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TIME dotCom-MOBILE

TIME dotCom AIMS TO BE A LEADER IN MOBILE NEXT YEAR

By: Emillia Rosnizar Ahmad Hanipiah

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 31 (Bernama) -- Much has been said about TIME dotCom Bhd of late. From its under-subscription of its initial public offering as well as its quest to find a strategic partner in the competitive telecommunications industry.

In spite of these challenges, TIME dotCom Bhd is set towards becoming one of the leaders in Mobile Services by the second half next year, said its Chief Executive Officer, Bob Fox, in an interview with Bernama recently.

"We are definitely not the market leader (in mobile), and we are not the market laggard either. So we are somewhere in the pack there," he said.

"We have a target to be amongst the leaders. That will take about some time next year, probably the second half," he added.

To achieve its target, Fox said the company has invested more than RM100 million on its mobile network to upgrade its services and as well as to widen its geographical coverage.

TIME also invested RM15 million recently on its call centre and customer services operations at Menara AA building to refurbish, reorganise and streamline the call centre to integrate all calls from its four entities namely, TT dotCom Sdn Bhd, TIMECel Sdn Bhd, TIME Reach Sdn Bhd and TIME dotNet Bhd.

"We are constantly working on improving our business operations, that's part of us as a learning company," he explained.

On the General Packet Radio Service (GPRS), he said TIME launched its GPRS late last year, but due to lack of handsets available, expected it to be rolled out next year.

When asked about 3G, he said TIME "whole heartedly welcomed" the proposal of not auctioning the spectrum mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently.

TIME has more than 5,000km of fibre optic network and connected about 1,000 commercial type buildings in the country.

"Given our content development on the fixed (line) side and the various content partners that we already have, we are well-positioned to upgrade our network to 3G in the future," he said.

TIME, which is among the five key players in the local telecommunication industry, is working close to its forecast for the current financial year under review, said Fox.

With his knowledge in the broadband services, Fox, who took office in the middle of this year, has been described as "the man" who could turn around the company.

Although TIME's half year results ended June 30, 2001 fell far short against its forecast revenue of RM1.75 billion and a net profit of RM150.6 million, Fox said the company had not made any formal revisions to its forecast yet.

"As a public listed company, there are certain procedures that we need to go through if we want to revise our forecast," he said.

TIME reported a first-half year revenue of RM462.7 million and a net profit of RM49.9 million.

Fox cautioned that the forecast contained in the prospectus was based on a business plan done long before the telecommunication industry was affected due to global economic slowdown.

He maintained his optimism that the forecast might be achievable as the

company had been restructured on two aspects -- its debt situation and organisational restructuring in the last few months.

"That has put us in a more efficient position to address the market place," Fox said.

He noted that TIME's restructuring did not include any lay-off as it re-designated its employees to focus on different areas.

On the search for a strategic partner, Fox did not mention any details except to say that it was shareholders' issue.

Khazanah Nasional Bhd, the government's investment arm holds a 30 percent stake in TIME under an agreement last year.

When asked on market speculation that Singapore Telecommunications Ltd (SingTel) and Japan's NTT DoCoMo were eyeing for more than RM2.0 billion worth of stake in TIME, Fox said: "I can say that there are all sorts of speculation going on in the press and it's quite normal to have this kind of speculation but I can't really comment on rumour or speculation."

Fox welcomed competition in the telecommunication industry because this would mean the emergence of innovative products and maintain prices at reasonable levels.

He also said telcos would collaborate and compete when it made sense.

"That is the approach that we take," Fox said. -- BERNAMA

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