

TOP GLOVE- DRIVING VALUE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY- FORBES

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With the largest glovemaking capacity in the world, Top Glove has taken a step beyond simple manufacturing and carved out its place as a global high-tech producer. Today its customer base spans 195 countries worldwide.



Tan Sri Lim Wee Chai, Executive Chairman and Founder, Top Glove Corporation Berhad

Ask Tan Sri Lim Wee Chai, executive chairman and founder of the Top Glove Group of Companies what is the most important aspect of his rubber glove manufacturing business, and he gives an unequivocal response.

"That's easy, he said. "It is research. For us, no research equals no future."

Lim maintains that to stay competitive, his company has to continually invest in quality control and research and development, which for Top Glove doesn't just mean a small laboratory at its corporate headquarters. "We have 27 factories in total across the region," said Lim. "Each one has its own R&D department, and we have a specialist research center at our Factory 25 facility at Klang in Selangor."

This attention to on-the-ground detail is a hallmark of Top Glove's approach. It prides itself as an innovator and has invested heavily in electron scanning microscopes and

high-tech, material-analysis machinery as well as in a raft of smart, PhD-level researchers to help develop ever-more reliable, sophisticated and consistent quality gloves.

Automatic Results

But just as importantly, Lim's company also invests heavily in automation. This is in pursuit of both the highest quality and consistency of its glove products, and also — from a business perspective — of the highest output per worker. And uniquely, it doesn't buy the latest high-tech automated production machinery from around the world. Instead Top Glove designs its own production machinery, which is then built by Malaysian engineering experts.

"We have spent up to US\$5 million on automation in just a single factory," Lim said. "But we see the payback on that in less than three years. We get consistent quality, and most importantly, we do it ourselves."

Lim adds his company also recognizes the need to specialize. It's that constant searching for a better process and a better end product at the best possible price that keeps Lim and his team looking for innovations in gloves donned for jobs that range from cleaning kitchen sinks to performing surgeries.

With a production capacity running at 45 billion gloves a year from almost 500 production lines, and a 10,000-strong workforce across the region, it would be easy for the company to become complacent.

But Lim has other plans, noting that the company aims to boost its market share from 25% now to 30% by 2020 by concentrating on its core expertise. Any company can morph into a conglomerate and run multiple subsidiaries, but they won't all be at the top, he adds.

"We know it's not easy to stay number one once you get there," he said. "We have to work hard to stay healthy, keep the company healthy and look to the future."

It would seem that Top Glove is in safe hands. ■



Production line