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## MARKETING CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING PERLIS TOURISM INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY OF UNIC ASTANA HOLIDAYS A TRAVEL AGENCY IN PERLIS.

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This case was written by Azilah Kasim and Hisham Dzakiria, 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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On the morning of March 29, 2012, Mr. Anas Akmal Arshad, Head of Finance at UNIC Group of Companies was discussing with Armanwadi Sh Hj Abdul Latif, Executive Chairman UNIC Group of Companies at UNIC Avenue HQ in Sintok Kedah regarding the dormant companies that need to be audited for year-end closing in December 2011. Mr. Anas is an accountant by profession. At the time, Mr. Anas Akmal was just recently hired to work with UNIC Group for about two weeks. His previous employment was as an external auditor in Ernst & Young, the biggest audit firm in Malaysia. When Mr. Anas was checking the name list of dormant companies, which are related companies by common directors, one name in particular jumped out from the list. The company, UNIC Astana Holidays, made Mr. Anas Akmal feel excited for some reason. Travel and event organizing have always been among his passions. Thus he felt sorry that this company, which he thought has lots of potential, be a waste. This dormant company was registered in February 1985 as a travel agency. It has acquired a complete list of licenses for Outbound Operator, Inbound Operator and Ticketing from the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia. Therefore Mr. Anas wondered why the company has not operated for so long and why no one is interested to run this company again. He jokingly asked the Executive Chairman if he be allowed to take over and run this company for UNIC. The Executive Chairman was surprised, but decided to give Mr. Anas a chance. On April 23, 2012, officially Mr. Anas Akmal was appointed as one of the Director Company for UNIC and was entrusted to helm the UNIC Astana Holidays. He started with zero knowledge about managing a travel agency. He attended a few seminars and courses to upgrade his tourism knowledge. "It is not an easy things to do when you don't have experience", he often complained. His biggest challenge was to gain the trust and confidence of the key players in the industry. It was hard for him to get projects or be involved with events organized by the government travel agencies. People didn't want to get to know what his business was offering. He also observes that most tour operators like him were left on their own to promote Perlis tourism offerings. News about any major state tourism events often came late to tour operators. He also had to put up with negative competition at the beginning of his business operation. Therefore it was difficult for him to establish any partnerships or collaborations that could help his business. "Perhaps its because I am just as a small player in the industry" he concluded. "I need to gain their trust and confidence first, I need to prove myself and the company's services. Thus Mr. Anas needed an action plan to make UNIC Astana Holidays and his team be recognized as an important player in Perlis Tourism. They needed to identify the root causes of the problems and strategize on how to address or minimize each problem. They needed to position their company well, so that their voices can become a force to reckon for in Perlis Tourism.

## **Introduction**

Nowadays, tourism has been considered by many as the most vital segments of the worldwide economy particularly in terms of tourists spending. Disbursement from international and local domestic tourism are over a trillion of dollar annually, generating multiple types of support businesses that help the industry grows. This happens despite global problems such as terrorism, inflation, economic turmoil, currency fluctuations and recession, and many other factors that can negatively affect the industry's growth.

As a relatively newcomer in the industry, UNIC Astana Holidays is excited to join in and reap benefits from the continued robust growth of tourism in Malaysia. The management knows that the tourism industry in Malaysia has experienced significant progress and advancement over the last few decades. They are aware about the abundance of tourism resources in the country and feel that these resources should be promoted and shared with the global community in the form of tourism activities. The introduction of the borderless world concept and the advancement of the internet meant that there is now an enhanced accessibility to information for tourists everywhere and that all

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