

Special feature brought to you by PwC

## Strategy in Action

# Crafting a strategy for success

PwC is helping companies devise and execute practical strategies to grow their business in the region

**W**HEN Richard Skinner first joined PwC in 2005 from a strategy consulting firm, it was with some trepidation. There was a perception in the market that a Big Four firm like PwC would be more focused on their auditing and tax businesses, and it wasn't clear that they were committed to strategy consulting.

Thankfully for Richard, who now heads PwC's strategy team in Singapore, that thinking has changed dramatically over the last decade as Strategy& – PwC's strategy consulting arm – now offers strategy consulting services that are amongst the best in the market.

Richard started his consulting career in 1999 at a firm started by a group of former Booz & Co. partners in London, before moving onto an international strategy house. His career came full circle when PwC acquired Booz & Co., then the fourth-largest strategy consulting firm in the world, and rebranded it as Strategy&.

"It was quite a twist of fate that PwC's acquisition of Booz & Co. in 2014 brought the Booz connection into my career again. Thinking about the evolution of PwC over the years, it's easy to overlook how remarkable the change in our own business strategy has been. As recently as five years ago, it would have been surprising for business leaders to think of PwC as business advisers. Today, we have the largest multi-disciplinary professional services network in the world," he says.

"As a strategy consultant, PwC is really a wonderful place to be; not only do I get to work with world class experts in various disciplines, we are focusing more and more on developing our consulting business and expertise – the pace of growth has been phenomenal."

Not only can PwC now offer world class strategy consulting, it is also able to bring to bear its full suite of expertise in areas such as corporate finance, pre-deal commercial, tax, operations and financial due diligence and post deal integration and operational improvements in one comprehensive package – effectively strategy through to execution.

Reflecting its growth in this space, PwC was recently named a Leader in Business Consulting Services Worldwide by IDC MarketScape.

"Our clients want a one-stop shop that can both devise a strategy and execute it. It is cumbersome and costly working with

multiple consultants for advice on growth strategy, market entry, mergers and acquisitions, tax, operations, financing or risk management. We provide the best-in-class under one roof," says Richard.

Britain-born Richard has worked in the UK, Europe and the Middle East, and has been based in Asia since 2013, although his work for the Singapore government devising the national food security strategy has seen him work in Singapore since 2011. His move to the city-state was a timely one, as there has been a surge in demand for strategic advice on internationalisation in recent years as more companies seek to grow their presence in Asia.

"Historically companies in the US and UK are big users of advisory services compared to those in Southeast Asia. However as companies look to internationalise and diversify, we are seeing an increase in demand for these services, as they start to see how consultants can help increase their chances of success," he says.

However, expanding in Asia can be a daunting prospect as each market in the region is different. As such, possessing local capabilities is critical for success.

"There are still misconceptions that Asia is fairly homogeneous. On the contrary, there are important specifics that differ between the likes of say Vietnam, Myanmar or Indonesia. This is the reason why local knowledge is key," explains Richard.

He advises companies looking to penetrate the region to prioritise potential markets against the strengths of their own businesses. This is especially true for enterprises that may lack the international infrastructure of larger organisations.

"Businesses need to be highly targeted in their approach to international investment – and that usually means understanding where they have a competitive advantage versus local players," he says. "This allows them to focus their scarce resources on fewer markets to increase the chances of building scale positions that can support future growth."

Over the last three years, Richard has built a diverse team with deep local knowledge across Asia's complex markets. His strategy team, which is based in Singapore and operates across Southeast Asia, is comprised of professionals of 14 different nationalities who can work directly with counterparts in the various regions to best meet client needs.

## The challenge for Singapore companies

Richard has been impressed with Singapore's diversity and growth since moving here four years ago. Despite Singapore's small size and limited domestic market, the country's geography, good economics and governance make it an attractive entry point to Asia for



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the rest of the world.

"Asia is the growth story and at the heart of strategy consulting is helping businesses grow. The opportunities for businesses here are almost limitless. To top it off, the diversity of talent in Singapore is simply astounding. We're not just talking about nationalities, but also skillsets and ideas."

So what advice does Richard have for local companies who are seeking growth? Firstly, Singapore-based firms need to think about how to be competitive globally and go beyond the country's shores. Singapore's relatively small population limits growth opportunities domestically.

"We have one of the most exciting and attractive markets on our doorstep and Singapore is perfectly placed to be a stepping stone to this market."

Secondly, they need to think longer term, and in particular look to embrace new technological enablers like ecommerce, the Internet of Things and data analytics to get ahead. "Compared with other highly developed countries, Singapore is behind in the adoption of technologies in areas such as digital, ecommerce and cybersecurity. But we are very well placed to catch up."

Technology and the Internet are both a disruptor and great lever. It is a great time for companies to really make technology a part of their business strategy and model, and really leverage it to not only enter the larger regional Southeast Asian or even Asian

market, but use it to Singapore's advantage. Singapore already has the right infrastructure and regulations – companies just need to take bolder steps to innovate."

Finally, he believes that businesses here have to help develop local talent. One way to do this is to expose more Singaporeans to the global market by spending a few years abroad. They can then return to help local businesses expand internationally.

And as an integrated professional services firm, PwC is well placed to help Singapore enterprises overcome these challenges of becoming regional and global players.

Says Richard: "At the end of the day, businesses are looking for a partner to help make their ideas a success."

■ This is the first instalment of a five-part series 'Strategy in Action', which is brought to you by PwC. The next instalment will appear on Nov 3

