CATHARINA DAUM

Coffee and creativity – a winning formula from Indonesia

Indonesia is famous for its beautiful beaches, dense jungle, volcanoes and coffee. People are less likely to associate it with digitalization – but Tiwan Liutama's company is hard at work challenging those preconceptions. In this interview, the 60-year-old entrepreneur explains how TruConnect helps him keep his competitive edge and why his employees need to unleash their creativity.

Digital machines aren't necessarily the first thing that comes to mind when people think about Indonesia. What sparked your interest?

TRUMPF introduced us to the topic very early on, though I have to admit we were initially pretty skeptical! At first, we struggled to understand what benefits TruConnect could offer us. But the more we learned about it, the better we liked it. Nowadays, we even use tools such as the TruTops Monitor app, which helps us track our machines' productivity and keep tabs on our manufacturing performance. We see Industry 4.0 as a process, and we're gradually trying to integrate elements of it in our everyday work. For a country like Indonesia that consists of 13,000 islands, digitalization is extremely important, because our biggest competitors are thousands of miles away, on another continent.

But would it be true to say that the road to digital success wasn't an easy one for PT Duta Laserindo Metal?

Absolutely. When we founded the company in 1997, the region was in the midst of the Asian financial crisis. It wasn't the best time to set up a new business! The Indonesian currency was devalued by 400 percent during the economic crisis, and a lot of job shops went bankrupt. Newcomers had to have either enough capital to see them through, or a strong will to survive. Against all the odds, I took the decision to set up my company anyway. PT Duta Laserindo Metal (DLM) was the first job shop in Cikarang, West Java and something of a role model for many companies that came afterwards. Fortunately, we made it through the bad times, largely thanks to an incredible amount of hard work by our team. But also thanks to new ideas, the kind of innovations that are still helping us today in the realm of digitalization.

What kind of new ideas?

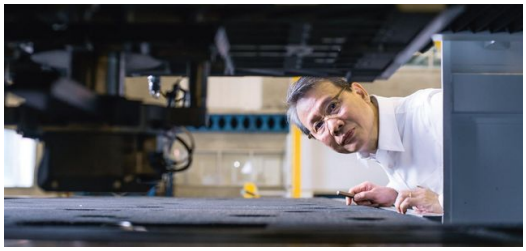
Whenever we were faced with difficulties or a challenging financial situation, we took the company to the next level by adopting new technologies. That helped us gain a competitive edge in the market. Things went so well that I was able to set up another company in 2003, this time in East Java, called PT Dempo Laser Metalindo. We began using CAD software for sheet metal fabrication right from the start, so in a sense we were already laying the foundations for today's process of digitalization. We soon realized that our new technologies were gradually getting us noticed by new customers who were

facing new challenges. So we started offering advice to our customers on design and construction issues and helped them optimize their products.

I believe in giving my employees the chance to get creative and develop their own products.

Tiwan Liutama, managing director PT Duta Laserindo Metal

Fostering a team spirit: Tiwan Liutama believes in empowering and challenging his employees as equal stakeholders.
 – Chendra Cahyadi



Well-versed: Tiwan Liutama knows every machine inside out. – Chendra Cahyadi

Nowadays you even have your own in-house design team. Why do you rate that as so important?

For one simple reason: if a job shop employs creative and talented people, there is always the possibility that they will end up getting bored. They might start to feel that "just" processing orders isn't challenging enough. So I believe in giving my employees the chance to get creative and develop their own products. That process has already given rise to a coffee roaster and an industrial tractor. It takes our company to a new level and poses exciting new challenges for our workforce.

But what does a coffee roaster have to do with creativity?

It may not seem obvious at first glance, but a coffee roaster is a highly sophisticated product that requires some really creative thinking. It's also a great choice for our location, because the first Arabica coffee plantations were established in Java. When we were developing the roaster, we had the smell of coffee beans drifting through the factory all day long. It was great! More and more employees began taking barista courses to learn how to make the perfect cup of coffee. None of it really had a direct link to sheet metal or laser cutting, but my employees were happy! And if that's the price of keeping a spirit of innovation alive here, then I'm happy to pay it.

What else do you do to motivate your staff?

Well, I think it's very important to challenge talented people by setting them new tasks. In our case, that means getting to grips with the latest technology. We send our employees abroad to trade fairs such as TRUMPF INTECH to broaden their horizons in the field of digitalization. And obviously I encourage them to take whatever training courses they need. I believe that a company can only achieve great things if the management is prepared to support staff who wish to develop both their personal and professional skills. It makes them more motivated and, ultimately, more creative.

Data may be the new oil, but creativity has always been the most important currency.

Tiwan Liutama, managing director PT Duta Laserindo Metal

You help your employees find their creative side – but what about you?

I'm no Picasso, but I think he was onto something when he argued that painting should always come before coffee. Obviously in my case it is more a matter of always putting the customer before coffee! I firmly believe that giving customers what they want requires passion and creativity. That's why I often tell the young people in my company that data may be the new oil, but creativity has always been the most important currency.

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