

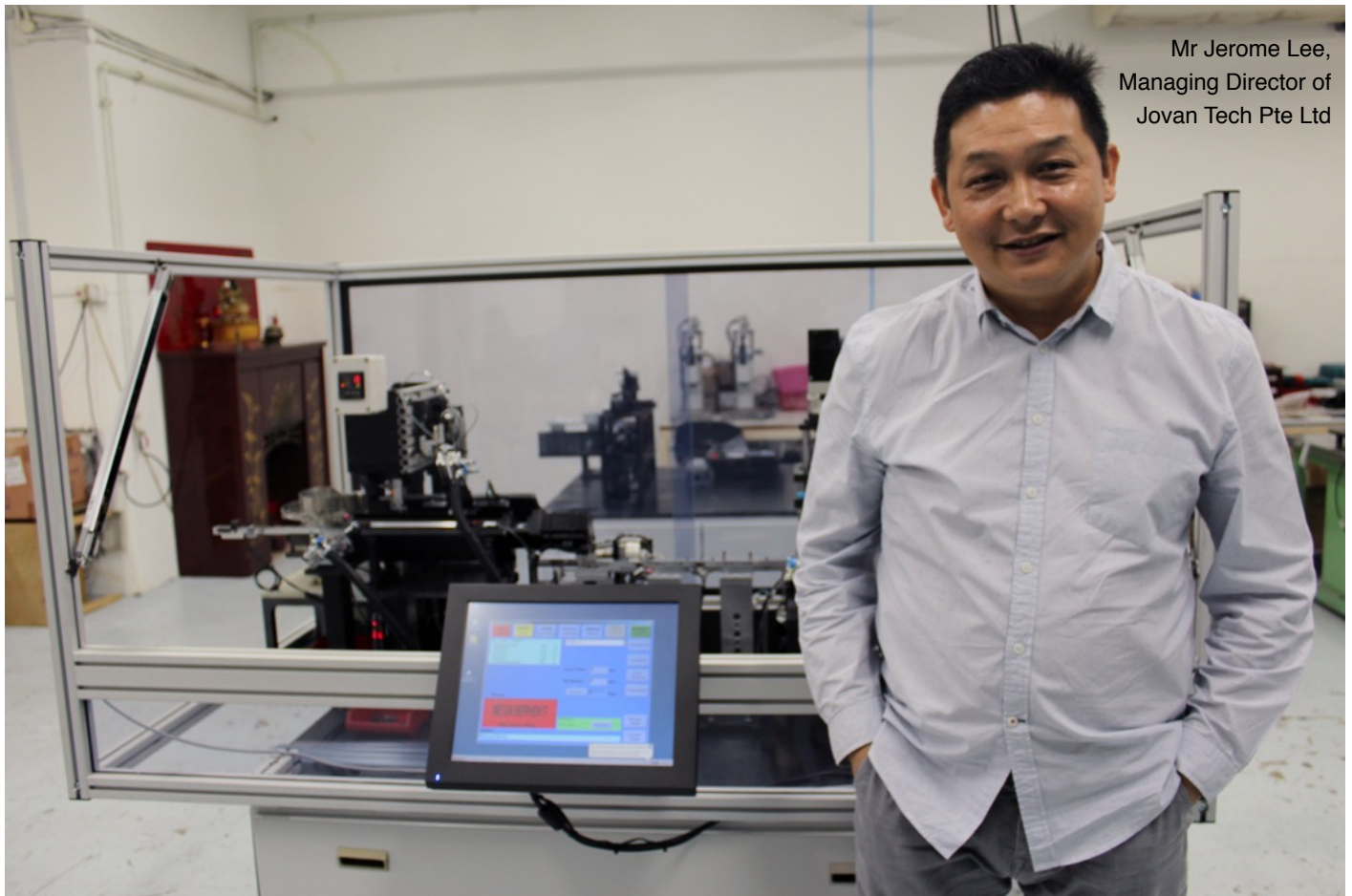


FEATURE

TOWKAYTALK: PEOPLE-POWERED INNOVATION

SINGAPORE 1000
SINGAPORE SME 1000
INTERNATIONAL 100

A gem at the heart of the SME innovation drive *by GERALDINE LEE*



Mr Jerome Lee,
Managing Director of
Jovan Tech Pte Ltd

WHERE STANDARDS AND FLUIDITY COMPLEMENT. At Jovan Tech Pte Ltd, innovation and standards are key drivers of the business. Mr Jerome Lee, Managing Director of Jovan Tech, believes in establishing standards, constant risk assessments, the training of staff and relooking one's business model to ensure agility for staying ahead. 2015 marks the first year that Jovan Tech is ranked as a 2015 Singapore SME 1000 company, an achievement of excellence made possible with continuous advancements and a team of empowered staff.

Founded in 1996, Jovan Tech transformed into a solutions-driven business, serving the design and manufacturing needs of clients. The firm started off as a tooling workshop, providing precision machining services, which then expanded its business modules into areas including automation design development and contract manufacturing. Today, Jovan Tech has developed and released into the market its proprietary product, Skylight, a light transporting equipment with technology that requires minimal maintenance and eliminates the glare of artificial lighting.



Jovan Tech has about 800 workers in their Batam, Indonesia office.

Q: In your opinion, what do you think is the main driving force behind Jovan Tech?

Jerome: We are in a customer-centric business and there is always a need to restructure ourselves to adapt to their demands. Global companies today place great emphasis on standards not just on operations but the environment and corporate social responsibility as well. Our established standards and openness to change have served us well over the years.

Jovan Tech's people also play a huge role in boosting the business. It delights us when we receive unexpected positive feedback about the calibre of our staff, which reassures our partners of the level of excellence we strive for and have achieved.

Q: How then, does Jovan Tech approach talent grooming and retention?

Jerome: We are proud to discover that we have quite a number of long service staff in Jovan Tech. Most of our staff have been with us for at least 5 to 7 years. In fact, when giving out 10-year long service awards at our anniversary celebration last year, the sheer number of recipients on the list surprised us. Our approach stresses on training and developing our talents; grooming a technician into an engineer, an engineer into a manager.

We also have a people philosophy. Jovan Tech firmly believes in upholding our responsibility to our people, to ensure fair treatment and transparency in all that we do. This is something that our staff, both in Singapore and Indonesia, value and appreciate.

Q: Are you considering protecting Jovan Tech's proprietary products?

Jerome: While we feel that we do not have the relative expertise to ascertain what can or should be protected and are in the midst of finding out more, protections and trademarks come across as a little complex to us. In our research and formulation of our product, we do use a combination of ideas inspired from other technologies. Will this be an intellectual property then?

At the same time, Jovan Tech focuses on achieving higher levels and innovating further to keep ahead of the market, bringing more value to our customers. I guess it is a challenge of technical understanding and the allocation of resources, which will need to be balanced as we explore further.

Q: There are inevitably ups and downs in a business. How has Jovan Tech dealt with such times?

Jerome: Indeed there are good times and bad. Jovan Tech went through 2 crises, one in 1993 and another in 1997. During that time,

we tightened our belts, concentrated on cost reduction and constantly conducted risk assessments.

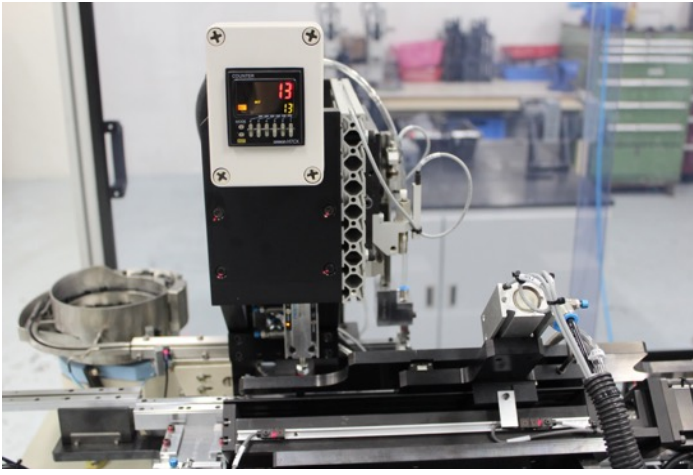
Till today, we carry on with risk assessments and business reviews every 3 months, tallying areas of improvements, pre-empting and planning for the unexpected.

“ We are in a customer-centric business and there is always a need to restructure ourselves to adapt to their demands.”

Q: You are an advocate of reviewing one's business model and finding ways to do things differently. Can you share with us some examples from the Jovan Tech story?

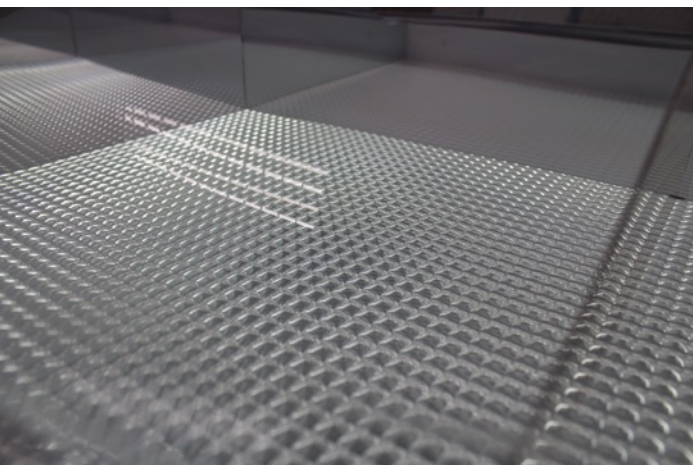
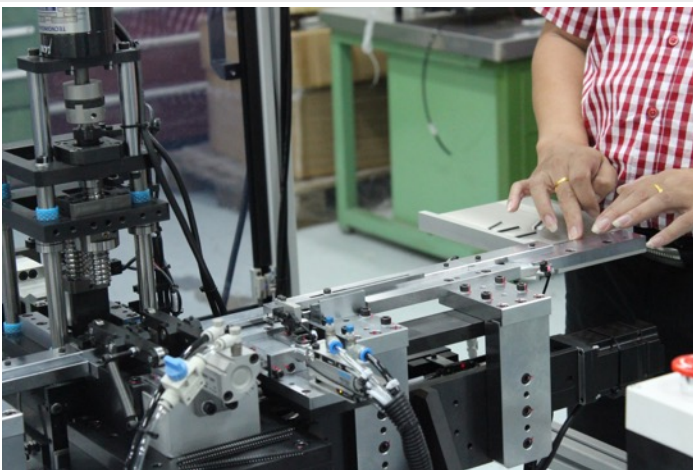
Jerome: Quite a number of businesses have made the move out of Singapore, affecting local businesses especially those in the services sector like Jovan Tech. We thus shifted our attention to a solution-based one, doing as much as possible to help our customers make more profit.

For example, Jovan Tech builds its own automation solution that reduces the number of workers



From top to bottom: Some of Jovan Tech's proprietary innovations - automation and Skylight (far bottom).

STANDARDS ARE ESSENTIAL TO OUR DAILY BUSINESS OPERATIONS.



required by the client for the job. This enables our clients to be more productive and facilitates their cost-cutting measures when need be.

Q: With the wide profile of clients that Jovan Tech serves, what are some challenges that the company faces?

Jerome: Interestingly, we find that smaller companies tend to be a little more challenging to work with, given the business we are in. Most of these firms do not have existing standards, making room for disagreements especially when larger projects are concerned. This drawback is also one that we commonly encounter when working with international partners, since different countries exercise varying levels of rigidity and in some cases, have yet to impose the need for standards.

In such cases, we get on the line to collect as much information as possible so that we can try to write and establish the standards and systems for them. This helps to ease communications and facilitates more opportunities with these partners in future.

Q: Jovan Tech is known for its established standards and certifications. What went through your mind when embarking on this move?

Jerome: In order to have your own product, you will need some accreditations to talk about. This forms part of your brand. You will need to brand it such that others will recognise and trust this mark. Using a third party to certify our product also makes it more credible. I personally feel that this is the best way to get your product more recognised, likewise for our service.

Q: How has this move benefitted Jovan Tech?

Jerome: When venturing overseas, having established standards and certifications will help, though its effects are intangible.

If your company has nothing to show, people will ask a lot of questions – is your product good enough? Did it go through a proper system?

After being familiarised with these, I found that these standards are essential to our daily business operations. In a way, having certified and established standards and products is also a customer-driven move. Our clients have different certifications and we need to follow and keep ourselves on track with them.

Q: Jovan Tech has offices overseas, like in Indonesia. What is your approach towards managing operations across multiple countries?

Jerome: In our quest to continuously empower our staff with skills and ensure standardisation across countries, we frequently conduct customised trainings for all staff.

We have just completed our six-sigma training for Singapore and Indonesia. We also conduct internal audits along with our risk assessment exercises to ensure that our standards are aligned.

Q: How about the challenges you faced when venturing overseas?

Jerome: The immediate challenges that come to mind are the cultural difference and selecting the right key personnel for the job.

It is important to bear in mind that you are selecting someone who will fit in with the culture of the organisation in that region to lead effectively and are not just seconding someone over to run the place. This is especially so for overseas offices since you will not be there most of the time.

We also had to be sensitive to the culture of doing business in different countries. It is vital in some markets to establish transparency and firmness in your business dealings. Always do your homework on the economical, political and social climate of the country. This will facilitate how you run your business, lead your staff and approach potential business partners.

Q: Tell us a little about yourself. What is your personal business philosophy?

Jerome: There will always be ups and downs but it is most important to have passion in your job. If you are having a bad time and are without passion, your people, and even yourself, will give up easily.

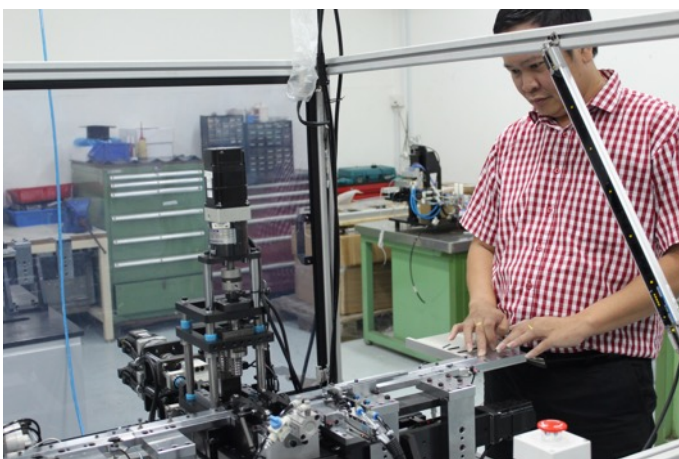
Being clear and transparent is also something I believe in, as rumours can easily amplify the harm on your mentality and that of your staff. Always believe in yourself and the passion must come from within. Only then, can you be an effective leader to drive and lead others.

Q: As a parting shot, where do you see Jovan Tech's specific verticals in future?

Jerome: Jovan Tech has evolved through the years and it will continue to do so. From a company that used to focus solely on engineering, we have ventured into automation, contract manufacturing and are now coming up with our own products, which is where most SMEs want to be.

With our new proprietary product, Skylight, it is an exciting time for us – participating in overseas exhibitions, conducting trials with partners and collaborating with organisations like A*Star to further enhance our solution. There is so much to be done and we are only at phase one.

Below: Jerome's Singapore office and an automation machine that reduces the number of workers required from 9 to a mere 3.



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