



HEAD OF THE BOARD

When Jui-Hsiang Chou joined Apex International in 2006, the Chairman of the circuit board manufacturing company, Shu-Mu Wang, outlined his vision for Apex to become a publicly listed company. Jui-Hsiang achieved this goal, within five years, and today the company has never looked stronger.

JUI-HSIANG CHOU / CEO Apex International

Jui-Hsiang Chou, also known as Bill, is understandably proud of Apex International. Having spent thirteen years at the Taiwan-based company, he has witnessed incredible advances in both technology and in the rapid expansion of the company itself. His enthusiasm is plain to see, and he never misses a chance to showcase his firm's talents.

"Apex started out as a small Taiwanese family run concern and had around 600 employees when I arrived," he explains. "Today, we are a publicly listed company with over 6600 employees. Although there have been some difficult and challenging times over the past few years, things have gone exceptionally well recently, and I anticipate an even brighter future ahead."

The day he joined the company and was informed of Chairman Wang's vision, Bill accepted it was going to be a long journey to reach listed company status. His first task was to bring in a senior management team, in order to start building a structure from the top down.

"Senior management is integral and is the core to any decision you make," insists Bill. "Most of the team I employed came from the operational team in my old company. Combined, they had a wide range of skills in a number of fields including finance, manufacturing and sales etc."

Over the years, the team has transformed Apex's customer base from 80% Japanese into an equal ratio of Western, Korean and Greater China. This has not only helped diversify risk, but also opened Apex to a much bigger market and moved them closer to becoming a fully fledged, international company. It is thanks to this policy that today, APEX is one of the major PCB (Printed Circuit Board) suppliers to many of the world's leading brands.

But Apex has had to diversify its products in order to maintain this success, in what has proved to be a volatile market over the past decade, as Bill explained.

"For the electronics industry, the price erosion and price competition never ends. When I started in this industry things were so →



different and with regards pricing today, we have certainly hit rock bottom.

“For example, the price of an LCD TV today is around 15% -20% of what it was 10 years ago. Those televisions use a large number of PCBs, so you can imagine the effect these fluctuations had on our business.”

The Apex team chose to diversify and start producing multi-layered PCBs. Having previously produced two-layer PCBs, they now produce up to 12 layers today. This technology has seen a steady rise over the past few years, thanks, in part, to the growth of smart cars, as Bill pointed out.

“The increasing demand for smart cars has proved integral to us. 70% of the PCBs in these types of vehicles are multi-layered and, with an average annual growth of around 4%, you can understand why we are concentrating and thriving in this sector.”

Apex has also gained from the volume of output in this area, which has been decreasing a great deal in other regions. Whereas Japan and then the Taiwanese and Koreans were the leading suppliers in this market, China quickly

“ The increasing demand for smart cars has proved integral to us ”

moved in and took the lead. However, due to the ongoing environmental policy restrictions in China, as well as increased labour costs, China’s ability to dominate has become dramatically reduced and Apex has plans to fill the void.

With the electronics sector in Asia accounting for around 50% of the total value of exports, Bill is planning further investments in the business, but even he is troubled by the current climate.

“We intend to invest around 4 billion baht in the next three to five years. However, the trade war between America and China has created a great deal of instability and although we do see plenty of opportunities for Asia, we remain fairly cautious about where things may go in the immediate future.”

This instability has not dampened Bill’s fu-



ture plans for Apex and he still has solid ideas about where the company is heading. With Apex’s revenue at approximately 370 million US dollars in 2018, they remain one of the largest conventional PCB makers in South East Asia and this year, Bill is targeting 10% growth.

“In the next five years, we have put a plan in place to increase revenue to up to 625 million US dollars. This growth will allow Apex to fulfil more orders and extend our product specifications. We also plan to increase automation, in order to offset labour costs and enhance the reliability of our products - Industry 4.0 is where we are heading.”

Bill is a firm believer in a strong team and maintains that, in order to provide an excellent product, a company requires excellence in its people.

“At our heart is discipline with the enforcement of the standard operating procedure,” says Bill. “This is passed down from top management to the supervisors and then finally to the basic operators. In 2016, we were awarded the AREA (Asia Responsible Enterprise Award) for investment in people, because at



Apex there are no lone heroes but a cohesive team - that is why we have ‘Teamwork’ printed on our uniforms.”

Bill sets himself similar high standards and maintains a philosophy that, if there is any problem, one should always look to oneself to get it fixed. Pushing back to the customers is not the answer; otherwise, he believes you are only pushing away the business. He has a simple but effective ethos, as he explained.

“I believe in the ‘hard touch’ when it comes to discipline, execution and quality control but a soft touch when it comes to care, understanding and patience. This has always proved to be the best approach for me.”

It certainly seems that Bill has the magic touch when it comes to maintaining Apex’s high success rate and turnover. Constantly searching for the next opportunity and ready to maximise his company’s strengths in this ever-fluctuating market. But as he clearly states, it is the people who have made Apex what it is today and when it comes to circuits, everyone knows that strong and reliable connections mean everything. 🔗



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