

Providing smart security for a Smart Nation

Ademco's VerifSuite solution allows customers to acquire contract-based, pay-as-you-go managed security services, enabling them to trim their costs

By Angel Koh An Qi,
Brandon Loi, Kum Po Kee
and Zhao Wenjing

Singapore
A MAN was exercising alone at a 24-hour gym in Singapore at 3am when he suffered a heart attack.

Thankfully, the gym had a panic button which he used to alert a security guard of his plight. The guard soon found him crouching on the floor through a CCTV and contacted an ambulance.

This incident highlighted a dilemma faced by businesses – stationing a security guard 24/7 to deal with such rare situations will result in high costs, but the safety of customers is also paramount.

In this case, a life was saved by tapping on technology to enhance the duties of the security guard.

Ademco (Far East) is one such company which specialises in security technology, a rising trend in the industry.

Ademco operates one of the largest 24-hour central monitoring centres in Singapore, providing integrated security solutions to more than 8,000 clients across Asia, spanning governments to technology giants to financial gooliaths, all the while maintaining a healthy client retention rate of over 90 per cent.

Today, it is led by group managing director Toby Koh, who has taken over the business from his father, founder Koh Tiong Chwee.

The younger Mr Koh started his career in 1993 as a corporate banker with Maybank. He left shortly after to join Ademco in 1995 as a salesman, and worked his way up to group managing director in 2010.



As technology has been core at increasing productivity, the key is to be willing to adopt novel solutions to old problems, says Ademco's group managing director Toby Koh. BT FILE PHOTO

Mr Koh drew inspiration from his father who taught him the value of perseverance.

He said: "The limits we perceive are set by our own mind; it is how much you want it and how hard you work for it. It is vital to make sure that we execute the plan and ignore the naysayers. If you listen to them, you cannot achieve anything."

As technology has been core at increasing productivity, the key is to be willing to adopt novel solutions to old problems, he said.

In line with this belief, Ademco in-

troduced VerifSuite solution to ease the financial and operational constraints of businesses.

Without having to invest in additional capital, staff or hardware, Ademco's customers can acquire contract-based, pay-as-you-go managed security services. This enables clients to trim the fat from their businesses and manage their costs.

Recognising the importance of digitalisation, Ademco has supported VerifSuite through a 24-hour central monitoring and command centre (CMCC) that provides properties with

high-end security technology such as drones and robots.

Outsourcing security operations allows the customers to better focus on their core operations.

The customisable service offering also allows Ademco to cater to businesses of various sizes.

Ademco's scalable business model is evident through its more than 50 per cent market share of Singapore's fire monitoring systems.

Ademco suggested the privatisation of the fire monitoring services sector in Singapore and after the relevant laws were passed in Parliament, the Singapore Civil Defence Force was able to focus on its expertise of fighting fires.

Digitalisation is often associated with mass retrenchment following the replacement of workers with robots.

But Ademco's VerifSuite ensures that security officers are retrained to perform security services with the aid of robots and artificial intelligence (AI), making use of their skills, not their sweat.

The integration of technology and the human touch ensures cost efficiency and improved surveillance for the company, while benefiting the security officer's health and morale.

To pitch this idea to the public, Ademco created a promotional video entitled *Hello! Uncle Not Machine* that has reached over 746,000 people.

Mr Koh's favourite quote by boxer Mike Tyson exemplifies his belief in crisis management: "Everybody has a plan, until they get punched in the face."

No matter how much companies plan for a crisis, what ultimately separates the wheat from the chaff is how it is able to adapt to crisis when these plans fail.

Covid-19 is one such punch in the face: it swept through the globe in a matter of months, sending economies into a tailspin. Needless to say, jobs could be on the line.

In Ademco, however, Mr Koh assured employees of their jobs at the start of the pandemic and even paid out bonuses to reward employees during this difficult time.

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the growth of Ademco's managed services model.

Mr Koh highlighted the scarcity of security officers in Singapore during the 2020 SkillsFuture Forum where he said: "If a security officer were to quit in the morning, he would be hired by lunch."

This problem was further exacerbated by Malaysia's Movement Control Order in March 2020 to curb the spread of the virus.

Malaysia's lockdown affected about 15,000 security officers working in Singapore, a third of the already scant supply of security officers.

The manpower shortage and increased costs highlighted the importance of reducing reliance on manpower in the security sector.

In an interview in July 2020, Mr Koh compared the cost of a remote system like Ademco's 24-hour CMCC against the salary of security officers.

He pointed out that the adoption of Ademco's system would translate into S\$18,000 to S\$24,000 of savings annually.

In addition, security officers in the guardhouse have blind spots and may not always be aware of intruders in the buildings. Thus, the physical presence of the guards may not be key to security.

This transformation from manpower-heavy, tech-light to a manpower-light, tech-heavy model will be a key theme for the future, he said.

Technology will also continue to make waves in the security industry, with blockchain in particular likely to be a gamechanger, predicted Mr Koh.

Imagine that you are involved in a car crash in the dead of the night. With blockchain technology integ-

rated with security, the car is able to send a signal to get help, putting our minds at ease and potentially saving lives.

This works by having a car with a SIM card that is connected to the internet that sends a signal to the security centre in the event of a car accident.

The security personnel then responds quickly and sends for an ambulance. In fact, Ademco is currently providing these services for the latest car models of a premium European car manufacturer.

"Blockchain will be the future as it solves real problems," said Mr Koh.

The potential to reduce a lot of backroom transactions and blockchain's widespread application makes it very promising.

As blockchain is not Ademco's area of expertise, Mr Koh decided to be the founder and angel investor of two blockchain startups: TraMes, a supply chain ecosystem, and Fresh Turf, a last-mile solutions provider.

"Ademco sees the potential to create value and improve inefficiencies in the world," he said.

Mr Koh also highlighted the importance of finding good partners. Ademco currently operates in seven countries – Malaysia, Indonesia, India, the Philippines, China, Vietnam and Singapore – with plans to continue growing in Asia.

In 1995, however, a Chinese partner absconded with Ademco's hard-earned money in its venture in China. Calling it a "painful but valuable lesson", Mr Koh now knows better.

He added: "Bad partners equal to a bad start. So finding a good partner, it's a learning experience in itself."

ENTERPRISE



*Celebrating Singapore's
Enterprising Spirit 2020*

This series is part of the Enterprise 50 Educational Project between the E50 partners and the NUS Business School. Ademco (Far East) was among the winners in 2019. The annual E50 ranking is co-organised by The Business Times and KPMG, sponsored by OCB Bank, and supported by Enterprise Singapore, Singapore Exchange and Singapore Business Federation.