

Should Mozum Menswear Compete in The Digital Era?

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Prologue

On a rainy day, Mr. Haikal arrives early in the morning at his sewing shop which located at Kubang Kerian in January 2019. It is a monsoon season on the East Coast. After preparing the customer's order, Mr. Haikal paused for a moment in the pantry before embarking on the task of sewing the custom clothe, he brews a cup of coffee. He slammed an empty stomach with Jacob's cookies dipped into a hot coffee, beginning to think of a legacy that would continue his sewing business while looking out the window to recall the fate of his sewing shop which has fewer customers day by day.

History of the Establishment of Mozum Menswear

"I have won a number of sewing competitions in domestic and international level, partly due to the uniqueness and trendy designs that I create. My teachers have always praised my design, along with the unusual sewing techniques that I use. They say my designs have been followed by other students as well."

Since 1990, Mr. Haikal who is passionate in sewing, had learned to sew at Institut Kemahiran Belia Negara (IKBN). During his golden age circa 1990 until 1993, he was well-known among IKBN staff and students for being a top student and having won several national and international competitions. He had been a champion of many sewing competitions at the IKBN level throughout Malaysia. Later on, he was sent to compete in the ASEAN stage held in the Philippines in 1992, and became the ASEAN champion. Subsequently, he was sent to compete on a world stage in 1993 and received a consolation prize.

"After working with several of sewing companies, I thought I would like to set up my own sewing company. It was my dream to acquire a sewing company of my own."

After graduating, he went on to work from year 1994 to 1998 with around five companies. During that time, he gained a complete set of experience such as learning on proper ways to manage a tailor

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KEYWORDS

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shop, to prepare a balance sheet, bookings and many others. In year 1999, he set up his own company under the name Mozum Menswear. Two years later, in 2001, his staffs increased to 10 employees. The focus of the Mozum Menswear business is on men's reservation for shirts, blazers and corporate suits.

The Sky is Not Always Bright

“After a few years of opening up my business, it has been disrupted by poor management systems, massive stockpiling, lack of human resource management and incompetent marketing. After I succeeded in solving this problem, another problem arose when my business was at its peak. The subsequent problem was due to the external factor of intense competition. ”

Not so long ago, his sewing shop was lively with customers constantly coming to make custom clothes. But for the past 2 years, in 2002 to 2003, the store has been quiet and sluggish. Within a day, there were at most three customers visiting his shop. This circumstance can be resolved when Mr. Haikal identified the problem and started applying proper business management techniques. With good management practices, Mozum companies began to experience rapid growth from year 2004 to 2011. At that time, the average annual bookings were nearly 4,000 pairs per year. As the saying goes, the sky is not always bright, from year 2012 to 2016, the company's growth has begun to decline. Bookings have steadily declined with aggressive competition from other growing outlets such as Elrah Exclusive, Prima Valet and other online businesses. On the other hand, starting in year 2017, sales began to rise again as Mozum's company began to strategize in its business. Such strategies consist of focusing on digitalising of its business including online sales, promotion in social media and digitalising of its day-to-day business operations.

Hurdles in Developing a Company

“I had been into plenty of problems in business, but I managed to handle the situation quite well.”

In the early days of the company, in 1999 to 2003, Mozum comes in its own set of the obstacles and challenges in developing the business. The obstacles are such of these; since this company is relatively new and unfamiliar with the intricacies of business, Mozum is often deceived either by its own customers who do not pay the balance of the reservation or deceived by the booking sub-contract that earns double. Apart from that, management issues also still at poor level in terms of using technology in accounting, distribution, human resource management system and online sales. Last but not least, Mozum is still struggling with the problem of managing a business digitally and making an eye-catching promotion in social media.

Since its operating, throughout the year 1999 until 2016, digital obstacles and challenges remain to be encountered by Mozum. In contrast to Mozum's stressful situation, top notch businesses like

Elrah Exclusive and Prima Valet able to bring greater number of customers due to aggressive marketing in social media.

The other obstacle was due to the gig-economic situation. Majority consumers tend to make purchases online. This is negatively affected on the company's sales revenue which still depends on brick-and-mortar type of business. Otherwise, the average customer will book up to four pairs of clothes every time they shop. But then, most customers only order a pair of *baju melayu*. Likewise, before the month of Ramadan, the store will be filled with customers who want to order clothes for religious holiday. In normal days, only a handful of customers visit the store physically.

Strategies to Overcome the Problems

“As of today, the strategy that I implemented in the business had shown fruitful outcome. I guess I can sleep well now. The total sales have increased day by day.”

In 2017, Mozum has planned several strategies to overcome the obstacles since its early start-up and at present. The strategy began to recognize business management system applications. This is to ensure that the cash inflow and outflow of the company is well-managed. Then, Mozum has added non-tailor (clerk) employees who can manage the accounting and other management system applications of the business. This is to ensure that the company management system is being implemented more systematically and thus can assure the profitability of the company.

Mozum has also identified other several strategies to counter the obstacles mentioned earlier. First, starting in 2017, Mozum has been aggressively promoting and selling products in social media such as Facebook and Instagram. He is yet to widen the horizon to other social media such as TikTok, Twitter, Pinterest and SnapChat as he worried that he could not cope with the demand. Among the items sold are ready-made clothing, sewing aids and the promotion of sewing classes. As a result, customer will buy directly through online or walk-in to the store to make a reservation if they want to purchase other than what they sell in online. So far, Mr. Haikal's followers in Facebook have reached over 20,000 and followers in Instagram have reached over 15,000. In order to diversify his product, he also makes video tailoring and sells the video on pay per view online. So far, the promotion of this video has only been done through Facebook platform. This video was recorded and edited before it can be sold online.

The second strategy is that Mozum sells online sewing aids. These tools were designed exclusively by Mr. Haikal. One of the tools is a small iron board dedicated to rubbing sleeves, followed by the ruler of the fabric gauge. This tool helps to facilitate the work of measuring the fabric. Both tools are in high demand among tailors who are also Mr. Haikal's followers. Till today, Mr. Haikal is still in the process of patenting his design tools.

As for the third strategy, starting in the middle of 2018, Mozum has set up a sewing class roadshow nationwide depending on demand. This class is advertised through Facebook and Instagram. Mr.

Haikal has hired a manager to manage his Facebook and Instagram affairs including updating, promoting, replying comments and more. Other than that, roadshow schedules, tailor-made promotions, seminar room reservations are all managed by this manager. The fee for the roadshow is around RM250 to RM300 per person and per day for Malay and corporate shirt sewing classes, while the cost for blazer shirts is RM500 per person for two days. Generally, the fee collected per roadshow is around RM12,000 per roadshow. However, there is another strategy in this category that will be implemented in the future by Mr. Haikal is making online sewing classes via Facebook as a medium to get connected with potential customers.

In a subsequent strategy, in 2019, Mozum also promoted online to attract large bookings (approximately below 1,000 sheets per pairs) from the institution. As an example, Maktab Rendah Sains Mara (MRSM) has ordered 300 corporate suits. To date, the company has yet to receive orders above 1,000 sheets above due to labor shortages and the cost is a bit steep. Besides, Mozum has sold thru online a patent for designing a garment such as a Malay shirt design men and corporate clothing. The patented design made by Mr. Haikal is in demand because of its uniqueness and meet the current trends. As part of his last strategy, Mozum also plans to make and sell e-book of sewing methods. At this moment, this e-book is still in the process of being made.

Way Forward

“My business is flourishing again. Although I am not yet satisfied with this success, I am relatively satisfied with the Divine’s provision. However, from time to time I will always think of other strategies to take my company to the next level.”

Now, from a series of digital strategies implemented, Mozum has grown well in terms of finance, manpower and assets. For example, in the period from 2017 to 2019, Mozum's sales has achieved around RM100,000 per month. From the total, RM50,000 of the proceeds were contributed through in-store sales, while another RM50,000 came from online sales of clothing, selling sewing tools and sewing classes. Currently, Mozum has 16 Malay seamstresses and six foreign seamstresses, however, the latter are sub-contractors only. In addition, Mozum also has a staff who involved in day-to-day management of the company and staff in charge of the company's accounting and business system affairs. While in term of assets, Mozum has owned a premise that is currently used for sewing and clothing gallery located in Kubang Kerian, sewing machines, other sewing equipment and also fully-equipped studio for online promotion purposes.

Nowadays, Mozum Menswear is among the custom tailor companies that offer lower prices in Kelantan than other custom tailor companies such as Summit Style Tailor and Peter Libly Boutique and Tailoring. In regards to Mozum's future survival, Mr. Haikal felt that Mozum had a long way to go in this industry. However, Mozum already has a name in the famous sewing shop chain in Kelantan, but Mr. Haikal feels that Mozum has yet to be further developed in terms of revenue and sales coverage of the goods and services offered by his company. Therefore, Mozum should move in line

with competitors in relations to business techniques, clothing design ideas and promotions to remain on trend.

Epilogue

After having some niggling thoughts to make improvement in his business, he comes up with several possible strategies to be exercised in the future to enable his legacy to drive this business forward. Somehow, the absolute powers owned by government to make best use of established agencies in order to promote sewing entrepreneurship by allocating financial resources and devise an efficient mechanism for upgrading skills in sewing to a higher level and easily adjusted in current technology.

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