Rashidah Ibrahim – Executive Director, MVP, Malaysia

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Rashidah Ibrahim, executive director of Malaysian Vaccines & Pharmaceuticals (MVP), tells the story of MVP as the sole animal vaccines manufacturer in Malaysia. She also explains how important animal health is for human health and what plans she has set for the company moving forward.

Can you introduce MVP to our international audience?

The company has been around for the last 25 years and its creation was initially the brainchild of our current Prime Minister as he realized, in his previous mandate, how much the country was spending on vaccines and medicines for animals. He was aiming for the country to be self-sufficient in this field. Therefore, the government put up a tender to privatize the vaccines developed by the Veterinary Research Institute. MVP started with two shareholders: the founder who won the tender and Arthur Webster Australia, now known as Bayer Animal Health. After a few years, Khazanah Nasional Bhd, the government sovereign fund, through its unit Malaysian Technology Development Corp (MTDC) bought over the founder's 70 percent shares. In 2006, it made an offer to dispose of about 55 percent of MVP. At the time, I was a stockbroker looking for a professional reconversion, so I joined the bid and won.

It was a very big shift and when I took over, the first step I took was to engage someone to do all the troubleshooting for the company. It was a major challenge for the employees to go from public

to private. For example, previous marketing strategies were passive and without much external communication but are now more aggressive and competitive. I also introduced KPIs and conducted annual assessments of their performance.

How would you assess the performance of the company?

Initially, the company was running at a loss. Indeed, during those days, even though the initial set up for the company was to reduce the country's dependence on imported vaccines, our local market share was below 10 percent and 80 percent of our sales were from exports. We realized it was due to the local mindset that anything imported is of better quality. It took time to convince local industry players that MVP products are equally as good as imported vaccines.

For this reason, we had to go abroad and opened more markets. We targeted markets with large populations and collaborated only with the top three distributors in those countries. We refused to compromise on quality and positioned our products well. South East Asia became our main market, not only because it is easier to penetrate, but also because the vaccines we produce are regionally suitable for the climate we share.

As a result, in 2012, we registered our first profits of RM 100,000. We gave this money back to our employees as bonuses to motivate them to reach higher. When we broke our first million mark, we decided to return to Malaysia, so in 2015 we started penetrating the local market by collaborating with top distributors and dealers. In Malaysia, our competitors are only importers and they are mostly big players in the industry. Nevertheless, our success in overseas markets made our job much easier. We engaged more veterinarians to go to the field and provided technical support to farmers.

What do you see as the key success for a company like MVP?

We have set two strategies: market segmentation and product differentiation. Looking at market segmentation, MVP comes into each country by studying its market and requirements. We also studied the products required by different countries. We customized and developed our vaccines based on the market needs. For example, for the Middle East, we promoted vaccines that can resist the heat.

Besides that, we created a happy and healthy working environment for the employees as we believe they are our greatest and most valuable assets.

How MVP can participate in helping public health?

Animal and human health are inter-related. MVP realized that and work very closely with Department of Veterinary Services, local research institutes and universities to create new products and new technologies. As of now, MVP has commercialized three vaccines from a local university, which are distributed all over the world.

We also give awareness seminars and information visits to farmers, so they know how important vaccination is for their live stocks as few farmers are unaware that vaccination programs cannot be ignored, and it is their responsibility to cut down their dependence on antibiotics and hormones which are unhealthy for both animals and humans. We are also raising awareness of vaccines having a very important preventive role to avoid epidemics.

What is the next step for MVP, the only vaccine manufacturer in Malaysia?

After ten years of helming the company, we are now ready to be one of the major players in the world for animal health. As Malaysians are beginning to reduce their consumptions on seafood and migrating towards poultry as a cheaper and the easiest source of protein, MVP must be ready to move in line with this trend to cater with the growing demand. Also, as the nation is moving towards Industry 4.0, which include IOT, robotics and blockchains, we want our employees to be prepared and equip with the knowledge.

Lastly, we were recently awarded ISO 9001:2015 certification within the Quality Management System (QMS) and are now applying for the UKAS (United Kingdom Accreditation Services). Next is getting the EU-GMP certified, once we get this in place, we plan to penetrate Europe!

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