz in Japan and Taiwan. -- BERNAMA

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