

# Company's talent pool brings in fresh ideas

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scratches on broom heads.

"The original plan was for me to wind up the business," revealed Seow.

But a visit to broom makers in Europe changed his mind.

"As the German and Italian broom makers proudly told me how their businesses had lasted into the fourth generation, I started to reflect on why we couldn't even make it past the first. That was when I realised a company's success was not only about its product but also its management style," he said.

Using his people skills, Seow wooed the staff back and re-strategised the company's direction. The first thing he did was to come up with a marketing game plan.

The crucial question was, where could he apply his products? The answer presented itself in 40 different subcategories, after Seow dwelled on his experience as a store manager with McDonald's during his days as a student in Australia, where cleaning was an organised affair.

Confident of the vast potential of the business, he stopped relying on wholesalers and decided to personally approach buyers by embarking on a broom-education campaign.

Those who had witnessed Seow's demos were shown the benefits of UV-treated brush filaments, rendering them with a quality that made them better dust trappers.

Buyers also learned how broom handles were tailor-made for different countries. In Indonesia, the height of a broom stick is 108cm while in Malaysia, it is longer by 12cm to suit physical requirements.

Seow also ventured into the industrial market and found out why brushes for cleaning kitchens were blue (so food waste is easily distinguishable), and why the nylon used had to withstand temperatures up to 180°C (so people could clean ovens without having to deal with melted plastic).

But the one system that would leave a mark in the company's operation was the establishment of a "route" system, an idea mooted by one of Seow's salesmen who was once a taxi driver.

"The idea was to sell to every single shop that was open on that route. That was how I could get by selling only one mop to some shops. People thought I'd go bust if I carried on like that, but they didn't know I had a delivery system that followed a route. That was how we improved on sales, little by little," revealed Seow.

Like fashion, the colours of brooms, brushes and mops were subject to culture and trends. Sales data revealed how Malays prefer pink and green, Indians like the purple and Chinese, the reds. For this reason, Seow produces his wares in bright, solid colours.

Recounting some trying times, Seow said, "I had no money at that time, so I borrowed RM1.3mil from my father (who insisted that Seow repay the loan with interest). Of this, I invested 80% in machinery."

The Jusco supermarket chain eventually gave Seow his big break and by 2000, the company gained the OBM (Own Brand Manufacturing) and ODM (Own Design Manufacturing) statuses.

Does Seow ever worry that brooms and scrubs will one day make way for modern vacuum cleaners?



**Adding colour:** Coloured nylon bundles await a permanent fix to their heads at the factory. Like fashion, brooms are also subject to colour trends.

"Brooms are conveniently mobile. They don't need power and are not as cumbersome to move around like vacuum cleaners," he said.

Even then Seow has taken steps to address the issue.

In 2002, he was approached by Dyson, the famous British manufacturer of upright vacuum cleaners, to make their vacuum head brushes.

"They sent out an evaluation team that ended up knocking on our door. At first, we said no because it would involve setting up dedicated machines. But they came again and this time, we said 'yes' because they offered to send a team to train our production people," said Seow. In the end he invested between RM800,000 and RM1mil on machinery to secure the contract.

Rather than seeing it as a risk, Seow considered it a step into the future. The production team, he said, should learn new skills to

keep up with the times.

"The secret of the company's success lies in our talent pool. From the onset, I knew it would be impossible to do everything on my own. So, I hired the experts to bring in fresh ideas. Joining professional associations helped me connect with these talents," he said.

Currently boasting a workforce of 200, the company is also a training ground for the engineering faculties of Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman and Universiti Malaya.

## For every purpose:

The differences in filament size determine usage and application.

