

ELECTRICAL & ELECTRONICS

FLEX'S SUCCESS WITH PEOPLE AND OPERATIONS

GLOBAL supply chain and manufacturing solutions provider Flex has notched several operational and business milestones as well as people-related achievements since its maiden foray into Johor in 2006.

Beginning with the Flex Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP) facility, the multinational corporation has over the years expanded its operations in the state. Today, it has three manufacturing sites in Johor and, what's more, these factories are playing a significant role in the group's global manufacturing operations.

The Flex PTP site, for example, is the largest battery pack assembly manufacturer among all Flex sites globally. "We build and supply battery packs to Flex sites in Zhuhai, China and Mexico," says Lim Lian Chong, general manager at Flex PTP and Flex Skudai, adding that Flex Skudai is one of the largest vacuum cleaner manufacturing locations for Flex globally.

He says Flex PTP has grown beyond providing product assembly services to having an in-house machine shop, automation design capabilities and failure analysis labs. "Customers are delighted with these value-added services," he says, adding that Flex PTP garnered the Manufacturing Excellence 2022 Awards by the Association for Manufacturing Excellence for its efforts and performance in continuous improvement culture and lean systems implementation.

Operating in Malaysia since 1988, Flex — formerly known as Flextronics — has 11 facilities in Penang and Johor as well as a regional office in Selangor, with a total footprint of four million sq ft.

"We serve customers in the industrial, communications, enterprise and cloud, lifestyle, consumer devices and health solutions segments. The group's facilities in Johor cater for the lifestyle, consumer devices and health solutions markets," says Lim.



Fishing competition held at Flex PTP as part of sports activities for employees

At Flex PTP, the focus is on battery pack assembly, plotters, smart laser-cutting machines, electronic logging devices, voice-controlled music players, payment systems, cryochillers, jukeboxes, wire bonders and precision vision cameras. Flex Skudai, established in 2013, specialises in floor care (vacuum cleaners) and beauty care products such as hair dryers, while Flex Senai, established in 2011, is a healthcare-focused site that provides printed circuit board assembly for highly complex medical equipment,



ranging from laboratory diagnostics to respiratory support to ophthalmology.

“Our vision is to become the most trusted global technology, supply chain and manufacturing solutions partner to improve the world. Sustainability is a cornerstone to making that vision a reality,” says Lim.

The company’s sustainability priorities are especially palpable in its people-related initiatives and achievements.

“We are one of the largest employers in Malaysia’s technology sector with 18,000 employees, out of whom 8,000 are based in Johor,” says Lim, adding that the company is “proactively creating opportunities for employees to develop skills and pursue fulfilling career pathways”.

In Johor, Flex is partnering with Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and other educational institutions to deliver continuing education programmes for its employees — offering them the opportunity to upskill and obtain academic credentials via specialised course certificates and diploma programmes. More than 238 employees have graduated from these education programmes since 2019, he adds.

“Flex is also partnering with Jabatan Pembangunan Kemahiran (JPK) to develop the

School bags with study items were distributed to Flex employees with children in primary and secondary school as part of the company’s back-to-school programme

National Dual Training System within Flex PTP (which is now an accredited learning centre with in-house trainers conducting JPK’s approved syllabus). To date, we have trained 33 employees on electronics equipment and appliance troubleshooting, and manufacturing operations. Operators who undergo this training will have the opportunity to be promoted to a higher job grade,” he says.

Like most of the companies in the electrical and electronics (E&E) industry, manpower is a key issue, which is why the company has “established a strong foundation of purposeful execution, allowing us to attract, develop and retain exceptional talent”, says Lim. “At Flex, we foster a collaborative and inclusive workplace where employees can thrive and make a difference. Our total rewards packages are thoughtfully designed — considering market data, company performance, employee performance, grade level and location.”

The company has also partnered with



PHOTOS BY FLEX

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Lim

the Johor Deaf Association to hire and train employees with hearing impairment. To ensure inclusion and equal opportunity in the workplace, the company has established among others a buddy system to help employees with disabilities. "At Flex, employees with disabilities work alongside other employees at the production floor. Flex also offers basic sign language training for all production supervisors, department admins and human resource business partners. This basic sign language training is helpful in enabling better communication with employees with disabilities," he says.

In addition, the company has established the Asia Bamboo Programme, a targeted learning initiative designed specifically for female managers. This programme focuses on developing women's leadership competencies, personal resilience and ability to overcome common obstacles. Additionally, it is implementing a global leadership programme known as "SheLeads", which strives to advance the development and fortification of its talent pipeline for female leaders.

"Our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is key to supporting a culture of wellness at Flex. EAPs are a first line of support in wellness and mental health resources for all employees. We offer employees counselling and consultation with our licensed in-house psychologists via face-to-face and online sessions," he adds.

The company's human resource initiatives over the years have not gone unnoticed. According to Lim, Flex PTP was certified as a Responsible Business Alliance Factory of Choice in 2022. Flex Johor also clinched the Sustainability and CSR Malaysia Award from 2020 to 2023, thanks to its active involvement in environmental, safety and community initiatives. "Flex in Malaysia has also been honoured by TalentCorp Malaysia for providing a safe and equitable workplace where every employee, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity and ability, can contribute their talents, thrive and progress in their career with new skills," he adds.

STRATEGIC LOCATION

Like most of the players in the state's E&E industry, the draw for Flex is Johor's mature supply chain, particularly for mechanical parts, sheet metal and plastic parts.



Tree-planting activities to commemorate Earth Day

The availability of highly skilled graduates from universities such as UTM, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and University of Southampton Malaysia, to name a few, is another selling point.

Flex PTP's location within the Port of Tanjung Pelepas also means transport costs are minimised and, in addition, there are other benefits such as simplified customs and green lane access, duty-free import of items used in production, duty-free export of finished goods and enhanced security.

Proximity to Singapore's port and airport is another plus. Lim sees the recent signing of the memorandum of understanding to set up a special economic zone in Johor as a positive development. While he points out that the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) is still under development and the full extent of its impact will depend on the specific policies and regulations implemented, it has the potential to positively impact Flex in Johor.

"The JS-SEZ aims to improve cross-border movement of goods and people. This could streamline Flex's supply chain, reducing transport time and costs between its Johor facilities and Singapore's international trade hub. The zone aims to attract skilled workers from both countries. Flex could benefit from a wider talent pool, potentially filling specialised positions and fostering knowledge exchange," he says, adding that the JS-SEZ might attract new investments, which in turn will potentially attract new customers to Flex. ● By Sreerema Banoo