



Headline	Wahab raises the bar for Mimos		
MediaTitle	The Edge		
Date	26 Mar 2012	Color	Full Color
Section	NetV@lue 2.0	Circulation	25,041
Page No	72	Readership	75,123
Language	English	ArticleSize	613 cm <sup>2</sup>
Journalist	Karamjit Singh	AdValue	RM 10,555
Frequency	Weekly	PR Value	RM 42,218



# Wahab raises the bar for Mimos

Karamjit Singh

It is almost six years since Datuk Abdul Wahab Abdullah joined Mimos Bhd as its CEO with a mission to add the all-critical commercialisation element to the work the government R&D agency does.

The first thing he did was to cut out research that was being conducted in isolation of market and industry needs. "No more fun-type projects for our researchers," he says.

He then changed the way Mimos did its research by focusing on niches in which it could develop a competitive edge and where Malaysia needed help to move its industries up the value chain.

Initially, he concentrated on seven areas, but today, after some refinement and consolidation, the key areas are government, education, agriculture and healthcare, and cutting across these is communications. Wahab likes to call this 4+1.

As the former head of Motorola's R&D centre in Penang, Wahab knows what it will take for Malaysia to develop world-class products and solutions — by building products, software or hardware based on technology owned by Malaysian companies. Thus, owning patents became critical to his mission. "Patents are your competitive advantage. You cannot play the global game if you do not have them," he impresses upon visitors to his office.

Any product built by Malaysian companies on a technology platform that is Malaysian-owned can thus be branded as made in Malaysia and enjoy higher margins as well. This is an important marketing and reputational tool for the country and its indigenous technology companies, which are still battling stubbornly persistent local perceptions that Malaysian technology is not good enough.

"Our job is to create technology platforms that can translate into products, solutions and applications built by Malaysian companies," Wahab says. That last part is important as the success of Mimos rides on the ability of Malaysian companies using its technology platforms to build products that the local and global markets need.

By its own calculations, Mimos did very well last year. According to Wahab, it partnered 10 local companies that used the platform technology of Mimos to earn RM1.09 billion in sales as measured by the letter of intent (LOI) these companies received.

The agency's strong research work also resulted in it helping the country move up to No 25 in a global innovation index. Wahab is particularly pleased that Mimos contributed 40.4% to the patents Malaysia applied for.

But the goal this year is to raise the bar. "This year, we want to move to solutions that drive economic sectors," Wahab says, referring to the four areas Mimos is focusing on. He also wants Malaysian companies to start competing with the big boys, that is global companies. To do that, Mimos has to build up the ecosystem and apply the

80:20 rule, he says. This means focusing on research (20%) and letting industry take care of the development (80%). "Many people still don't understand what R&D is," Wahab remarks, pointing out that development, in particular, is about stitching together various technologies to come up with a product.

With the technology platforms that Mimos has come up with and the framework, he feels a strong foundation has been laid for Malaysian companies to build their applications and products on.

Interestingly, Mimos has attracted foreign companies with its technology. For instance, an Indian company has licensed its Enterprise Knowledge Management System and aims to apply it to life sciences. There is also no shortage of Malaysian companies that want to become technology recipients of Mimos.

"Our technology recipients can take our platform and put it to work in whatever vertical they want," Wahab says, crediting CTO Thillai Raj with the success. Not only are the technology platforms of Mimos neutral — which means users can choose any type of technology they are familiar with to build on the platforms it has developed — but the agency has

its own Clustered Platform Security System, which is critical because the IP for it is Malaysian-owned.

According to Thillai Raj, they are akin to the gearbox or chassis of a car. "You can build any type of car or design on our gearbox/chassis." It is up to the technology recipients to customise the end product to their customers' needs.

But Mimos is facing challenges in trying to get companies to maximise the technology platforms it has built; it has found that the smaller Malaysian technology companies have a hard time building robust end products that meet customers' needs. The challenge now lies with the private sector, which no one can say the government is not doing its part to help. In the past, Wahab said that it was not the job of Mimos to build end products for companies.

He has his own challenges with Mimos allocated only a quarter of the budget it received under the Ninth Malaysia Plan, although the expectations have increased.

Still, the redoubtable Wahab has rallied his troops with his "do more with less for more and more" battle cry. Mimos has also started to offer incubation services to address the shortcomings it sees in local companies trying to develop its technology platforms. Its board has approved the setting up of a commercial arm to intensify efforts to commercialise its proprietary technology. Frontier Novature Sdn Bhd is a platform for Mimos to not only streamline its licensing of technology to local and foreign industry partners but also begin monetising technology as a strategy to create successful ventures. Says Wahab, "The expectation is that FNSB will be able to generate start-ups as well as revitalise existing businesses through the investment of frontier technologies created by Mimos."

Meanwhile, a less sexy role that Mimos now plays, but which will potentially impact government technology spending greatly, is to handle the technology requirements of various ministries. It has already started this process with Socso. "We want to



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reduce the amount the government spends on technology or ensure that at least 70% of it goes to local companies, with the balance to foreign players. Right now, it is the other way round," observes Wahab.

According to Thillai Raj, Mimos specifies that technology to be sold to government agencies should be built on its various platforms. "Of course, where we do not have a platform, like in databases, we cannot specify that. But in the cloud, security, decision support and enterprise application intelligence, for example, we ask that the existing vendors of the various agencies build their applications on our platforms and customise to their

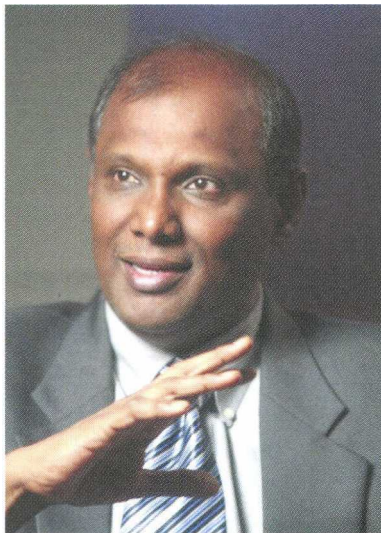
end customers' needs."

There are three obvious advantages to this approach. It saves money, keeps most of government tech spending circulating in the country and justifies the money the government gives Mimos for R&D. "Otherwise, why give us money to do R&D if the research is not being put to good use?" asks Thillai Raj.

He cites an example of where Mimos technology proved superior to that of a US company and which resulted in the government saving almost 70% in the cost of acquiring the foreign-made hardware. "Most of the Kampung WiFi hotspots, which

is a bridging digital divide initiative, used a wireless access point that cost over RM3,000 to provide WiFi to the selected kampung, but the boxes were blowing out frequently because they could not handle local weather conditions, especially when there was lightning. We tested our WAP and it proved more robust," says Thillai Raj. As a result, the government switched to the Mimos product.

Mimos believes there are many more possibilities such as this, and with Wahab relentlessly driving the agency forward, there can be little doubt that it will make a bigger impact. **E**



**Thillai Raj: Why give us [Mimos] money for R&D if the research is not being put to good use?**



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**Wahab rallying the troops at Mimos during an in-house town meeting with the CEO. He wants to see Malaysian companies build their products on top of Mimos' technology platforms and compete with global players.**