

# SWIFT BLAZING FORWARD: MALAYSIA AS A HUB OF EXPERTISE



## Key Points:

- Growth of the SWIFT Business and Tech Centre in Malaysia to become the second largest SWIFT centre globally, exceeding all previous expectations.
- Malaysia's robust talent pool known for technical expertise and language capabilities, modern infrastructure and cost competitiveness were pivotal factors in its choice to set up.
- The Malaysian centre has evolved to become a multi-disciplinary hub of expertise for fintech and digital services in the financial industry.
- Strength of local talent is seen through increased activities brought in, allowing the Malaysian centre to create its own identity, ownership and accountability within the global SWIFT organisation.
- SWIFT believes Malaysia has a good basis of talent to spearhead their digital services.

**H**aving been around for 45 years, SWIFT has carved its mark in the financial industry as one of the oldest fintech companies in the world. Over time, they rose to become the world's leading provider of secure financial messaging services.

One of the company's most unique features is that they are industry-owned, whereby both members and customers are also shareholders of the company itself. SWIFT provides all those under their global umbrella, a unique platform for messaging as well as products and services, to aid the facilitation of financial messaging in a secure and reliable manner.

Their messaging platform, products, and services are used by 11,000 customers worldwide, and are represented in more than 200 countries. SWIFT also sets out to bring the global financial community together to shape the practices, standards and discussions that would benefit the ecosystem as a whole.

The company's main headquarters is located in Belgium, with nearly 3,000 employees working in 28 branches across the globe. In Malaysia, the SWIFT Business and Tech Centre was set up in 2013 and has reached significant growth over the course of five years – exceeding all previous expectations. With over 450 employees, the Malaysian branch is now the second largest centre of SWIFT globally, and holds significant importance to the company's overall operations.

## Malaysia, Gateway To Asian Market

After an intense search and review process, Malaysia was chosen as the location for SWIFT Business and Technical services ahead of neighbours Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea. There were three key aspects that resulted in this decision that positioned Malaysia in the limelight.

Firstly, due to a shift in their business, they were on a mission to expand their footprint in Asia as it was a growth market for the company. As their growth strategy and plans kicked in, they embarked on a hunt for talent and Malaysia's strong talent pool with high education levels offered a very attractive proposition. Compounded with a well developed infrastructure and cost competitiveness, this sealed the deal as an ideal location to set up.

To help bolster their entry and setup here in Malaysia, the government provided much assistance and incentives were aplenty. The setting up of the SWIFT Business and Tech Centre in Malaysia was also seen as a long term investment in the overall footprint of the organisation.

When they first started out, their focus was mainly on the IT and financial services. As the centre grew, their breadth of services increased, and they transformed into a multidisciplinary centre covering IT development roles, testing and business oriented functions, financial services, customer operations and support services.

The organisation as a whole has moved away from the shared services sphere which they started out in, and given the scope of activities and responsibilities that the SWIFT Business and Tech Centre in Malaysia covers, it has evolved to become hub of expertise for fintech and digital services in financial industry.

### Championing A People-Oriented Culture

In both their global operations and here in Malaysia, there are three components that, together, form the DNA of SWIFT – Excellence, Community Role and Innovation. Excellence within the organisation is derived from their strong focus on reliability, security, resilience and availability.

In terms of their community role, SWIFT has built up a robust community structure where they constantly engage shareholders, banks and financial institutions. Innovation is a pivotal driver of the value which SWIFT can offer as a technology company, which goes beyond their basic messaging services, allowing them to offer additional value added services and software solutions.

The centre takes pride in their people-oriented culture which has contributed to the success, retention and growth here in Malaysia. When they started out in KL, this was the basis in which they built up their operations. They concentrated on the well being of their staff, initiated social activities, held more CSR programmes,

encouraged talent development, created a wide open office environment, emphasised work flexibility and provided clear career growth paths to their employees.

In line with their culture, SWIFT banked heavily on knowledge growth in their pool of employees. SWIFT owns specific technologies as part of their technological solutions offering, hence there is an abundance of SWIFT-specific knowledge that can be gained in order for them to be proficient at their roles. On-the-job and internal training programmes were tailored towards their Malaysian staff and are carried out vigorously to raise the expertise and competency of their existing talent pool.

### Malaysian Talent - The Full Package

The vision of becoming a hub of expertise for fintech and digital services however, could not have been realised if not for the local talent brought into the centre. Over 79% of their staff are Malaysians, and many have taken on leadership roles within the organisation. With this vibrant multilingual talent mix, the SWIFT Business and Tech Centre is also able to cater to 14 languages.

Forging a strong relationship with universities are also part of the centre's overall hiring strategy as they are constantly aiming to have varying levels of experience within the organisation to create different perspectives and sharing of knowledge.

The centre's rapid growth is largely

attributed to the positive work ethics of the locals, who are hardworking, focused on delivery, have a high base level of education, and proficient in the English language. Surpassing their hiring expectations, the strength of local talents can be seen by the increase in activities brought in, which paved the way for the centre to create its own identity, ownership and accountability within the global SWIFT organisation.

Looking into their technical capabilities, SWIFT believes that there is a good basis of talent to spearhead their digital services which utilises Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. Within their centre itself, they have 15 data scientists who are running point on these digital services and more.

Malaysia also has a strong talent base when it comes to cybersecurity skills, which comes to the fore in their portfolio of products and services offered as security and reliability are critical elements.

With competent talent, strong infrastructure and an innovation-driven culture in place, SWIFT Business and Tech Centre in Malaysia went full tilt in their technology services and offerings.

### At The Cusp Of Technological Advancements

Overall, the financial landscape is changing and this is being driven by global regulations, open banking, emerging technologies and the need for more real-time customer service. Together, these changes are driving rapid innovation in the industry, which are further supported by fintechs that are driving new initiatives. Therefore, SWIFT plays a crucial role in enabling and facilitating this innovation.

Within SWIFT's strategy, there is evolution in the payment landscape, which has led to company to look into new services such as the SWIFT global payment innovation (GPI). Within the Malaysian centre is a dedicated team working on business intelligence products, which are using data analytics. Members of this team have a background and experience in data science and analytics, and have seen much success from the products released.

SWIFT is now looking at end-to-end interconnecting domestic networks, by which they have launched a pilot between Australia and Singapore, where they are offering real-time service by using GPI.

SWIFT is currently defining strategies to provide a platform for API development, testing and standardising format and messaging to be used. They are also pushing for proof of concept in their innovation labs around how distributed ledger technology can be applied to bring value to the financial industry.

Looking ahead, SWIFT plans on refining their data strategy – with a strong focus in AI and Machine Learning – as they predict a surge in demand for data science and analytic-type roles within their operations here in KL.

With innovation and expansion of services on the horizon, the SWIFT centre is already making waves in the financial industry, having capitalised on Malaysia's strong talent pool in technology, and believes that their Malaysia Business and Tech centre will remain as a driving force for their Asian operations.



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