

entrepreneur

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Chu Jenn Weng President and CEO Vitrox Corp Bhd

Nature of business:
Machine vision technology

Revenue FY2010:
RM18.13 million

What were your goals and ambitions for the business when you started it?

From the very beginning, we wanted to build a world-class technology company with our own learning centre that would continuously produce new talent to support our long-term business growth. This vision has not changed. In fact, we are starting to realise it now with the completion of Phase Two of our Vitrox Innovation Centre last October. The new facility, which is four times the size of the old centre, will give us plenty of space to expand our R&D facility, manufacturing facility and learning centre.

How many people does Vitrox employ?

We have over 200 employees now. We look for people who are passionate and committed and assess them based on their skills and, most importantly, their attitude.

Vitrox Corp Bhd co-founder and managing director Chu Jenn Weng believes in investing even during economic turmoil as the company will then be in a better position during the recovery. That's why the Penang-based company specialising in machine vision products upped its R&D spend by more than half to RM5.7 million in 2009.

Vitrox's success is evidence that Chu's approach has paid off. In the following interview, Chu, the Ernst & Young Technology Entrepreneur Of The Year in 2011, shares his thoughts on building a successful technology company, especially in a difficult market.

Tell us about Vitrox Corp Bhd.

We are in the machine vision business. We design, develop, manufacture and sell machine vision products to the semiconductor and electronics industry. Machine vision products are used in manufacturing facilities to check and control process and product quality. Our products are capable of identifying defects found in the manufacturing process or in the products itself, automatically.

So far, we have installed more than 9,000 vision systems around the world. We have customers in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Korea, Japan, the US, Mexico, Brazil, Hungary, Morocco and Australia.

How did it start and what inspired it?

We were three graduates from Universiti Sains Malaysia and two of us, Steven Siaw and I, were working for a multinational corporation in Penang. We started Vitrox in 2000. We realised that we could offer machine vision technology to many companies locally and abroad to improve their manufacturing capability.

What challenges did you face when you were starting the business?

It was difficult to recruit and retain talent as Vitrox was a very small company without any brand and status when it was established in 2000. We started the company from scratch and therefore had limited knowledge. We lacked capital and networks, and sought a lot of help from old friends, business partners and even customers. We had to figure out a lot of things through trial and error, and deal with issues when they arose. But we had a strong partnership and trust in each other so we were able to resolve these issues, by putting the company's interests ahead of our own.

What was the initial capital investment?

We started the business with RM20,000, partly borrowed from friends and families. The company has now grown into the largest listed machine vision company in Malaysia with a market capitalisation of more than RM200 million, and more than 100 customers worldwide.

Do you have a management philosophy?

We believe the best management style is to encourage staff to manage themselves based on a set of principles. We have a pretty flat organisation and practise an open-door policy where everyone works in an open space without walls. This promotes openness and efficiency.

What is the culture of Vitrox and how do you inculcate it among the staff, new and old?

There are five core values that we try to inculcate at Vitrox: integrity, accountability, courage, respect and care. We try to create a conducive working environment by allowing staff to play and engage in team-building activities on site.

We demand that our leaders lead by example and demonstrate the core values in their decision-making and day-to-day activities. We also conduct workshops and camps to build teams. Our staff are assessed on their adherence to our core values so rewards are not only based on their performance but their attitude as well.

What, to you, defines a successful business?

To me, a successful business is one that makes a positive contribution to the world and is built to last a long time. A successful business must have people who will uphold its culture and work together for its betterment during both good and bad times.

What goals and expectations do you have for Vitrox's future?

I would like Vitrox to stay focused and continuously improve its machine vision technology so it can grow to be a global technology company meeting international standards. We want it to be recognised by customers, suppliers and competitors worldwide. I do have a vision that when people talk about machine vision technology, they will inevitably end up talking about us.

I also hope Vitrox will be a company that grows quality and professional managers and engineers for the industry. I want Vitrox to continue creating value-added jobs and also hope it will play a central role in helping our local industries grow and help our economy improve.

And lastly, your personal goals in terms of your role in Vitrox?

I have not really thought about personal goals but I will leave you with a quote by William Hewlett, who is the co-founder of Hewlett Packard, which reflects what I desire to do for Vitrox.

'As I look back on my lifework, I am probably most proud of having helped to create a company that by virtue of its values, practices, and success has had a tremendous impact on the way companies are managed around the world. And I am particularly proud that I am leaving behind an ongoing organisation that can live on as a role model long after I am gone.'