

COMPETITIVE CITIES

KL has a pool of highly capable engineering talent says Dieffenbacher

A pool of highly capable engineering talent in Malaysia was a decisive factor for Dieffenbacher, a world-leading manufacturer of press systems and complete production lines for the wood-based panel industry, automakers and automotive suppliers in establishing its regional headquarters in Greater KL. Dieffenbacher is part of the strong community of specialist engineering companies based in Germany. It is over 140 years old and has been helmed and owned by the Dieffenbacher family since its inception in 1873 and has remained in the same town called Eppingen where it was originally founded.

"To have withstood the test of time, Dieffenbacher has well-established values such as a strong customer focus, continuity, tradition, and reliability. It is an independent, fifth-generation, family owned company that believes in innovation and in providing the best for our clients. This means that we need extremely capable engineers that can deliver world-class plants and provide reliable after-sales service. It was really a nice surprise to find such engineers in Malaysia," says Andy Mueller, senior manager, Asia Pacific for Dieffenbacher Asia Pacific Sdn Bhd.

Dieffenbacher is an international group of companies employing more than 1,700 associates around the world. It has a presence in many countries besides its Asia Pacific regional headquarters in Greater KL. "As Dieffenbacher Asia Pacific's regional headquarters, we provide technical and sales support to our global clients. This means that we assist the sales team from Germany since we are very familiar with the Asian market and culture and we participate in after-sales service by responding to technical questions. The team here can also source spare parts and provide consulting advice to clients that are thinking of upgrading or modernising their existing plant," says Mueller, who has been with the company for 30 years and in Malaysia since the local operation was established in 2002.

The team of engineers at Dieffenbacher Asia Pacific also participates in project installations for wood-based panel plants. According to Mueller, this is a rapidly growing industry in Southeast Asia and companies in countries such as Thailand, Laos and Vietnam are showing interest in building their own plants. "The technical team in Malaysia is very experienced and capable and they are often a part of the entire process of designing, building and optimising a greenfield plant for a client. Our senior engineers are also able to lead an international team of engineers from Dieffenbacher during the installation of a new plant," Mueller says.

GREATER KL, AN IDEAL LOCATION

Greater KL's strategic location and accessibility, combined with affordable cost of living provides the right environment for multinationals like Dieffenbacher that need to serve regional clients. The team of engineers at Dieffenbacher can meet the requirements of their clients quickly as Malaysia is centrally located in the Asean region and well-connected with numerous highways and international airports. This was a key consideration when deciding on a location to establish our regional headquarters, says Mueller.

"The client or customer is at the centre of our operations. We develop our products and services according to their needs and this gives them and us, a competitive advantage. It is a critical business need that their plants, which we customise and build for them, works efficiently and effectively. We choose to be based in Greater Kuala Lumpur as this location puts us in close proximity to several Malaysian clients. We can be at their premises within two hours if they need any type of support."

"Furthermore, office rental rates and salaries are reasonable and business transactions and financial documents are written in English. This makes things easy for a global company like Dieffenbacher," he adds.

One of Dieffenbacher Asia Pacific's major clients is a Malaysian company (MIECO) and Mueller says it made business sense for the company to establish a base in the country back in 2002. However, he did not expect the company to be able to grow on the back of capable technical talent.

A POOL OF WORLD-CLASS TECHNICAL TALENT

The office in Greater KL is Dieffenbacher's biggest office outside Germany. Mueller attributes its growth to the calibre and capabilities of their local employees. "The pool of well-trained professional multilingual engineers that can be found in Greater KL is a strategic advantage for us. Malaysian engineers have a lot of technical knowledge in the wood-based panel industry and this made it easy for them to learn about our products and our processes."

"We currently have 17 employees. Out of this number, 15 are engineers because they have proved to have the skill-sets and positive work attitude that suits a leading, international company such as Dieffenbacher. The team here consists of two Germans, including myself, two Indian nationals and Malaysians. In terms of skill sets, we have mechanical engineers, electrical engineers and looking at developing process engineers in the future," says Mueller.

Besides being technically-proficient, local talent is generally multi-lingual and familiar with Asean culture. This enables them to



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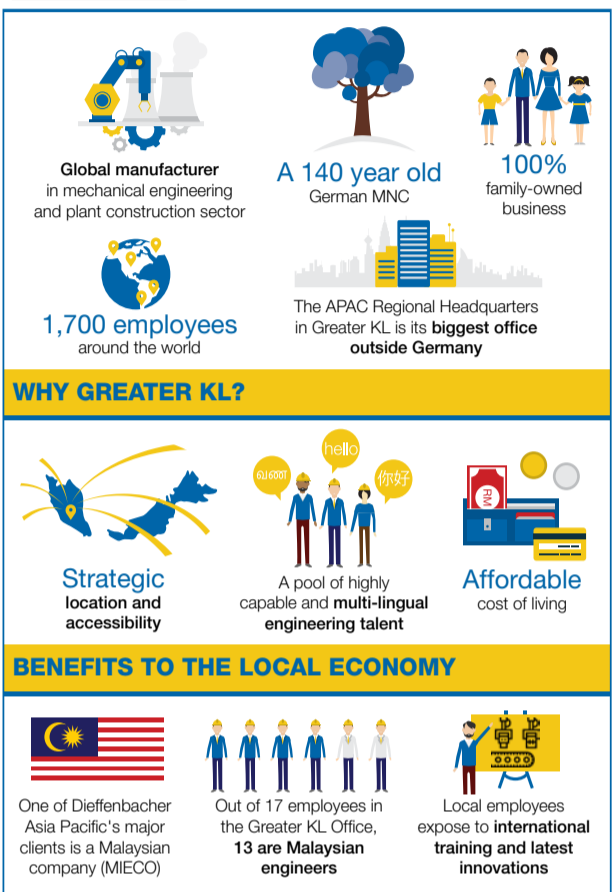
communicate effectively and quickly understand the needs of their clients in this region. "It is not hard to find good talent in Malaysia. We have been and still are very impressed with their calibre and their positive attitude towards work. They are willing to go the extra mile for our clients. This attitude is very much aligned with Dieffenbacher's values," says Mueller.

From a practical aspect, Dieffenbacher Asia Pacific's employees can travel relatively easily to other countries. Mueller points out that it is not difficult to get the relevant work permits and visas. "This is also important as travelling is a key component of the work that we do," he says.

Engineers often receive training at Dieffenbacher's headquarters in Germany. They also learn from an international team of Dieffenbacher's employees at each project. "Motivated, responsible and reliable employees are our most valuable assets. Unlocking our employees' potential ensures the success of the Dieffenbacher Group. Our employees have the opportunity to continuously expand their knowledge by joining external and internal programmes," says Mueller.

Innovation is a central tenet to Dieffenbacher's sustainability and the latest technology, ideas and designs in this industry is constantly being developed by highly-skilled engineers in the company. Mueller says local employees are constantly updated and trained in the latest

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innovations in this industry. "Senior process engineers in Dieffenbacher tend to transfer their knowledge to Malaysian engineers and their counterparts at a project site. So, our engineers are constantly kept up-to-date with the most recent innovations in this industry and they have an international perspective since the teams always consist of people from around the world," says Mueller.

FOR THE LONG TERM

As the wood-based panel industry in Southeast Asia is rapidly growing, Mueller says the company has been able to formulate long-term plans. "In the past five years, our sales in this region have grown strongly. Nevertheless, competition is heating up with players from China as well as Europe in this market. To stand apart, we leverage on innovation and a strong team that stays together and supports each other. In the future, I hope to see more engineers based in Malaysia," says Mueller.

He adds that assistance from government agencies such as InvestKL have benefited Dieffenbacher Asia Pacific by making it easier to obtain work visas, and to find interns and employees.

As a family-owned company, there is a culture of treating employees and partners such as Invest KL, as friends. Mueller says colleagues frequently invite each other over to their house for meals. "Genuine friendships have developed between our employees based in Malaysia and other parts of the world. This is something that is beautiful and unique and I believe it has contributed to a lower employee turnover rate for the company," he says.

Mueller enjoys living in Greater KL as it offers both a fast-paced modern city lifestyle and also a quiet, serene environment. "As a person from a small town in Germany, I really appreciate the beauty of Greater KL's natural environment. I have been living in Malaysia for 13 years and enjoy the city life and the quiet, peaceful environment in my township, just outside Petaling Jaya. I also enjoy the cultural diversity of Malaysia and find the community to be open and friendly. Finally, there is good infrastructure and the cost of living is certainly affordable."

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