Bobby Liu – CEO, Milton Holdings International, Hong Kong



Hong Kong has an exceptionally open mindset, which is essential to remaining an international powerhouse. We are open to new ideas and thrive on the freedom of speech and ideas that we have"

08.10.2018

Tags: Hong Kong, Milton, Packaging

Bobby Liu of Milton Holdings International outlines the company's evolution in the plastics and packaging industry and the specialized services it provides to clients in medtech and pharmaceuticals.

What is the story behind the creation of the company and how did you find such a niche in the market?

Although I was born in a less affluent area of Hong Kong, I had the opportunity to attend a technology high school, with a curriculum that covered all the different but basic concepts of industrial domains. I treasure my education because it exposed me to numerous aspects of different industries, including plastics. However, upon graduating high school, I did not have the opportunity to then attend university due to my family's financial background. Thus, I started work in junior roles, with the dream of saving enough capital to someday start my own business.

Shortly thereafter, I began working for a U.S company selling plastic during the 1980s, which was a turning point for the sales profits of that company. Sales of plastics soared, with mainland China buying in bulk from Hong Kong due to its proximity. This is where I saw the opportunity to start my own company. My brother and I founded Milton Plastics in 1990 in Hong Kong.

We began by buying and selling plastic in bulk, mainly to mainland China. Nevertheless, we continued to grow and opened our second office in Dongguan, China. Over the years, we grew from a basic trading company to one that owned a plastic manufacturing facility and was more involved across the supply chain.

In 2007, the decision was made to establish Milton Holdings International Ltd, which serves as the umbrella company for Milton Plastics. The motivation of the restructuring was to incorporate the different branches of the business, such as integrating rubber into our product portfolio under Milton Technologies. The growth of Milton has been exponential, but these different branches needed to be streamlined, partly to provide organizational clarity to our partners and also to raise the professionalism of the company.

Today, we have nine offices spread across Hong Kong and mainland China, with around 120 employees. In addition, we have joint ventures with a German company, as the sole distributor of their rubber flooring products in Hong Kong. Furthermore, we have extended our corporation to become a shareholder in our partner’s business in Malaysia.

What are the main services you offer your clients here in Hong Kong?

We have transitioned into a company that prioritizes professional serves through specialized domain expertise, distancing ourselves from simply supplying materials. Milton Plastics has specialized in distributing high-performance polymers and engineering plastics for almost three decades. However, innovation is the key to the future. Not only do we support our clients in supplying high-quality materials, but we are going the extra mile to offer consultancy services, enhancing the customer’s experience. We are becoming a bridge between business partners, manufacturers, and brand owners. Furthermore, we offer project management and technical support for our customers, taking a holistic approach to each and every project.

Milton Plastics covers many different industries in its portfolio. What is the importance of the healthcare sector for Milton Plastics?

We cover several market segments, with the most important being automotive, followed by healthcare as well as other industrial equipment. Each region in China has unique demands for industries, but we are also seeing the demand of medical innovation spanning to all corners of China and Hong Kong.

The healthcare and life sciences sector covers a larger spectrum, ranging from medical devices and biotechnology to pharmaceutical packaging and so on. However, we are wary of spreading ourselves too thin, so we focus mainly on supplying and servicing medical devices companies and stakeholders.

Our sales strategy in the healthcare sector focuses primarily on medical devices, including equipment in hospitals, laboratory centers, and aftercare equipment and accessories for patients.

What are the main advantages of Hong Kong for the company like yourself that is deeply rooted here?

Hong Kong has an exceptionally open mindset, which is essential to remaining an international powerhouse. We are open to new ideas and thrive on the freedom of speech and ideas that we have.

Furthermore, the country is inundated with talent, which is vital in an international market. There are so many individuals that speak multiple languages, which continues to push Hong Kong as the world-renowned phenomenon that many recognize and aspire to replicate in their own countries.

Looking at the Greater Bay Area Initiative, how do you aim to capitalize on this?

With regards to the Greater Bay Area and its “9+2” cities, these cities are characterized by their own strengths and capabilities, making it easy to direct our attention to the relevant areas. Some areas are more advanced in terms of chemicals, finance and automotive for example, but the government is yet to decide which area will be best to extensively promote healthcare. In my opinion, and looking at past records, the main cities will be Shenzhen and Guangdong.

We are still waiting for the final developments of the plan, and everything is mostly still on paper. This will bring many opportunities to Milton Plastics, and we will play our part in promoting the area as a prime location for innovation, especially in the automotive and healthcare sector. Plastics have over 100 years of history, but we need to see more breakthroughs in innovation, so the next steps in this initiative will be crucial for further development. We have the talent here in Hong Kong, remaining as a vital tool to mainland China, and increasing its relevance as a stepping stone into the country.

What are the main trends in the industry that you think will reshape the country and the service you provide

One of the main trends I am most excited about is 3D Printing, which is set to revolutionize the technical world of the plastic industry. The main advantages of this tool are that complex designs can now easily be created, and it can lower the cost of manufacturing.

In Asia, 3D Printing is well known. However, few are truly acting and getting involved, but are instead merely observing its potential instead of capitalizing on it. Here at Milton, we are trying to connect the end user with the advantages of 3D Printing. We also have a strong relationship will all of our partners, and we have learned a lot from about this technique. We are aiming to recommend to the government more investments into 3D printing, and other services that can really transform the efficiency of a business.

Looking to the future, we have big data and robotics that will serve as a great aide to the industry, but we cannot invest our time in everything. For Milton, 3D Printing is now booming in the market, now that is available to our customers, they are demanding more information. We have held many successful seminars informing our clients about 3D Printing, showing that we are present in the developments of technology in our industry and that we are willing to innovate our services.

We will continue to use tools like 3D Printing to serve and engage more with our clients and customers, experimenting with how far we can go with our service offering to them.

What makes you the partner of choice in the healthcare landscape?

We are the partner of choice because we stand by our strong values. Firstly, we have a clear methodology, and our impressive team is able to provide a superior service built on this framework. This comes hand-in-hand with an openness to embrace change. There are some 500 to 600 plastics companies in China and Hong Kong, but they are simply traders and do not have a technical team, an R&D team or a supply chain. Some of them do not even keep stock, because they do not want to take the risk.

At Milton, we have nearly 30 years of experience and quality expertise and can easily use our data to inform a customer whether or not their design will be successful. We have the background knowledge of certain design requirements, which this enables us to offer advanced expertise, meaning we can precisely suggest different types of plastic materials that are appropriate for each client and their unique needs. The success rate on a new idea being launched into the market is

around 20 percent. Thus, it is essential that our engineers are ready to asses any design, and again this comes from our prior knowledge of the industry and other designs we have successfully helped to create.

The business model we have in place is unique, which we know that our multinational partners highly appreciate.

All of our customers, past, and present, trust in our culture of accountability, fostering a strong trust that goes beyond our organization. They perceive Milton as a quality “one-stop service”, providing consultancy as well as materials at an exceptional standard.

Our main market is China, mainly due to its size and potential, but to entertain and maintain our service there is a big ask. However, our business strategy can also take Milton throughout the APAC region. We currently have several different projects ongoing in countries like Malaysia and Singapore, and we aim to continue expanding our reach.

See more interviews