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Mohd Khairil Abdullah

CEO, Axiata Digital, 2015 – Present
Group Chief Marketing and Operations Officer, Axiata, 2012 – 2015

My past seven years in Axiata has been a thrilling and significant experience. Everything I have achieved here stemmed from my need to give back to the nation that helped groom me in my younger years. Despite living and working abroad for 23 years, I was compelled to return and utilise my skills to make a real impact.

In many ways, joining Axiata back in 2012 as Group Chief of Marketing and Operations was akin to “National Service”. Axiata aligned well with my prior experience and I was able to holistically contribute towards its mission.

It was an exciting period because there was still enough headwind to focus on telco levers to drive growth in our core business. I truly enjoyed getting down in the trenches with the team to enable the future of telco to become more digital. Unknowingly, I was also being prepared for the next shift in my career – leading Axiata Digital (AD).

My experience in San Francisco in the late 90s during the dotcom boom had helped sow the seeds for my transition to become the CEO of AD in 2014. A natural progression, as the direction began to focus on building a digital-centric telco, seamlessly creating digital businesses to leverage on our telco assets.

The most significant milestone at AD has been pivoting the focus of the organisation from a venture builder of tech start-ups with a portfolio of 30 businesses to an operator of three core digital businesses. These are: Digital Financial Services, which comprise Boost, proudly homegrown and Malaysia’s largest e-wallet; Digital Advertising through ADA, Asia’s largest independent digital agency; and Apigate, an emerging global platform company that digitally connects businesses to consumers. These three businesses aim to champion the next generation of digital natives across Southeast Asia.

Creating sustainable digital businesses is not easy, as very few telcos in the region have succeeded for two main reasons - different organisational DNA and stiff competition. However, the blood, sweat and tears the team put in came to bear very sweet fruit when we received validation and monetisation from Sumitomo and Mitsui & Co, two Japanese conglomerates. This has helped fuel our growth and enhance how we accelerated digital adoption to ensure a future-ready and digitally inclusive society for rural consumers, SMEs and MNCs.

The greatest success for me has been proving that telcos can create successful digital businesses and watching them flourish and grow year-on-year. On a personal level, it has been the joy of grooming the next generation of business leaders, as we continue to forge ahead to make the region more digital.

