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KONTON JATURAPATTARAPANIT

Keeping 'kool' in competition

INTERVIEW

ALFRED THA HLA

The myth behind how Konton Jaturapattarapanit brought V-KOOL window film to Thailand is something on a par with David slaying Goliath.

Goliath, in the guise of big-name corporations with unlimited financial resources, vied for the sole distributorship of V-KOOL, but were all turned down by the Singapore-based parent company.

Meanwhile, out of the blue, Konton, an ex-US Air Force Reserve pilot from San Bernadino, California, who was merely trying to earn a good grade for his MBA business project (with V-KOOL as his chosen product) ended up bagging the distributorship of V-KOOL in Thailand.

Konton flew to the US when he was 8 and graduated from the University of Utah with a degree in marketing before returning to Thailand for his MBA degree at Assumption University.

The enterprising entrepreneur-turned-student-with-big-dreams flew to Singapore but didn't have the financing for a deposit; but luckily a recently acquired credit card from the US did the job.

"The CEO [Andrew Kwan] didn't think I was serious when he asked me for a business proposal. Of course I was eager to show what I had learned in the classroom, so I went back and compiled a thick business proposal [gesturing with hands] on the marketing, finance and technical feasibility aspects.

"Other big companies [upper management] gave a verbal proposal that Andrew couldn't picture, as opposed to my written proposal, which included everything on how I intended to operate V-KOOL in Thailand," said Konton.



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In layman's terms, V-KOOL being a new product in Thailand, if managed by big companies, would become a small product in a big portfolio, so to speak.

"They [parent company] saw the fire and passion in me and asked for a US\$10,000 deposit. I happened to have a Chemical Bank gold card with a \$12,000 credit line, but I kept my cool and said I would meet them in a few days.

"I felt that this deal had to be sealed so I went to a UOB ATM machine on Orchard Road and took out the \$10,000. I could care less about the 3% surcharge and didn't even care how I was going to pay it back," said the then 25-year-old Konton.

For Konton, this was only the beginning of the end, so to speak, because after he launched V-KOOL in 1994, the phones didn't ring for three months.

"We didn't sell a single roll of film because V-KOOL was three to four times more expensive than the market leader [3M]. The only phone call was from the electric company," quipped Konton.

Konton's big break came when a *Tam Pai Doo* TV show aired his product on Dec 5 that year.

"The telephones started ringing and have never stopped ringing since," he said.

Despite its high price V-KOOL Corporation achieved a 4% market share last year and expects its business and market share to grow 6% by year's end.

"We grew our business by 50% last year and will be the market leader in three years with 30% market share."

Strong words indeed since V-KOOL captured only 4% market share last year with 32 V-KOOL dealerships, and is about three times more expensive than most of the 40 window film brands in Thailand.

The reason behind its steeper price is that V-KOOL was developed from space-

10 QUESTIONS

■ What is your favourite car?

MINI Cooper.

■ Favourite watch?

My Guess watch, which my wife bought for me.

■ Favourite destination?

Hua Hin.

■ Favourite pastime?

Golf. My handicap? (laughs)

■ Favourite restaurant?

Home Fresh [Italian] on Ramkhamhaeng Road. They use hydrofarm methods for their raw materials.

■ Favourite human being?

My mother.

■ Favourite athlete?

(hesitates) Tiger Woods... I still like him.

■ Greatest achievement?

Getting the Mrs to say yes to my marriage proposal.

■ Favourite vice?

Cabernet Sauvignon wine. You can't go wrong with it.

■ If you were in charge of automotive policy for a day, what would you do?

I'd prevent the type of window film [that absorbs heat] that places tension on the air conditioning system.

age technology (Stealth bomber) and is able to reflect heat while allowing light to enter the car. V-KOOL window film has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 300, while most sunblocks have an SPF of 30.

According to Konton, substandard window film places unnecessary stress on the air conditioner's compressor.

"V-KOOL is like a mirror while our

competition is like a sponge."

The reason why Konton is bullish on V-KOOL's ability to achieve 30% market share in the next three years is attributed to the strategic business alliances with car showrooms and dealerships.

V-KOOL is the most expensive window film in the market and should cost about 30,000 baht for a single installation when

compared to its much cheaper counterparts.

"Because of my ignorance I only concentrated on the quality of the product. Ignorance can be good sometimes, because it doesn't stop you from what you want to do."

That, in a nutshell, is how Goliath was slain by David.