

Homegrown World-Class Innovation

The move to a brand new office in April this year was not the only cause for YJack Technology Sdn. Bhd. (YJACK) to celebrate. The company had also reached the RM1 million mark revenue by the first quarter of 2016.

These milestones come on the heels of their success in December 2015 as a finalist at the International Grand Prize of the CIC Innovation Award in Hong Kong. In addition, YJACK won a gold medal at the 26th International Invention, Innovation and Technology Exhibition (ITEX) in 2015, beating 60 other companies in the construction industry category. While these accomplishments are impressive, it is particularly noteworthy for a company of its size to achieve by just its second year of operation.

YJACK was established on 31 March 2014 to offer a new form of pile testing services to the construction industry. The company's name is derived from its innovative method of pile testing. According to Mr. Yeow Leong Swee, President and Co-founder of YJACK, the conventional way of conducting pile load test requires 10 days of preparation and involves loading concrete blocks onto a structure supported by the pile to determine its strength and durability. This process is not only tedious



and logistically cumbersome, it is also costly and have safety concerns. In comparison, the YJACK method only requires a day of preparation and reduces the cost of pile testing by up to 50%. It involves installing a hydraulic jack, which is embedded in the pile to conduct the pile load test, thus, eliminates the logistical and technical constraints of the conventional method and is less hazardous. The technology has been patented in Malaysia and filed under Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) application with World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

This type of service requires direct marketing which involves face-to-face time with clients and conducting demonstrations. References are very important



Mr. Wai Yee Kong, company co-founder and inventor of the YJACK technology said, he initially offered his innovative pile testing service to friends and contacts in the industry at half price so that he could get their references and take photos to create brochures for their marketing efforts. "This type of service requires direct marketing which involves face-to-face time with clients and conducting demonstrations. References are very important," says Mr. Wai. To seek assistance particularly market acceptance and validation for his new products, Mr. Yeow sought the assistance of PlatCOM Ventures Sdn. Bhd. He sent them an email at midnight on a Friday and was surprised to receive an immediate reply. A meeting was scheduled on the following Monday. Through PlatCOM Ventures, YJACK was enrolled in the High Impact Programme 2 (HIP 2) under the SME Masterplan. Under the programme, YJACK was able to link up with relevant organisations such as the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) to get their innovation assessed. The YJACK technology has since been validated by Jabatan Kerja Raya (JKR) and the company was awarded a grant under the Pre-Commercialisation Fund amounting to RM700,000. The programme does not stop there. PlatCOM Ventures continues to

provide continuous advice and monitoring based on monthly reporting.

"It took us two years to start generating sales," says Mr. Yeow. However, once the ball starts rolling, YJACK has been able to sustain its momentum adding major companies such as SP Setia Berhad Group and IJM Corporation Berhad to their list of clients. One of the biggest pile testing services project they have provided for is the West Coast Expressway, which will link Taiping, Perak to Banting, Selangor. The company has also appointed a distributor for the East Malaysia and Brunei markets.

In fact, YJACK has plans to market their service even further abroad. According to their research, in 2013, the market for the construction industry was worth USD193 billion in ASEAN and USD7.5 trillion globally. After participating in HIP 2, PlatCOM Ventures set up a meeting between YJACK and Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) to get YJACK to join HIP 4 or the GoEx programme. The programme enables companies to make inroads overseas. Since then, YJACK has participated in trade missions and have also been featured in MATRADE's 'What's New from Malaysia' magazine, which is distributed to 54 countries. The company has a busy travel calendar this year to participate in several trade fairs and to understand the markets through greater market information and intelligence through the GoEx programme. "Our target markets are Viet Nam, Brunei and Indonesia and also to establish joint ventures in China, India and Sri Lanka. By this year, we will definitely go outside of Asia," says Mr. Yeow.

Aiming to be Global Player in Halal Consumer Goods

Julia and Adam which began as cute cartoon characters had started to look outdated when YBhg. Dato' Haji Zaihal Hazri bin Haji Abdul Halim took over Al-Meswak Mu'min Sdn. Bhd. in 2012. Mu'min Junior toothpaste icons were wearing 1980's childrens' clothing.

Dato' Haji Zaihal instructed a 'fashion makeover' for them to give a more Muslimah feel to the brand. He renamed 'Julia' to 'Zaharah', after his daughter.

In their new and modern outfits, 'Zaharah and Adam' continued to smile and wave their toothbrushes on the new revamped colourful boxes of Mu'min Junior toothpaste. This was all part of Dato' Haji Zaihal's strategy to enhance the product appeal when he took office as the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Al-Meswak Mu'min Sdn. Bhd. (Mu'min).

Prior to that, he conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis and came to the conclusion that the Mu'min brand of products were not faring well in the market due to lack of product improvisation and innovation. When he came in 2012, Dato' Haji Zaihal restructured the company's product lines and re-categorised them according to their target markets. Unpopular products were discontinued and old products were



upgraded to premium status. The company also introduced new variants to their existing lines such as a new range of flavours for Mu'min Junior, which now includes strawberry, orange, grape and fruities. Adults have also been spoilt for choice as there are several Mu'min toothpaste lines for them to choose from including Premium, Max Oral Care and Economy range.

The toothpaste's halal status may be Mu'min's unique selling point but the lack of conventional ingredients such as fluoride and triclosan is also what sets it apart from

other popular brands in the supermarkets. "These ingredients are not good for your health and have been linked to cancer. Many international brands have stopped using harmful chemicals in their products. We need to educate the local market as well," maintains Dato' Haji Zaihal. He adds that Mu'min consults with the Islamic Dental Association of Malaysia. "We are the first company to develop a halal standard for toothpaste and oral care in the country."

Last year, the company started to branch out from toothpaste and began manufacturing its own range of personal care products. The products include mouth wash, body wash, hand and body lotion, as well as talcum powder. "Our goat's milk body wash sold out when it was introduced. For three months, the product was not available in the market," says Dato' Haji Zaihal. The company has 40 new products in the pipeline and is exploring potential distribution channels.

Mu'min's distribution's strategy has been instrumental to its growth. Dato' Haji Zaihal introduced a centralised distribution system and appointed a master distributor to channel the company's toothpaste to consumers. "Our master distributor is huge and has distributed products for a lot of big brands. Mu'min is the only Bumiputera product they took on." The company also appointed a distributor to focus solely on dental clinics to promote its Max Oral Care Mouthwash. In addition, Mu'min promotes its products annually at exhibitions such as the Malaysian International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) and Halal Fiesta Malaysia (HALFEST). Last year, the company exhibited its products at the Thailand Halal Assembly.



Mu'min's product line will continue to expand as the company plans to introduce its own brand of household products. The company had purchased five acres of land at the PERDA Halal Park in Penang to build three factories for each of its product range: oral care, personal care and household. This is in line with Dato' Haji Zaihal's aim for Mu'min to become a leading global player in the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) segment. The aspiration is to make it just not at the local level but at the international level as he said, "The market potential is huge overseas."

Mu'min products are already present in Oman and even in the People's Republic of China, although on a small scale. In addition, the company has been recognised with an array of awards including the Middle East Business Leaders Award for Leadership Excellence in International FMCG in 2014. The following year, Mu'min won the Asia Pacific CSR Award for Socially Responsible Company in Health Enhancement as well as Global Leadership Awards in two categories.

While the company sets high business targets, it also aims to give back to society in a big way as how one of its employees had said, "We would like to be the largest contributor of zakat in the country."

Success in Shoe Business in Sarawak

Once upon a time, an executive in the banking industry decided she needed to explore a new career path, so she quit her job to pursue her passion. Puan Normah Ibrahim, also known as Emma, may not be a fairy-tale princess but she has a few things in common with the protagonist in one of these tales.

Like Cinderella, she has big dreams, is a hard worker, and believes that one shoe can change your life. So she founded Red Profile Sdn. Bhd. on 15 March 2006 in Kuching, Sarawak to become the first homegrown shoe manufacturing company in Sarawak. Just like in any fairy-tale worth telling, Puan Normah faced many challenges before she could realise her dreams. "There were no skilled workers in shoe making because the shoe manufacturing industry does not exist in Sarawak and it costs a lot to hire a trainer from Kuala Lumpur to train local workers in this field. The lack of raw materials locally also posed a problem as Red Profile produces leather footwear. They either have to be sourced from Peninsular Malaysia or imported from overseas," she explains.

Despite the difficulties in the beginning, Puan Normah stayed the course. Her patience and determination paid off when the company received its first small order to supply shoes for Shell Berhad in August 2006.



With assistance from SME Bank and some Government agencies, Red Profile was able to upscale its operations the following year. In 2008, the company reached a turning point when the Ministry of Finance approved Red Profile's contract application. "Since then, our business has taken off and grown rapidly achieving RM3 million to RM12 million in annual sales from 2011 to the present," says Puan Normah.

Nevertheless, the company has felt the effects of the global economic slowdown and the surge in oil prices. The cost of raw materials including leather and soles, as well as delivery fees have shot up, says Puan Normah. "The economic slowdown has also resulted in Government departments slashing their budgets by up to 30% in the last two years and that has had an impact on our sales." She credits her experienced and committed management team with helping her through the hard times and growing the business. "Red Profile is dedicated to maintaining the quality of its shoes and continuously conducts research and development (R&D) to improve its products," says Puan Normah.

Aside from occupational footwear, the company also manufactures shoes for casual wear under the 'Emma Daniel' brand name. The quality of Red Profile's shoes have been confirmed through the International Standard certification that the company received from SIRIM QAS International. Additionally, its shoes have also been tested, measured and inspected by the Science and Technology Research Institute for Defense (STRIDE), a department under the Ministry of Defence Malaysia, providing further testament to its good calibre.

Red Profile is dedicated to maintaining the quality of its shoes and continuously conducts research and development (R&D) to improve its products

Puan Normah aims to expand the market for her products and looks forward to capitalising on the opportunities available through the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA). "The AEC and TPPA enable free flow of goods, services, manpower, investments, and capital in and out among participating countries. This means skilled workers, raw materials and products can be easily acquired and sold without constraints or limitations, opening up new opportunities for businesses," she says. The main challenge for Red Profile now, says its founder, is to take the plunge and succeed in the open market. "In preparation, we will work on enhancing our image and products by ensuring that our outlets are uniquely attractive and our products are consistently up-to-date. If necessary, we will embark on rebranding our image and products," she maintains.

In real life, happy endings have to be consistently achieved, something Puan Normah is well aware of as she continues to have big dreams and aims to fulfil them. "Our ambition and vision in the next 10 years is to have our own outlet in every state in Malaysia."

Everything You Need Under One Roof

The era of dietary management for companion animals began in the United States of America (USA) in 1943 when Dr. Mark Morris, a veterinarian, formulated a special prescription diet to save a guide dog with a serious kidney disorder. However, thirty five years later in Malaysia, it was still common for pets to be fed leftovers and scraps.

While pet owners in the country were sending their companion animals to the veterinarian, many failed to follow-up with proper aftercare, particularly in ensuring that their pets adhered to a diet that fulfilled all their nutritional requirements. To address this concern, Dr. S. Sivagurunathan agreed to his staff's proposal that a small area of his veterinary practise be dedicated as a special corner where pet owners do not only purchase the necessary food and grooming products to maintain their companion animals' health and well-being, but also be educated on how to properly care for them.

In the 38 years since it was established in 1978, Pets Corner has expanded into a full-fledged business that has developed in tandem with the evolving attitude towards pet care in the country. Headquartered at Jalan Tun Razak in the same building as the clinic where it was founded, Pets Corner has contributed to improving the

standards of companion animal care by making available a diverse range of high quality products including nutritionally balanced premium pet foods, healthcare, hygiene and grooming products, as well as accessories that are approved and recommended by veterinarians. Aside from importing established brand names, Pets Corner has also ventured into developing and distributing local products including pet litter, deodorisers for the litter, as well as special sanitisers and soaps that are shariah compliant and specially formulated for Muslim customers.

To extend its reach to customers from different market segments, Pets Corner has branched out into the wholesale business and distributes its products to veterinary clinics in both Government veterinary departments and private practices, as well as to pet shops and breeders. The company has also formed working relationships with

wildlife parks and animal sanctuaries, in addition to supplying products through Government tenders to national service departments that require animals' service such as the Royal Malaysian Police and the army. In line with its growing operation, Pets Corner has been certified with a four-star rating under the SME Competitiveness Rating for Enhancement (SCORE) by SME Corp. Malaysia. Also, the company has opened a new distribution and retail centre in Kepong to better display their products and to cater to large orders.



Pets Corner's growth is also marked by its workforce which has increased from merely two employees at its inception to more than 50 staffs today. "All our staff members love animals and grieve with customers at the clinic when they lose their pets. At its core, our business is about promoting responsible pet ownership in order to strengthen the human animal bond," says Mr. Shrilan Sivagurunathan, Managing Director of Pets Corner. He has witnessed for himself the value of such a bond when the clinic hired a teenager with Downs syndrome,

who had difficulty interacting with people and functioning in society, to help out with general work. Eighteen years later, that employee is still working at the clinic, now as a kennel technician who takes great pride in his job looking after and caring for sick as well as wounded pets.

In addition to compassionate hiring practices, Pets Corner supports the work of its charitable arm, the Malaysian National Animal Welfare Foundation (MNAWF), to promote a caring Malaysian society by cultivating appreciation for the value of animals and advocating for the improvement of animal welfare. To achieve this aim, MNAWF conducts a number of activities including the Canine SportzClub, which runs an outdoor obedience training programme for dogs, and Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) for disabled orphans, and the elderly. Pets Corner is also involved in a number of initiatives to create awareness on the importance of pet nutrition and care, as well as to educate the public on the proper method of disposing pet waste in public areas. The company also donates pet food to animal shelters and welfare organisations such as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA).

While the mindset and attitude towards companion animals such as cats and dogs have improved since Pets Corner was initially established, Mr. Shrilan maintains that much more needs to be done to increase the level of awareness about the value of animals. "There's no point in having a pet if it doesn't teach you anything about empathy or compassion. After all, that's why we give it a home and a life," adds Dr. Sivagurunathan.

Staying Ahead of Competition

They call themselves the 'rock solid management team' because no matter how harsh the environment in the meeting room, the three directors of Instant Exhibition Services Sdn. Bhd. always walk out without any ill feelings.

This is because they accept that disagreements are part of the process of finding a solution to a problem. "We trust each other to perform our respective roles and responsibilities as we are all working towards the same goal. We will question, analyse and source for solutions but ultimately, we will work together as a unit to solve any issue that arise," says Encik Herwan bin Daud, Managing Director of Instant Exhibition.

It is an operational practice that has served them well as the company has grown to become one of Sabah's leading event and exhibition management companies handling over 10 big events a year, in addition to 40 to 50 smaller events. The company provides a comprehensive range of services including stage preparation, advertising, event management and audio-visual for primarily indoor events. "In our first year, we did events mostly for IT companies but after a couple of years, the IT market wasn't doing so well. Now, our major clients are property development companies," says Encik Herwan who adds that about 80%

of the company's clients are from the private sector, while the rest are from the Government. Some of the major events that they have worked on include the Borneo International Trade Fair and the Sabah International Exposition.

One of the biggest challenges the company faces is managing its cash flow because of the nature of its business. Producing an exhibition requires huge capital investment upfront, "We have to be accurate in forecasting the supply and demand of our stock as wrong investment or bulk purchase can cost us financially," says Encik Herwan. The company also has to contend with the challenges of protecting its intellectual property as there have been instances where Instant Exhibition's design and artwork have been misappropriated to undercut its bid for a project. "Most of our work is done in-house but we've faced the problem of other event providers getting access to our event visuals and layout proposal, and then amending it slightly and quoting a slightly lower price, "It is heartbreaking as



The economy is beyond our control but we can make it work by persevering and exploring more possibilities with our clients so that the project can be achieved within their budget

our team of designers and sales personnel have spent days and nights in long meetings to develop the proposal only to have it hijacked by another company to win the contract," Encik Herwan laments.

Additionally, the company has felt the brunt of the economic downturn as it affects one of their core businesses, which is production. "Our products are calculated based on the current prices of raw materials so it is not easy to convince our clients about the changes of our prices as they also have their own budget to manage," he continues. However, this has inspired the company to strive harder for creative and innovation solutions to satisfy their clients. "The economy is beyond our control but we can make it work by persevering and exploring more possibilities with our clients so that the project can be achieved within their budget," adds Encik Herwan.

In fact, Encik Herwan always chooses to err on the side of optimism, noting that opportunities can arise from the challenges

they face on a daily basis. "From the accumulation of experience, our team has become more informative and innovative. That is our strength and is what keeps us ahead of our competitors, enabling us to lead the industry at the moment," he says. When Instant Exhibition was established in 2012, its staff size was less than 15, but now, its current team consists of more than 30 employees. Last year the company set up a branch in Sarawak, after having secured a contract with a property organiser to manage three events for them in Kuching. This year, they've added a couple more projects to their portfolio in Kuching and remain hopeful about their prospects to further expand their business there. Looking even further ahead into the future, Instant Exhibition has its eye on becoming listed through its parent company. "We have seen other similar companies listed in overseas markets and they are good role models for us. So we hope and aim to have our company be part of the listing within the next 10 years," Encik Herwan says.

Designing Dream Homes

The Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 may have been a bane for many companies, but for Oriwise Sdn. Bhd. it turned out to be a boon. Prior to the crisis, the company worked primarily on a contract basis for developers.

“From 1992 to 1997, we were well known contractors. We had a lot of clients and were making a lot of money so we felt pretty confident,” says Mr. Simon S.H. Tan, Managing Director of Oriwise Sdn. Bhd.. The signs of a crisis loomed a couple of years prior to the event, but Mr. Tan admits that he did not heed the warning signs until the problems began to unfold in 1997. When the crisis hit, the challenging market conditions that followed made him realise that it was no longer ideal to continue working on a contract basis.

“We needed to become a company that dictated our own price,” he says. In fact, the notion of having the final say on all matters related to their work was the motivating factor for the change in the business direction. “As contractors, we didn’t have a say in the designs we worked on. We can only implement the designs



based on the developers’ specifications but sometimes their designs were not practical,” he explains. He decided to reorient the business by focussing on providing interior design services directly to clients. The aim was to sustain and grow the business by working on projects for commercial offices and residential homes.

Oriwise strived to survive in its first five years, says Mr. Tan. Aside from expanding its clientele, they continued to take on contract jobs to keep the company afloat. Nevertheless, they were selective in only choosing projects that would enhance Oriwise’s reputation. Eventually, the company saw the need to expand its market beyond Johor. In the midst of another economic downturn, Oriwise made a game changing move by opening an office in Kuala Lumpur in 2008. “The market started going down that year and with the limited

market share in Johor, it was tough for a company to remain secure. Our brand was beginning to get better exposure so it was time to start targeting the KL market," says Mr. Tan.

The company also re-evaluated its business model and decided to aim for more end-users as the market potential among consumers was more promising. Oriwise positions itself as a dream home maker, working closely with customers to come up with designs that fulfil their idea of a dream home. In order to capitalise on the company's strength, a spin off venture called ORISS was established to provide kitchen cabinets and wardrobes. "The largest volume of work we do in homes is for the kitchen. This is what people spend most of their money on. ORISS is our first attempt to provide branding with a product," Mr. Tan explains. The brand has done well, winning awards from the International Interior Design Association (IIDA) in the kitchen category for three years in a row. ORISS also made a mark in the local industry by winning the National Mark of Malaysian

The largest volume of work we do in homes is for the kitchen. This is what people spend most of their money on



Brand from SME Corp. Malaysia in 2014 and was certified under its Malaysia Brand Certification Programme. Understanding the importance of branding certification, Oriwise later followed suit in receiving the same certification last year.

These achievements have bolstered Mr. Tan's plans for the company. He expects a 30% to 40% increase in sales by the end of 2015 and says that Oriwise will aim for an increase in sales of more than 40% in 2016. In the slightly longer run, his goals are even more ambitious. "I want Oriwise to be the biggest interior design firm in Malaysia in three to four years' time. After that, I want to list my company on the Malaysian stock exchange," he says.



Suite of Solutions to Combat Crime

When TESS International Sdn. Bhd. made its debut in SME Corp. Malaysia's Enterprise 50 Award (E50) in 2014, the company turned out to be the fifth winner. This was an unprecedented achievement because new companies to the E50 Award usually do not make it within the top 10 winners in the first year and have to work their way up in the following years. However, TESS International is used to defying the odds, having done so early in the game as a young start-up trying to find its place in a saturated market.



When its founders, who were professionals in the fields of IT and investment banking, shook hands in 2000 to establish TESS International, the obvious direction for the business to take was by providing Internet and mobile banking solutions. Unfortunately, the market turned out to be more challenging than anticipated and they did not get the response that they hoped for from local banks and financial institutions. "The widely held perception was that products from the West were better so they did not have confidence in solutions available locally or even in Asia," says Mr. B. Y. Liew, TESS International's Chief Executive Officer.

In search of a more stable business model, TESS International decided to seek out a new category of clientele the following year by adapting its solution for companies in the unit trust business. While they fared better in the new market, its founders knew that the company was still vulnerable and needed to focus on a niche in order to strengthen their position. This realisation came when they were invited to participate in a tender for a project with a bank. “We were one from over 40 companies, including international organisations that sat in for the tender briefing,” says Mr. Liew.

It took them over a year to brainstorm a possible niche before they came up with the idea to develop an anti-money laundering solution. “We had no clue if it could work but we put up a paper and sent it to the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation Sdn. Bhd. (MDEC).” MDEC approved their application and provided them a matching grant in the amount of RM1.2 million, which allowed TESS International to proceed with the research and development (R&D) for their new solution.

While it took them over a year to find customers, their clientele continued to grow to financial institutions, and insurance companies not just in Malaysia but also abroad. TESS International worked with the Government of Thailand to provide a platform for Thai financial institutions to screen all their customers’ financial standing. The company approached authorities in Thailand after the country was placed on an international financial blacklist for money laundering and to date, about 300 financial institutions in Thailand have subscribed to its platform. In addition, TESS International

has secured customers in the Philippines and Cambodia, and is currently participating in a few tenders in Singapore and Viet Nam. “We want to put our flag in every country. At the moment we are concentrating on ASEAN countries, the next wave will be Taiwan, Hong Kong, People’s Republic of China and Sri Lanka,” says Mr. Liew.

The widely held perception was that products from the West were better so they did not have confidence in solutions available locally or even in Asia



TESS International has also expanded its range of products to include solutions for detecting fraud activities, currency monitoring, as well as statistical reporting and analysis, among others, allowing the company to create an overarching brand called the ‘Coral Suite of Solutions’ to solidify its position as a developer and provider of financial crime solutions. Its reputation has been further enhanced by the number of awards added to the office shelf. Aside from making it to the E50 in 2014, the company won second prize in the Technology Acceleration Programme (TAP) 2013 Award and the Best of Financial Application Merit Winner Award from MSC Malaysia APICATA Awards in 2014. In addition, TESS International took home the Gold Award at the ASEAN ICT Award (AICTA) in Bangkok, Thailand in 2014.

Selling Like Hot Cakes

The use of the word 'world' to brand their *putu bambu* may seem like a misnomer when it is sold at a small outdoor stall with only an umbrella for cover, but the two entrepreneurs were confident in the quality of their product. So they were unfazed when a customer came up to their stall and mocked their use of the word.

"I'm going to try it and judge for myself," challenged the customer. "After taking a bite he told us, you were right to use the word world!" recounts Encik Karim bin Atan, Managing Director of MD Foodstuff Sdn. Bhd. These days their brand name is seldom disputed, probably because it is no longer just handwritten on a piece of cardboard. The phrase 'Putu Bambu World' is boldly emblazoned on the food trucks and kiosks that sell their product, while

the brand name and company logo are featured prominently on their plastic bag packaging and mineral water bottles.

The hardships of selling at an outdoor stall may be far behind them but Encik Karim says even back then he believed in the huge market potential of *putu bambu*. He points out that unlike other popular traditional delicacies, people typically don't make *putu bambu* in their own kitchens. "The process of preparing it can be quite laborious so people prefer to just go out and buy it." Encik Karim can attest to the hard work involved, having toiled in the kitchen himself in the early days. "We worked from midnight to dawn getting the *putu bambu* ready to be sold by a nasi lemak seller in the morning. At the time, we didn't even think about how much we earned or whether we could have sufficient reserves to plough back to grow our business," he says. Encik Mohamad Hassan, his Business Partner and Operation Manager of MD Foodstuff, adds, "We were only earning about RM30 a day."



The process of preparing it can be quite laborious so people prefer to just go out and buy it



However, the encouraging response they received from customers soon motivated them to expand their horizons. They approached Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) for a loan and was taken aback when told that their facilities would have to be evaluated first as part of the application process. "We had a modest kitchen with only a single stove, one steamer and a box of flour when they came to visit," chuckles Encik Mohamad. Nevertheless, their loan application was approved and they received RM10,000 from MARA. Other than MARA, financial assistance was hard to come by as they did not have a track record. "I have never been employed in my entire life," says Encik Karim. But he persevered and the company continued to upscale its operation in line with its growing business objectives. "We started operating from the Kawasan Industri Kecil dan Sederhana (IKS) in Ayer Panas because we wanted to chase bigger targets. From there, we started supplying to hotels, factories and cafes," Encik Karim adds.

MD Foodstuff is now based in Taman Perindustrian Selayang, where its operation has been streamlined. The company's headquarters houses its central kitchen and storage facilities, while also functioning as the distribution centre for all their outlets

and franchisees. MD Foodstuff currently has 24 outlets, mostly in the Klang Valley and also in neighbouring states, including Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Pahang. One of the company's biggest challenge is securing suitable sites to situate their kiosks and trucks. Aside from difficulties getting approval from local authorities, a couple of locations were not able to generate the volume of sales expected. While Batu Caves and Taming Sari are well known tourist attractions, their *putu bambu* only sold well during peak seasons at these locations.

The company now has its own evaluation to test a location. "If it doesn't sell well in the first week, it is not likely to do well at that location," Encik Karim says. The company sets its daily and monthly sales targets for every outlet and monitors these outlets closely so that they can relocate immediately if unsatisfactory sales. The plan is to expand to 30 outlets by end-2016 and eventually to 300 outlets throughout the country. Encik Karim believes *putu bambu* can also do well in the global market but at the moment, he says there is no technology available to preserve the product for export.

Their *putu bambu* may not yet be available to consumers around the world but there is justification for the use of the word 'world' in its brand name. By branding the product and making it widely available, MD Foodstuff has opened a new whole world of possibilities for the humble *putu bambu*. Much like what popular franchise establishments have done for doughnuts, MD Foodstuff may well elevate *putu bambu* from a traditional breakfast or teatime treat to a popular snack that can be enjoyed by the masses at any time.