Star SOBA 15

STAR OUTSTANDING BUSINESS AWARDS

EMPOWERING PROGRESS, ELEVATING BUSINESS EXCELLENCE

For 15 years, the Star Outstanding Business Awards (SOBA) has been a platform for Malaysia's most visionary entrepreneurs, celebrating those who drive change and inspire progress. Their achievements go beyond success today—they are building a stronger, more resilient economy for the future.

Step inside to explore their journey.

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Honouring excellence: celebrating Malaysia's business leaders

I am honoured to extend my warmest congratulations to Star Media Group for hosting the prestigious Star Outstanding Business Awards (SOBA) 2024.

This annual celebration is a testament to the spirit of entrepreneurship, perseverance and innovation that drives Malaysia's business landscape forward.

It is truly inspiring to witness an initiative that continues to recognise and empower small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as they shape the future of our economy.

Malaysia's SME sector forms the backbone of our nation's economic growth, contributing significantly to employment generation, technological advancement and global trade competitiveness.

In an era where businesses must continuously adapt to digitalisation, sustainability goals and evolving consumer expectations, SOBA serves as an essential platform to honour enterprises that exemplify resilience, ingenuity and excellence.

These awards not only celebrate business success but also encourage others to emulate the outstanding achievements of industry leaders.

As we navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing economic landscape, the government remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering a conducive business environment.

Our policies and initiatives are geared toward strengthening Malaysia's business ecosystem, enhancing ease of doing business and ensuring that local enterprises receive the necessary support to thrive both domestically and internationally.

Collaboration between the public and private sectors is critical in achieving these objectives. This year's theme, of "Empowering Progress, Elevating Business Excellence", which highlights innovation and sustainable growth, aligns perfectly with Malaysia's long-term vision of becoming a high-income, technologically advanced and environmentally responsible nation.

It is heartening to see that many businesses are embracing sustainability, leveraging digital transformation, and striving for excellence in their respective fields. Their courage, tenacity, and forward-thinking mindset exemplify the qualities needed to drive Malaysia's economic prosperity in the years ahead.

To all the nominees and winners of SOBA 2024, I extend my heartfelt congratulations. Your achievements reflect the unwavering determination, creativity and hard work that define Malaysia's entrepreneurial landscape. Whether you are an emerging start-up, an established SME, or a pioneering industry leader, your contributions serve as an inspiration to others and reinforce the strength of our business community.

I also take this opportunity to commend The Star for its unwavering commitment to fostering business excellence through this remarkable initiative. By recognising and rewarding outstanding business leaders, SOBA continues to elevate Malaysia's corporate sector and inspire greater innovation and ambition among aspiring entrepreneurs.

As we celebrate the achievements of our nation's brightest business minds, let us reaffirm our collective commitment to building a resilient, inclusive, and progressive economy. The road ahead is filled with opportunities, and with the right vision, strategy, and dedication, I am confident that Malaysia's business community will continue to flourish and make an indelible mark on the global stage.

Once again, congratulations to all participants and award recipients of SOBA 2024.

May your success stories inspire generations to come, and may we continue to work together in shaping a thriving future for Malaysia.

Thank you.

Dato' Sri Haji Fadillah Bin Haji Yusof
Deputy Prime Minister

A legacy of impact

WHEN we first started the Star Outstanding Business Awards (SOBA), our aim was to recognise the most visionary entrepreneurs and successful businesses in the country.

Over the years, SOBA has grown into one of the most coveted business accolades, a symbol of excellence that distinguishes the best in Malaysian enterprise. Winning the SOBA trophy is more than just an achievement – it is a mark of credibility, resilience, and ambition.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of SOBA. What began as an awards programme has evolved into a powerful platform for Malaysia's businesses, celebrating those who drive change and inspire progress.

More importantly, SOBA has become a catalyst for transformation, empowering businesses to strive for greater heights. It has become a driving force for business excellence, championing the spirit of entrepreneurship, fostering knowledge-sharing, and strengthening networks within the business community.

I am also pleased to share that several SOBA winners have gone on to achieve remarkable milestones, including listings on the stock exchange. Their success is a testament to the potential and strength of Malaysian businesses. It proves that with the right mindset, determination, and support, local enterprises can scale beyond expectations, competing on both regional and global stages.

The past 15 years have been about laying the foundation for a stronger, more resilient economy – one that fosters innovation, sustainability, and growth. Now, as we look forward to the next 15 years, we remain committed to making SOBA even bigger and better, evolving alongside the needs of the business community and continuing to empower progress across industries.

Our commitment remains steadfast in championing businesses, fostering excellence and shaping the future of Malaysia's economy. As we celebrate this milestone, we look forward to discovering and recognising the next generation of trailblazers who will define the future of Malaysian entrepreneurship.

Tan Sri Wong Foon Meng
Chairman
Star Media Group

Forging the future of Malaysian business

MALAYSIA'S business landscape is evolving at an unprecedented pace. With rapid digitalisation, shifting consumer behaviour and a greater emphasis on sustainability, businesses must continuously adapt to remain competitive.

The ability to embrace change, harness technology, and innovate will define the success of tomorrow's industry leaders.

For 15 years, the Star Outstanding Business Awards (SOBA) has celebrated businesses that lead the way – those that push boundaries, set new benchmarks and challenge the status quo. But as we mark this milestone, our focus is firmly on the future.

SOBA is not just an award; it is a catalyst for growth, a platform that supports businesses in navigating new challenges and seizing emerging opportunities.

The next chapter of SOBA will continue to empower businesses – connecting entrepreneurs, fostering collaboration, and championing innovation. We aim to provide the tools and recognition that will help businesses expand beyond borders and build a lasting impact.

The future of Malaysian business will be shaped by visionaries who dare to evolve and redefine their industries. SOBA remains committed to celebrating these trailblazers, ensuring that the businesses of today are well-positioned for the opportunities of tomorrow.

We look forward to celebrating the next generation of business leaders – those who will shape industries, drive progress and take Malaysian enterprise to greater heights.

Chan Seng Fatt
Group Chief Executive Officer
Star Media Group

Messages of support

CGC Group's partnership with SOBA stems from our shared commitment to empower Malaysian micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), the backbone of our nation's economy. This collaboration has supported their growth and set a benchmark for excellence by recognising achievements and fostering innovation.

Through Star Media Group's extensive reach, we have connected with a broader audience in Malaysia's MSME ecosystem, providing invaluable resources that help businesses thrive. By celebrating strong, resilient enterprises, SOBA inspires continuous progress, encouraging MSMEs to adopt sustainable practices, embrace digital transformation and contribute to long-term economic resilience.

Datuk Mohd Zamree Mohd Ishak
President and Chief Executive Officer
Credit Guarantee Corporation Malaysia Bhd

As industries evolve and face new challenges, we believe that SOBA, along with its industry and strategic partners, will continue to play a vital role in educating and encouraging businesses to remain competitive both locally and globally.

Through SOBA's recognition, businesses are empowered to take bold steps toward setting new industry standards, pushing boundaries, and leading the way in global competitiveness, particularly in adopting ESG – which is increasingly essential for businesses aiming to forge strong partnerships with multinational conglomerates and meet international standards.

Datuk Seri Dr Michael Tio
Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director
PKT Logistics Group Sdn Bhd

SMEs drive innovation and progress, and for 15 years, SOBA has been their champion. RHB is honoured to support this platform, helping businesses turn ambition into success.

As a key driver of economic growth, SMEs play a vital role in shaping the future of our nation, driving innovation, and creating opportunities.

Congratulations to SOBA for its unwavering commitment to SMEs – here's to more years of empowering enterprises to grow and thrive!

Yip How Nang
SME Banking Head
RHB Bank Bhd

A platform for growth, a legacy of excellence

THE Star Outstanding Business Awards (SOBA) was introduced in 2010 with a simple yet powerful vision – to recognise visionary entrepreneurs and outstanding businesses, inspiring them to strive for excellence.

More than just an award, SOBA was designed as a platform to nurture and elevate homegrown businesses, driving lasting impact on Malaysia's economy.

From the outset, the awards programme sets itself apart by evaluating businesses not by industry, but by their excellence across key fundamentals such as innovation, sustainability, leadership and growth.

This commitment to recognising holistic business excellence was evident at the inaugural awards gala, where nine winners took the stage – marking the start of what would become a defining platform for business recognition in Malaysia.

As businesses evolved, so did SOBA. The second edition introduced two new award categories and launched SOBA Forums in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor and Sarawak. These sessions provided a space for entrepreneurs to learn, share insights, and build connections – laying the foundation for a thriving business ecosystem.

With each passing year, the awards gained momentum. The number of submissions grew, attracting companies of all sizes and industries. To ensure fairness and inclusivity, SOBA introduced a two-tier category system in 2016, segmenting businesses based on turnover – up to RM25mil and above RM25mil. This allowed emerging businesses to compete on a level playing field while giving established companies a platform to showcase their continued excellence.

The annual SOBA Gala Night has also become a hallmark event in the business community. More than just a night of celebration, it is the culmination of months of learning, networking and collaboration.

Beyond the awards, SOBA introduced impactful business initiatives, with the SOBA Forums evolving into multiple specialised programmes designed for meaningful, targeted engagement. These included SOBA CEO Powertalk, SOBA Labs, SOBA Association Hosting, SOBA Clinics, SOBA BizClub, SOBA Prestige, SOBA Connect, SOBA Ambassador, and SOBA Elevate and Masterclass.

These initiatives equipped entrepreneurs with invaluable knowledge, mentorship, strategic insights and networking opportunities – solidifying SOBA's role as more than just an award, but a movement that empowers business growth and innovation.

SOBA would not be what it is today without the unwavering support of its sponsors, who have played a crucial role in championing its mission. Their commitment has not only sustained the awards but also enabled the continuous growth of initiatives that empower businesses to scale and thrive.

Further strengthening this impact, Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) came on board as a trade promotion partner, amplifying its impact by helping businesses explore global opportunities.

The next chapter of SOBA

Today, SOBA is not just an awards programme, it is a catalyst for growth. Many of its alumni have evolved from ambitious small and medium-sized enterprises into industry leaders, with several making the leap to public listing. Their success stands as a testament to SOBA's role in shaping Malaysia's business landscape.

But beyond the numbers, its true impact lies in the businesses it has empowered, the leaders it has inspired, and the community it has built.

Looking ahead, a SOBA Council has been established, comprising past winners, judges and sponsors, to provide strategic direction, address market challenges, and ensure the awards continue to drive meaningful impact.

Fifteen years ago, SOBA set out to recognise the best in business. Today, it stands as a symbol of progress, resilience, and ambition. And as we look to the future, we remain committed to empowering businesses, celebrating success, and shaping the next generation of industry leaders.

Here's to the next 15 years of growth, innovation and impact.

Award powers up ABM Fujiya for innovation, growth

WINNING the SOBA award was a significant milestone for ABM Fujiya Bhd, elevating the company's credibility and boosting trust among clients.

"This recognition is one of the most prestigious business accolades, and it has increased confidence in our brand while attracting new customers," said deputy managing director Datuk Alan Tay. The award also brought greater media attention, enhancing brand visibility and market awareness.

Tay highlighted that the SOBA win provided a powerful marketing tool, helping ABM strengthen its reputation. "It raises our marketing equity and enhances the brand's value in the eyes of customers and competitors," he said. Over time, the recognition has had a sustained positive impact on the company's business reputation and market positioning.

The award also served as a motivator for continuous improvement, pushing ABM to innovate its product range. "Since winning, we have developed a new range of batteries to meet market demand," Tay shared. In addition, the company partnered with a Chinese battery manufacturer to establish a new plant, which commenced operations last year.

Investment in employee training has also been a priority since receiving the award. "We have committed to more training, development programmes, and leadership initiatives to enhance our workforce," he said. Alongside workforce development, ABM has scaled up operations by investing in modern automated machinery to increase production capacity.

However, sustaining the momentum of success has been challenging. "There is pressure to constantly innovate," Tay admitted. "After winning the award, expectations rise, and there's a risk of stagnation if not managed properly." To address this, ABM set realistic goals, celebrated small achievements, and established clear innovation pipelines to foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Another challenge was avoiding complacency. "Winning an award like SOBA can lead some to rest on their laurels," said Tay. "We counteract this by staying focused on long-term objectives, setting new challenges, and motivating our teams with fresh targets."

Customer expectations also increased post-award. "Managing these heightened expectations realistically is crucial," he noted. To meet these demands, the company developed a new range of enhanced flooded and absorbent glass mat batteries, targeting emerging markets. "These products reflect our commitment to innovation and investment in research and development."

ABM's diversification strategy has been instrumental in ensuring long-term stability. "We are expanding our income streams to reduce reliance on specific markets, positioning our business for sustainable success," said Tay. By continuously launching innovative products, the company remains competitive and adaptable to market shifts.

Beyond business growth, the SOBA recognition has facilitated learning and expertise development within ABM. "It has broadened our scope of influence, enhanced our work quality, and reinforced our credibility," Tay explained. The accolade has also shaped ABM's long-term vision by increasing motivation and confidence to pursue even greater achievements.

"The award has opened doors to new opportunities and larger platforms to share our vision," said Tay. "It has ultimately strengthened our reputation and positioned us for future success."

Offering advice to aspiring entrepreneurs, Tay emphasised the importance of patience and perseverance. "Success doesn't happen overnight. Stay consistent with your efforts, even if results take time." Passion, he added, is key to navigating challenges. "Passion keeps you motivated through tough times.

"The entrepreneurial road is tough, especially today. There will be rejections, failures, and roadblocks, but successful entrepreneurs bounce back, pivot, and keep moving forward. Stay resilient and adaptable to change."

Shaping the future of the pharmaceutical industry

ALPRO Alliance Sdn Bhd recently achieved a significant milestone, winning a prestigious award that serves as a testament to the company's commitment to excellence. Chief executive officer Ostwin Paw described the accolade as "one of the biggest acknowledgements from the public," reinforcing the trust and confidence placed in Alpro by its suppliers, partners, and customers.

"To us, it's a big win because it's a testament to our suppliers, all our partners that have been with us for so long, and also with our customers," Paw remarked. "It's like a form of trust."

This recognition has been a morale booster for Alpro's employees, whom Paw fondly refers to as "Alperians."

In celebration, the company ensured that the award was circulated among all outlets, allowing staff to personally see and hold it.

"Most of the time, they only see it in the newspapers, but we let them feel it. That moment created a lot of pride and built confidence – it was truly magical," he shared.

Beyond internal recognition, the award has strengthened Alpro's relationships with suppliers, validating their partnership with a reputable company. "It's like a stamp of authenticity, confirming that we are not only adding value to the community but are also a company of a high standard," Paw stated.

Winning the award has propelled Alpro beyond Malaysia's borders. The company has expanded through a partnership with Japan's Sugi Pharmacy, forming Alpro Sugi. "Sugi is one of the top three pharmacy chains in Japan, and through Alpro Sugi Venture, we are expanding our reach," Paw explained.

Alpro has also introduced new business units, including Alpro Baby and Alpro Optisaver, with the aim of creating a sustainable healthcare ecosystem. "We believe in building a stronger platform to provide a wider range of services for our customers," he said.

One of Alpro's most impactful initiatives is Onco Help, a programme designed to provide cancer patients with affordable and fast-access medication. Recognising the financial burden of cancer treatment, Alpro took a bold step by offering medications at cost price, covering only handling and logistics fees.

"There are huge markups on cancer medication in the market, so we decided – why not remove profit?" Paw explained. Despite initial challenges, including scepticism from suppliers, Alpro persisted.

"Not everyone believed it was true, but we emphasised training and education for our Alperians. Within a year, we grew from serving 496 patients to nearly 1,500," Paw noted, highlighting the programme's success and increasing acceptance among suppliers.

Alpro continues to enhance its offerings by providing a wider selection of products and services. "People visit a pharmacy because they have problems to solve, but we realised we could add more value by expanding our range," Paw said.

Through collaborations with international partners, including their major Japanese supplier, Alpro is working to increase its product selection to over 50,000 stock-keeping units (SKUs). Additionally, the company has launched a mega online store, ensuring affordability and accessibility for customers.

Looking ahead, Alpro is committed to its vision of a "healthy and vibrant world." The company has expanded to Indonesia, focusing on medication safety, and aims to further its impact beyond Malaysia.

"Winning in 2022 was an affirmation that we are on the right track," Paw said. "It reinforced our determination to build a healthcare ecosystem that provides not only medicine but also consultation and care."

Through its ongoing initiatives and strategic partnerships, Alpro continues to redefine the pharmacy landscape, ensuring that healthcare remains accessible, affordable, and patient-centric.

Aspen's vision for innovation to empower progress

"WINNING SOBA was more than an accolade," said Aspen (Group) Holdings Limited co-founder and group chief executive officer Datuk M. Murly.

"It validated our belief that innovation and integrity can reshape industries. For Aspen, it amplified our visibility across the region, attracting investors, partners and talent who shared our vision."

Murly reflected on a lesson from his early career: success is not just about building structures but about building trust. "SOBA reinforced that trust, enabling bold steps like our initial public offering (IPO) and solidifying our reputation as a forward-thinking developer. Recognition isn't the destination – it's fuel to push boundaries further."

Post-SOBA, Aspen doubled down on transparency and innovation. "We revamped our governance framework, embraced data-driven decision-making, and integrated sustainability into every project," he shared. "Great companies aren't built on ideas alone – they're built on execution." This mindset propelled Aspen's IPO and strategic partnerships, diversifying its portfolio while maintaining a commitment to quality.

Balancing rapid growth with quality was a key challenge. Murly empowered teams to innovate while upholding high standards. Staying ahead of market trends required studying lifestyle dynamics, leveraging global trends, and listening to customers. "Challenges are opportunities in disguise," he said. "By fostering collaboration and adaptability, we turned setbacks into stepping stones for growth."

Since SOBA, Aspen has launched transformative projects like Beacon Executive Suites in Penang and high-profile developments in Aspen Vision City, Batu Kawan, blending modern design with sustainability. The company also diversified into the food and beverage industry with Kanada-Ya, offering authentic Japanese experiences.

Murly highlighted Aspen's smart-living features, such as digital security and energy-saving systems, which have enriched residents' lives. Beyond property, Aspen deepened its community focus through CSR initiatives.

As title sponsor of the Penang Bridge International Marathon, Aspen expanded the event to Aspen Vision City, fostering inclusivity by supporting 14 visually impaired participants with guide runners. The company also built a state-of-the-art football field in Aspen Vision City to promote health, wellness, and community engagement.

"SOBA reminded us that our work has a ripple effect – on communities, economies, and the environment," he said. Moving forward, Aspen will focus on sustainability, innovation and community impact, investing in cutting-edge technologies and sustainable designs.

He advised aspiring entrepreneurs to dream big, embrace failure as a learning experience, and leverage innovation to solve real-world problems. "Surround yourself with forward-thinkers and foster an environment rooted in integrity and empathy. The most resilient organisations are built on trust and genuine human connections."

He concluded, "Stay curious, stay adaptable, and never lose sight of your purpose. Dream boldly, act decisively, and always strive to leave the world better than you found it."

Aspen's journey, fueled by SOBA, continues to redefine possibilities in real estate and community-building, ensuring it remains a catalyst for positive change and innovation.

Fuelling perseverance through passion

WINNING the SOBA award in 2021 was a defining moment for Cape EMS Bhd, significantly boosting its brand visibility in the electronics manufacturing services (EMS) industry, both locally and internationally.

"The recognition strengthened our credibility with existing clients and attracted new business opportunities, contributing to our growth trajectory," said managing director and group chief executive officer Christina Tee. "It also showcased our commitment to excellence, innovation and quality, which resonated with key industry players."

The award also had a profound impact on the company's employees. "It boosted morale, reinforcing a sense of pride and motivation within our team," Tee added. "Overall, it positioned us as a trusted leader in the EMS sector, opening doors to strategic partnerships and solidifying our industry standing."

Since winning the SOBA award, Cape EMS has focused on strategic enhancements that played a crucial role in its successful initial public offering (IPO) in 2023.

"We streamlined our operations by investing in advanced manufacturing technologies and automation to improve efficiency and production capacity," said Tee. "We also strengthened our corporate governance framework to meet stringent regulatory requirements, ensuring transparency and accountability – key factors for investor confidence."

To drive sustainable growth, the company diversified its client portfolio and expanded into new markets, reducing dependency on specific sectors and improving revenue stability. "These improvements, combined with our strong emphasis on sustainability and innovation, positioned us as a resilient, growth-oriented company," Tee stated.

However, maintaining momentum after the SOBA win posed challenges. The highly competitive and evolving EMS landscape required constant adaptation to shifting market demands and supply chain disruptions. "To address this, we invested in supply chain resilience by diversifying suppliers and optimising inventory management," Tee explained. "Staying ahead of technological advancements also required continuous innovation, which we achieved by enhancing smart manufacturing technologies to improve efficiency and product quality."

Employee engagement was another challenge as the company scaled. "We implemented robust talent development programmes and fostered a culture of continuous improvement," she said. "This ensured our team remained motivated and aligned with our growth vision, helping us build on our award-winning success."

Since its SOBA win, Cape EMS has introduced several innovations in its vertically integrated electronic manufacturing services. "We enhanced our capabilities by adopting advanced automation technologies and implementing smart manufacturing systems," Tee noted. These advancements improved production efficiency, quality control and scalability.

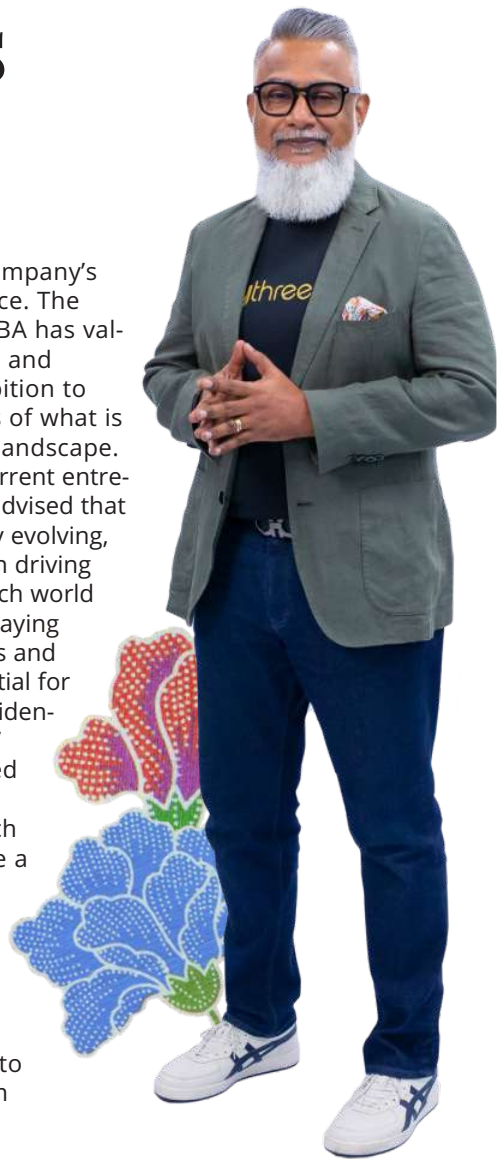
Additionally, the company expanded its service offerings to include comprehensive design-for-manufacturing (DFM) support and value-added services, enabling them to provide end-to-end solutions tailored to clients' needs. "These innovations have significantly improved turnaround times, reduced production costs and enhanced product reliability for our clients," she added.

Looking ahead, Cape EMS aims to strengthen its position as a global leader in vertically integrated EMS. "Our key goals include expanding into new international markets, enhancing our technological capabilities through automation and smart manufacturing, venturing into smart energy solutions and driving sustainability initiatives across our operations," Tee shared.

Reflecting on the award's influence, she said, "The recognition has been instrumental in shaping our long-term vision. It reinforced our commitment to excellence, innovation and continuous improvement, inspiring us to set higher benchmarks in quality and operational efficiency."

She encouraged aspiring entrepreneurs to embrace challenges and view failures as learning opportunities. "Stay curious, continuously innovate and never settle for complacency," she advised. "Build strong relationships with clients, partners and teams, as they form the backbone of sustainable growth. Most importantly, remain passionate about your purpose. Passion fuels perseverance, even when faced with setbacks."

SOBA recognition fuels tech-driven progress



WINNING the SOBA awards has significantly accelerated Daythree Digital Berhad's growth and industry recognition, according to chief executive officer Raymond Davadass.

"SOBA fuelled our transformation from a traditional contact centre to a tech-enabled BPO, establishing us as a key technology player," said Davadass. The recognition also paved the way for further accolades, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

Since 2020, the company has won awards from the Contact Center Association of Asia Pacific (CC-APAC) and the Asian-Oceanian Computing Industry Organization (ASOCIO) DX Award for Outstanding Tech Company, reinforcing its prominence in the tech sector.

This momentum, driven by SOBA wins, culminated in Daythree's successful listing on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia in July 2023, a major milestone in its journey.

"SOBA's impact is evident in the key operational improvements we've implemented," said Davadass. "We've strengthened leadership with tech-driven experts and expanded our digital transformation team threefold. This has significantly enhanced our capabilities, allowing us to integrate cutting-edge technologies."

The company has also bolstered its governance, forming a dedicated governance, risk and compliance (GRC) team that collaborates with the digital department to ensure sustainability and compliance. "These changes solidify our position as an innovative, tech-driven industry leader," Davadass added.

While award-winning success has elevated Daythree's visibility, it has also introduced the challenge of maintaining high standards amid growing demand. To address this, the company has expanded its sales and growth team to explore new markets and sustain its momentum.

Further innovation has followed its award wins, with enhancements to its FAITH and DAISY platforms, enabling customisable implementation across various industries. Daythree's business intelligence tool, SAIGE, is now being deployed with several major clients, offering data-driven insights to optimise operations and strategic decision-making.

The company has also introduced CAIRA, a platform focused on customer analytics and voice of the customer (VOC). This innovation allows clients to gain deeper insights into customer preferences and needs, representing a significant leap in Daythree's capabilities.

"We remain committed to excellence, innovation and sustainable growth," said Davadass. "Our key goals for the future are ambitious and driven by a vision of market leadership. We aim to solidify our position as a leading tech-enabled BPO, recognised for innovation and client success."

A major focus will be on accelerating regional and global growth, strategically expanding the client portfolio, and strengthening the company's international presence. The recognition from SOBA has validated this approach and inspired further ambition to push the boundaries of what is possible in the BPO landscape.

For aspiring and current entrepreneurs, Davadass advised that business is constantly evolving, with digital innovation driving rapid change. "The tech world moves quickly, and staying abreast of new trends and technologies is essential for competitiveness and identifying opportunities."

He also emphasised the importance of a consultative approach in business. "Become a trusted advisor, a problem-solver and a valuable partner in your clients' success."

Finally, he encouraged entrepreneurs to seek inspiration from unexpected sources.

A winning inspiration for expansion and efficiency

WINNING the Star Outstanding Business Award (SOBA) 2020 was a defining moment for DC Healthcare Holdings, then operating under the brand Dr Chong Clinic.

The company secured multiple SOBA accolades, including Malaysian Business of the Year, Best Use of Technology, Best Customer Service, and Best Marketing, which significantly boosted its industry visibility and credibility.

According to managing director Dr Chong, the recognition was more than just an award.

"This is one external recognition that really gives a very good boost in terms of motivation," he said, adding that it was a catalyst that accelerated the company's growth by attracting more clients, business partners, and stakeholders.

The awards served as a strong external validation, motivating the entire team and affirming that they were heading in the right direction.

Following the award, DC Healthcare Holdings focused on strengthening its operational efficiency and expanding its service offerings. This included launching a new skincare brand, NewB, and enhancing its marketing strategies to be more targeted and effective.

The company also refined customer service practices, ensuring a seamless patient experience and elevating overall management efficiency.

One of the biggest challenges post-award was maintaining the high expectations that came with the recognition. To meet these standards, the company prioritised top-tier customer service and innovation. Not only did its team of medical experts continuously improve their expertise, but departments like marketing, human resource and operations worked tirelessly to keep up with evolving industry trends.

Despite the hurdles, the company embraced challenges as learning opportunities. These experiences paved the way for DC Healthcare Holdings' initial public offering (IPO), marking another major milestone in its journey. Even after going public, the company remains committed to innovation and industry leadership.

The aesthetic healthcare industry is highly niche, and DC Healthcare Holdings' advancements have contributed significantly to closing the gap between Malaysian and Korean aesthetic technology.

"Our group has progressed far in terms of innovation compared to a few years back," said Dr Chong. "This has also not only pushed us to a next level, it also helped the whole industry, every other player in this industry, to bring them up to speed as well."

To maintain its leadership, DC Healthcare Holdings has implemented various innovations, such as adopting cutting-edge radiofrequency and laser technologies. The company also launched a specialised slimming team under the Dr Chong Slimming Team brand. The NewB Skincare line has also grown beyond aesthetic clinics.

Another key initiative is the establishment of DC Academy, an internal training institute focused on upskilling employees.

Looking ahead, DC Healthcare Holdings is focused on expanding its presence beyond Peninsular Malaysia into Sabah and Sarawak, as well as exploring opportunities across South-East Asia. Innovation will continue to drive the company's growth, with plans to introduce new skincare products and advanced aesthetic services.

According to Dr Chong, success is rooted in passion, perseverance, and a strong team culture.

He advises aspiring entrepreneurs: "Stay committed to your vision, build a strong team aligned with your core values, and never shy away from challenges. Growth is a journey, and with the right team and mindset, success will follow."

A boost to keep growing, uphold high standards

WHEN Delux Holdings (M) Sdn Bhd won the SOBA awards back in 2022 the team experienced a tremendous boost of encouragement and confidence, which in turn drove continuous business growth.

This recognition enhanced Delux's visibility and credibility within the industry, allowing the business to stand out in a competitive market. It also opened doors to more collaboration and expansion opportunities.

Chairman and founder Datuk Dylan Chui said, "We established Malaysia's largest flagship showroom, showcasing a more comprehensive range of products.

"The showroom also features a children's play area and a testing laboratory, allowing customers, and local, as well as international, agents to better understand and experience Delux products."

He added that the company has relocated to a brand-new headquarters, which provided the team with an improved work environment to enhance productivity and foster innovation.

"One of the main challenges after winning the SOBA award was maintaining momentum and ensuring continuous growth," said Chui.

In order to address the matter, his team set both short-term and long-term goals, developed actionable plans and executed those with discipline.

"We focused on supporting our team, addressing customer pain points, and building a strong company culture and structure. By staying committed to our mission and values, we have ensured steady progress and ongoing success."

Chui added that the mission at Delux is to enhance its customers' quality of life through design and innovation.

"We have continuously introduced new designs, colours and features to meet our evolving customers' needs. We have also launched a gate cleaning service, providing greater convenience and value to our customers.

"These innovations have strengthened customer loyalty, expanded our market share, and reinforced our leadership in the industry, ensuring that we remain at the forefront of innovation and service excellence."

Delux's ultimate goal is to become a public-listed company in Malaysia. The recognition from the SOBA award has significantly enhanced its reputation, bringing the company closer to this vision.

The award has also reinforced its commitment to continuously innovate, provide exceptional customer service and practise sustainable growth as it strives to be a market leader.

"This recognition also serves as a powerful motivator, pushing us to uphold high standards and pursue excellence in every aspect of our business."

Chui admitted that in the past, the company has primarily focused on making profits.

"Over time, we've come to realise that a business's responsibility extends beyond just making profits – it also involves having some form of social responsibility.

"To be a successful entrepreneur, it is crucial to take care of your team, customers and shareholders. Building strong, lasting relationships is key to long-term success.

He also asserted that giving back to the community is equally important. Delux actively participates in charitable activities, by contributing to society and making a positive impact.

"Success is not just about profits, but about creating a meaningful legacy."

Empowering the transport industry to drive progress

GOHUB won several SOBA awards in 2022, which it says has profoundly transformed its business.

It won the Best Innovation Award, Best Use of Technology Award and Elite Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

As a leading provider of enterprise IT solutions for the transportation sector, specialising in bus and rail industries, these accolades have reinforced its commitment to enhancing efficiency, convenience and overall performance.

"The awards have significantly bolstered our visibility and industry recognition, validating our dedication to innovation," said chief executive officer and executive director Tan Cherng Thong.

"This recognition coincided with our successful listing as a public-listed company in 2024, marking a pivotal milestone in our journey."

Since winning the award, GoHub has implemented several significant improvements in its business operations and strategies that directly contributed to its successful initial public offering (IPO) in 2024.

These enhancements included optimising its internal processes to streamline efficiency and scalability, enhancing its product development to meet market demands more effectively, and strengthening its market positioning through targeted marketing and strategic partnerships.

This recognition facilitated investor confidence and interest, paving the way for its IPO success.

However, GoHub faced a significant challenge that involved sustaining innovation and staying ahead in a rapidly evolving industry, compounded by the ongoing need for talent acquisition.

"We tackled this by fostering a culture of continuous improvement and investing in design and development," said Tan.

"This approach enabled us to consistently enhance our solutions, keeping them relevant and competitive. Additionally, navigating regulatory and market changes posed ongoing challenges.

"We overcame these by staying agile, monitoring regulatory developments closely, and adapting our strategies accordingly."

Since winning, the company has introduced innovative biometric technologies such as facial recognition and palm vein scanning as ticketing solutions for the public transportation sector.

"We are currently at the proof-of-concept (POC) stage with these advancements," explained Tan.

"These technologies hold tremendous potential to enhance operational efficiency, bolster security measures and elevate the overall passenger experience within Malaysia's transportation sector."

Tan noted that the introduction of these new services has already begun to positively impact his business by generating interest from stakeholders and potential clients alike.

He said that customers have increasingly recognised the added convenience and security these innovations bring.

"We are excited about the future prospects these technologies offer and remain committed to further developing them to meet the evolving needs of our industry.

"My key goals for the future revolve around making a meaningful impact in my community, by promoting environmental sustainability through local initiatives and fostering entrepreneurship among the young generation," Tan added.

He said receiving recognition from the award has significantly bolstered his long-term vision and direction, that it has given him greater confidence and reinforced his belief on the path he has chosen.

"This recognition serves as validation that my efforts are making a positive difference and motivates me to continue striving towards my goals.

"Ultimately, I aim to leverage this momentum to contribute even more effectively to solving community challenges and inspire others, especially the younger generation, to pursue their aspirations with determination and belief in their abilities."

Tan opined that to be a successful entrepreneur requires a blend of determination, positive thinking and resilience.

"Believe in your vision and capabilities, and maintain a mindset focused on growth and learning," he advised.

"Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth rather than setbacks. Remember, every setback is a stepping stone to success if you choose to learn from it.

"Stay persistent, stay positive, and never give up on your dreams. Dare to dream big and pursue your entrepreneurial ambitions with passion and determination!"

Recognition that pushes boundaries to stay ahead

MAXVUE Vision's growth, visibility, and industry recognition soared after winning SOBA in 2018 and 2020.

"These accolades have reinforced our reputation as a trusted leader in the eyewear industry, validating our commitment to quality and innovation," said co-founder and director Viji Ramasamy Pillai.

The recognition significantly enhanced the company's visibility, attracting new customers and business partners while elevating its profile in local and regional markets.

Winning SOBA also opened doors to networking opportunities and allowed Maxvue to build stronger relationships and explore new business avenues.

"The exposure and credibility we gained through these awards have allowed us to expand our reach.

"We are truly grateful for the platform provided by SOBA, which has empowered us to push the boundaries of innovation, strengthen our brand, and solidify our position in the industry."

However, maintaining momentum after winning was not without challenges.

"One key hurdle was staying ahead of industry trends while ensuring consistent quality," said Viji.

"The eyewear market is constantly evolving, and we had to invest heavily in research and development to innovate continuously. Plus, scaling operations to meet growing demand required optimising our supply chain and expanding production capabilities."

Regulatory requirements also played a significant role, as obtaining necessary approvals and certifications for new products could be time-consuming but was essential for compliance and market acceptance.

Moreover, retaining key staff was crucial to sustaining success. To address these challenges, Maxvue focused on strengthening partnerships with suppliers, improving inventory management, and enhancing employee development programmes.

"We also expanded our product offerings and optimised our digital presence. These efforts helped us maintain growth, customer loyalty, and industry recognition."

The company introduced several innovative products that positively impacted both its business and customers.

"We launched new daily and monthly silicone hydrogel contact lenses, offering enhanced comfort, breathability, and durability – these have been well-received by customers seeking high-quality, long-lasting lenses."

Maxvue also introduced multifocal contact lenses for presbyopia correction and red chroma lenses to help colour-blind individuals distinguish colours more effectively, improving their quality of life.

The company now offers customised colours and designs for customers seeking personalised contact lenses or private brand solutions.

Such innovations expanded Maxvue's product portfolio and attracted a broader customer base, while its tailored solutions increased customer satisfaction.

Looking ahead, the company aims to expand its market presence regionally and internationally, continue innovating in the contact lens sector, and strengthen customer relationships through personalised services.

"We aim to introduce more cutting-edge products, such as new designs and advanced lenses."

Winning SOBA has influenced Maxvue's long-term vision, by reaffirming its commitment to quality, innovation, and customer satisfaction.

"Becoming a successful entrepreneur requires a blend of perseverance, adaptability, and a deep commitment to your vision," said Viji.

"Always focus on solving problems for your customers – if you can identify and address their needs effectively, success will naturally follow."

She also emphasised that setbacks provide valuable insights leading to growth and improvement.

"Your staff, customers, and vendors are your core strength – building strong, motivated relationships with all three is essential to sustained success," she said.

Viji advised entrepreneurs to remain flexible to market shifts while staying true to their company's core values and mission.

Mega Fortris ready for greater technological advancement

MEGA Fortris Bhd's journey to industry leadership has been marked by innovation, resilience and strategic growth. The company's success was further cemented in 2016 when it received multiple SOBA awards, a recognition that group managing director and chief executive officer Datuk Adrian Ng describes as a pivotal moment.

"As a global leader in security solutions, we were honoured to receive SOBA recognition in multiple categories in 2016," said Ng. "These awards validated our team's dedication and innovative spirit while acknowledging the exceptional work of our people across all levels of the organisation."

Beyond mere recognition, the awards played a crucial role in strengthening existing partnerships and opening new business opportunities. "They helped foster conversations with organisations that share our vision for smarter, more sustainable security solutions," he added.

Following its SOBA triumph, Mega Fortris embarked on a transformational journey that paved the way for its initial public offering (IPO). The company intensified its focus on Industry 4.0 automation, digitising data analytics and integrating sustainability initiatives such as biodegradable additives in its products.

"We wanted to push traditional boundaries and consistently innovate while ensuring operational efficiency and commercial capability," he explained.

Investments in people development also became a priority, equipping teams with the necessary skills to drive the company's ambitious goals. Scaling rapidly in a global market presented its own set of challenges. Managing unprecedented growth while maintaining operational excellence required both strategic foresight and decisive action.

"We transformed challenges into opportunities by investing in automation and digital infrastructure, allowing us to enhance production capabilities without compromising quality," he said. "We streamlined our global supply chain and implemented advanced quality control systems to meet growing demand efficiently."

Mega Fortris also faced the challenge of maintaining innovation in a mature market. The solution lay in strengthening research and development (R&D) efforts and fostering a culture of continuous innovation.

"Our teams consistently push boundaries to develop solutions that anticipate future security needs, not just address current ones," he noted. This forward-thinking approach, combined with an agile decision-making structure, has enabled Mega Fortris to set new industry standards.

The company's commitment to innovation extends beyond security solutions. "Our focus on environmentally conscious security seals and advanced IoT solutions reflects our dual commitment to security and sustainability," Ng stated.

Mega Fortris has introduced multiple new products tailored to the evolving security landscape, including RFID, BLE and IoT-enabled security solutions. These advancements have strengthened the company's global standing and resonated with partners increasingly prioritising environmental responsibility.

Looking to the future, Mega Fortris remains dedicated to advancing security standards and sustainability within the industry. "Our roadmap emphasises continued innovation, strategic expansion and sustainable practices," said Ng.

"Winning the award gave the platform to expand our ambitions and capitalise on our reputation for excellence."

Reflecting on his experience, Ng emphasised the importance of vision, leadership and authenticity. "Success in the global marketplace demands a clear strategic vision and strong leadership.

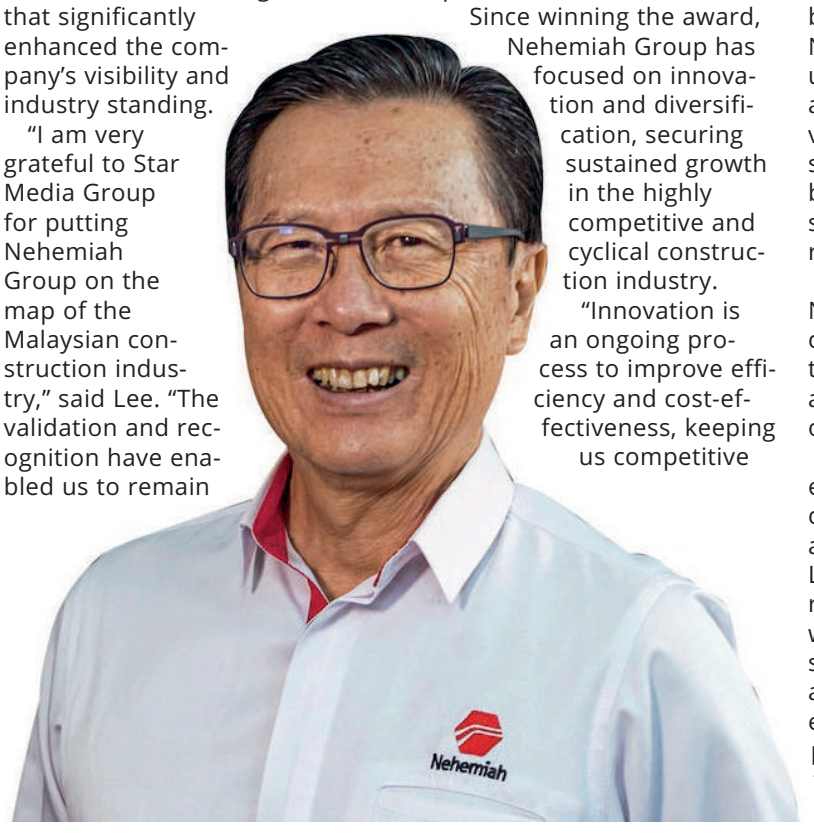
"Build strong teams, cultivate innovation and stay adaptable to change. But most importantly, create genuine value for stakeholders while contributing meaningfully to industry advancement."

His final words underscore the ethos that has guided Mega Fortris: "Success is relative. When one achieves it, they must stay humble and be grateful."

Putting Nehemiah on the map of Malaysian construction industry

FOUNDER and chairman Dr Nehemiah Lee of Nehemiah Group won the SOBA Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2011, a recognition that significantly enhanced the company's visibility and industry standing.

"I am very grateful to Star Media Group for putting Nehemiah Group on the map of the Malaysian construction industry," said Lee. "The validation and recognition have enabled us to remain the undisputed market leader. In fact, our homegrown company has overtaken the previous market leader, a multinational corporation."



Since winning the award, Nehemiah Group has focused on innovation and diversification, securing sustained growth in the highly competitive and cyclical construction industry.

"Innovation is an ongoing process to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness, keeping us competitive and reinforcing our market leadership," Lee explained.

Diversification has also been key to the company's long-term sustainability. By expanding beyond its core business of Nehemiah Walls, which are used in highway interchanges and flyovers, the company has ventured into prestressing, geosynthetics and super long-span bridge girders. These additional services spread risk and reduce reliance on a single product.

Despite its success, Nehemiah Group has faced challenges, including competition, an unpredictable market, and the unprecedented impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We overcame these challenges through innovation, diversification, prudent financial management, and faith in God," said Lee. "We maintain a low gearing ratio and, during the pandemic, we did not retrench a single staff member while honouring all our debts. We even supported our labour subcontractors by providing meal allowances for their workers."

To further strengthen its business, the company launched a subsidiary focused on prestressing, a specialised technology used in bridges, car park columns, high-rise building podiums, and warehouse floor slabs. It also expanded into geosynthetics to tackle slope failures and soft soil issues.

Additionally, Nehemiah Group partnered with a Korean firm to design and construct patented super long-span girders, providing cost-effective and space-efficient solutions for urban highways.

"Our solutions, based on advanced technologies, help clients save costs and complete projects on time," Lee noted.

Since founding the company 31 years ago, Lee has remained committed to making a positive societal impact.

"We contribute to nation-building by participating in infrastructure development, evident in the Nehemiah Walls, flyovers and bridges we have built locally and overseas," he said.

Beyond construction, Lee emphasises ethical business practices.

"We conduct business with integrity despite immense pressure and temptation to conform to corruption. Integrity is a valuable asset, earning us trust and repeat customers. If each of us upholds integrity, we can transform society and build a better Malaysia."

Looking ahead, Nehemiah Group aims to persevere in innovation, digitalise operations, and expand globally. The recognition from SOBA has reinforced the company's determination to push boundaries while staying true to its core values.

Lee believes success requires more than just values; it demands hard work, resilience, and vision.

"There is no substitute for hard work," he stated. "To build tenacity, one must develop perseverance and a strong will to never give up.

"A successful entrepreneur must have a vision and be willing to take calculated risks to achieve it."

A defining journey of ambition and strength

FOUNDER and executive chairman of MyNews Holdings Bhd Dang Tai Luk reflects on the transformative journey of his company since winning the Silver Award for Entrepreneur of the Year at the SOBA awards in 2011. "The endorsement by SOBA reminded us that we were on the right track and encouraged us to keep growing," he says.

"SOBA is a very credible award, and the publicity from Star Media Group significantly enhanced our profile in the industry."

When MyNews won the award in 2011, it had just over 100 outlets. Within five years, the company expanded to 300 outlets, a milestone achieved in 2016. This growth was supported by strengthening backend operations, including IT systems, logistics, and warehousing, as well as investing in talent and human resources.

"We managed the business efficiently, maintained profitability, and kept it financially healthy," Dang recalls. This success culminated in MyNews' initial public offering (IPO) in 2016, marking a significant milestone. "The IPO boosted our profile and provided the financial resources needed to expand further," he adds.

However, the journey was not without challenges. MyNews began as a newsstand business, selling print media such as newspapers and magazines. As digital media began to replace print, sales declined, forcing the company to pivot.

"We reacted to changing consumer demands by transitioning into convenience stores," Dang explains. MyNews expanded its product range to include snacks, beverages, and services like mobile reloads and Touch 'n Go top-ups. Today, MyNews is one of Malaysia's leading homegrown convenience store chains.

"Changing and evolving with the times is necessary to survive," Dang emphasises. "We faced the challenge head-on and succeeded in repositioning ourselves." This adaptability has been a cornerstone of MyNews' success. From a single newsstand, the company now operates five brands and concepts: MyNews, CU range of convenience stores from Korea, WH Smith travel convenience stores, Super Value mini markets, and Maru Coffee, a standalone coffee house.

Innovation has also been key to MyNews' growth. The company has partnered with renowned Japanese businesses to establish the Japanese Food Hub, a production centre that creates baked goods and ready-to-eat meals for its stores. Additionally, MyNews embraced digitalisation early, launching an omnichannel platform in 2019 that allows customers to order online and have products delivered to their doorstep.

Looking ahead, Dang envisions MyNews as the go-to convenience store for Malaysians. "We want to provide easy access to 3,000 types of products for immediate needs," he says. The company plans to continue expanding its network, improving its concepts, and integrating physical stores with online platforms to enhance the shopping experience.

Winning the SOBA award remains a significant milestone for Dang and MyNews. "It energised and inspired us," he says. "Being recognised by such a prestigious award meant we were doing the right thing."

Dang's journey from a 200 sq ft newsstand to leading a publicly listed company is a testament to passion and perseverance. "We started small, but we worked hard, stayed consistent, and iterated," he shares. "Baby steps eventually become leaps and bounds."

For aspiring entrepreneurs, Dang offers this advice: "Stay passionate, persevere and continue to improve. It doesn't matter where you start; what matters is that you keep moving forward. With hard work and determination, you can achieve great things."

MyNews' story is one of resilience, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to meeting consumer needs. As the company continues to grow, it remains a shining example of how adaptability and perseverance can turn challenges into opportunities.

SOBA wins enrich Secret Recipe's growth

WINNING the SOBA award is a prestigious achievement that holds significant value for businesses. "It's something we are very proud of," said Secret Recipe Group managing director Patrick Sim. "When you win a SOBA award, it's not something that can be bought – it's something we really worked hard for. Our employees and customers gain confidence in our brand when they see us win."

Reflecting on their journey, the company has won the Business of the Year award three times – in 2013, 2019, and 2021. "This progression proves that despite being in business for a long time, we remain relevant. SOBA itself has evolved, and winning it has become more challenging, but emerging as champions makes us even prouder," said Sim.

While the company has not gone public, its growth aligns with SOBA's evolution. "The award categories have expanded to include technology, corporate social responsibility (CSR), environment, social and governance (ESG), and green initiatives – elements that weren't as crucial years ago but are now essential benchmarks for successful brands.

"Participating in SOBA has made us reflect on our own progress in digitalisation, sustainability, and corporate responsibility," he added.

This mindset has driven significant improvements. "We have digitalised many operations, introduced a loyalty programme, developed an app, and integrated QR code ordering.

"With 360 outlets, our business intelligence system provides real-time insights, ensuring efficiency. Customers today expect businesses to be ESG-conscious, and SOBA recognition reinforces our commitment to sustainability."

Challenges are inevitable, particularly in the food and beverage industry. Sim elaborated that manpower shortages, fierce competition, and low barriers to entry make sustainability difficult.

"The key is to stay relevant by understanding evolving customer needs. Gen Z consumers, for example, prioritise technology, so we adapt accordingly.

"As an employer, we also ensure we remain attractive to today's workforce. The key to longevity is adaptability – there's no single right answer, but evolving with the times is crucial."

Innovation is a continuous process. "We are constantly launching new cakes and food items, expanding to different platforms and increasing accessibility, such as via Shopee, our website and delivery services," Sim said.

"Opening new locations helps us reach more customers. Our loyalty app has significantly supported business growth, and last year was a record year for us. By consistently innovating, we keep the market excited."

Winning SOBA has also driven the company to set ambitious goals. Sim said that the company aims to reach a billion-dollar revenue by 2030 and expand to at least 440 stores.

To scale to that level, he said, requires substantial back-end improvements, particularly in digitalisation.

"We plan to leverage AI to streamline operations, eliminating administrative tasks and focusing on value-added activities.

"AI helps identify key areas for improvement and enhances efficiency. While we started traditionally, we are now shifting towards becoming a technology-forward company."

When asked to share insights or advice, Sim said that entrepreneurship is challenging, especially in the beginning.

"You often lack resources – finance, talent, networks. Perseverance and adaptability are crucial. Failures should be seen as learning opportunities.

"Every setback teaches you a new way not to fail, and maintaining a positive mindset is essential. While luck plays a role, the harder you work and the more adaptable you are, the luckier you become.

"Staying consistent and committed over time is the real key to success."

Winning with purpose, growing with impact

SENHENG New Retail Bhd's turning point was marked by winning the SOBA awards in 2018 and 2020.

Executive chairman Lim Kim Heng said, "These accolades amplified our visibility and cemented our standing as a trailblazer in Malaysia's retail landscape. They signified the trust our customers and stakeholders place in us, motivating us to continually raise the bar."

He said the recognition positioned Senheng as a desirable workplace, enabling it to attract top talents who share its vision of creating a seamless, rewarding shopping experience. These wins are not mere milestones but a reminder of the company's responsibility to innovate and lead with purpose.

"Since winning the SOBA awards, we have invested in technology-driven innovations to optimise operations and improve customer satisfaction," said Lim.

"Our online-merge-offline (OMO) strategy integrates digital and in-store experiences seamlessly, making shopping more convenient and personalised."

The company also enhanced its loyalty programme with the "My Choice, My Rewards" campaign, which empowers customers to claim rewards more easily using their S-Coin.

They have over 2,000 products, services and vouchers to choose from, which deepens the customer engagement but also provides more reasons to choose Senheng for a rewarding, personalised shopping experience.

Such enhancements have driven efficiency and set new benchmarks for retail excellence in Malaysia.

"Maintaining momentum after our award-winning success has required us to stay ahead of rapidly evolving market demands and consumer expectations," said Lim. "To address this, we've focused on continuous innovation and diversification."

He added that Senheng has expanded into solar solutions to align with growing sustainability trends. As part of the company's commitment to a greener future, it is dedicated to helping the country achieve net zero by 2050.

These initiatives complement other efforts such as enhancing its OMO strategy, optimising operations, and investing in employee development to ensure the team is equipped to meet future challenges.

"By proactively addressing these challenges, we've been able to sustain growth, deepen customer loyalty, and reinforce our position as a leader in the retail industry."

Since winning the award, the company has introduced transformative initiatives such as the OMO strategy, designed to create a seamless shopping experience that bridges online and offline channels.

"With over 1,200 sales assistants at more than 100 outlets nationwide, our OMO approach ensures that when you shop online, you receive personalised service as if you were shopping in-store," said Lim.

"We also revamped the Senheng App, making it a one-stop solution for tracking purchases, managing memberships and accessing exclusive rewards.

"We also expanded our product range with a focus on energy-efficient appliances, catering to eco-conscious customers.

"These innovations have strengthened customer loyalty and positioned Senheng as a pioneer in the retail industry."

In Lim's view, entrepreneurship is about creating value – solving real problems for customers with passion and persistence.

"Stay curious and embrace change, as the business landscape evolves rapidly," he said.

"Build a strong team that shares your vision, and don't shy away from calculated risks."

He added that success does not only mean profits but about creating a lasting impact on the industry and community.

A turning point that unlocked new opportunities

WINNING the SOBA award in 2017 was a turning point for Proguard Technologies (M) Sdn Bhd, unlocking new opportunities, expanding its client base and attracting top talent. "The recognition of winning six consecutive awards that year became a powerful catalyst that inspired us to push the boundaries of innovation and pursue excellence," said group executive vice chairman Datin Choh Yern Mei.

Between 2016 and 2020, the company achieved an impressive 31% growth rate, a feat made even more significant by the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. "This success is a testament to Proguard's resilience, unwavering commitment and ability to adapt to adversity," Choh added.

Since receiving the award, Proguard has fully embraced environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), accelerating efforts to achieve a Net Zero Carbon Footprint by 2050.

"We uphold the responsibility for reducing our environmental impact and achieving net zero emissions for a sustainable future," Choh said.

Sustainability efforts date back to 2009, including corporate social responsible (CSR) initiatives like blood donation drives, solar panel installations, and water harvesting projects. The company has also implemented the "Anak Belajar, Ibu Bekerja Programme", enforced strict anti-bribery policies and transitioned to electric forklift use.

Choh highlighted that the real challenge of winning awards is managing high expectations, avoiding complacency, and ensuring continuous innovation. "I took a strategic approach by expanding our presence in other prestigious awards such as the Export Excellence Awards (EEA) and the EY Entrepreneur of the Year Award. This allowed us to benchmark our performance against diverse industries and gain broader recognition."

This proactive approach helped the company identify emerging trends, refine strategies, and stay relevant in a rapidly evolving landscape.

"Participating in these platforms reinforced our commitment to excellence by exposing us to new challenges and opportunities for improvement," she said.

Proguard has continued to innovate, introducing a range of safety products, including the Hydra safety eyewear and the Momentum and AlpinPLUS safety helmets, designed for both industrial and mountain climbing use. The company has also expanded into medical safety products.

"Our commitment to comprehensive safety solutions extends beyond product innovation to ensuring compliance with Malaysia's certification standards," Choh explained. "We work closely with Sirim and the Department of Occupational Safety and Health to ensure our products meet the highest safety standards, enhancing credibility and customer confidence."

Looking ahead, Proguard aims to become the ultimate partner for customers, suppliers, and employees, with safety at the heart of its business. "We strive to lead the global market in safety solutions, providing innovative, high-quality products that adapt to the evolving needs of industries worldwide," Choh said. The company envisions a future with zero workplace accidents by continuously enhancing safety standards and practices.

Sustainability remains a core focus, with ongoing efforts to minimise environmental impact and achieve net-zero emissions. "Winning these awards has reinforced our dedication to safety, innovation, and sustainability. It has validated our core values and elevated our brand reputation, motivating us to push further in these areas," she stated.

For Choh, entrepreneurship is about perseverance and embracing the journey. "There are no right or wrong decisions, only the consequences of your choice, each offering a valuable lesson. View failure as a stepping stone, not a setback. True success is built on resilience, learning, and unwavering commitment to your vision. Believe in yourself, take bold steps, and keep pushing forward."

How an award inspires revolutionary vision care

WINNING the Star Outstanding Business Awards (SOBA) in 2020 and 2021 has significantly elevated Vista Laser Eye Center's industry credibility and market presence.

"The accolades for Best Customer Service validate our commitment to delivering exceptional WOWx patient experiences and reinforce our reputation for medical and service excellence," said Vista Laser Eye Center Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Tay Chin-Ching. "This recognition has increased brand awareness, leading to higher patient referrals and market expansion."

The SOBA awards have also opened doors for new collaborations and strategic partnerships, allowing Vista to solidify its position as a leader in laser eye treatment in Malaysia. In response, the company has implemented transformative improvements, including investments in advanced technology such as Femtosecond Laser Cataract Surgery and CLEAR PRO, a cutting-edge treatment for short-sightedness and astigmatism.

These innovations have expanded Vista's treatment portfolio, providing safer, more effective solutions for a wider range of eye conditions.

"Enhancements in our customer service include streamlined appointment scheduling and more personalised follow-up care, ensuring a seamless patient experience," said Tay. "We have also strengthened staff training programmes to stay abreast of international best practices, elevating the quality of care provided."

To sustain its success post-SOBA, Vista has introduced comprehensive training programmes to instil a culture of service excellence. "We focused on creating a happy work environment, fostering camaraderie, sharing best practices, and genuinely listening to our staff. Our motto is 'Happy staff = Happy patients'," Tay shared.

A key initiative, the Gamification Upskilling programme, incorporates competitive and engaging elements to help staff adapt to the industry's fast pace. "This programme empowers our team to develop new ideas, acquire skills, and cultivate leadership qualities," said Tay. The initiative has boosted employee satisfaction and retention, reinforcing Vista's momentum as an award-winning institution.

Innovation remains central to Vista's mission to provide world-class eye care. The introduction of CLEAR PRO, known for its smoother incisions and faster recovery, alongside digital transformation efforts, has improved patient consultation and post-surgery care. "We leverage advanced diagnostics and digital engagement, which strengthens patient trust, enhances treatment outcomes, and reinforces our reputation as a leader in the industry," Tay stated.

Guided by its Ikigai WOWx philosophy – aligning passion, purpose, and excellence – Vista continues to push boundaries in vision correction. "Winning the SOBA awards has fuelled our passion for continuous improvement, inspiring us to invest in our people and elevate patient care standards," said Tay.

Future plans include expanding services to more Malaysians while maintaining a commitment to cutting-edge technology and service excellence. Beyond business success, Tay emphasised the importance of purpose-driven leadership. To aspiring entrepreneurs, she highlighted three key insights:

- Find your ikigai – Discover what you love, excel at, what the world needs, and where you can create value. Purpose-driven businesses thrive by delivering real impact.
- Embrace change and innovate – "The world is evolving fast; stay curious, adopt new technologies, and continuously seek ways to improve. Innovation is not an option but a necessity."
- Build a strong team and culture – Success is not a solo journey. "Surround yourself with the right people, cultivate an empowered team, and success will follow."

"Stay committed, keep learning, and never stop creating WOW moments!" Tay concluded.

With its unwavering commitment to innovation, patient care, and strategic growth, Vista Laser Eye Center continues to set new benchmarks in the eye care industry, staying true to its mission of fighting preventable blindness and redefining excellence in vision correction.