

CITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Orange launches Asia Competency Centre in Kuala Lumpur to serve Asia-Pacific

When French information technology service provider Orange Business Services (Orange) set out to find a suitable regional base for its Asia-Pacific operations centre several years ago, the stakes for making the right choice were high.

Orange Business Services — the B2B branch of Orange SA (with 95,000 employees in France and 59,000 elsewhere) — is a leading infrastructure operator, a technology integrator and provider of global information technology and telecommunication services to multinational companies (MNCs). Orange has a global headcount of 22,000, with 3,500 spread across 14 nations in Asia-Pacific — its fastest-growing market.

Orange SA (formerly France Télécom SA) is one of the world's leading telecommunications operators with sales of €41 billion in 2017, and it is listed on Euronext Paris and the New York Stock Exchange.

According to Orange Business Services Asia-Pacific vice-president for regional operations Silke Weber, after a thorough evaluation Orange set its sights on Kuala Lumpur, where it already had a strong presence. Its Centre of Excellence (CoE) was eventually set-up in May 2017.

"The city has all the right ingredients — readily available talent at competitive costs, ease of doing business and good infrastructure, coupled with strong air connectivity."

"Geographically, the city is right at the heart of the action. Southeast Asia is one of Orange's fastest-growing markets within Asia-Pacific, and Kuala Lumpur's time zone covers most of our regional business operations," Silke says.

Besides having strong technical capabilities, the choice of Kuala Lumpur arms Orange with a critical competitive advantage — multi-lingual capabilities that are vital to its Asian language support function in Kuala Lumpur.

"A challenge we faced was catering for the various language support services required by our customers. By having the business operations hub in Kuala Lumpur, Orange was able to tap the language talent pool with these capabilities," she says.

Called the Asia Competency Centre (ACC), the CoE in Kuala Lumpur serves most of Orange's MNC customer base in Asia-Pacific.

The Kuala Lumpur ACC joins its other regional CoEs that serve Orange customers in Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and Russia.



Silke: The city has all the right ingredients — readily available talent at competitive costs, doing business was easy and infrastructure was good, coupled with strong air connectivity.



Tuan: Asia-Pacific is a key growth market for Orange with strong focus on network, cyberdefence, IoT and cloud business activities.

Key growth market

With a strength of 200 highly skilled professionals in the Kuala Lumpur ACC so far, Orange is poised to grow from strength to strength in the capital city.

Its future growth in Kuala Lumpur will march in lockstep with its ongoing push into various niche markets within Asia-Pacific, which offers exciting potential.

"Asia-Pacific is a key growth market for Orange. We continue to focus on our network infrastructure, solution platforms and up-skilling of staff in the region," says Tuan Le, Orange Business Services general manager for Asean and Korea.

The latest regional economic outlook report by the International Monetary Fund, released in May this year, forecasts that Asia-Pacific will grow by 5.5% this year, accounting for two-thirds of global growth.

In the longer term, the region is expected to remain the world's fastest-growing economic bloc until 2030, by which time its share of global gross domestic product will rise to 40%, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

"These exciting growth prospects hold a trove of opportunities for Orange," says Tuan.

"Asia-Pacific alone is expected to see a compound annual growth rate of 18.9% until 2023, based on a study

by BBC Research, with an estimated market value of nearly US\$1 billion by that year. Smart cities require numerous technological solutions that Orange is well positioned to provide. To the uninitiated, Orange considers multiple key areas of expertise in assisting its client base. These include software defined networks, big data and internet of things, cloud computing, unified communications and collaboration as well as cybersecurity," says Tuan.

Range of support

The ACC Kuala Lumpur supports its end-to-end service delivery across Southeast Asia, Australasia, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan and South Korea.

"These supporting functions range from pre-sales and technical solution design to project management, among others. The diverse geographical breadth covered by the ACC also requires it to provide support in the various languages spoken by its customers," says Silke.

Hence, having multi-lingual Asian language

support capability, available in Kuala Lumpur, is crucial. The presence and continued growth of the ACC in Kuala Lumpur will also mean the further growth of high-value technical skills that will help propel the national economic agenda forward.

ACC expansion

InvestKL, the investment promotion agency tasked with advocating for Kuala Lumpur as the preferred destination for multinationals operating in Asia-Pacific was one of the reasons the ACC was able to expand easily and quickly.

Among others, the agency eased Orange's expansion by providing support in the establishment process — connecting it to the appropriate government agencies to facilitate its establishment.

InvestKL also promoted the Orange presence in Malaysia so it could gain market access more quickly. Naturally, the fact that Orange already had a sales office in Kuala Lumpur eased the entire process.

Kuala Lumpur's proximity to Orange's Asia-Pacific headquarters in Singapore was also a major coordination benefit.

Looking ahead

Orange sees clear skies ahead as it seeks to expand and grow its ACC in Kuala Lumpur in line with its business growth in Asia-Pacific.

"Plan is to build strong business support ecosystems in the ACC for its strategic portfolios including cyber defence, cloud and flexible IT solutions, IoT services and big data analytics expertise. This will naturally create further job opportunities in Kuala Lumpur.

"The ACC workforce will naturally have access to regular specialised technical skills training — further enhancing their global competitiveness," says Tuan.

The training sessions are conducted by experts from Orange's international teams, who can either deliver the instruction in person or through comprehensive online learning platforms.

"Due to these training sessions, the workforce is able to up-skill and cross-skill, which makes them very valuable to Orange and our customers," says Silke.

With more MNCs like Orange establishing centres and enhancing the talent pool in Malaysia, we can look forward to becoming an even more attractive destination for global businesses operating in Asia-Pacific.



Kuala Lumpur is rightly poised to drive innovation into Asia-Pacific

As Malaysia pursues a more innovation-centric transformation agenda, growing the national capacity for innovation and digital expertise is crucial. Enter Orange Group, who has set-up a regional base in Kuala Lumpur as a springboard into a booming Asia Pacific market.

It is a win-win relationship between the nation and the global telco player. Kuala Lumpur, strategically located in the heart of Southeast Asia, offers a capable workforce with masterful command in various Asian languages that the group needs to support its Asia Pacific expansion.

And Orange, in turn, brought exactly what the nation's professionals needed as Malaysia marches into the future: access to specialised, high-value technical skills and training that will only spur local capacity for innovation and digital competency.

"It is the sort of mutually beneficial investments that we strive for," says InvestKL CEO Datuk Zainal Amanshah, as Orange's regional hub in Kuala Lumpur immediately puts the capital city at the forefront of digital innovation in the region.

Zainal explains that the agency has been selective as it is important to ensure investments coming are aligned with the country's goal of raising the level of innovation activities and making a contribution to national productivity.

"The group is a perfect fit to those requirements given their expertise in and access to advanced digital technologies, such as Internet of Things, Industry 4.0 capabilities, artificial intelligence, big data analytics and cyber security," Zainal adds.

As the agency works tirelessly to continue attracting dynamic investments into the capital city, it is making good progress. Within six years up to end-2017, KLIInvest had brought in 73 MNCs investing a total of RM11.07 billion, which had created 10,971 high-skilled jobs for Malaysians.

Keeping the pace is critical. Already, the Malaysian

government is working hard to ensure the nation is not left behind as the world economy digitalises, particularly by way of automation and adoption of technology.

To that end, the Ministry of International Trade of Industry (Miti) is currently shaping a national policy on Industry 4.0 in particular to sustain the momentum in driving digital transformation for manufacturing and related services, Miti Minister Darell Leiking says.

"The Fourth Industrial Revolution is reshaping economies around the world with rapid technological advancements," Darell said in August. "By providing an enabling ecosystem for the manufacturing sector to thrive by adopting new technologies, we can ensure that Malaysia will remain as an attractive prospect for high-technology, innovative and high value-added industries in years to come."

And InvestKL is relentlessly playing its role in helping to create that ecosystem. Its choices of MNCs are deeply thought-out to ensure that the incoming MNCs fit the national digital agenda and move it forward.

"The game, for us, is not about throwing money or drown them in incentives, that's not sustainable. We aim to create a win-win arrangement that, on our end, leads to more high-value professionals and more leaders of the future," says Zainal.

In the face of emerging digitalisation and innovation, the agency also today plays a crucial industry regulatory bridging role via the trusted partnership with the national financial and telco regulators. This helps ease the transition and acceptance of new ideas. The stringent criteria in place has narrowed the profile of MNCs that fit Malaysia's vision to high-value services-based organisations that seek a regional hub serving the Southeast Asia.

That effectively leverages the strategic location of Kuala Lumpur at the heart of the region as a natural springboard into the region — which is already Orange's fastest-growing market within Asia Pacific.

For Malaysians, the strict selection process by InvestKL ensures the right jobs are created with the right access to the skills needed in a digitalised future. Thus, locals are able to benefit by way of career opportunities that will ride the digitalisation wave instead of being washed away.

In turn, the mutually reinforcing effect between the MNCs and the local workforce will boost Malaysia's effort to achieve 20% contribution from e-commerce to the national economy by 2020, up from 18.2% currently.

Zainal: Getting the profile of MNCs investing in the capital right, is crucial.

