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Mimos wants to help SMEs

In May, *netv@lue2.0* met with the president of the Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI) based in Taiwan, Johnson Lee. ITRI was founded in 1973 with the aim of transforming Taiwan's economy from a labour-intensive model to a high-tech industrial one.

The success enjoyed by ITRI in fulfilling its role as the Taiwanese government's main research arm for industry and innovation is there for all to see. Last year, ITRI earned between US\$50 million (about RM175 million) and US\$60 million in licensing revenue and around US\$200 million from contract research it is hired to do, mainly by overseas companies. It also spins off between four and five new companies a year.

By any yardstick, these are impressive numbers and make it worthwhile for any government to try and emulate ITRI's success.

This is where Malaysia's own Mimos comes into the picture. The idea for Mimos was to try and emulate ITRI to some extent. Like ITRI, Mimos too began with the semiconductor industry but that is where the similarities end.

Mimos under its previous leadership failed to meaningfully engage with industry and academia to create winning research, products or development. The government tolerated its poor performance until 2006 when it brought in a new CEO who has the experience and know-how on what it takes to be world-class. Since he came on board, Datuk Abdul Wahab Abdullah, the president and CEO of Mimos, has worked hard to turn Mimos into an organisation that can deliver meaningful contributions to the country's development, specifically in ICT.

New blood has been brought in but more meaningfully, Wahab has worked hard to transform the existing team at Mimos into a more motivated and results-driven unit. While the jury is still out on the effectiveness, it is clear that Mimos is striving hard and engaging with industry and academia. We asked Wahab how SMEs could benefit from the work being done at Mimos. An edited version of his response follows.

The Edge: Has Mimos been reaching out to SMEs to create awareness that they can utilise your resources as they try to innovate?

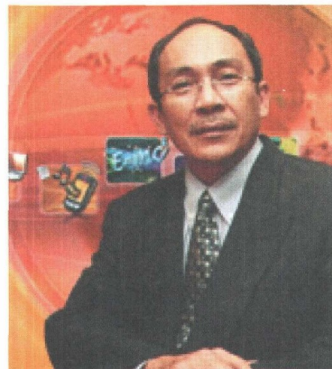
Wahab: Yes. We have been reaching out to the industry players, including SMEs, through several forums and technology events. In 2007, they had the opportunity to preview the technologies from Mimos labs at three key events, namely, at the National Information Technology Council (NITC), NIC Exhibition and Mimos Technology Forum. So far this year, we have showcased our technologies at the Mimos Technology Preview, and the Malaysia Agriculture, Horticulture and Agrotourism Show (MAHA) 2008. During the Mimos Technology Preview, we had over 500 participants representing various industry players, while more than 2,500 industry players visited our exhibition in Maha which showcased IT's relevance in agriculture.

Do you believe you can be of assistance to our SMEs? How so and in which areas?

Today, most SMEs depend highly on foreign technology which they acquire at huge costs. Mimos' role and commitment is to develop technology platforms for the indigenous industries, including SMEs, in line with Mimos' vision of becoming the premier applied research centre in frontier technologies. SMEs can then use these platforms in various market verticals. Mimos' role essentially is to transfer or licence the technology platforms to Malaysian companies to further develop these technologies into products and applications to serve the global market needs. The ultimate aim is to help move Malaysia's ICT industry higher up the value chain and shift the economic needle.

Malaysian SMEs are slowly coming around to the notion that innovation, especially process innovation, is something they can achieve. Are you able to help them in this area?

By acquiring foreign technology and incorporating it with Mimos' very own indigenous technology into



Taiwan has its ITRI which is an outstanding example of government-sponsored research tailored for industry, especially its SMEs. Do you think such a set-up would benefit Malaysia?

Mimos has repositioned itself as a market-driven R&D institution in the country. This is where Mimos is similar to ITRI. Both Mimos and ITRI look at the full eco-system when bringing products to the market. However, the Mimos model is unique where we develop technology platforms which can be adopted in various vertical markets.

With globalisation upping the ante on quality, as well as cost issues for SMEs, do you think our SMEs can compete and win at the global stage?

Mimos' mission is to pioneer innovative information

Mimos' mission is to pioneer innovative information and communication technologies towards growing globally competitive indigenous industries.— Wahab

technology platforms, we are providing SMEs with fast time-to-market solution.

Would you be able to work with SMEs if they came to you with certain problems and asked for your help to solve the problem or would this not fit in with your current approach to working with the industry?

The main concern of SMEs lies in their entry into the market space. A tripartite committee coordinated by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in which Mimos is a member assists SMEs in three ways: Mimos mitigates technology risks, MDeC mitigates markets risks, while Malaysia Venture Capital Management mitigates financial risks. The tripartite committee looks at SME issues and concerns as a whole.

and communication technologies towards growing globally competitive indigenous industries. For us to help our industries to be global, we have institutionalised various process tools such as CMMi and Six Sigma to give our SMEs the credibility to tackle global business opportunities.

Because we develop robust technology platforms, SMEs which are our technology recipients will have a speedy time-to-market and price elasticity to position themselves globally. With the intellectual property that we have generated, we would also be able to reposition our local industries to play in niche markets globally.

Besides that, Mimos also provides state-of-the-art IT infrastructure to support the tool in product development and process through KnowledgeGRID Malaysia, which can be utilised by the local industries. **E**