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**Malaysia's MSC needed rebranding**
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**MALAYSIA--The government's move last year to rebrand its decade-old ICT strategy was a necessary step to maintain the country's competitive edge, and correct perception that the project was nothing more than a content creation hub.**

Formerly coined Multimedia Super Corridor, the mega ICT initiative was renamed MSC Malaysia in April last year. The MSC is a government-designated zone, originally an area covering 15 by 50 square kilometer, which showcases the latest technology in the information and knowledge age. Since expanded to include Malaysia's commercial capital Klang Valley, the MSC is targeted to blanket the whole country by 2020. Launched in 1996, the Multimedia Super Corridor was seen as a forerunner to large-scale, government-supported ICT hub projects in Asia. Since then, however, other government-driven ICT hub projects have sprung up across the region in Hong Kong, Singapore, China, Taiwan and Dubai. Since its inception, Malaysia has invested billions of ringgit into building its cyber-city--dubbed Cyberjaya--which is an hour's drive south of its capital Kuala Lumpur. There are currently 1,792 MSC Malaysia-status companies, states the MSC Malaysia Web site, where such companies are given special incentives such as a 10-year tax break to develop ICT-based businesses in the country.

In an e-mail interview with ZDNet Asia, a spokesperson from the Multimedia Development Corporation (MDeC) said the re-branding exercise was necessary to "ensure MSC Malaysia and the Malaysian ICT industry remain competitive against other global ICT hubs". The rebranding exercise, launched without much fanfare last year, was crucial to correct perception that the MSC was merely a physical location or hub, where companies focused only on developing creative content, said Muhammad Zain Ibrahim, head of brand and communication at the MDeC. "This will catalyze our socio-economic growth to transform Malaysia into knowledge-based society," said Muhammad Zain told ZDNet Asia.

"Selling this initiative under the brand name Multimedia Super Corridor, led to the perception that the initiative offers only a physical location, as the word 'corridor' connotes a confined location, whereas the value propositions of MSC Malaysia are vast," he explained. The government official also dispelled suggestions that the word "multimedia" had seemed outdated. "[It was] not an obstacle. But it certainly required some clarification on what MSC actually is," Muhammad Zain said. "Multimedia connotes film and the creative content industry. The perception was that the Multimedia Super Corridor was a location for companies to develop creative content." Malaysia has an attractive country story to sell-- our people, strategic location, environment, world-class infrastructure, political and economic stability, and of course a strong and sound government leadership," he added. He noted that the rebranding exercise resulted in more than just a name change, and included significant improvements in business processes and strategies within the MDeC. Muhammad Zain said: "We had a brand audit on the MSC at the start of the rebranding exercise to understand perceptions, expectations and gaps. There have been many internal changes made since the exercise. We are [also] more customer-focused." He said the improvements were implemented to bring in more foreign investment, and develop the local ICT industry by encouraging the creation of intellectual property. The government also aimed to empower Malaysians through the new MSC Malaysia initiatives and elevate their quality of life, he added.

According to Bobby Varanasi, COP, Head of Marketing & Branding at Outsourcing Malaysia, while the MSC had proven its worth, it needed to reposition itself to attain greater progress. He told ZDNet Asia that the MSC has gone beyond multimedia to represent a larger set of ICT-related industries, and achieved enough success in terms of positioning competencies across various verticals such as software, outsourcing, creative design and technology. "For a period though, the word ['multimedia'] did become an obstacle in terms of branding and the overall domestic perception it had created," Varanasi said in an e-mail interview. The executive is also Vice President – Strategy, Operations and Quality at EA Consulting Asia-Pacific, an IT outsourcing services provider.

He also acknowledged that Malaysia has yet to produce many examples of successful globally-oriented professional organizations, nor has it built a single industry icon that is recognized worldwide. India, for example, has created companies and individuals that are respected and recognized worldwide in the outsourcing industry. "These include Narayan Murthy [at Infosys], Aziz Premji [at Wipro], S Ramdorai [at TCS], Ramalinga Raju [at Satyam], Kiran Karnik [at Nasscom], and so on," Varanasi said. "These companies and individuals have taken head-on the likes of globally established companies like IBM, Accenture, EDS and CSC, and have proven that cheap labor is not just about cost arbitrage and that they have competencies that are not easily replicable," he said.

He noted that Malaysia needs to develop such icons for the world to acknowledge, respect and [associate with] Malaysia. "This requires a significant transformation in the mindset of corporate chieftains here in the country," he added. "Worldwide, there is acknowledgement of Malaysia's potential for becoming a regional hub for outsourcing and related activities. Internally, there's still a lot to be done to orient the corporate sector to become more professional, transparent, value-driven and results-oriented." In addition, Varanasi said the available talent pool has to change its mindset in order to sustain Malaysia's position as an ICT hub. "One of the sad aspects of the local talent pool today is a lack of passion," he said. "Without passion and an ability to think [critically and innovatively], new services aimed at value creation cannot be developed. In the absence of a latent base of such competencies, it would be an uphill road for Malaysia in its bid to achieve its goals in the longer term," he said.

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