

# Contrasting ways of GROOMING TALENT



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Haroon Bhatti,  
DiGi.Com  
Bhd



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Rahim,  
TIME dotCom  
Bhd

One company believes in developing talent, so does the other. But their methods of doing so are vastly different. Local telcos DiGi.Com Bhd and TIME dotCom Bhd share their different perspectives in grooming local talent.

**D**epending on whom you ask, the telco sector is an exciting one rich with opportunities for deserving talent, or a narrowing window of opportunity due to the competition affecting the sector itself.

In this feature, KINIBIZ spoke to two very different telco companies – mobile operator DiGi.Com Bhd and Internet service provider TIME dotCom Bhd – on their perspectives and methods of attracting and grooming talent. It turns out that while both have a common goal of grooming and retaining talent, their motivations and methods are very, very different.



**DiGi.Com Bhd: Giving talent the right kind of freedom**

Majority-owned by Norwegian multinational telecommunications provider the Telenor Group, DiGi.Com Bhd was founded in 1995 and it is the third largest mobile operator in the country as of end 2014.

As DiGi’s chief human resource officer, Haroon Bhatti described the company’s employer value proposition as “freedom to inspire the next”. According to Haroon, DiGi aims to be an Internet company and a digital service provider in the future.

“We’re going to be a slightly different company in the future. What does it require to be that company and what kind of talent do we need? The third thing is, what does Malaysian talent want?”

“The intersection of these three different perspectives was important for us and we wanted to take a position in that intersection. Our position was very simple: we wanted to give the

current and future employees the freedom to inspire the next,” he told KINIBIZ in a recent interview.

He added that at DiGi, they pride themselves on telling employees at different levels to continue to challenge the status quo. “Your hierarchy and your titles do not matter. When you have an idea, when you see something that can be done better or can disrupt the market in our favour, you can push your voice and your ideas, and we will give you the freedom to do that,” he emphasised.

He explained that freedom could also come in the form of connecting with others. DiGi, he said, is a very open company, where collaboration happens everywhere. “Anyone can stop a leader at a very high level by saying, ‘I was

listening to you and I had this idea.’ The ability to connect with leaders is very powerful,” he added.

Another value that DiGi holds in relation to freedom is allowing employees the freedom to express themselves. In many companies, he said, young people are the idealists and the dreamers. “At DiGi, we genuinely want to hear you out. We will give you the freedom to express yourself without any repercussions.



You will have the freedom to determine your destiny,” he said.

“However, freedom without responsibility is nothing. Freedom without the desire to create an impact is nothing. So when we say we give employees the freedom to inspire “the next”, we mean that our employees have the freedom to act on their inspiration to come up with the product, service or innovation. This could also mean inspiring the next customer, netizen or Malaysian they speak to,” Haroon explained.

He highlighted that one of the advantages of working at DiGi is to have the freedom associated with a start-up company combined with the stability of a paycheck from a larger corporation, which gives employees the best of both worlds.

When asked his opinion on Malaysian talent, Haroon said that the company is “very bullish on the talent coming out of Malaysia”, and that DiGi is going to be very instrumental in both reaching out to and recruiting young people.

In fact, the mobile operator is continuously grooming young talent through a series of internship and graduate development programmes, recruiting more than 100 young talent every year. For instance, in its internship programme, interns with a project idea are paired with the right section or department at DiGi to ensure that the interns get the best internship experience.

In addition to that, DiGi also promotes diversity in the workplace where women represent 44% of its talent pool, and its workforce comprises employees of more than 10 nationalities. According to Haroon, DiGi has in the past groomed female employees for leadership positions, two of which he said have turned out “tremendously productive”.

The company also prides itself in helping its local hires to take on more global roles, beyond just working at DiGi. In terms of globalising

local talent, DiGi has worked with Talent Corp Malaysia Bhd (TalentCorp) for the My Asean internship programme.

Under the My Asean programme, 100 high-achieving Malaysian students in local universities participate in internships with leading Malaysian employers at various Asean locations, while Asean students in Malaysian universities will be able to intern in Malaysia. Internships run for a 10-week period.

Furthermore, according to DiGi, 26 of its locally-hired employees have embarked on global assignments across the Telenor group. The company has also stated its commitment to attract and facilitate the return of five Malaysian experts living abroad and will be embarking on efforts towards this end goal in the future. “At some stage, we’re going to deliberately brand ourselves to that segment (Malaysia experts abroad) as well,” Haroon said.



**TIME dotCom Bhd: Throwing talent into the ‘deep end’**

While DiGi.Com has a measured, structured approach in attracting and grooming talent, TIME dotCom Bhd adopts a more realist-type approach in its methods of recruiting and retaining talent.

The company is also realistic about the attractiveness (or lack thereof) of the telco sector as a whole to employees. “The industry as it is now is not as attractive as it was previously. It’s over-glamorised and telcos actually innovate very little. Our job as a fixed line telco is to offer the best speeds at competitive prices,” TIME’s chief executive officer Afzal Abdul Rahim told KINIBIZ in a recent interview. (Afzal is officially known as commander-in-chief of Time.)

“It is the apps companies such as over-the-top operators that are innovative and interesting. So are the telcos and the mobile operators with a big retail presence; they are a learning ground for consumer behaviour, to understand how to become a real marketer,” he added.

Commenting on the telco industry, Afzal noted that in the last 15 to 20 years the trend has been for mobile operators to have amazing growth, but now what’s going to be interesting

is how they are going to transform themselves and figure out how to keep selling to people. “This is what is going to separate the men from the boys,” he said of the highly competitive industry.

“The telco sector is not for the faint-hearted and the best way to learn is to be thrown into the deep end,” Afzal said.

When asked about TIME’s experience in attracting the talent it needs, Afzal said: “I completely reject the old ways of attracting talent, such as graduation fairs. Instead, we focus our efforts on recruiting those we know and those who want to be with us. This is typically done through recommendations and not through cold CVs or resumes. A lot of our employees come from different industries, which is interesting.”

He added that the company is true to its purpose “and it is in our DNA to do away with formalities and pretentiousness, that’s what makes us tick”. “Although we sometimes find it difficult to attract talent because we are perceived to be a second-tier brand, we have the advantage of being real and growing careers in a realistic manner,” he explained.

Afzal added that TIME has an environment that gives people the opportunity to learn their trade, and the freedom to make and learn from their mistakes. “We throw them into the deep end with none of the ‘manjanness’ that some companies practise,” he said.

When asked what kind of qualities TIME looks for in talent, Afzal replied: “We are not on the lookout for people with pedigree, but we look for character, survival skills and most importantly street smarts.”

Commenting on TIME’s previous collaborations with TalentCorp, Afzal said that the company has in the past engaged with fresh graduates through TalentCorp’s Graduate Employability Management Scheme. This programme’s objectives are to provide unemployed graduates with opportunities and job exposure.

He added that his vision for TIME is to be a place that loves and catalyses entrepreneurship. “It would be wonderful if over the next 10 years, we see how many entrepreneurs come out of TIME dotCom. By making people think like business owners, that gives us a differentiating factor than our competitors,” he said. ☞

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