



Mings Products & Services



This case was compiled by the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Guyana as part of a study of progressive Caribbean businesses.

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Abstract

Since Mings Products & Services Ltd (MPS) was established in 1990 at Tiger Bay - a then depressed community in Georgetown, Guyana - the company has engaged with the community to help it reach a higher standard of living, particularly through a series of strategic donations to further education. This has ensured the physical security of the business as well as the company's ability to secure loyal, motivated and skilled labour to support its growth over the years.

The Company

MPS was established by Stanley Ming in 1990 and is the exclusive Guyana distributor for the entire range of products manufactured by Yamaha Motor Co. Ltd of Japan, including outboard engines, motorcycles, generators, water pumps and water vehicles.

The Company is also the exclusive distributor for the entire range of motor vehicles manufactured by Mitsubishi Motors Corporation, - Japan. MPS provides all the necessary parts and repair services for the products they supply. MPS distributes a range of construction and building materials and owns a modern fleet of heavy equipment including excavators, bulldozers and loaders.

With a staff of four, limited financial and other resources, MPS was originally established in a section of a rented building in Tiger Bay, Georgetown, Guyana. Now, 15 years later, MPS employs 50 people and has expanded to encompass three large properties in the area.

The Motivation

When the company started up in Tiger Bay it was clear to MPS that the area suffered high rates of crime. Blatant robberies were common. *"Back then, Tiger Bay was known for 'choke and rob' because that was what happened to people that went there,"* owner Stanley Ming explains. MPS recognised that security was a major issue for the company, both in terms of the safety of its customers and employees, and the risk of theft.

Faced with this challenge, Mr Ming framed the choices thus: *"We had the choice of investing in high walls and barbed wire or investing in the community."* MPS chose to invest in the community, adopting a management philosophy focused on developing good business-community relations and uplifting the quality of life in the neighbourhood.

Convinced of its utmost importance to development, including the reduction of crime, MPS chose to target education with the company's strategic donations. Mr Ming observed that: *"Education is the solution to various problems currently facing Guyana and other developing countries. The success stories of today - most of which are from South East Asia - have been based on education. By dealing with education you pre-empt a series of other problems."*

This focus was also chosen based on the reasoning that it would allow MPS to not only recruit loyal and motivated employees, but also skilled workers with the capacity for further development. It would also, in the long term, assist in the development of a larger client base for the company's goods and services.

Taking Action

The company's longstanding close relationship with the community began in 1991 when it took the initiative to contact community members, particularly the elder leaders, to identify their most pressing needs. Many problems were

identified, including drug addiction, poverty, crime and a lack of education.

MPS has helped address the issues in various ways, including developing a community-based security group, providing drug-rehab services and actively hiring and training disadvantaged youths from the community. However, education has been at the forefront, since the company considers this to be the primary long-run solution to most problems.

One of the more elaborate initiatives undertaken by MPS was to form a partnership with Clico Life Insurance Company of Guyana in 1998 to provide an insurance scheme for school-going children in the Tiger Bay area. The project thus both protects the youth and encourages them to complete their schooling.

Both Clico and MPS recognised the potential impact of supporting educational programmes within the community and so the partnership established a medical system that provides insurance coverage for over 160 children.

The insurance policies cover school children for accidental, medical and dental expenses, dismemberment and death benefits. The insurance scheme has already resulted in higher school attendance and completion rates. In fact, two young ladies covered in the 1998 medical system obtained outstanding academic standing (top 5% of the country) and are currently employed by MPS.

MPS has also engaged in many other ventures to promote education, including partnering with Banks DIH and Shell Antilles Guyana Ltd. to provide school children living in the riverain

areas surrounding Bartica with a large fibreglass boat and engine (valued at G\$1.4 million or US\$7,000) to ensure that they can attend secondary school in Bartica. Prior to this transportation facility, children from the various communities tended to finish schooling at the primary level.

Business Benefits

MPS has enjoyed many benefits of engaging in education promotion and community development. Having developed a reputation as a business that cares for the community, MPS enjoys a very limited need for security systems, since members of the community respect and appreciate the company's efforts. According to Mr Ming, *"Our continuous investments in the community have certainly paid off. We could not be where we are today had we not worked with the community the way we have."*

Vision for the Future

MPS has directly benefited from its philosophy of community development. However, the company faces new issues that threaten the sustainability of the business, including the lack of a growing population and the increased effects of the 'brain-drain' phenomenon felt not only in Guyana, but throughout the Caribbean.

Recently MPS has experienced the loss of trained and highly skilled employees to migration. Consequently, the company may be forced to focus on its short-term potential and forfeit its current long-term aspirations.