

Netpoleon carves out a niche in competitive cybersecurity market



Netpoleon Solutions CEO Francis Goh, who received the Enterprise 50 Award in 2017, has been willing to enlist the help of industry professionals, which has helped the SME professionalise and institute the processes and strategies necessary for the business to drive performance and deliver value. PHOTO: NETPOLEON SOLUTIONS

Investing in its employees' development, creating a nurturing work culture and offering its clients holistic services give the SME a competitive edge

By Cherie Cher Hui Shan, Denise Yap Li Ying, Ryan Cheong Tse Xiang and Shao Yujin

WITH Singapore well on its way to becoming a Smart Nation, the cybersecurity market has been booming and local cybersecurity value-added distributor, Netpoleon Solutions, has seen a surge in growth in recent years.

Indeed, with a string of major international hacking incidents and the recent SingHealth data breach, there has been a sharp increase in awareness on cybersecurity issues. Netpoleon has been able to leverage the opportunities created by a growing cybersecurity market.

Established as a value-added system integrator in 2000 by current chief executive officer Francis Goh, Netpoleon offered clients integrated computing systems of software, hardware, and networks.

However, in 2006, after recognising greater opportunity in other parts of the value chain, Netpoleon repositioned itself as a value-added distributor, distributing cybersecurity solutions and offering technical expertise to clients.

Since then, Netpoleon has successfully expanded across the region, doing business in Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Myanmar, in addition to their main operations in Singapore.

More recently, in 2017, Netpoleon was bought over by Macnica Networks Corporation, a leading value-added distributor in the Japanese cybersecurity market and a subsidiary of Macnica Fuji Electronics Holdings Inc, which has a revenue of about US\$5 billion.

Despite Netpoleon's steady growth and the market for cybersecurities brimming with opportunities, navigating the industry has not been an easy task for the small and medium enterprise (SME).

With large companies in the market always eager to make full use of the advantages afforded to them by their size, Netpoleon has had to develop its own methods for dealing with the intense competition.

Now, after more than a decade in the industry, Netpoleon has carved out a place for itself in the market. By focusing on providing greater value to both employees and customers, it has managed to cement itself as an essential part of the value chain.

Creating value for clients

For its clients, Netpoleon is more than just a distributor. It also offers technical services like penetration testing, malware analyses, and assessments that determine if a network has been breached. Rather than being just a middleman, Netpoleon creates additional value for its customers by offering its clients holistic services as a value-added distributor.

Netpoleon also provides proof-of-concept work for their clients – the firm is able to demonstrate its security solutions, allowing potential clients to first test-run the system, before committing to the investment of purchasing a secure cybersecurity solution.

Along with the various technical services it offers, Netpoleon's ability to provide proof-of-concept work requires it to have both the required equipment and technical expertise. Such capabilities have not been easy to develop and is not something its competitors have been able to easily replicate.

Highly skilled personnel

To offer such technical services for its clients, Netpoleon has had to build a team of highly skilled employees by investing heavily in their development. Along with internal training, Netpoleon puts its employees through internal tests to ensure their competence.

More important however, is the mentorship it provides to newer personnel, with mentors assigned to guide them and point out the gaps in their knowledge, leading them in the right direction.

Other than internal training, Netpoleon also sends its employees for product training by vendors and ensures that many of them attain external certification from organisations like The Council for Registered Ethical Security Testers (CREST). In an industry that moves rapidly, skills can become obsolete within a year, and Netpoleon's commitment to investing in its employees has ensured that it always has capable personnel to offer clients technical services.

With so many resources invested in its employees and a constant shortage of skilled labour in the market, Netpoleon has also had to deal with the potential poaching of its trained employees by larger firms.

The greater resources and higher prestige often accorded to large firms has meant that the recruitment of fresh university graduates has been difficult as well. To manage this prob-

lem, the firm has chosen to create a motivating and encouraging work environment for its employees. This has opened up an alternative stream of skilled workers, with many employees referring their friends to Netpoleon.

By coupling its investment in employee development with a nurturing work culture, Netpoleon has sought to create a career path that will be attractive to potential employees.

Government grants and subsidies

Netpoleon's ability to remain competitive also lies in its willingness to tap the various grants and schemes available for SMEs in Singapore. The Capability Development Grant from Enterprise Singapore is one such grant the firm has utilised.

Netpoleon received a grant from the government to subsidise its Human Capital Development projects and to help further improve the HR practices within the company. The ability to further invest in its people has proven indispensable to Netpoleon in helping it maintain its competitive edge.

The Loan Insurance Scheme (LIS) is another government scheme for SMEs that Netpoleon has utilised. By insuring banks against the insolvency of borrowers, the scheme allows companies to secure short-term trade financing. This aided the firm significantly in its earlier days, when it was small and many banks were hesitant to approve loans for SMEs.

Second family

Unlike many family-centred SMEs in Singapore, Mr Goh has been willing to enlist the help of industry professionals. This has helped Netpoleon professionalise and institute the processes and strategies necessary for the business to drive performance and deliver value.

Such a mindset towards employing talent has helped the company thrive in the industry and create a place for itself in the market.

Now, the firm itself has become a second family to many employees at Netpoleon. By not just investing in its people, but also creating a warm culture for its people to thrive in, Netpoleon's focus on its people has given it a unique competitive edge in the cybersecurity industry.

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