

The Malaysian Exhibition Services (MES) is one of Malaysia's premier exhibition organisation and over the years, it has established itself as a leader in the exhibition industry. This is due to its reputation of consistently producing well turned out exhibitions in the country. June this year, MES organised in Kuala Lumpur, the biggest oil and gas show which was a huge success. Recently Julia Douglas had a conversation with Tan Sri Asmat Kamaludin, Chairman of MES.

Q1. The exhibition industry creates employment in several segments such as venues, organisers, stand builders and service companies. Will you say that the exhibition industry plays an important role in providing employment in Malaysia?

Yes the economic spin-off provides employment opportunities for thousands of Malaysians in the hospitality and service industries.

In fact, the exhibition industry is unique, as it creates high value employment. It requires specialised skills and labour in organising exhibitions especially when we have to meet very demanding deadlines.

After having organised and managed several exhibitions of international standard such as OGA, ANGV, ASCOPE and MTA, we have dealt with many multi-national or global companies. These companies are usually particular with their corporate identity and most of the time engage the services of world renowned designers or architects to create their stands.



Q & A

with Tan Sri Asmat Kamaludin,

Local professionals or stand builders will then be employed to work for them. The experience gained will benefit the local professionals and besides getting high value contracts, they will be able to adopt the positive work attitudes and high standards adhered to by these international professionals.

Q2. Malaysian Exhibition Services have organised numerous exhibitions over the years. Your last exhibition, for example, was the Return of Investment (ROI) positive?

Obviously for new shows sometimes our ROI does not always bear fruit in the initial stage but for our flagship shows such as the Oil and Gas Asia, we are happy with the ROI that we

have seen.

Q3. Now let's discuss the visitor spending in your major exhibitions. Are they mainly by foreign or local visitors?

At the moment, the majority of visitors to any Malaysian based shows are locals. However, this is changing, and for it to change at the rate we want, we need to improve the facilities.

Q4. Do you think that the exhibition industry in Malaysia can contribute to direct foreign investment in the country?

Without a doubt it has. Many of the exhibitors, who were in our shows, have used them as a platform to access the Malaysian market. The exhibitors are now fully set up in this country, having injected capital and resources into Malaysia to develop their business here which helps the local economy immeasurably.

Q5. In what section of the exhibition industry in Malaysia would you like to see some improvement so as to be competitive in attracting international exhibitions into the country?

I would like to say that Malaysia has come a long way in the last decade in terms of exhibition infrastructure and development, but there is still some way to go to be able to compete with other cities on the exhibition circuit. First and foremost, we require a bigger exhibition centre. Already some of our shows have outgrown the facilities available, and this is a real barrier to us growing and developing our shows the way we want it.

Any new exhibition facilities need to be close to the city centre in order to provide a real user friendly experience for the increasing

of pure ground level exhibition space, but with a provision area for future expansion.

Malaysia does not lack home grown internationally recognised exhibitions. We have the Defence Services Asia, MIFF, Oil & Gas Asia, KL Motor Show to name a few. These exhibitions easily require more than 30,000 sq metres of exhibition space. Since no one venue can accommodate this space requirement, they will have to maintain their exhibition size or hold them at multiple venues, which can create an administrative and logistic challenge.

Should Malaysia have a proper exhibition centre, I'm confident these exhibitions can grow even bigger.

We have to look at countries around us, for example Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong even Middle East countries such as UAE, Qatar and Bahrain, these countries see exhibitions not just as a trade event that benefits the organiser, but more importantly as a high value tourism revenue.

Q7. What can exhibition organisers in general do to make exhibiting more successful?

Any reputable exhibition organiser will always be looking at ways to improve the whole exhibition experience. For anyone exhibiting at our trade shows, the key is the quality and relevance of the visitors we manage to attract. This is the core of any exhibition. We want all our exhibitors to leave our events thinking it was time and money well spent, and the main criteria for them to assess this, is if they have met the right people. So, a massive percentage of our time and effort goes into ensuring we match successful exhibitors with visitors.

I would also say, from an exhibitor's point of

4 Do your own press campaign and make sure you tell your key customers you are exhibiting.

5 Think of your booth design and how it can attract the eye in a large exhibition.

6 Latch on to the organiser's visitor campaign, and see how you can use this to enhance your pre-show profile.

Q8. How far in advance do you start to prepare for exhibitions?

As soon as the current show ends, we begin our preparations such as planning and strategising for the next exhibition. In fact, during our current show, a good percentage of sales for the next edition will already take place. In some cases, like our Oil & Gas show recently, we pretty much sold out the OGA 2009. I was told that there were companies, who wanted to sign on for their OGA 2009 booth even before OGA 2007 opened.

Q9. Are training given to your exhibition staff?

We have two levels of staff. We have the permanent staff and temporary staff whom we employ to work for us during the exhibition in areas such as the visitors' registration counters, lounges etc. For the permanent staff, we do have long term programmes drawn up based on each individual's tenure and development process. For the temporary staff, the employment agency that we appoint to recruit the staff, provides the relevant training.

Q10. Lastly Tan Sri are you optimistic in the future of the exhibition industry in Malaysia?

As I mentioned earlier, should we have a proper purpose-built exhibition venue, we will

Chairman of Malaysian Exhibition Services

number of overseas exhibitors and visitors that we see at our shows now.

Q6. Also can the present number of venues in Malaysia support the growing exhibition industry in the country?

For conference-led exhibitions, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (KLCC), Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC), Sunway Lagoon Convention Centre are well suited.

But what Malaysia lack is, a purpose-built exhibition centre that can cater to our ever growing exhibition industry. To start with, Malaysia will need to have 50 000 sq metres

view, there are additional things that an exhibitor can do to help such as:

1 Do a thorough research on the market you are entering.

2 Check on the exhibition you are targeting like its track record, visitor audit from previous shows, details of who is exhibiting and the PR campaign.

3 Exhibitors should not always leave it to the organiser to promote their presence especially at a large event, where everybody is vying for attention.

see more international quality exhibitions.

My view is, the exhibition centre has to be built by the government, as the pay back period or return of investment could be slow, but will give immediate benefits to the country and its people. As we know, the exhibition industry creates high value economic spin-off to the host country. Let's take the Sepang Circuit for example where the Formula 1 is held. If it would have been left to the private sector to build and run this circuit, it would have been rather difficult. We can't do it alone. We need the government's help in developing venues for international events.