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# Friends of design

When old buddies get together, creative sparks fly → pages 10 & 11



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# Creative bond a winner

*A closely-knit bunch of five ex-college mates have been designing practical, award-winning products, writes **Izwan Ismail***

**W**HEN research and development outfit Mimos won the prestigious Red Dot Design Award last year, team leader Saharudin Busri attributed the success to teamwork built over years of friendship. He was referring to his four sidekicks — Mohd Nizam Najmuddin, Nuzairi Yasin, Mohd Rohaizam Mohd Tahar and Nazjimee Amat Omar — who form the core of the research and development outfit's industrial design team.

They may not be as famous as Bill Gates or the late Steve Jobs, but their creations are original and have big potential in the consumer market.

Prior to winning the Red Dot Design Award, the team had come out tops in various design competitions including Malaysia Good Design Mark and Korea Institute of Design Promotion Award.

## FROM FRIENDS TO DESIGNERS

Each of the four had parted ways after graduating from the Industrial Design Faculty of Universiti Teknologi Mara.

"After graduation, we took our own career path. We did not expect to end up in Mimos and to work as a team," says Saharudin who worked at Proton for 13 years in car design.

Nizam was a designer for a water taps and bathroom accessories company for 12 years, Nuzairi worked for Japanese company Oriental

Nichinan which made prototype products, and Rohaizam was with a Taiwanese consumer product and automotive design company called Nova Design and Nazjimee worked with several companies, including that which design the KLIA ERL train and an outfit that supplies parts to Proton. He was also with Limkokwing University.

When the industrial design department at Mimos was established in 2007, Saharudin was the first to come on board. At that time, Mimos was spearheading itself to be the nation's provider of technologies for local recipients for commercialisation. Among Saharudin's first design work at Mimos was the Idola PC, a version of today's tablet PC. He was also involved in the creation of JEN-ii Internet access device, which was designed to spur the adoption of ICT among rural communities.

Other products that he helped design and develop included Mimos WiWi 1.5 (a wireless access router for Internet access on WiFi and WiMax) and a wireless sensor node for agriculture use.

Saharudin says when his ex-college mates came in later, the industrial design department had all the expertise to produce designs, from concept to prototyping.

"The different experiences we had gathered over the years made us unique and strong as everybody had his own special skills," says Saharudin.

## WORKING WITH TEAM

As team leader, Saharudin doesn't want hierarchy to stand in the way of their working closely together.

"We were friends in college. Now we work together as friends here," he says, adding that this camarade-



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rie allows for the freedom of expression and creative thinking.

The five usually start the day by having breakfast together and informal meetings and discussions about stuff they're working on.

"As we have different expertise in the product design stage, the opinions we share help pave the path towards a complete product," says Saharudin.

He is an industrial design specialist, Nizam a CAD specialist and Mohd Rohaizam a CAID and CMF specialist while Nuzairi and Nazjimee are pros at modelling and prototyping.

Since they work closely together and communicate a lot, they all use Blackberry to take advantage of its BBM service.

"It's easy to have one platform of communications like the BBM," says Saharudin.

#### ON DESIGNING PRODUCTS

Years of experience in the car and other related industries have taught Saharudin and his team a lot about product design. "A product that is boxy, for example, is boring. You need to add emotion with contour, lines, shape," he says.

The challenge is to come out with products that look good and yet are functional.

"From time to time, products need to be slimmer yet more powerful than the predecessors. We need to put more into smaller devices," he says.

A product design can take three to six months, from design research to rapid prototyping. Although what the team does is initial design and

not manufacturing, the processes are still as vigorous.

There are meetings to establish design concept formulation, development using CAID, sketching and rendering, retail specification, meeting with engineers and other departments like marketing to discuss appropriate production costs, processes and commercial issues, and presentation to senior management.

In total, the team has designed nine products award-winning products and 30 without awards. All the nine products are now moving into production stage. The WiWi device is being used at Gloria Jeans, while the Idola tablet is marketed by a local manufacturer as Wing, a Windows 7 tablet.

#### KEEPING UP MOMENTUM

Despite their success, Saharudin says it's not easy to keep up with the design momentum.

"As industrial designers, we are constantly on the lookout for new things to design and these are normally based on problems people face in their daily lives," he says.

For example, the Erascan whiteboard eraser was conceptualised after observing how people use whiteboards over the years. "Most of the time, after information such as strategy and planning are written on the board, these will be deleted before they are recorded.

"In some cases, they are not erased because people do not want to lose the information," he says. "We figured there must be a way that one could save the data on the whiteboard quickly, so we came up

with the Erascan eraser concept," he says.

The Erascan looks just like a regular eraser but it can capture notes on whiteboards for storing and sharing.

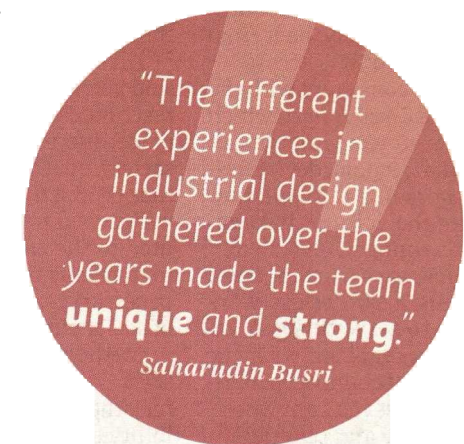
"One can erase the writings in whatever directions and the information will still be captured," says Saharudin.

It took three months to design the product. Crazy as it may sound, the team has just completed two designs which may not sound logical — a mirror for the blind and an ironing board for the disabled.

#### WHAT'S NEXT

According to Saharudin, his team will start work soon on another design to vie for this year's Red Dot Award. "We will start working on it from mid-year but even now, we are thinking of ideas," he says.

He is optimistic that they can come out with more award-winning designs this year. With friends that he can count on, he certainly dares to dream.





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*The Mimos Industrial Design team after winning the Red Dot Design award 2011 in the design concept category*



*Saharudin says product design is normally based on problems people face in their daily lives*



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The **Erascan** design concept



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*Saharudin shows how emotion is applied to a product through the usage of contour, hidden screws, etc*



*How the Erascan is used*



*Saharudin (left) and his team with some of the product designs they made. Second from left are Nuzairi, Mohd Nizam, Mohd Rohaizam and Nazjimee*