

## **The Business Times, SME Spotlight, Pg 10 24 October 2006, Tuesday**

### **Not just another accolade**

Enterprise 50 Awards winners tell NANDE KHIN that entering the contest helps them to review their business strategies and operations

THE Enterprise 50 Awards (E50) - which have been around for more than a decade - are more than just another accolade to adorn the trophy cabinet. Past winners say entering the E50 competition helped them in more ways than one - from forcing them to review their business strategies and operations during the application process to winning recognition from potential customers and making potential investors sit up and take notice after they won the award.

Ang Yu Seng, CEO of Union Steel, which won the E50 award twice - in 2003 and 2004 - said the rigorous nature of the E50 application process helped gear his company for an initial public offer. It listed in 2005, raising \$13 million in net proceeds in an IPO managed and underwritten by OCBC Bank.

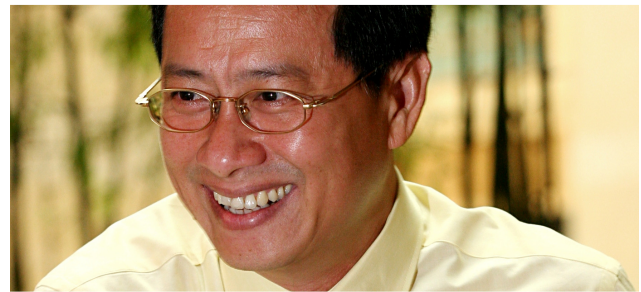
Although Union Steel had not decided on a listing when it entered the E50 competition for the first time, it knew an IPO was just a matter of time. 'And in business you need to think long term,' says Mr Ang. 'I knew I needed a number of years to get myself and the company prepared. And participating in the E50 was one of the ways to prepare and progress to the next level.'

During that time, Union Steel also focused on obtaining various ISO certifications to be IPO-ready. But these were just 'standard formalities to follow', unlike entering the E50 competition which is a 'real learning process', says Mr Ang. 'People always think, Just submit lah.' But before you write anything down, you've got to think, Am I going in this direction or not?' So it helps to crystallise your thinking.'

Other E50 winners say they benefited from a similar learning process. GMP Group, for example, which won the E50 award last year, entered the competition to gauge its performance vis-a-vis other businesses, says CEO Annie Yap.

The recruitment firm not only managed to do this but also achieved more. 'The whole process was like a self-assessment that helped us review our business strategy, the organisation structure as well as our internal processes and procedures,' says Ms Yap.

And after all the hard work, winning the E50 is a great form of recognition, say winners. 'It helped boost our morale and spurred us on towards our vision to be a globally recognised, leading supplier to the micro electronic industries,' says Colin Kua, managing director of Alcotec Precision Engineering.



**Winners** : The E50 awards are a strong form of encouragement for the company, and winning an award shows you are on the right track and is thus a good morale booster', says Union Steel CEO Ang Yu Seng (above). The credibility and reputation of the E50 award also beefs up the brand name of winners, says GMP Group CEO Annie Yap (left)

Mr Ang agrees. 'The awards are a good form of encouragement. It shows you are on the right track and is thus a good morale booster.'

The awards also help strengthen the brandname of winners. 'The E50 has a credible and prestigious reputation,' says Ms Yap. 'The thorough judging criteria deter companies without a sound strategy from participating in the awards, and it also helps that the E50s are supported by government agencies.'

Therefore, winning an award 'shows potential investors that GMP has a solid brand name and sound strategy. Investors are more willing to listen to our growth proposals. This is particularly helpful at a time when GMP is exploring overseas growth through franchising'.

Nick Soon, CEO of two-time E50 winner Air Market Express, also says winning the award raised the profile of his company. 'The award has very good branding and reputation,' he says. 'After we won the award, we had more customers approaching us.'

Alcotec has benefited similarly. 'With this prestigious endorsement we are able to gain the confidence of more customers as well as better support from our suppliers,' says Mr Kua.

Another advantage of winning is in being a member of the E50 club that is open to all past winners. Union Steel's Mr Ang says he has attended almost every event organised by the club, as they are a great way to 'network with other businessmen and make new friends'.

He regrets that so far he has not been able to make it for the overseas missions organised by the E50 club so, but says he will definitely go on future trips because 'I feel we need to be more active in such things'.

GMP's Ms Yap also says E50 events are conducive to 'high-level networking', because they are open to top businessmen and often involve government officials. 'It is always easier to share business ideas and challenges with other like-minded business elites and government officials during such informal settings,' she says. 'You never know if a business opportunity would arise from such gatherings.'

All in all, Mr Ang feels that entering the E50 competition is a great learning experience, and although Union Steel can no longer take part because it is listed, he encourages peers and 'friends who are doing business' to do so. 'I encourage them because I hope that they can go down the same route I did,' he says.