RESCUE 911: THE INITIAL STAGE OF REVIVING MYDIN PKE EMPORIUM

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This case was written by Marlin Marissa Malek Abdul Malek, Mohd Nizam Abdul Kadir, Abdullah Lin, Nazahah Abdul Rahim and Shahrin Saad, Universiti Utara Malaysia. It is intended to be used as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a management situation.

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Nizar’s mind was wandering off being preoccupied with an earlier conversation that he had this morning. He was on his way home after picking Nani, his daughter from nursery. His adorable 3 year old daughter who was talking to him animatedly telling him about what happened at nursery today shouted with anger “Daddy, you are not listening to me. Meow, the cat at school scratched me today. Look Daddy, it is still bleeding.” “Oh sorry my dear, let me see your arm. It’s not that bad. Let’s put a plaster when we get home”, replied Nizar to Nani. She continued her chatter oblivious to the fact that her Dad is not listening to her. His mind is still thinking on the new project assigned to him by the senior management team (i.e. the steering committee) of MYDIN Headquarters (HQ) to revive the flagging MYDIN PKE to a profit-making emporium. He still remembers the statement made by Datuk Hj. Azeez Ali, the Managing Director of MYDIN via the phone, “I strongly believe you can do it, you are one of our best managers. We do not need an external consultant to do it. We know you can transform MYDIN PKE to a profit-making centre!”

MYDIN Holdings Berhad (MYDIN) projected accumulated annual revenue of RM3.0 billion in 2013 with a profit nearly RM24 million. MYDIN has enjoyed sales growth approximately at 12 percent per annum until 2012. However, forty five outlets performed quite badly which had resulted in a significant drop in sales performance in 2013. The 45 outlets comprised of 3 emporiums, 2 supermarkets and 40 mini markets. One of the 45 outlets was MYDIN Pekan Emporium (MYDIN PKE) which recorded a significant net loss of RM668,756. This poor performance has affected MYDIN’s overall plan to go for public listing.

MYDIN senior management team formed a Steering Committee to review and address issues that would have contributed to the overall financial performance of MYDIN. Some of the more crucial items for MYDIN to work on was to intervene and stop MYDIN PKE from making more losses, revive and convert MYDIN PKE to be a profit-making emporium. They should find a suitable project leader and this project needs to be executed immediately. Hence, Nizar, one of MYDIN’s highly reputed Senior Managers had been assigned to lead the business turnaround project at MYDIN PKE. His mission was to identify and determine the reason behind MYDIN PKE’s dismal performance and to initiate reviving efforts for MYDIN PKE to revert to its former glory with the ultimate aim of improving the overall sales performance in ensuring that MYDIN could take care of their shareholders and also go for public listing.

Nizar was a Senior Manager at MYDIN franchise outlet located in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan. He had 12 years relevant working experiences in retail industry at various areas such as setting up new outlets, project management, merchandizing and operating outlet. He possessed good entrepreneurship skills when he led the MYDIN Mart Nilai and his outlet (i.e. MYDIN Mart Nilai) received a number of prestigious awards, including the Anugerah Kedai Pilihan Rakyat 2013, Anugerah Kedai Harga Patut for two years (in 2010 and 2014) and Sijil Prestasi Cemerlang PUNB 2009. He also gained experiences in various companies such as Permodalan Nasional Berhad as business consultant and Kumpulan Darul Ehsan Berhad as QA & Procedure Manager – prior joining MYDIN Group. Nizar obtained a Degree in Marketing from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM).

The Industry – Wholesale and Retail

Wholesale and retail business is among the biggest contributors towards the GDP of Malaysia. These sectors registered the sales value of RM121 billion in 2015 providing employment for 1.4 million people
(Department of Statistics, Malaysia). These sectors are categorized under the Service Sector Industry by the Malaysian government which are mainly divided into three components, namely:

- a. Wholesale and retail trade; restaurants and accommodations (WRRA)
- b. Finance, insurance, real estate and business services (FIRB)
- c. Transport and storage; and communication (TSC)

In September 2010, the Government had introduced the wholesale and retail sector as one of the 12 National Key Economics Areas (NKEA) under the initiative of Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), a high priority programme with the goal of boosting Malaysian economy and for becoming a developed-nation by 2020. The other objective of ETP is to alleviate Malaysia’s status as one of the world’s best shopping destinations.

According to Price Waterhouse Cooper Report 2015-16, the retail industries were expected to grow by 5.4 percent in 2014 with the overall transaction of USD93 billion compared to the statistics of 2013 (6.4%; USD89 billion) – Refer Exhibit 1.

For the years 2013 and 2014, Malaysian businesses including retailers were subjected to two important policies by the government; the introduction of minimum wage and imposing of Goods and Services Tax (GST). In January 2013, Malaysia had introduced a minimum salary scheme in which the basic rate of RM650 for a general worker had been increased to RM900, for Peninsular Malaysia and RM800 for East Malaysia. These increases equalled to 38 per cent of increased wage. Employers had no choice but to accept these changes which sadly have caused their operational cost to increase and their profit margin to decrease. Many of the small businesses were at risk and some of them had to cease operations or had changed their focus to other forms of businesses that required lesser people. Some companies even had to go back to the drawing boards to re-strategize in order to ensure they remain in business.

The GST was officially imposed on 1st January 2014 by the Malaysian government. Despite many assurances given by the Minister of Domestic Trade, Consumerism and Cooperative that the price of most products would become cheaper, the price of consumer products kept on increasing from time to time. GST is supposed to replace sales and service tax (SST) which varied for different products; at a maximum rate of 12 percent to a flat rate of 6 percent. However, manufacturers and producers insisted that the increasing costs of raw material, fuel hike and other factors had resulted in them hiking the product prices. Ultimately, the consumers suffered and had to fork out extra money due to the price increase.

The minimum wage policy had put a real blow on the profit and loss of labour-intensive industries like manufacturing, agriculture, construction and retailing. However, some argue that better wages would increase the morale of employees and boost productivity, both positive for employers. Meanwhile, those against the minimum wage argued that it interfered with the market demand, increases business costs and lead to some inflationary impact as higher costs will be transferred to consumers.

The government also admitted that certain products might suffer from price hike. Despite the issue surrounding minimum wage policy, the number of products involved was very minimal. On the other hand, some manufacturers had increased the price ahead of the date of implementation that caused price to increase before the implementation of GST. As a result, sales volume had fallen in the aftermath and affected the revenue of many companies.
The Competitor in Retail Industry

The retail sector can be considered as a fragmented industry due to geographical influence. The rural areas are still dominated by traditional stores. On the contrary, in urban areas, the trend showed that the markets are more organized and mostly cater for premium brands. For household and groceries subsector, hypermarket establishments were the popular choice due to its convenience, easy accessibility and “all under one roof” merchandizing. Based on a 2015 PriceWaterhouseCoopers Report, Dairy Farm, a Hong Kong-based subsidiary dominated this subsector with 3 chain formats in 2013: Giant (which had 78 hypermarkets and 72 supermarkets), Cold Storage (17 outlets) and premium market, Mercato (2 outlets). Tesco, the UK-based retailer has 46 hypermarkets; and AEON Jusco (Japan) had increased its share with 58 outlets after taking over from Carrefour in 2012.

For the local companies, MYDIN had strengthened its strategy by having 14 hypermarkets, 38 departmental stores/emporiums, 2 premium outlets, 6 franchise outlets, 52 supermarkets and 8 convenience stores. (Figures for Mydin are as at 2014). Parkson Grand, a subsidiary of local conglomerate, Lion Group dominated the departmental stores segment with 39 outlets mostly located in the mall of major cities. Other small players are Econsave, Jaya Grocers, Billion, TF Mart and Hero Mart are mostly located in small cities and towns.

In the future, there is still room for growth for every player as this industry would keep growing due to its nature – where people need to fulfill their daily needs. In addition, the current development at major cities showed the market is going to be dominated by hypermarkets - one stop centre that provides new trend for modern merchandizing, a one-stop avenue for family shopping and leisure. However, having said that, players need to be mindful of the growing influence of online shopping especially by the younger generation in urban areas.

History of MYDIN Holdings Berhad

MYDIN Holdings Bhd. previously known as Syarikat MYDIN Mohamed is a local retailing company, steadily growing from a small family business in Penang selling merchandize such as toys to a well-established Malaysian-owned business throughout Malaysia. The founder of this company is Mr. MYDIN Mohamed (also known as Uncle MYDIN). In 1945, he started a small business in Georgetown, Pulau Pinang, then he moved to Kelantan to set up his very first shop in 1957. Later in 1979, he again moved to Terengganu and his eldest son Mr. Murad Ali had set up a branch at Kuala Terengganu. From then on, MYDIN has established itself to be a reliable and trustworthy retailer with their branches offering a variety of merchandise at affordable prices. In 1986, Uncle MYDIN’s second son, Datuk Hj. Azeez Ali who had never shown any interest in the family business came back into the family fold and helped to open their third branch in Jalan Masjid India, Kuala Lumpur and together with his three brothers, MYDIN had steadfastly moved forward and continuously expanded their business.

MYDIN business model come in several forms namely hypermarkets, emporiums, mini markets, 24 hours convenience stores, bazaars and complexes (see Exhibit 2). In year 2013, they have 110 outlets with 10,500 employees and hope to emerge as the best home-grown company in distributing halal goods and services. At the beginning of their business, MYDIN only sold non-food items such as textiles and bags known as soft-line products. For the record, the hard-line products include stationery, electrical, toys, bags, and more. When they opened their first hypermarket in USJ Subang Jaya, they sold full range of products that include fresh foods items such as chicken, vegetables, fruit, drinks, beverages and confectioneries. The food items also began appearing in other branches such as mini market and bazaar.
Business Concept

As per Exhibit 3, each MYDIN branch has their own business category, based on the capacity of goods traded. In 2014, MYDIN had 114 retail chain outlets nationwide which consist of:

a) 14 hypermarkets – one stop shopping centre under one roof. It provides all necessary items inclusive of non-food and food items. The sales area was about 55,000 sq. ft.
b) 32 emporiums – selling several product lines without fresh foods and the size approximately 20 to 30,000 sq. ft.
c) 6 franchise MYDIN Mart (emporium)
d) 52 supermarkets / mini markets (48 MYDIN, 2 MYDIN Bazaar & 2 Sam’s Groceria - premium minimarkets – selling groceries, fresh and wet with medium scale size of stores (10 – 30,000 sq. ft.)
e) 8 Convenience stores – under the flagship of My Mart, a small outlet around 1,400 sq. feet operating 24 hours every day. Similar concept with 7 Eleven.
f) 2 premium café – Sam’s Deli (F&B)

MYDIN was also entrusted by the government to operate the national discount mini markets, which are Kedai Rakyat 1 Malaysia (KR1M) under the public-private partnership arrangement. As of 2014, there were 113 KR1M outlets throughout Malaysia.

Recognition

Based on the overall performance, both MYDIN Holdings as a company and the Managing Director of MYDIN Holdings, Dato’ Ameer Ali had received 40 awards and some of the prestigious awards received were:

- Corporate Social Responsibility Leadership Award 2012 – Young Entrepreneur Organization Malaysia
- Special Award for Industry Collaboration 2012 – UUM
- Brand Laureate Top 10 Master Award 2011- SMEs Chapter Award for Most Preferred Brand in Retail-Hypermarket
- Retail & Courtesy Standard of Excellence Accreditation Program 2011/2012 – MRA
- The People’s Choice Putra Brand Award 2011
- Excellence Brand – The 8th Asia Pacific International Entrepreneur Award 2009
- The Malaysia Business Leadership Award 2010-Retail Chain Sector E&Y
- The E-50 Enterprise 2007 – SMIDEC & Delloitte
- Fair Price Retailer- KPDNKK from 2003 till 2014
- Anugerah Tokoh Kepenggunaan Islam 2008 -PPIM

The awards received reflected the recognition of a Malaysian company that has successfully strived and competed with the big multinational competitors such as Tesco, Carrefour, Jusco, and Giant – as well with other local players such as Econsave and Billion.

MYDIN Emporium (MYDIN PKE)

MYDIN Emporium (MYDIN PKE) is located at the royal town of Pekan, Pahang. MYDIN PKE rented eight double-storey shop lots in the commercial area of Pekan. The emporium started operating its business in September 2005. The size of the emporium was about 22,400 square feet and the product assortments were more to non-food merchandize; with no fresh items sold. Pekan then was
populated with approximately 112,000 people with the main activities were agriculture, plantation and livestock. The majority of them fell under the low and middle income categories.

MYDIN PKE was led by a young Assistant Manager named Bakri holding a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration with less than one year of working experience. He had been appointed as Management Trainee at one of MYDIN’s outlets for 4 months. Due to his superb performance during internship program, MYDIN has decided to hire him as MYDIN PKE manager in January 2014. This big and hasty decision were made since the current MYDIN PKE manager had tendered his resignation on a 24-hour notice. Taking in an outsider may take a longer time. Therefore, MYDIN needed to hire someone who already know the operation of MYDIN PKE and how to manage the staff. MYDIN PKE had 64 employees and 50 of them were on a 2-rotating shift. As such, Bakri took the reign of MYDIN PKE when the sales were on a declining trend.

Since the inception, MYDIN PKE enjoyed the sales growth of about 5% to 7% a year. However, the growth could not be sustained and the sales started declining in 2012 and 2103. Based on internal report, the sales for this outlet is shown at Exhibit 4.

The significant movement and volatility of sales figure normally affect the profit and loss of any business. As for the wholesale emporium, the huge declining of the revenue would definitely reduce the profit for the respective year. This was also due to the nature of MYDIN’s business, which was selling at a wholesale price instead of retail’s price. MYDIN has targeted for small margin and expected high volume of sales in order to make profit. When the sales volume drastically dropped, MYDIN is unable to make profit since the other costs such as operation and fixed costs remains unchanged. Therefore, MYDIN suffered a big lost during that particular year – See Exhibit 5 for MYDIN PKE’s Financial Report.

The Initial Turnaround Journey

Nizar was assigned by the steering committee as an internal consultant or project leader for the initial revival initiatives for MYDIN PKE. He needed to turn the loss to profit from year 2014 onwards. In addition, he needed to train and mentor the existing MYDIN PKE branch manager, Bakri on how to better run the emporium and manage the stakeholders. When Nizar came to MYDIN PKE, he was working closely with Bakri and gave advice on certain procedures and issues that could be further improved. There were days that Nizar spent ‘shadowing’ Bakri when he went for his ‘walkabouts’ in the emporium and took notes. Later, he will advise Bakri on the better ways in handling certain issues with the employees. He realized that the top management of MYDIN Holdings failed to put management succession program in place. They simply appointed Bakri, a fresh graduate as the MYDIN PKE branch manager without providing him sufficient knowledge and skills prior to holding the branch manager position. They assumed that this newbie could perform the job due to his stellar performance as an intern. Unfortunately, Bakri failed from the beginning due to the lack of relevant knowledge and skills in managing the people and the whole operation. As a young and new manager, despite him being excited and raring to go, he still had a lot to learn in business operations and people management. Personally, Nizar felt that what Bakri was lacking in terms of experience, he made that up through determination and hard-work. He was very receptive of whatever suggestions that Nizar put forth as he knew that Nizar was a very senior manager and his Mydin Mart Nilai, under his management and leadership was doing very well. On several occasions, Nizar noticed that when Bakri was interacting with his staff, they were giving some negative body language which for Nizar indicated that they were not too happy with Bakri and how he was running the branch. To him, Bakri still has a lot to learn especially in terms of managing people.
What Happened to MYDIN PKE?

The sudden departure of MYDIN PKE branch manager in the beginning of January 2014 forced the MYDIN management team to quickly appoint someone to lead the branch. Due to his superb performance during internship program, Bakri was selected to be the new branch manager for MYDIN PKE in January 2014. Since he was a fresh graduate, MYDIN had offered him as Assistant Manager first instead of the manager position. Bakri had just graduated from a local university majoring in Business Administration. Soon after graduation, he was offered as Management Trainee at one of MYDIN’s outlets (i.e. not MYDIN PKE) for 4 months.

To rub salt in the wound, MYDIN PKE was severely understaffed! As at January 2014, MYDIN PKE had 64 staff, 50 of them working in shift period (2 shifts rotating) and the rest work normal office hours. The overall manpower planning was 88 staff. The penchant of job-hopping amongst their younger workers made it harder for them to retain staff and groom them to be promoted. The turnover rate especially for store-workers was high.

Nizar contacted Sarah and Azmi to know more about the situation at MYDIN PKE. Sarah and Azmi are attached to MYDIN PKE since the opening of MYDIN PKE. Both of them were supervisors at MYDIN PKE. Sarah was the operational supervisor and Azmi was the store supervisor. Prior to joining MYDIN PKE, Sarah worked under Nizar at MYDIN Mart, Nilai and Azmi was his friend at MYDIN Holdings, Kuala Lumpur.

Below are some information gathered from his conversations with both Sarah and Azmi. As they were experienced staff, Nizar valued their input especially on the operations issues, staffing and input gathered from the feedback from other staff and customers. The issues could be grouped into six (6) areas as follows:

**Operational Issues including Supply Chain and Inventory Management aspects**

There were lack of supervision and enforcement by the supervisors which caused the items to be always out-of-stock (OOS). MYDIN PKE got its supply from the HQ warehouse. HQ warehouse was responsible to deliver the items to MYDIN PKE before the items go OOS. When OOS was not properly managed and controlled, the outlet could not make sales. The situation worsened when the basic items normally needed by the customers were not displayed since the items was OOS. On the other hand, some of the important items were already OOS at the headquarter warehouse causing long waiting time at MYDIN PKE. The record showed reduction in delivery compliance between HQ warehouse and MYDIN PKE from 72% to 66%.

For ordering system, MYDIN PKE used the Internet broadband leased from a private company. However, the Internet was slow in transmitting data (i.e. the order) to the headquarters resulting in delay in issuing purchase order (PO). It was observed that manual recording for receiving items were still practiced. In addition, the music that was played loudly in the background had caused disturbance to manual checking and recording. As a result, the staff had to wait for manual record to be completed before they could collect the items for sales. In addition, they have also realized that when items arrived within the same week, the deliveries created mountains at the receiving area where many of the boxes were left unattended and blocked the walkways. That in itself posed health and safety risk in case of emergencies. Also, manual record could contribute to error in item counting.
Working Environment

The outlet consisted of 2 storeys equipped with toilet and other facilities. Unfortunately, the first floor toilet was forced to be closed under the direction of Bakri ever since he found some staff had misused the toilet on the first floor for smoking, resting and loitering. As a result, the staffs who work at the first floor would now need to spend more time going to toilet at the ground level. With heavy traffic, the toilet would be congested and unclean. In addition, some of the staff felt that they did not have a proper toilet and resting area. They felt stressed and experience unpleasant working environment.

In addition, the backroom and the storage areas were quite humid. There was no air-conditioner installed. They only used normal air suction and blower machines for better ventilation of air flow. Due to stuffiness, many staff were reluctant to enter inside the backroom and storage areas to get the items.

Lack of Skills and Experience

As a new kid in the retail business, Bakri was still lacking in understanding on how to analyse reports and make use of the data for remedial and improvement actions. There were many useful reports such as Top 100 sellable item or the report on ABC items. For instance, ‘A’ items are items mostly needed by customers/bestselling; ‘B’ items are the items that always received customer complaint; and ‘C’ items refer to basic wholesale items. It was also found that selling key units (SKU) was not correctly done where category of items were mixed between A, B and C. In addition, 3 out of the 4 supervisors were also new and have not fully understand the workflow at MYDIN PKE. Bakri was also inexperienced in ‘reading between the lines’ and interpreting staffs’ behaviours.

External Environment

The increase in high living cost resulted in lesser the spending power. People tend to use money for more important items and saved some for rainy days. In addition, MYDIN’s competitor such as Giant had its operation at Pekan Shopping Mall and offered better service and competitive price. As a result, some of MYDIN PKE’s customer shifted to Giant. One customer lamented “so frustrating to jostle for parking space and when you go to the shelves, products are not there”. Another customer just shrugged and left his shopping items in his trolley and went out of the store complaining that the cashier “took forever to scan the items and line was so long..Go to Giant better”.

Manpower

Apart from staffs had to work double shifts, MYDIN PKE also was experiencing the high turnover rate especially amongst the store-workers and younger generation. In addition, some of the staff were not willing to work overtime due to family and other commitments. Most of the staff especially the foreign workers, security guards and cashiers had to work for longer hours due to staff shortage. The normal working is 8 hours but due to shortage of staff, most of them had to work overtime. Some of them worked 12 hours a day, for 20 to 26 days a month. Despite having some extra money from the overtime payment, staff felt stressed and were physically and mentally tired due to the long hours which then prompted them to leave the company. Sarah and Azmi also witnessed staff lashing out to each other and to poor, unsuspecting customers.
Facility for Customers

Due to the shortage of trolleys, some customers would buy fewer items from their list or shop elsewhere. The staffs are unable to restock the needed items on rack if the trolleys are unavailable to transport the items. There was no escalator to move from ground floor to first floor. People needed to use staircase which caused inconvenience to them. Furthermore, some of the items were without price tags and heavily influenced on the refusal of customers in purchasing these items. There were 7 counters for cashiers but most of the time, only 4 to 5 counters were opened due to staff shortage. Some customers just left their items in the trolleys and walked out from the outlet since they were not willing to wait in the long queues.

Go or No Go?

Nizar was given a month to diagnose the problems and propose relevant strategies for the initial reviving efforts for MYDIN PKE and share them with the steering committee. He was challenged to make the initial turnaround within 3 months. Is this project going to be good to cement his influence and guaranteeing a solid career with MYDIN or a suicide mission? Nizar has always been praised for his good observation skills and entrepreneurial mindset. He has also being hailed as one of MYDIN’s ‘next-in-line’ leaders. However, he is not sure whether he could deliver what the steering committee wanted in the given time frame. While he was mulling on this dilemma, he suddenly heard his daughter crying and cries of “Daddy, Daddy” shifted his attention to the present. To his dismay, Nani was lying face-down on the steps at the entrance of the house. She fell down while trying to navigate her way to the front door tripping herself on her untied shoelaces. Nizar quickly ran to his daughter, calmed her and carried her inside. “It’s okay Princess, you will be fine. Let’s go in and I shall get the plaster for your arm and we will see what else needs some tender loving care”.
Exhibit 1: Malaysian Retail Sales Outlook 2011-2015

<table>
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<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tr>
<td>Retail sales volume growth (% p.a.)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Forecast)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>(Forecast)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Retail sales (USD million)</td>
<td>78,260</td>
<td>82,554</td>
<td>87,939</td>
<td>93,295</td>
<td>106,831</td>
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Source: Economist Intelligent Unit, BIMB Research

Exhibit 2: Business Structure of MYDIN Holdings Berhad

Exhibit 3: MYDIN's Business Concept
**Exhibit 4:** Extracted from MYDIN PKE Financial Performance Summary (Annual Sales)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Profit/(Loss) (RM)</th>
<th>P&amp;L Growth (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>177,406</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>116,406</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>(668,756)</td>
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*Source: Audited Financial Report 2010-2013*

**Exhibit 5:** Extracted from MYDIN PKE Financial Performance Summary

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Annual Sales (RM)</th>
<th>Sales Growth (%)</th>
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<td>2013</td>
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*Source: 2013’s MYDIN PKE Sales record*