

IBNU SINA: Now, I Can See The World!

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Prologue

Every morning, Hj Mohd Nizam's daily routine involved stopping at a coffee shop to enjoy a cup of coffee and two half-boiled eggs. In early January 2010, after his usual breakfast, he passed by a row of electrical goods outlets that sold refrigerators and televisions. The encounter triggered several questions in him,

"Will the customers always buy the appliances?" and "If the outlet does not receive a customer each day, how does the owner survive for decades?"

Hj Mohd Nizam recalls his experience as a salesperson in direct selling and the moments when he recorded the highest network marketing sales. He was devastated by how he failed in business previously, and with his hands held up like a warrior, he found a new spirit to emerge as a business survivor, stating, "Once I had clarity on this being my purpose and outcome, it was time to begin to plan how I could best go about working in that way". A few days later, Hj Mohd Nizam bought a pair of spectacles at one of the shopping malls in Kota Bharu. After wearing them several times, he felt discomfort in his eyes and went to a clinic for an eye test. He was surprised to discover that his eyes were fine while the spectacles prescription he required was reduced from $+1.75D$ to $+0.50D$. Inspired by his observation at the electronic shop, he figured that the shop owner must have constructed an effective marketing strategy to market the products. Thus, he asked himself, "Why don't I use my experience in direct sales and as a salesperson to try to sell new products?". He believed that the right strategy could ensure long term product survival in the market either by using the same product marketing strategy or a new strategy for business survival.

The Journey of Ibnu Sina

Saying 'I want' in life is impossible to some people. Nonetheless, deciding what you want is freeing. Throughout one's life, many decision points and choices are left to make. "One of the biggest choices I have made, and I am happy to report that I love, is becoming a therapeutic eyewear entrepreneur known as Ibnu Sina," said Hj Mohd Nizam. The journey began in direct selling when he joined Wholesale Warehousing Industries (WWI), a two-year-old direct selling company. Subsequently, he left to join Grolier (M) Sdn Bhd for two years before joining several leading direct selling companies in Malaysia and achieving the highest level of sales in network marketing (Multi-Level Marketing).

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The 12th of February 2010 was an important date for Hj Mohd Nizam when he launched and branded the Ibnu Sina Eyewear product under Monizone Resources Sdn Bhd (MRSB). The MRSB currently employs twelve permanent workers. "I love to read a famous book named 'The Canon of Medicine', which is inspiring. The book is written by the famous Muslim scholar Ibnu Sina. The Canon of Medicine describes the world of medicine covering the history of traditional medicine including Islamic medicine, Persian medicine, Chinese medicine, and Indian medicine". His interest in the book inspired him to brand his product as Ibnu Sina Eyewear based on the author of the book. Hj Mohd Nizam acknowledged that "The jump from direct selling to entrepreneurship feels tiny because the experience I learned during MLM made it easier and certain".

During his years in direct sales and sales, he gained valuable knowledge and marketing experience. In 2013, MRSB thrived in the market with the addition of several other eyeglass products. He has also established the Monizone Academy to provide business training to entrepreneurs starting from 2016. The business currently owns seven kiosks throughout Malaysia and three kiosks are located in Kota Bharu at the Sultan Ismail Petra Airport, Pengkalan Chepa.

In the beginning, he marketed his product through online marketing on "Cari Gold". After several months of online marketing, he realised that Ibnu Sina Eyewear sales were declining and not receiving much customer response. Thus, he began considering launching a new marketing strategy to attract customers. Subsequently, he started using any site that suited his product for direct sale to the public.

The Sultan Ismail Petra Airport, Pengkalan Chepa, was selected as the initial place to sell to the public directly and as his first site for Ibnu Sina Eyewear marketing. "I started by renting a booth for three days at RM150 per day. The booth received impressive sales over the three days, exceeding its target by a good margin". The location was where his therapeutic eyewear business really ascended. Along with expanding his company from two to eight employees, he began marketing the products at a new site in a Lembah Sireh supermarket in Kota Bharu. Within months, he expanded around Kota Bharu, Kelantan, such as at the Tenaga Nasional Berhad building, Hospital Raja Perempuan Zainab II, and the KB Mall shopping complex. He became convinced of the marketability of Ibnu Sina Eyewear products.

The eyewear industry in Malaysia

Malaysia is the third-largest economy in Southeast Asia. The country was ranked the 23rd most competitive country in the world between 2017 to 2018. The monthly household income of Malaysians has surged at an annual rate of 6.6% from 2014 to 2016. Malaysia is a country where vision impairments, such as myopia, hyperopia, and presbyopia are rising at a concerning rate. Significantly, due to the increased demand for prescription glasses, the eyewear market in Malaysia has increased at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 6.4% during the 2011 to 2016 review period. The country also holds a significant demand for sunglasses. Malaysians are highly price-conscious, considering that the major businesses in the country offer branded eyewear products at discounted and affordable prices. Furthermore, Malaysian optical shops constantly hold sales and promotional activities to attract more

Malay customers and to accommodate the evolving consumer behaviour, many optical shops have refurbished the existing store layouts to an open concept store layout.

Recent developments in the Eyewear Industry in Malaysia

The Malaysian eyewear industry continues to record strong positive sales growth as various consumer lifestyle trends have positively influenced buying decisions in different eyewear categories. Although contact lenses are in higher demand and the demand is still increasing for daily wear and lens replacement, eyewear sales are growing mainly due to the sale of existing, inexpensive, and conventional lenses. Demand for glasses continues to expand, a trend supported by increasing users experiencing issues with their vision due to exposure to digital screens. With internet penetration in Malaysia currently at over 90% and 98% of the population using smartphones to access the internet, Malaysians are increasingly experiencing a decline in their vision as they spend increasing time on electronic devices. The need for eyewear is growing rapidly as new frames are in style. The trends are shaping the market.

Increasing commoditisation within spectacles

As observed within the apparel and fashion accessory industries, eyewear is increasingly commoditised, particularly for spectacles. The average unit prices are on the decline, with a rising number of consumers speeding up replacement cycles and opting for cheaper references to keep up with rapidly changing fashion trends. Retailers are boosting the trend with relentless '2-for-1' or 'second unit half-price' deals on corrective spectacles. Sunglasses are regarded as a fashion accessory rather than an eye care protective device. The growing appeal of fashion brands and fashion-related channels clearly indicates that aesthetics is preferred over functionality or UV specifications. Moreover, the rapid expansion of fast fashion companies offering affordable design-led sunglasses is a driver behind the trend. Commoditisation is also evident in distribution. From 2012 to 2017, optical shops lost four percentage points to non-specialist channels, mainly e-commerce, with consumers placing more importance on convenience and price than on the know-how from eye care professionals.

Cashing in on prevention and vision enhancement

Global consumers are choosing to take greater ownership of themselves and are conceptualising their health in a longer-term, in a preventive sense, as opposed to the treatment for specific conditions. The proactive approach suggests greater opportunities for eyewear manufacturers and retailers as the consumer base expands from further diagnostics while opening extra revenue streams for non-corrective or preventive references. From Essilor's Crizal Previncia launch in 2013 (one of the first preventive lenses offering protection against blue light and UV rays), many players have transferred into the preventive territory. Zeiss instantly followed with Zeiss digital lenses and the recently launched Zeiss Energizeme. Energizeme refreshes a patient's eyes after the removal of contact lenses through the prevention of digital eye strain using the DuraVision BlueProtect technology. Advancing one step ahead of prevention (into enhanced territory), Hoya recently established EnRoute, a lens designed for drivers

that minimises glare and reflections while enhancing contrast and brightness by absorbing blue light, thus significantly reducing light scatter when driving.

Global ageing (and rapidly growing) population

Ageing is one of the most significant global demographic factors influencing eyewear. In 2017, 29% of the world's population was over 45 years old (average onset age of presbyopia), which is predicted to increase to over 33% by 2030 when over 2.6 billion consumers require a particular type of presbyopia-related eye care solution. The growth represents a market opportunity of approximately 500 million new consumers globally. Nonetheless, ageing poses specific challenges, particularly in product development. Senior consumers (over 65 years old) tend to suffer from dry eye syndrome, thus the contact lens fitting among the consumers require extra care.

Industry players agree that low usage among the elderly is due to low consumer awareness of the benefits and low professional encouragement for elderly consumers to experiment with the lenses. Further material innovation could overcome the issue among senior consumers and opticians.

Premiumisation is the most critical path to top-line growth across many references, and eyewear is no exception. Premium products and services enable brands to form consumer relationships amid competition from e-commerce and social media. Consumers will grant maximum loyalty and money to companies that serve as partners, binding products and benefits to long-term services. The health and wellness trend gripping consumers has infiltrated nearly all industries, including eyewear. As health becomes a status symbol, consumers increasingly shift towards a proactive approach. Preventive eye care is gaining ground similar to the concept of enhanced vision among consumers with healthy vision.

Company operation

Monizone Resources Sdn Bhd employs 12 workers and is headed by Hj Mohd Nizam as the Managing Director. His spouse, Dr Ruzanifah, acts as the Director of Finance in the company operations. Figure 4 illustrates that the company unit heads run the company operations in departments, such as marketing, administration, customer service, logistics and inventories, and graphic design. The diagram outlines the business organisation chart of 12 employees based on their respective positions.

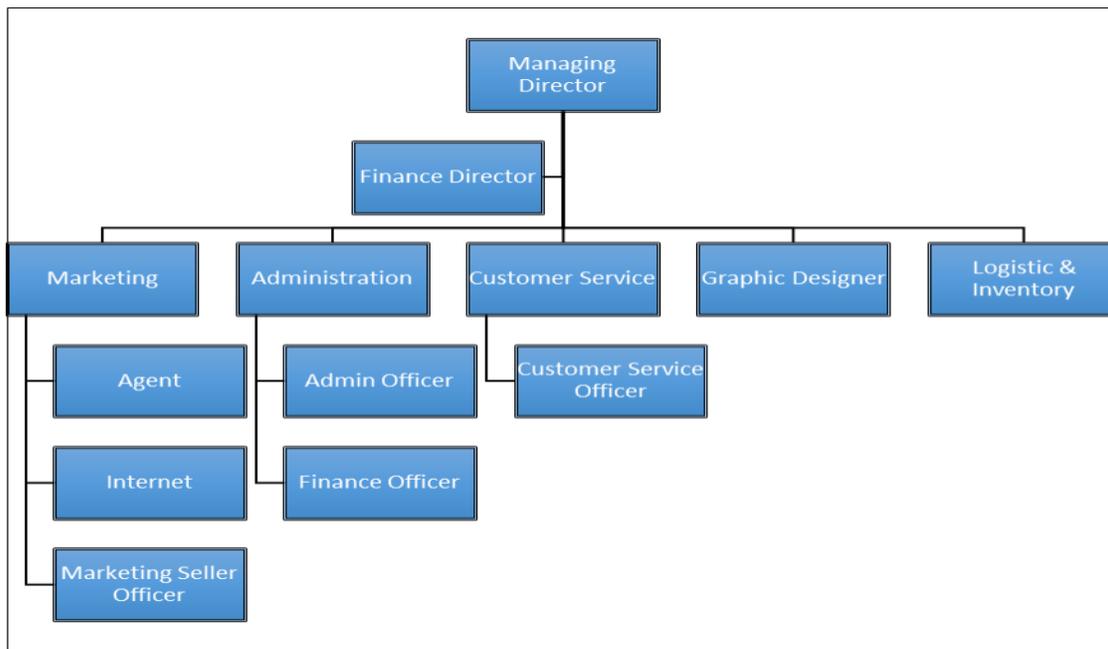


Figure 1: Organisation chart of Monizone Resources Sdn Bhd

Growth strategy

Monizone Resources Sdn Bhd through the Ibnu Sina Eyewear product has successfully established seven kiosk outlets across Malaysia and has recruited over 10 employees. Through experience and knowledge in marketing gained from directly engaging in business, Hj Mohd Nizam has taken steps to register the business logo under the Intellectual Property Act.

In the early stages of his venture into business, he received advice from a religious teacher in Kelantan who said, "You have an ability in business, and you should start with a small business". The establishment of the therapy-related eyewear business was based on his experience, where he attempted to use eyewear purchased at an optical shop in Kota Bharu. After several weeks, the experience positively impacted his eye condition. Consequently, he gained motivation and inspiration to establish a business related to therapeutic eyewear. He first studied the benefits of eye therapy using therapeutic eyewear glasses.

After gaining confidence with Ibnu Sina Eyewear business prospects, Hj Mohd Nizam began seeking the right place to introduce his product. He selected the Sultan Ismail Petra Airport, Pengkalan Chepa, as the first location to market the product. According to him, within three days, Ibnu Sina Eyewear product sales reached RM11,000, which exceeded his expectation.

Hj Mohd Nizam ensured that he remained positive and focused on the business. He stated, "Every entrepreneur must be good at finding opportunities and having an entrepreneurial mindset. Your whole body must be consistent with your business target in terms of your spoken words, your thinking, and your vision". He also ensures that all his staff is educated on the values and characteristics of entrepreneurs.

Marketing strategy

Before commencing any business, a routine that Hj Mohd Nizam Bin Mohamed practices is preparing documented paperwork to function as a written guideline. The routine was repeated with Monizone Resources Sdn Bhd, where he prepared two sheets of paperwork to guide him in the Ibnu Sina Eyewear business.

He stated:

"In order to be successful in our business, we must focus on our 5Ps (product, price, place promotion, and people) marketing strategy. This is because everyone can introduce a product, but most products fail because they are not marketable. Therefore, I am very much in the business of 'methods of marketing'".

Hj Mohd Nizam ensures that he will first review the product pros and cons, target market, and market strategy before starting any business. Meanwhile, business knowledge in the form of body language and closing the market are essential skills for a businessman. Body language in business establishes the foundation for businessmen to communicate with others on a different level. Using facial expressions with body movements can convey product information to the customer. Additionally, body language is the most effective method to communicate emotions and can significantly influence business meetings. Meanwhile, the closing market occurs when an employee trades the market price and stock at the end of the day. Normally, the situation is represented by the market graph and stock market chart. Thus, the employee will be able to recognise the market flow to make a profit or a loss.

Epilogue

Ibnu Sina Sdn Bhd has long been involved in the Malaysian eyewear industry, specifically Kelantan. The company has remained competitive in an industry dominated by other manufacturers. To ensure the continued viability of the company, the founder plans to push Ibnu Sina to another level. Despite employing several workers under the company, the owner does not feel safe and comfortable. He realises that his business can encounter an issue if he fails to decide on ways to expand the products due to the increasingly competitive marketplace. Considering that many competitors enter the market with all types of easy-to-follow product variations, the situation will not be easy for him as he embarks on the next project to stay relevant in the market. Hj Mohd Nizam has been considering the latest developments in the eyewear industry and its influence on Ibnu Sina Sdn. Bhd. Therefore, Ibnu Sina has ventured into training and development, which is more profitable than the eyewear business. Will Ibnu Sina employ the same strategy as the eyewear industry or shift to other business strategies? Is Ibnu Sina capable of doing so? Is the eyewear industry still attractive for the company? The questions revolve around the company but the founder knows he requires an action plan to ensure the 15-year-old business survives in the competitive market.

Acknowledgement

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