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Industry collaboration important

By Arni Shahida Razak

UNIVERSITIES should collaborate with industry, said Universiti Sains Malaysia's programme chairman and head of Network Research Group (NRG) Associate Professor Dr Sureswaran Ramadass.

"We wouldn't be where we are today if there was no collaboration with businesses. After all, scientists at universities are good at coming up with research and developing new products, but they don't do too well when marketing them. That's why we need industry players to help us," he said.

And since USM is serious about its mission of becoming an e-university, smart partnerships with giants in the computer industry are inevitable.

"It is no easy task to convince them that we are worth partnering, but I think our good track record says it all. Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's vision for the Multimedia Super Corridor and ICT has also somewhat propelled us to work harder in the areas relating to computing and networking," he said.

Sureswaran, who is from the School of Computer Sciences, is not only busy connecting USM with IT companies in the country, but is also keen on participating in local and international workshops. He was also elected as the international advisor to the Asia Broadband Programme Study Group which conducts survey on the status of content development and information flow in Asia.

"We are tied up with so many things at the moment, but it's all good," he said.

The NRG focuses on three areas: multimedia conferencing architecture and system; network monitoring; and public library.

The Multimedia Conferencing System (MCS), developed in the early 1990s, garnered awards from the Computer and Multimedia Industry of Malaysia (Pikom) and the Multimedia Development Corp, among others. Its customer list includes big names like the Penang Government, Telekom Malaysia, Kulim Hi-Tech Park Malaysia and Lembaga Lebuhraya Malaysia. The Los Angeles City Council (United States), California State Polytechnic University, Suntec City Development Pte Ltd (Singapore), Keio University in Tokyo and Bharti Broadband Services in India are also using the MCS developed by USM.

"We're constantly conducting research to improve the MCS. In fact, the MCS is now into version 5.0," he said, adding that the MCS was a joint-effort involving the Multimedia Research Lab Sdn Bhd, a company involved in carrying out research, development and marketing activities on multimedia conferencing systems.

Apart from that, the group is also busy in the development of the Penang Library Network Project (PLNP), an idea that was mooted in 1999.

The group was given the task of establishing the infrastructure to be used in the project and to promote a more economic and efficient way of disseminating information to the public, among others.

Its efforts in developing the Intelligent Network Monitoring Software (iNetmon) and research conducted on the IPv6 (the next generation Internet protocol) Monitoring Tool have also garnered international recognition.

"Following the call by (from Dr Mahathir), we realise that we can no longer just be a Malaysian player. It is time to be an international player, and yes, we are capable of becoming one," he said.

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