

Hot Off The Can

With persistence and self-belief, an inventor has turned his modest operations in Balakong into an award-winning enterprise that is eyeing the global market.

• By Karin Chang

Thomas Alva Edison's spirit of perseverance and Sir Isaac Newton's dogged determination to excel provided the inspiration for Datuk Kenneth Warren Kolb to try his hand at invention from an early age.

Growing up, these acclaimed inventors were Kolb's biggest motivation to create things which were functional and user-friendly. This burning desire eventually led him to invent a solar steel apparatus to purify river water into clean fresh water for his first science fair project in sixth grade. That invention won him an award at the age of 11, and he was hooked on inventions ever since.

From dream to reality

Kolb first invested in a company which was trying to create a self-heating can drink many



years ago. However the venture was unsuccessful and the company went bust soon after. Frustrated, he decided to revive the abandoned project and

spent a considerable amount of time and money to research and fine-tune his invention.

Eight years later, he eventually succeeded in commercialising the project after navigating through some stumbling blocks and rough patches.

"The idea of how to make it work was very simple. Doing the patents took a couple of years, but even that was easier than commercialising it. Because it's one thing to make a sample and to test it, and another thing to make tens of thousands and millions and

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have everyone come out the same," Kolb said.

He remarked the biggest challenge for him was to source for financing, as commercialising the invention involved a huge capital outlay. After knocking on the doors of angel investors and venture capitalists, he eventually succeeded in convincing Mayban Venture Capital Company (MVCC) to give him a loan of RM3 million to kick-start the business.

Business growth has been non-stop since. The manufacturing plant located in an industrial area just minutes away from Balakong, Selangor has been churning out millions of Hot Can beverages a month for the export market. With a wide range of beverages such as cafe latte, hot chocolate, mocha and hot tea, consumers are spoilt for choice.

Hot Can is currently exported to Australia with orders for up to a million cans per month, while 100,000 cans are being shipped to Turkey monthly. Hot Can is targeting to sell at

least 10 million cans per annum with an increase of ten to 15 per cent a year, while in Turkey it is targeting at least a million cans with an expected increase of ten per cent yearly.

An award winning innovation
Kolb has since come a long way from the day when he first set foot on Malaysian soil some 20 years ago, to work in an American furniture company. In 1992, this New Orleans native decided to hang up his corporate suit for good to pursue his lifelong dream as an inventor.

His persistence was what kept him going all these years, as he stood proudly on the podium to receive the coveted Best Innovation in Halal Industry Award at this year's World Halal Forum. The invention also bagged several awards at the International Invention, Innovation and Industrial Design and Technology Exhibition (Itex).

Much ado about funding

Plans are afoot for Hot Can to increase their production capacity to 1.2 billion cans by 2017 to meet the increasing demand. At present, Hot Can had to turn away several markets due to the lack of capacity. To cater for the expansion, Hot



Datuk Kenneth Warren Kolb

Can needs a minimum of RM50 million, and they have tried to obtain funding from several government bodies to no avail.

tap into the lucrative markets in Saudi Arabia, South Africa and United Kingdom. It is already in the midst of discussion for country distributorship in these countries and they have big plans to expand the range to include halal soups, halal dim sum and baby formulas.

"We have already patented the baby nipple design on Hot Can to produce baby formulas in the can for mothers on the go,



Manufacturing Plant

"I find one of the hardest things is the paperwork. We know where all the grants are; we've been to Smidec; we've been to Mida; and everything. It's just the amount of paperwork that you have to go through for the amount of money you are going to get out of it," Kolb lamented.

He added local banks were not of much help either, as banks like to confine their investments to safe markets only, instead of taking a gamble in future and emerging markets.

"Banks need to have a certain amount invested in the stable mature market and a certain amount risk on the future because if they don't promote the future ideas, then it's difficult for Malaysia to be a leader. You're always going to be a follower," said the inventor.

Powering ahead

Despite the current economic slowdown, the company plans to

and we are planning to launch it either end of this year or in the first quarter of next year", remarked Kolb enthusiastically.

How Hot Can Works

- The double chambered aluminium can contains the beverage in the outer chamber
- The inner chamber contains water and calcium oxide (quick lime)
- When the button at the bottom of the can is pressed, the water will mix with calcium oxide (quick lime)
- An exothermic reaction starts
- Contents of the outer chamber will heat in less than 3 minutes (50-55°C) to get a piping hot drink

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