

SMALL EARNS BIG MONEY

THE SMELL OF sweet success is definitely in the air for Mohd Ridzwan Abdullah and J S Dhaliwal of Sasha (M) Sdn Bhd, an 'off-campus' tenant at Technology Park Malaysia (TPM).

Barely two years old, the company now has a paid-up capital of half a million rgt with a rosy turnover figure. Sales for 1989, according to Ridzwan, was 1.2 million rgt. He anticipates a conservative 15 per cent growth for turnover this year. Dhaliwal is confident that good fortune might just continue to walk along Sasha's path. 'Things are beginning to happen,' he quips.

He says that the company is currently negotiating several major contracts worldwide; the latest one, with a Russian dealer, will boost its turnover figure. If these contracts do materialise, he projects turnover growth to exceed 100 per cent.

Sasha is a pioneering bumiputera company actively into hi-tech deals, primarily the manufacturing and marketing of 'notebook computers'. According to Dhaliwal the major difference between a notebook computer and a laptop computer is their weight. Notebook computers usually weigh approximately seven pounds while laptop computers can weigh between 12 to 18 pounds.

Despite this weight difference, Dhaliwal says that the notebook computer matches laptop model 'feature for feature'. 'In reducing the size, neither quality nor reliability was sacrificed,' adds Ridzwan.

According to Dhaliwal, Sasha is currently doing product development and has not embarked on actual product design or engineering. But he anticipates moving into design in a year or two. Sasha's notebook computer model was designed and engineered in Taiwan.

The company is currently in the midst of setting up a keyboard assembly plant. 'When the parts are assembled locally, cost is further reduced,' Ridzwan says, elaborating that Sasha's tie-up with TPM was to facilitate R&D. 'If cost of production is substantially lower after R&D, as a result of a more efficient process of production, then our products will be competitive.'

It is also through TPM that small companies like Sasha gets the opportunity to tap into the R&D expertise of research centres like Malaysian Institute of Microelectronics Systems (Mimos). 'Exposure of this nature will not be available in any other park or industrial estate,' Ridzwan reckons.

Approximately, 70 per cent of all Sasha's products are geared for international markets – North America, Europe, Scandinavia, Soviet Union, Middle East, Southeast Asia and parts of Africa. Dhaliwal says that the company is presently increasing its production in response to good market demands. 'We don't manufacture first; then look for a market. That's bad strategy,' he says. The company's concept is to find a market for the product rather than making a product for the market.

To do so, a prototype is created, which will then be taken to participate in exhibitions to gain feedback from prospective markets. If additional features or a change in product outlook are needed, they will be made before mass production to ensure the product sells.

The partners say that among the obstacles they faced when they first ventured into this business, financial institutions and the general public formed their 'most ardent critics'. Financial institutions tend to be quite fearful of giving out loans, even when the risk has been meticulously calculated. The general public, on the other hand, tend to be overly skeptical about the ability of Malaysians to come up with new, bright and innovative ideas.

Ridzwan, 34, is an electronics engineer trained in Britain, with a background in telecommunications. He worked for the Telecoms Department for about 12 years and another private company, before deciding to venture on his own.

Dhaliwal, 31, calls himself a 'systems man'. He dealt with both hardware and software while working for various computer companies for about 11 years before deciding to be his own boss.

Both maintain that quality products and good after-sales service are essential for success. At the rate things are going, they'll be playing in the big league soon.