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EON's Adzmi wins 'Most PR-Savvy CEO 2002' award

Koh Lay Chin

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Edaran Otomobil Nasional Berhad managing director Datuk Adzmi Abdul Wahab won "The Most Public Relations (PR) Savvy Chief Executive Officer 2002" award today.

He was chosen for being a "true public relations diplomat, managing director, nation-building volunteer and caring corporate mover" by the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM).

In his speech, Adzmi said it was not easy convincing Malaysians in the early days of Proton cars that they were as good as other models.

He said EON had to dispel a barrage of criticism, both locally and abroad, long before it succeeded in making Proton a household name.

"We brought to bear the full force of every PR game plan that we could possibly muster mercilessly.

"They say seeing is believing and in activities such as Sagarama, Sagathon and many more, we went on the offensive," he said after receiving the award from Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Parliamentary Secretary Wong Kam Hoong, who also launched the Exemplary Malaysian Public Relations Cases book.

Wong was representing minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin at the function.

Adzmi thanked Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for establishing the national car project, saying he would not have been today's recipient without Dr Mahathir's vision.

In the citation for Adzmi, IPRM said he was considered by many as an exemplary individual who had embraced the art of PR in today's complicated business environment - "a PR practitioner at his best even though his tertiary skills are deeply rooted in economics and business administration".

In another sweet victory today, EON Berhad also won the "Overall Winner of the Crystal Award IPRM 2002" in recognition of exemplary PR practice in Malaysia.

"When we started in 1985, a year after EON was established, nobody knew EON or Proton. Response to Proton cars though was good and we succeeded in selling about 7,500 cars," Adzmi said.

He said there were more than 1.8 million Proton cars on Malaysian roads today, providing transport for over six million people.

In the beginning, EON drove the car nationwide and to highlands to demonstrate to Malaysians that the car had power.

It also launched innovative communication campaigns, special number plates, took the Proton brand to dance floors and came up with attractive sales and after-sales packages.

"The experience was simply exhilarating and remarkable. Malaysians grew fond of Proton cars and owning one was special.

"They discovered Proton cars were not made of tin cans and they could certainly drive up steep mountains like Cameron Highlands."

He said although there were the successes achieved through good PR with target audiences, there were greater challenges ahead especially with the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta) and the effects of market liberalisation.

"Public relations for me is really about relationships and managing them. It is about talents and nurturing them. It's about sacrifices, profits and sustaining them, thinking out of the box, and being innovative."

"Above all, I think you need to be genuinely passionate about PR and to

remember that it is a collective effort where failures are learnt and successes are shared equally among parties involved," he said.

Adzmi, 60, first entered the national car project in 1982 when he joined Hicom Berhad as its corporate planning manager, later becoming Proton's administration and finance general manager in 1985.

He was appointed EON managing director in November 1992.

Other category award winners for the Crystal Award were Puncak Niaga Sdn Bhd, Public Bank, the Family and Women Development Ministry and HSBC Bank (M) Berhad.

Category award winners for the Special Public Relations Awards went to Peace Malaysia for its "Peace Rally" project, Wisma Putra for the 13th Non-Aligned Movement Summit and the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute for the NAM Business Forum.

Also present at the event were IPRM president Prof Datuk Mohd Hamdan Adnan, World Communications Network Resources Sdn Bhd executive director and chief judge of the awards Datuk Shaik Sulaiman Ismail and event organising chairman Shameem Abdul Jalil.