Star Special

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SOBA 2025

Star SOBA 2025

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Throwback to SOBA 2025's defining moments

THE Star Outstanding Business Awards (SOBA) 2025 has gathered strong momentum over the past year, reinforcing its role as a benchmark platform for Malaysian businesses striving for resilience, innovation and sustainable growth.

Launched under the theme "Powering Tomorrow: Driving Sustainable Growth" on June 5 last year, SOBA 2025 reflects the evolving priorities of Malaysia's business landscape.

Held at Menara Star in Petaling Jaya, it brought together sponsors, strategic partners and industry stakeholders, signalling broad-based support for the awards' mission to recognise excellence among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and larger corporations alike.

Star Media Group (SMG) chief executive officer Chan Seng Fatt noted that Malaysia's Asean chairmanship this year places the country at a strategic inflection point.

He emphasised that businesses must navigate technological disruption, changing consumer expectations and rising sustainability demands. In this environment, agility, innovation and foresight will determine which companies lead rather than merely endure.

"In this new era, agility, foresight and innovation will distinguish those who endure from those who lead," he said.

Main sponsors – Credit Guarantee Corporation Malaysia (CGC), PKT Logistics, RHB Bank and U Mobile – echoed similar sentiments. They highlighted the importance of digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, ESG adoption and financial resilience as key pillars for competitiveness.

SMG chief executive officer Chan Seng Fatt (at podium) addressing those who have come to celebrate the launch of SOBA 2025. — SAMUEL ONG/The Star

Malaysia External Trade Development Corp (Matrade), the official trade promotion partner, stressed that SMEs remain the backbone of Malaysia's economy and must be encouraged to scale internationally.

Synergy among intellects

Beyond recognition, SOBA 2025 has expanded its ecosystem of knowledge-sharing platforms.

Early on right after the launch, a roundtable session with council members and sponsors further examined the challenges businesses face in scaling up was held on June 17 in Menara Star.

Topics ranged from cultivating high-impact workplace cultures and attracting talent to preparing for initial public offerings.

These led to SOBA LABs and SOBA Elevate where SOBA participants can gather valuable information and strategies from past SOBA winners, as well as to network and build business connections.

The awards also continue to feature 18 award categories, including the Mikro SOBA Recognition Awards for micro businesses with annual turnover below RM300,000.

Participants agreed that SMEs require stronger financial literacy, clearer ESG implementation guidance and mentorship support to sustain long-term growth.

The need for AI adoption, digital marketing strategies, cybersecurity readiness and data analytics capabilities featured prominently in discussions

These themes were explored in depth during SOBA LAB sessions.

The first LAB was held at Menara Star on July 17 to address geopolitical uncertainties, including Trump's US tariffs, the expanded Sales and Service Tax and supply chain disruptions.

Panellists advised businesses to diversify markets, manage risks carefully and adopt ESG principles early. The LAB's second session focused on financing alternatives, where speakers encouraged SMEs to explore options beyond traditional bank loans, including private equity and IPO routes, while maintaining transparency and sound governance.

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RHB SME Green Building Financing offers finance purchase of green commercial properties or green-certified properties. — All images from 123rf.com

RHB Bank aims to lead in financing Green Shift

AS Malaysia navigates climate risks, social development priorities and a complex economic environment, the stakes of doing business, even in a relatively stable country like Malaysia can be challenging.

Not only do small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) face inflation due to geopolitical intrigue and potential disruption of their supply chains, they also would have felt the impact of the erratic weather patterns on their businesses.

Furthermore, the evolving workforce landscape also calls for inspiring ways to attract and retain talent, as well as building relationships with important stakeholders, following the environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles.

As a multinational regional financial services provider that can provide a suite of solutions. RHB Bank Bhd is among the top banks in Malaysia, with a significant presence in Asean.

As the bank strengthens its sustainable finance offerings, it encourages households and businesses to adopt environmentally friendly practices through targeted lending products and development-focused schemes.

The green evolution

This initiative reflects the bank's broader commitment to supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy and aligning its operations with ESG principles.

At the heart of RHB's approach are four "green pillars" that define its sustainability strategy: green energy, green buildings, green products and green processes.

Green energy financing supports the adoption of renewable energy solutions.

These focus areas aim to reduce carbon emissions and promote resource-efficient practices across residential and commercial sectors.

Green energy financing supports the adoption of renewable energy solutions, helping consumers and companies lower their environmental footprint.

Green buildings initiatives provide financial backing for green-certified real estate, covering energy-efficient construction, management and maintenance.

Under green products, the bank prioritises lending for eco-friendly assets, including hybrid and electric vehicles. Finally, green processes financing is tailored to assist businesses in enhancing machinery, equipment and production workflows to reduce emissions.

To translate these strategic priorities into tangible support, RHB offers a range of products for both retail and SME clients.

Green SME business offers

On the business front, RHB Bank's SME green financing suite includes several options aimed at stimulating investment in sustainable practices among SMEs.

The RHB SME Green Renewable Energy and Capex Financing covers the purchase of energy-efficient equipment and machinery with financing rates from as low as around 4.5% and up to full financing margins.

While RHB SME Green Building Financing offers finance purchase of green commercial properties or green certified properties at a low base level rate or base financing rate of 2.80% per annum with a margin of financing up to 90%.

Similarly there is also the RHB SME Green Construction Financing for sustainable building projects used by the business itself.

It can be used to finance the construction of green certified and sustainable buildings for the company's own use only, with a base lending rate or base financing rate of 2.80% per annum. The margin of finance is as high as 90%.

Another product is the RHB SME Green Working Capital Financing, which is designed to help businesses procure or increase the use of sustainable raw materials in manufacturing and production. The financing rate is as low as 4.5% per annum.

Future of ESG in RHB Bank

With RHB Sustainable Financing businesses can not only become or stay competitive in global markets, they can be assured that these can be proof of the SMEs' compliance with even foreign green regulations such as the European Union's Deforestation-free Regulation and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

The bank is ready to assist businesses to start on their green journey to reduce operational costs through its competitive financing packages, energy efficiency and better resource optimisation.

The launch of these products comes amid the bank's broader sustainability ambitions, outlined in its Progress 27 corporate strategy and Sustainable and Transition Finance Framework (STFF), which guides financing activities that generate measurable environmental and social outcomes.

According to the group's sustainability reporting, the bank aims to mobilise significant volumes of sustainable finance while integrating ESG considerations across its business activities, from lending to investment and insurance.

RHB's sustainability goals also align with broader industry trends in Malaysia, where major banks are scaling up green financing commitments to support renewable energy, efficiency and transition-related projects.

These initiatives feed into national and global efforts to decarbonise economies and meet climate objectives.

By expanding both consumer and corporate green finance options, RHB Group aims to make environmentally positive projects more affordable and accessible.

The bank continues to position itself as a partner for individuals and businesses navigating the evolving sustainability landscape, enabling progress toward greener practices across the Malaysian economy.

■ For more details, scan the QR code.

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SURE-i redefines holistic health in Malaysia

ESTABLISHED in 2014, SURE-i has grown from a traditional healthcare retailer into one of Malaysia's emerging names in integrative health management, blending Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), modern Western medicine and naturopathy under one roof.

Through guidance, support and therapies, the company seeks to enable individuals to achieve optimal wellness and equilibrium.

This has been the vision of its founder, Dr Calvin Lim Fook Loong, who opened his first pharmacy in Simpang Ampat, Penang, in 2000.

While serving patients, he observed a rising interest in natural alternatives to conventional medicine. This prompted an exploration into natural therapeutic approaches that led him to establish HAMC Health Centre, which was rebranded as SURE-i in 2020.

The company emphasises integration rather than combining different medical systems.

"Each discipline plays a defined and complementary role," said Dr Lim.

"Western medicine supports diagnostics and risk identification, TCM focuses on root causes and body constitution, while naturopathy addresses lifestyle and nutritional balance."

Cross-disciplinary case discussions and unified recommendations ensure patients receive coherent advice, preventing conflicting guidance. The result is a coordinated care model where each modality strengthens the other.

"One of our turning points was transitioning from a product-driven retail model to a solution-based healthcare brand," explained Dr Lim.

"The shift required retraining staff to become consultative advisors rather than traditional sales personnel, while building a multidisciplinary team spanning nutrition, medicine and wellness."

He elaborated that the move demanded high upfront investment in talent acquisition, professional training, systems development, and research and development (R&D). That also meant pivoting from short-term revenue generation towards a long-term customer value model.

"While it is challenging, it is essential for us to build a sustainable healthcare brand rooted in outcomes rather than transactions," he said.

The Covid-19 pandemic proved to be a catalyst for digital transformation. SURE-i quickly switched to live Facebook sessions, online Zoom consultations and messaging platforms. It even expanded its reach into e-commerce and TikTok Shop.

Dr Lim (centre, with his team) says Western medicine supports diagnostics and risk identification, TCM focuses on root causes and body constitution while naturopathy addresses lifestyle and nutritional balance.

Content-driven education through videos and live sessions became central to outreach, supported by automation systems such as customer relationship management tools and chat automation. These initiatives allowed it to evolve from a retail-focused model into a scalable digital ecosystem.

Education today still forms a core pillar of the company's strategy. SURE-i produces digital content across several platforms, including TikTok and other social media channels, while offering tools such as body constitution assessments and personalised health reports.

One-on-one consultations, workshops and community engagement via WhatsApp groups further deepen interaction. The aim is to empower customers with knowledge about their own health, reducing over-reliance on products and encouraging informed decision-making.

"While managing a diverse professional team can be challenging, we solve this by setting up structured systems and shared values," said Dr Lim.

The company implements standardised operating procedures to maintain consistency, alongside a unified communication approach to simplify complex medical concepts. Additionally, a collaborative culture focused on patient outcomes aligns expertise across disciplines.

This approach further positions the company as a purpose-driven workplace, attracting talent through professional growth opportunities and a shared mission to advance integrative healthcare.

Dr Lim said that the company aims to expand regionally across South-East Asia within the next five years, strengthen its R&D capabilities and build a comprehensive health ecosystem integrating testing, consultation, products and community support.

"However, 2026's outlook presents challenges, with intensified competition, declining consumer trust amid market saturation and talent shortages," he noted.

In response, he said SURE-i plans to focus on professionalism, transparency and long-term customer relationships, underpinned by robust internal systems and sustained talent development.

As Malaysia's healthcare landscape grows more complex, the company is positioning itself as an integrative health partner that bridges tradition and modernity.

Berry Group's bold online leap pays off

DURING the Covid-19 lockdowns, tuition provider Berry Group Sdn Bhd made a bold move to migrate its entire physical classes online.

Doing so set it on the path to becoming one of Malaysia's leading and most innovative online education providers and it continues to transform how students across the country access quality learning.

Serving more than 10,000 students nationwide, the group provides structured academic support for learners aged six to 17, covering Primary 1 to Form 5 in English, Bahasa Malaysia and Chinese.

Beyond supplementary education, Berry Group has expanded into higher education through Berry Online Diploma, offering flexible, fully online programmes that support students beyond secondary school.

Founded by director Victor Tan Xun Pei in 2010 with the mission of making quality education accessible to all, Berry Group believes that every learner deserves the opportunity to succeed regardless of geographical or financial limitations.

With tuition fees starting from as low as RM30 per month, the group has made structured academic guidance available to families across Malaysia.

Behind its success is a strong academic team of more than 150 educators, including school teachers, SPM examination markers and reference book authors, with the support of teaching assistants.

Tan (in the middle), with his diverse team of educators, aims to raise standards of online education while ensuring students receive personalised guidance and structured learning support.

This diverse expertise enables the group to deliver lessons aligned with national standards while maintaining engaging online learning environments.

As a result, over 90% of students demonstrate measurable academic improvement, with 31% achieving significant grade breakthroughs.

A key innovation developed by Berry Group is its "7 Steps Education System", a structured learning framework designed to help students move beyond rote memorisation towards deeper conceptual understanding.

By guiding students through progressive learning stages, the system helps strengthen both subject mastery and examination readiness.

Today, this system is delivered through more than 70 specialised VIP classes, led by six senior tutors and supporting over 3,000 students.

The programme reflects the group's continued commitment to raise standards of online education while ensuring students receive personalised guidance and structured learning support.

Recognising that academic challenges continue after secondary school, the group introduced Berry Online Diploma to address gaps in post-SPM pathways.

While many students face uncertainty when choosing between traditional routes such as STPM, A-Levels, or foundation programmes, the programme is also designed to support working adults seeking flexible opportunities to further their education.

Berry Online Diploma offers an alternative through fully online programmes that can be completed within six months to a year.

With a 100% coursework-based assessment model, students are evaluated through continuous assignments rather than final examinations.

The courses are delivered bilingually in English and Mandarin, helping students better understand the content while reducing language barriers. The programme also provides opportunities for students without SPM or equivalent qualifications to pursue further education.

Currently, programmes are offered in fields such as Business Management, Accounting and Business, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Information Technology and Beverage Management (physical class) focusing on both academic knowledge and practical skills.

By integrating tuition and diploma education, Berry Group is positioning itself as a long-term education partner, supporting students from early learning to higher education.

As education evolves, its approach reflects a shift towards accessibility, flexibility and meaningful understanding in modern learning.

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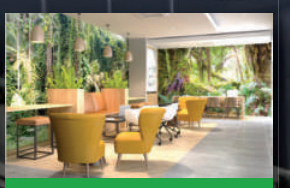
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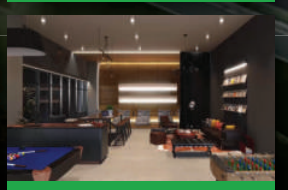
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MIDP transforms human capital in Malaysia

MIDP works with employers to strengthen workplace cultures by addressing mindset, behaviour and everyday habits.

IF you are familiar with corporate transformation, you may have experienced this: The strategy was solid on paper, the numbers made sense, the leadership team were all aligned and the roll-out town hall seemed successful. And yet, something just wasn't working.

A few months in, things start to slip. Inconsistent push at middle management, different interpretations leading to resistance, initiatives are executed but not in the way it was intended. At the end, aside from process adjustments, nothing really changes.

In today's fast-moving, high-performance environments, organisations are investing heavily in systems, tools and transformation agendas. But one critical layer is often overlooked – the human dynamics that determine whether any of it actually works.

Do people feel safe to speak up? Are leaders able to regulate their leadership environment? Are meetings filled with intellectual debates or are differences quietly suppressed? These are not soft questions. They are performance questions.

What we see across industries is a familiar pattern. Transformations don't fail because of bad strategy and teams don't fail because they lack capability. They struggle because of misalignment, poor execution and unspoken tensions. That's where the real work begins.

For the past 15 years, the Malaysian Institute for Development of Professionals (MIDP) has been working at this intersection – helping organisations understand not just what people do, but how they think, perceive, feel and behave at work. Because ultimately, that is what drives resilience and performance.

As a leading and award-winning human capital transformation institute, its mission is to elevate people and culture at work. Its work is grounded in a simple but often misunderstood idea: People don't thrive because they are told to (not even because they are paid to), but only when the environment allows them to.

Grounded in psychology and neuro-behavioural science, its work is designed to be meaningful, practical and immediately applicable. Ultimately, the company wants to see a change in mindset, behaviour and everyday habits – for long-term performance comes from people who feel confident, invested and empowered to contribute.

Complementing this work is "Speak Up Malaysia", an initiative under MIDP focused on building workplaces where inclusion and belonging are not just ideals, but everyday experiences.

This is achieved by addressing workplace dynamics, reshaping leadership behaviours and eliminating unethical practices that quietly undermine culture.

Over the years, the company has earned the trust of the industry and awarded various recognitions including the TalentCorp's Life At Work Awards 2025, the BrandLaureate's Best Brands Award 2025 and the NiagaTimes Industry Leadership Excellence Award 2023.

Leading this is its chief executive officer, Emellia Shariff. With a background spanning litigation, compliance and corporate governance, her journey into human capital was shaped by seeing firsthand where organisations succeed and where they fall short.

Today, her work extends beyond organisational transformation into national impact, including contributing to various legislative reforms, while serving as a member of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Tribunal in Malaysia.

This dual lens, corporate success and social justice, informs a key belief: that real change doesn't happen on paper alone, but through how people experience leadership every day.

As organisations look ahead, one thing is becoming increasingly clear. Technical skills may get you in the game. But it is people skills that determine how far you go.

■ To find out more about MIDP, attend its annual People and Culture Conference, visit *www.peopleandcultureconference.com*

MIDP Youth Institute provides structured programmes for students aged six to 18 that are delivered through weekly classes.

Nurturing future talents and thinkers

IF organisations today are struggling to build high-performing teams and culture, it raises a bigger question: Where are future talents learning how to think, speak and lead? This is why the mission to transform Malaysia's human capital doesn't stop with today's current workforce.

Through the Malaysian Institute for Development of Professionals' (MIDP) education arm, MIDP Youth Institute, the focus extends to building a pipeline of future talents equipped not just with knowledge, but with confidence, communication, critical thinking and the courage to navigate uncertainty and complexity.

Many of the challenges seen in organisations today don't start at work. They start much earlier. Students are taught how to answer, but not always how to think. They memorise, but struggle to articulate. They perform, but hesitate to speak up.

In the real world, success is not just about what you know. It's about how you think, communicate, influence and respond under pressure. This is where the shift begins.

At MIDP Youth Institute, learning goes beyond textbooks and classrooms. Designed for students aged six to 18, young learners are immersed in nurturing their soft skills through debating, public speaking, storytelling, Model United Nations, spoken word poetry and drama – not as extracurricular activities, but as core life skills.

These programmes provide students with safe, developmental spaces to experiment and express themselves, make mistakes as well as obtain feedback for self-improvement.

To support this, students step into competitive environments where they apply these skills under pressure, engage with peers and learn to navigate real-world challenges early. The impact is often subtle, but powerful.

A student who once hesitated begins to speak with clarity. A young leader learns to challenge ideas respectfully, but confidently. A team learns to collaborate, not just compete. Over time, these moments compound into something far greater.

These weekly classes are conducted by world-class trainers – champions and seasoned practitioners who bring global mastery directly to the classroom. This dedication to pedagogical excellence has received industry recognition, including the Education Awards for Best Training in Centre in 2024, and nominated as the Top 3 Best Soft Skills Institute in Parenthood's Parents' Choice Awards this year.

Over the years, the institute has seen its students go on to represent Malaysia on international platforms, including the world championships for debating, public speaking and poetry championships. Others carry these skills into scholarship interviews, university admissions and leadership roles in school and beyond.

"My experience has been one of the most vital to my overall development as a person," said Gelson Eng, a former student turned trainer and judge after winning several international and regional championships.

"It has given me wisdom and maturity beyond my age, while improving my ability to deal with real world situations. Learning here has also greatly increased my proficiency in English, helping me explore other passions such as poetry and creative writing. I have learnt much more than just debating, and I'm certain that I would not be half the person I am today had it not been for MIDP Youth Institute."

These outcomes are not accidental. They are the result of consistent exposure, strong mentorship and an environment designed for growth. The future of work isn't just shaped in boardrooms. It is shaped in the moments where young people first find their voice.

■ MIDP Youth Institute is currently accepting students for Semester II enrolment. Find out more at *midp.edu.my*

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IDCP simplifies retail beyond ERP

Wong (seated in the middle) and his team have built a cloud-based ecosystem specifically engineered to manage the high-volume, multi-channel demands of modern trading environments.

Rather than juggling separate software for various departments, IDCP Systems combines retail, e-commerce, warehouse management and finance into one cohesive system.

WHILE many enterprise resource systems (ERP) are built for the rigid production lines of manufacturing, the world of retail and distribution requires a different kind of agility.

In an industry where success is measured by the second at the checkout and by the unit in a sprawling warehouse, a "one-size-fits-all" software approach often leads to operational bottlenecks.

For Malaysian omnichannel commerce provider IDCP Systems Sdn Bhd, the focus is not on factory floors but on the fast-moving reality of retailers and distributors. It has built a cloud-based ecosystem specifically engineered to handle complex operations.

This effectively allows it to support a myriad of environments, from multi-entity, multi-brand and omnichannel to businesses with dozens of outlets and hundreds of consignment counters.

Established in 2021 by a team of specialist consultants and developers, the company was built to resolve the "disconnected systems" that plague maturing businesses. While the company is a relatively new player, its impact is most visible among Malaysia's industry veterans.

Many IDCP Systems clients are retailers and distributors with 30 to 40 years of operating history.

These established businesses often reach a breaking point where their legacy systems – or generic ERPs – can no longer support the scale of their operations.

Transitioning to IDCP Systems allows these legacy giants to gain real-time visibility and scalability that are required to thrive in a digital-first economy.

Its core advantage lies in its unified platform advantage: Rather than juggling separate software for various departments, IDCP Systems combines retail, e-commerce, warehouse management and finance into one cohesive system.

This elimination of fragmentation is particularly vital for multi-entity and multi-brand environments, including businesses managing dozens of outlets and hundreds of consignment counters.

"We help businesses overcome common challenges such as inventory control, multi-branch visibility and LHDN e-invoicing compliance by delivering everything in one powerful, scalable platform," says the company's founder and director K.H. Wong.

"Efficiency" is not just a buzzword for IDCP Systems, as it is a measurable metric. In high-volume environments, some managing up to 1.3 million stock units, implementing IDCP Systems' software has seen warehouse accuracy soar from 50% to 90%.

The operational turnaround times are striking:

> Stock takes: traditionally a gruelling three-day process, now reduced to just one day.

> Frontend operations: customer checkout times – the heartbeat of retail – have been slashed from over a minute to a mere 10-15 seconds.

> Agile management: Through the mobile ERP application, purchase approvals that once took days are now instant, allowing leadership to stay connected and responsive regardless of their location.

Beyond its technical prowess, IDCP Systems maintains a customer-centric philosophy. In an era of hidden fees, the platform offers complimentary built-in e-invoicing and analytics as standard features, ensuring clients stay compliant with LHDN and MDEC requirements without additional financial burden.

Currently holding the Malaysia Digital (MD) Status and recognised as a finalist in the Star Outstanding Business Awards 2025, IDCP Systems has deployed its solutions across seven countries.

With over 6,000 active users, the company remains committed to building practical, specialised IT solutions that empower the distribution and retail sectors to grow with confidence.

MCI Paint builds resilience in innovation, sustainability

The MCI Paint management team, led by executive director Mak Tak Wah (fifth from left) and managing director Ngan Kok Yoong (sixth from left).

IN today's rapidly evolving business landscape, resilience is defined not only by the ability to adapt, but by the clarity of principles that guide long-term growth.

For MCI Paint, leadership has been anchored in consistency, relevance and a commitment to deliver value through performance, innovation and purpose-driven strategy.

Since its establishment in 2009, the company has pursued a disciplined approach to growth, prioritising long-term capability over short-term gains.

This philosophy centres on understanding customer needs while continuously investing in research and development to deliver solutions that perform reliably in real-world conditions.

It has enabled MCI Paint to build trust through product consistency, technical reliability and a clear strategic direction in a competitive industry.

Over the past year, the business environment has presented challenges including rising material costs, supply chain fluctuations and changing customer expectations.

In response, the company strengthened operational efficiency, maintained strict quality control and aligned its capabilities with market demands. As a result, MCI Paint continues to deliver dependable solutions while sustaining operational resilience.

At the core of its product range is UNOTEC, the company's in-house technology developed and tested in Malaysia's demanding tropical climate. Designed to withstand heat, humidity and heavy rainfall, it delivers durable, long-term protection in real-world conditions.

Today, this technology supports projects across Malaysia, while the company also distributes its products to overseas markets across South-East Asia and markets beyond the region.

By helping surfaces retain their colour and condition over time, it reduces the need for frequent repainting and ongoing maintenance. MCI Paint operates its manufacturing facility in Selangor, supported by warehouse distribution networks in Sabah, Sarawak, Johor and Kuantan to ensure efficient nationwide coverage.

Its products are available through more than 1,000 hardware retail outlets across Malaysia. To better serve customers in Singapore, the company also maintains a dedicated presence there.

It serves the market through four brands: Baoma, Blue-i, Benzi and Brush & Roller. Each brand caters to different segments and application needs, enabling MCI Paint to reach a broad customer base while maintaining consistent standards of quality and performance.

As sustainability is a core pillar of MCI Paint's strategy, the company has positioned itself as a growing eco-paint specialist in Malaysia, with a focus on developing low-odour, environmentally responsible coating solutions that meet modern performance expectations.

A key shift in the industry has been the transition from solvent-based to water-based paints, as these can deliver comparable durability and performance.

Water-based paints impart less odour for improved indoor comfort, are easier to apply and clean up, present reduced health risks during use, dry faster and have a lower environmental impact due to their reduced volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions.

This transition is also reflected in specialised applications such as wood coatings. Products like Baoma Woodice, a water-based transparent varnish for interior wood surfaces, demonstrate how modern formulations can replace traditional solvent-based alternatives while delivering comparable finish quality, lower odour, easier application, and improved environmental performance.

For these advantages, MCI Paint has consistently invested in the research and development of advanced water-based technologies, which today make up more than 70% of its product range.

This strategic focus aligns with a growing market demand, as the adoption of environmentally friendly coatings continues to increase steadily year-on-year across both residential and commercial sectors.

Beyond product innovation, governance remains a key priority, with an emphasis on transparency, consistency and accountability across operations.

Socially, the company contributes by developing coatings that support healthier, safer and more comfortable living and working environments.

Looking ahead, MCI Paint anticipates continued shifts in the coating industry, where sustainability, performance and long-term value will remain central to decision-making.

As the business evolves, MCI Paint remains committed to delivering coating solutions that combine scientific innovation, environmental responsibility and long-term performance, giving customers greater confidence in the spaces they build and maintain.

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Expanding workforce solutions

WIKICAREER®

CONSULTANCY and recruitment agency Wikicareer has transitioned from its initial focus on managerial and administrative placements to become a comprehensive workforce solutions provider.

Founded in 2014, the agency has evolved alongside Malaysia's changing labour landscape over the past decade. A key turning point occurred in 2019, when the company officially ventured into the gig economy, positioning itself in the gig and human capital ecosystem.

The agency operates with full regulatory approval under its Jabatan Tenaga Kerja licence, which enables it to provide comprehensive services to both local and professional workers. This long-standing compliance reflects its ability to operate across a wide segment of the labour market while maintaining high standards of governance.

"At Wikicareer, our mission is to elevate the gig work and human talent experience for all," said its founder and managing director Ethan Yan Chin Yik.

To achieve this, the company continuously explores and leverages AI assistance to enhance internal productivity and refine its high-level business strategy.

By integrating these advanced tools into its technology platforms, Wikicareer ensures that its gig associates and partners are supported by data-driven insights.

Internally, Wikicareer attributes much of its growth to an operating philosophy that emphasises speed and adaptability.

"Because we aren't afraid to 'fail fast' and learn quickly, we fixed bottlenecks

Yik: 'We tested new ways to manage our people and services immediately.'

and improved our internal processes while others were still stuck in the planning phase," Yik explained.

"This 'act first' mindset kept us growing while the industry was uncertain."

While some organisations adopted extended planning cycles, Wikicareer focused on piloting adjustments to its service models and internal systems. Company representatives say the willingness to experiment and learn from early missteps allowed them to identify inefficiencies and resolve bottlenecks more rapidly during periods of uncertainty.

Looking ahead, Wikicareer sees workforce management moving towards what it describes as an "instant" operating environment, where responsiveness and flexibility are key differentiators. In this context, the company views its role as bridging traditional employment structures

Wikicareer explores and leverages AI assistance to enhance internal productivity and refine its high-level business strategy.

with the needs of a faster-moving labour market. Agility, rather than scale alone, is expected to define competitiveness.

Corporate responsibility also forms part of the company's framework. For its workforce, Wikicareer has introduced a "24-Hour Payment" initiative aimed at reducing financial strain among workers and limiting exposure to informal lending practices. It also organises community meals and sports activities to foster a sense of belonging among staff.

On governance, Wikicareer highlights its status as an official MDEC Sharing Economy Partner, which it says demonstrates adherence to regulatory standards and fair operating practices. Environmentally, the company is moving towards digitising documentation and streamlining operational routes, measures intended to reduce paper use and energy consumption.

Technology underpins much of its operational strategy.

"We use technology like AI and apps as tools to make life easier and move even faster," Yik said.

"These tools give us a 'live' look at what's happening in the company at any second. If something isn't working, the data tells us immediately, allowing us to try a new approach right away."

As Malaysia's labour market continues to evolve, companies operating within the recruitment and workforce management space face increasing pressure to balance compliance, efficiency and worker welfare.

Wikicareer's expansion from a niche consultancy to a multi-level workforce provider reflects these broader industry shifts.

With regulatory approvals secured, institutional partnerships established and a technology-driven framework in place, the company is positioning itself to respond to the demands of a labour market defined by change.

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Sky Power charges up for further growth

Sky Power
So Good That It Hertz

SKY Power Sdn Bhd's growth since its inception in 2024 has been guided by its strong core values of excellence, integrity, innovation, safety and sustainability.

Its leadership is grounded in experience, discipline and a people-first approach.

With over 30 years in the Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) industry, its managing director Desmond Goh has shaped the company's direction by balancing technical expertise with talent development.

The company is known for building strong systems and its capable team of experts, which has expanded from its core team of just eight.

Today, Sky Power has about 50 professionals within a year by empowering people, maintaining high standards, and fostering accountability. In a rapidly evolving environment, the company remains adaptable by strengthening governance, embracing digitalisation, and continuously improving our internal processes.

"The past year presented challenges such as manpower shortages, tight project timelines, and increasing regulatory requirements," said Goh.

"One of our most defining moments was taking over abandoned or delayed M&E projects – situations that required immediate problem-solving, technical expertise and coordination."

Goh: Organisations that invest in digital systems, build strong teams and maintain high governance standards will be better positioned to succeed in this evolving environment.

The challenges were eventually surmounted by the company strengthening its internal systems, enhancing cross functional collaboration and adopting digital tools to improve efficiency and project visibility.

"These experiences not only built our reputation as a reliable contractor but also reinforced a strong culture of resilience, accountability, and execution excellence within the organisation," said Goh.

As the business landscape is expected to become more competitive, Goh noted that there will be increasing emphasis on sustainability, compliance and digital transformation.

"The demand for high-quality engineering solutions and reliable post-project service support will continue to grow," he added.

In a rapidly evolving environment, Sky Power remains adaptable by strengthening governance, embracing digitalisation, and improving its internal processes.

Opportunities lie in infrastructure development, post-project services and maintenance (SOS Service and Maintenance), as well as ESG-driven projects.

However, companies must also prepare for rising costs, talent shortages and stricter regulatory requirements, he cautioned.

"Organisations that invest in digital systems, build strong teams, and maintain high governance standards will be better positioned to succeed in this evolving environment," he said.

With sustainability being an integrated part of Sky Power's operations and long-term strategy, the company adheres to environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles.

"Environmentally, we focus on responsible engineering practices, efficient system performance, and eco-friendly procurement. At the same time, we are expanding our SOS Service and Maintenance initiative to support households and building owners through fast-response electrical services, including breakdown diagnosis, upgrading, renovation works, and within 24 hours emergency response.

"This initiative ensures long-term system reliability, safety, and continuous service support beyond project completion. Socially, we prioritise employee development through training, mentorship and creating a safe, inclusive workplace."

He added that from a governance perspective, Sky Power maintains a zero-tolerance approach to unethical practices, with transparent tendering and strict compliance with industry regulations and ISO standards.

In line with its commitment to strong governance and operational excellence, Sky Power has successfully achieved three ISO certifications – ISO 9001 (Quality Management), ISO 14001 (Environmental Management) and ISO 45001 (Occupational Health and Safety).

This year, the company is progressing further by implementing ESG compliance frameworks and pursuing Anti-Bribery and Corruption (ABAC) certification, reinforcing its zero-tolerance stance on unethical practices and strengthening stakeholder confidence. By integrating ESG into both technical design and operational processes, the company ensures sustainable growth while delivering long-term value to stakeholders.

With innovation and digitalisation as key drivers of its productivity and growth, the company leverages platforms such as MS Teams for real-time project coordination, building information modelling (BIM), such as Autodesk Revit for design accuracy and clash detection.

It also uses digital human resource systems to manage its people.

The company has also implemented an integrated management system (IMS) that covers quality, safety, environmental and legal workflows to enhance efficiency and compliance.

"We are also exploring further automation and emerging technologies, including AI-driven analytics, to improve decision-making, cost control, and project performance. These initiatives enable us to deliver projects more efficiently, accurately," said Goh.

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Engaging award participants in value-added activities

The second SOBA LAB in Bukit Mertajam, Penang on Aug 14 centred on AI, digital marketing and financial literacy.

Experts emphasised that SMEs must at least establish a basic digital presence, harness AI tools responsibly and improve prompting skills to maximise technology benefits.

The SOBA Elevate session on Nov 3 last year discussed ESG adoption, talent and culture development, and strategies for scaling businesses beyond RM100mil in revenue.

Later on a fireside chat session, "SOBA Up Close", offered insights from past winners and judges on best practices and common pitfalls in award submissions

SOBA Prestige with GWM at Mitec, Kuala Lumpur attended by (from left) GWM South-East Asia general manager Bruce Xu and International vice-president James Yang, SMG chief operating officer Lydia Wang, U Mobile Sdn Bhd chief business officer How Lih Ren, Credit Guarantee Corporation Malaysia Bhd (CGC) president and chief executive officer Mohamed Nazri Omar, SMG chief executive office Chan Seng Fatt, RHB Bank Bhd Group Corporate and Business Banking managing director Wendy Ting, PKT Logistics Group Sdn Bhd chief executive officer and managing director Datuk Seri Dr Michael Tio, Karex Bhd chief executive officer Goh Miah Kiat, GWM Malaysia managing director Mike Cui and chief operating officer Roslan Abdullah after the unveiling of GWM's new WEY G9 Premium. — IZZRAFIQ ALIAS/The Star

Evaluating success stories

As SOBA 2025 progressed towards the judging stages, competition intensified. Finalists presented their business models, financial performance, innovations and growth strategies before panels comprising industry leaders and representatives from 16 statutory and business associations. Judging criteria extended beyond profitability to include governance standards, scalability, differentiation and ESG initiatives.

By the final judging session on Jan 13, 2026 at Menara Star, judges observed a noticeable rise in the overall quality of participants. Many businesses demonstrated clearer strategic direction, stronger governance frameworks and greater operational sophistication. Several finalists exhibited revenues and capabilities beyond traditional SME definitions, reflecting the rapid evolution of Malaysia's enterprise ecosystem.

Judges also noted that businesses are increasingly focused on sustainability, digital intelligence and regional expansion. ESG integration is no longer viewed as optional, while brand trust and purpose have become key differentiators. With AI, automation and data analytics reshaping industries, companies must invest in technology while strengthening cybersecurity and customer experience.

Importantly, judges stressed that participation in awards such as SOBA goes beyond accolades. The process encourages benchmarking against best practices, strengthening governance and building credibility with customers, financiers and partners. In uncertain economic conditions, such recognition can enhance trust and resilience.

Prestigious gathering

Complementing the formal judging process, the Star Outstanding Business Awards (SOBA) 2025 association hosting event for MRCA called on its members to upskill their workforce and adopt artificial intelligence (AI) in their operations.

In the following year, the SOBA Prestige event celebrated past winners and strengthened alumni networks at the Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre (Mitec), on Jan 29. The event provided SMEs with opportunities to forge partnerships, exchange insights and learn from seasoned entrepreneurs.

A fireside chat featuring Karex Bhd chief executive officer Goh Miah Kiat offered candid reflections on leadership transitions and scaling a family business into a listed company.

Industry leaders at the Prestige gathering reinforced recurring themes: embrace digitalisation, leverage AI, monitor global trends and prioritise differentiation. They advised SMEs to build niche strengths, focus on customer experience and reduce overreliance on government support. Mentorship was repeatedly cited as a vital catalyst for growth, allowing emerging entrepreneurs to learn from mid-tier and established players.

Across its launch, LAB sessions, judging rounds and alumni engagement, SOBA 2025 has evolved into more than an awards ceremony. It functions as a comprehensive platform for knowledge exchange, capability building and business transformation.

As Malaysian enterprises confront rising costs, technological disruption and heightened ESG expectations, SOBA continues to serve as both recognition and roadmap – spotlighting companies that are not only succeeding today but preparing to power tomorrow.

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