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Reinventing Insurance Distribution **Under The Sun**

Exclusive Interview with Raymond Lew



Raymond Lew
CEO & President / Country Head
Sun Life Malaysia

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Exclusive Interview with Raymond Lew



Sun Life Malaysia Assurance Berhad (Sun Life Malaysia) has a new Chief Executive Officer and President, Raymond Lew Yung Chow, effective May 1 2017. He also takes on the role of Country Head, overseeing the insurance businesses of Sun Life in Malaysia.

Previously serving as the Deputy CEO, Raymond Lew has stepped up to the challenge of leading the transformation of Sun Life Malaysia – and we were sure to get this exclusive interview with the new CEO himself!

While some of you may have only just begun to hear about Sun Life Malaysia in recent years, it has been a brand that is part of the nation's fabric for far longer than that. Formerly known as CIMB Aviva, the brand took on its new name officially in August 2013 and begun charting its current course immediately.

Key to that was Lew, himself a member of the team that developed the brand's long range strategy at the time – a strategy that is starting to bear fruit now.

Lew entered the insurance industry as a trainer 26 years ago. In that time, he has explored different parts of the business including recruitment, marketing, marketing services and communications. With years of knowledge and a broad range of experiences under his belt, he was the obvious choice to bring Sun Life Malaysia to greater heights.

His secret? Innovative thinking and perseverance.

While Sun Life Malaysia knew that it would do what every other brand was doing – building a traditional insurance business; it knew it would do it differently. For example, Sun Life Malaysia is one of the few – if not only – insurance providers in Malaysia that are reaching out to the underserved segments of Malaysia in both the private and public sectors in a comprehensive manner.

Besides offering a comprehensive scheme for key members of our civil service under a partnership with CUEPACS; the Company also looks at ways to help everyday Malaysians at the lower end of the society get much needed insurance protection through innovative telco focused deals.



Sun Life Malaysia

"I believe that the idea of work life 'blending' is key to everything I do. I extended that thinking further with the markets, products and offerings that we wanted to bring to Malaysia. While we are a fast growing and very commercially focused brand, we also needed to be sure that we blended in a sense of responsibility for our communities that we live, work and play in ... a need to look beyond just profits and look at what was really needed. This approach is key to why we are today one of the fastest growing insurance brands in Malaysia that is also able to serve various segments, including the underserved, in innovative ways," Lew explained in the conversation we had with him recently.

So what were some of the key areas of interest that we could explore? Lew gave us a few quick pointers, noting that more details would be revealed in the months to come.

Strength in Partnership Distribution

Sun Life Malaysia has been growing rapidly for the past four years with its number outperforming the industry norms. Moving forward, Lew is determined to sustain the strong momentum and in some areas, enhance it even more.

After all, before you can grow, you need to know your own strengths!

"We built a business that was about sustainable growth, being here for the long run and ensuring that we kept the heart of the business – our personal touch – alive and well. We also realised that we needed to keep the focus on our partnership distribution, which is where we get 90 percent of our business today namely in the area of bancassurance where we are able to distribute our products and services through our Bank partners' extensive network of branches."

"Today, we're enhancing our business and ensuring we have a foundation for continued growth by finding greater efficiencies

and innovating ways in which we reach out to our clients. This allows us to be even better at offering our clients with the right products and help them to build a better future that matches their own plans and ambitions."

Top Bancassurance

Lew attributed the rise of Sun Life Malaysia as one of the top bancassurers in Malaysia to having forged a strong partnership with the right partner from the beginning.

Rather than taking a combative stance, Lew and Sun Life Malaysia have approached the segment by blending old school growth techniques with open mindedness and a shared goal of success for everyone in mind.

"We have a very strong business partner in the CIMB Banking Group. Their reach, experience and support have been invaluable in getting us this far and we are very fortunate to count them among our strongest supporters. It helps that we are very aligned with the strategies and initiatives of the bank and our products complement each other so easily," he said.

This ability to work together is key to Sun Life Malaysia's aspirations of growing its client base. Through the relationship with the bank, Sun Life Malaysia has access to their 7.5 million client and offers them tailored life insurance products via their bankers who understand them best.

"The ability to jointly execute our plans very well is key to our strategy," Lew said.

"This includes aligning and managing resources together within the partnership. For instance we put a lot of resources at the front like training the frontline people, to make sure we are equipping them with the skill set that they require to be able to give their clients proper advices so that clients can make informed financial decisions."



Diversified Products

The future is however a diversified one for Sun Life Malaysia as it plans to further expand its ability to target the mass market, mass affluent market, and high net worth market - all at the same time.

"Simply put, diversification of channels and products translate to a bigger group of clients. And we know how to do this. For example, we have been able to grow our top line premium from over RM 300 million in 2013 to RM 1.04 billion at the end of 2016. This focus and diversification is going to push that even further," pointed out Lew.

Ensuring that growth was entirely probable, the brand's product development is centered on "client centricity, which is probably the most important focus for us in running our business," Lew said.

"We're using our personalised experiences and combining that with data analytics and insights to better understand our clients. From there, we are able to develop the right products that meet their needs today and in the future," he added.

Telco-Assurance

As far as Lew is concerned, bancassurance will never be just the only area of growth for Sun Life Malaysia. As such, he was also instrumental in expanding Sun Life Malaysia's offerings through a unique telco-assurance proposition in October this year.

Key to this decision was the desire to support the Malaysian Government's aspiration of achieving 75 percent insurance penetration rate by year 2020. This is a big task in a market that is as diverse as Malaysia's – but Lew has a plan.

Sun Life Malaysia realised that reaching out to the underserved segment of the Malaysian market, especially those at the lower

end economically of society - including a large portion of the mass market here – has always been a challenge to the insurance industry.

Some of the challenges faced were the issues of location and cost. Locations such as the outer suburbs of Malaysia's major cities and rural areas are not always easily accessible. Adding to this was the challenge of traditional insurance premium cost models as serving this market required the ability to facilitate micro protection from as little as RM5 to RM10 monthly.

Knowing that traditional methods would not work led Sun Life Malaysia to form partnership with telco companies such as U Mobile.

Extensive work and planning are in progress now and ultimately, both companies are looking at a unique offering that is simple and easily available digitally such as on mobile devices. More importantly is the ability to reach out to the mass underserved market with ease and offer them truly low-cost micro insurance product and ensuring that they would have some form of insurance protection.

"We believe that working and partnering with telco companies can help us to expand and build our digital distribution model. All the interactions and transactions are done on mobile apps and we wanted to make sure that we offered our clients a way to stay in touch with us in real time as well,"

"This is another example of how we are approaching our business. By balancing economics, responsibility and a social conscience, Sun Life Malaysia is bringing unique products to life. As I look at it, we have very different strategies as compared to the industry here in general." said Lew.

Digitally Driven

Digital is the catchword these days. At Sun Life Malaysia, it's one

of the ways that they are bringing their innovations to life.

“The fundamental approach to technology that we employ is that we constantly look at how we can use digital solutions and technology to automate, to enhance, to empower ... to make our current process flows more friendly and hassle free,” Lew explained, pointing to productivity and efficiency as the aim of everything the team does. This in turn allowed them to stay focused on their clients’ needs.

Lew broke it down into three key pointers from a digital focused point of view namely proactive engagement via social updates; using technology to resolve problems; and making life easier for clients.

This focus is the engine behind some of the upcoming products, services and enhancements that we can expect to see from Sun Life Malaysia in the coming future.

Culture & Management Style

Sun Life Malaysia also credits its growth to a focus on its people, who are Lew’s main priority. From employees to stakeholders of the company, Lew emphasises the importance of relationships as it is what holds the Company together.

Believing in a high performing culture, Lew leads by example and strives to create a conducive environment for his people. Recent validation of his efforts, include the results of a global employee engagement and satisfaction survey of Sun Life operations that saw Sun Life Malaysia scoring 88 over the 100 full points.

Lew emphasises the importance of being simple and

straightforward when asked on his management style. To him, every employee in the company plays an important role in helping the Company achieve its goals. He believes in tapping on the strength of the people working with him and channel it to realise Sun Life Malaysia’s growth.

“Innovation, flexibility and humanity are three words I use as a guide. I believe in strategic thinking, consistency, accuracy and motivation. To me, these are the traits that set a Company apart and drive teams to achieve outstanding performance,” Lew said.

Being a hands-on person, Lew enjoys spending time with business partners, participating in roadshows, and visiting bank branches to understand the issues and challenges faced by bank distributors. This personal approach and interest has led to interesting finds, like gaining firsthand information of what is going on in the marketplace. This in turn helps him successfully juggle the expectations of stakeholders, regulators and senior executives.

Another main point that ensures that he is truly “living the brand” is an active lifestyle for Lew himself. This includes watching his diet, working out and spending time with his family and friends, but “I cook as well and while we are careful about what we eat, we do have a good time. It’s about blending the right things together – and that approach allows us to live a life that is fulfilling, balanced and real.”

All in all, things certainly are shining bright at Sun Life Malaysia – definitely a brand worth keeping an eye on in the months and years to come. **M**

