

The billion-dollar man

Entrepreneur-author Marco Robinson tells why opportunities are too great here to leave

By Aida Ahmad

Malaysia-based Marco Robinson has come a long way since he used to walk home in the rain after yet another unsuccessful day as a salesman in Manchester, England.

Aged 20 then, he survived on pea sandwiches for months on end; such were his budgetary constraints.

"Walking home, I'd keep asking myself 'How can I succeed?' over and over," says the author of *Know When to Close the Deal and Suddenly Grow Rich*.

Just when the sack was looking imminent at his Manchester firm back in the late 1980s, a colleague switched him onto a book called *Bring Out the Magic in Your Mind*.

The young Robinson devoured the book overnight and the next day he brought in three big sales. His meteoric rise had begun, making his company and himself big bucks in the process. Job offers poured in from all over the world and his net worth was in the seven figures.

He arrived in Malaysia just in time for the 1997 Asian financial crisis but was unperturbed and has since invested his whole life here

with his wife and two children. He was convinced it was the best move he's ever made.

He had made his millions, was set for life, and could have chosen anywhere to live; so why here?

"Malaysia was interesting and I'd always been fascinated by the Far East. Some friends discouraged me saying it was basically a Third World country. I talked to some Malaysians and they convinced me to make the move. They even offered me a first class plane ticket for seven days, with no obligations. So I came over in August of 1997.

"I love it here because business is fast, opportunities are always coming up, and everybody wants to make money fast. As this is not a welfare state, it's far better for business as people are hungrier to make money. Working with locals is an honour and a privilege - they want to learn fast and are willing to try new things."

He had considered other places: "I thought about the United States and some European countries, but I didn't like the restrictions and protocols; too many rules and not enough opportunities.

"In Malaysia, it's cheap to set up business and hire staff, and the sun always shines!"

His book is currently third on the MPH Bookstore best-seller list.

However, it was not plain sailing when he arrived in Malaysia just before the economic crash. Within three months of arriving, the company he worked for couldn't pay him.

"I had to choose whether to stay or return home but the opportunities were too great for me here to leave.

"The property company I was consulting for stopped selling when the recession hit. However, I managed to completely transform the company, fired the freeloaders, changed all the products and hired 2,000 new salespeople.

"Over the next six months, we generated RM125 million sales, then US\$700 million (RM2.45 billion) over the following three years for the company."

In 2000, he took his first steps towards becoming an entrepreneur.

"I travelled around the world for a year and found successful entrepreneurs and mentorship. I paid them a lot of money and I went to loads of seminars. When I came back, I set up my first

consulting company."

In 2002, he established himself as a motivational speaker.

His next business, Max Generation, involved selling vacation incentives and loyalty programmes.

"I took Max Generation from nothing in 2006 to RM20 million in its first year and that's where I made my billion dollars in sales."

He started writing his book in 2007.

"I was lying on a beach in the Perhentians thinking what the title would be.

"The book is the story of my journey from having nothing to making a billion. Looking back, if I hadn't been through those tough times, I won't be here today doing this.

"You have to experience hardships and challenges. I've found that your results are down to your experience, experience is gained through bad judgments, bad judgments come from the choices that you make in your life," he adds.

In Malaysia, it's comparatively cheap to start a business and hire staff, says Robinson.

