

COMPETITIVE CITIES

Greater KL, the right place for a global leader

Based in Greater KL, the construction accessories business, Halfen-Moment Group, is part of CRH plc, a global leader in building material, with a number of strategic footholds in the ASEAN market.

CRH plc (CRH) is the second largest building materials company globally, the largest in North America, and the largest heavyside player in Europe. In Greater KL, CRH's presence includes the headquarters of the Halfen-Moment Group, these headquarters functions as part of CRH's broader construction accessories business in Asia," says Andi Lapon, managing director of Halfen-Moment.

CRH offers a diverse portfolio of products and services across the entire spectrum of construction solutions. Its products are categorised into three key segments: heavyside materials, lightside products, and building materials distribution. The focus of CRH's local operations in Malaysia is in construction accessories, which falls under the lightside product segment.

Headquartered in Ireland, CRH is a constituent of the FTSE 100 index. The Fortune 500 company is also listed on the Irish Stock Exchange and its American Depositary Shares are listed on the New York Stock Exchange. It currently employs over 87,000 people across 31 countries around the world. At the end of last year, CRH posted a 15% sales growth from 2015 to €27.1 billion on which pre-tax profit soared by 69% to €1.7 billion.

In Malaysia, the Halfen-Moment Group, was acquired by CRH in 2012. The Halfen-Moment Group specialises in efficiency-increasing construction accessories for building-site structures and industrialised building systems (IBS).

IBS is a construction technique whereby components are manufactured in a controlled environment, either on site or off site, and then placed and assembled into construction works. It is widely regarded as the way forward in the construction industry. It can reduce both construction time and labour costs.

"Quality is a major concern during the construction process and if there is no established system of quality certification, every initiative to increase the quality of products used on site has to be supported. The Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) has a crucial role here and in my experience they take this role very seriously. By having a body that focuses on (build) quality and more importantly enforces their policies, the standards and quality of the products are set to improve. With stringent quality control, potential dangers can be diminished as we control and reduce the quantity of low quality (building) supplies that make their way to (Malaysian) building sites," says Lapon.

"I am convinced that in the long run and given the right strategy, CIDB can further elevate (the construction industry in) Malaysia. In my opinion though, there is opportunity for Malaysia and the CIDB to look at, easier to implement solutions on site that reduce the need of labour tremendously, and can increase build quality. Halfen-Moment Group, for instance carry products that reduce labour by over 60% on site while increasing the quality of construction. However, these products now have to compete with cheaper low quality workarounds, and are therefore hard to introduce," says Lapon.

Improving the build quality

The use of low-quality products in the construction process is a concern as it affects the overall build quality of new developments. Lapon says that every initiative to increase the quality of products used at a construction site should be supported.

Quality control does not end with raw material checks, it should extend to the validation of the entire product design. "Let me use an analogy. If I buy a Bentley car, the quality of the steel used in the car is crucial, but it doesn't tell the entire story about the quality of the car. We at CRH always emphasize on high quality products which are well designed and engineered; from end-to-end," says Lapon.

The Malaysian advantage

It is an advantage for multinational companies such as CRH (through Halfen-Moment) to establish a presence in Malaysia. Lapon points out to two important commercial considerations: the cost of doing business and the ease of doing business in this country.

"The Malaysian Government has done many things to reduce the cost of doing business. The use of English as the main business language also makes it easy for Western companies to operate here. Furthermore, agencies like InvestKL are ready to support multinationals that set foot in Malaysia. They are an excellent facilitator for companies that need to find a way through a complex web of protocols and organisations," adds Lapon.

Building talent, a strategic asset

Local employees in CRH operating companies also have potential opportunities to work in CRH offices around the world.



"I have worked in Antwerp, Toulouse, Barcelona before working in Kuala Lumpur. When we acquire businesses, we always look internally before filling vacancies with external candidates. There are global employment opportunities for employees that master their jobs," says Lapon.

"I am blessed with a great team. We have a hardworking and well-educated workforce that is open to change, and are eager to become better. The company competes internationally and this would not be possible without the right people in place," says Lapon.

He says that being part of a global group of companies is also beneficial as local talent is often exposed to their foreign counterparts. "I see more people from Asia Pacific visiting and collaborating with their peers in Europe today. I believe that such international exposure can also be very rewarding on both professional and personal levels.

Through a gap analysis and appraisal interviews, we understand the training needs of our people. This allows us to have a structured training plan.. Training never stops in CRH. It's an on-going process," says Lapon.

"I believe experience is the key for any talent, hence we often look for talents that who will grow alongside with the company.

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Whilst we are mindful there will be inherent cultural differences, individuals with high adaptability and embrace change will find CRH an exciting place to work in," says Lapon.

CRH through Halfen-Moment has a partnership with University Malaya aimed at developing young engineers in the country. Here, Halfen-Moment works on new innovations and offers training and apprenticeship opportunities to young talent. "We work on joint-innovations for developments such as housing projects. We are considering introducing business cases with practical construction challenges to encourage students to come up with possible solutions. This will help them to bridge the gap between theory and reality. Another idea is the establishment of an innovative body where students or alumni can design, innovate and patent new construction products," says Lapon.

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InvestKL is a government initiative to attract and facilitate global multinationals investment into Greater Kuala Lumpur