

Son of GMM Grammy founder keen on taking empire into the future

WATCHIRANONT THONGTEP
THE NATION

THERE is no doubt that Paiboon Damrongchaitham and other high-profile executives built GMM Grammy into a strong music and entertainment empire with 30 years' worth of content in its library.

It is now the duty of Fahmai, a son of Paiboon - founder, chief executive and chairman of GMM Grammy - to build for the future on the available resources. The vision is clear that the empire wants to deliver music and radio and television programmes to all audiences.

Fahmai, now chief operating officer for platforms at GMM Z, the parent firm's satellite-television arm, stressed that his team had set a clear direction to make sure that the media platforms were up and ready. However, the 27-year-old executive admitted that this would be a great challenge.

"I have to make it successful in the next five years," he said in an exclusive interview with *The Nation*.

The five-year target was set according to the successful sale of 1.8 million GMM Z set-top boxes in the past two years. As the box is customer-friendly, he foresees a continued warm welcome. The pace of sales could double in the next two years.

By 2018, he expects that half of the Kingdom's households will be accessing TV programmes via GMM Z set-top boxes. The key selling point is quality and unique content. GMM Grammy offers special content bundled with the box. Customers also have the chance to subscribe to pay-TV channels via this box.

To sustain the music and entertainment empire, GMM Grammy's new-generation executive has taken a leading role to build strong and diverse media platforms to utilise and distribute its content to its customers.

"Though GMM Grammy has more than 30 years' experience in the music and entertainment industry and produces a large amount of the best content, it will be for nothing if the company runs its business without its own strong and diverse media platforms," Fahmai said.

GMM Z also emphasises other media platforms such as mobile applications with a leading telecom operator and Internet protocol television (IPTV) with a broadband provider. It also provides pay-TV content to cable operators. GMM Z would eventually create a total broadcasting business to support its parent company, he said.

Having its own strong and diverse media platforms also guarantees its sustainability in the broadcast business. After GMM Z entered the satellite-TV business, it found some difficulties in transmitting its TV channels through a platform provider. So it decided to operate its own platform.

Another example is that co-production of free-TV



Fahmai Damrongchaitham: By 2018, half of Thailand's households could be accessing TV programmes via GMM Z set-top boxes.

programming is difficult to control because of conflicting policies. To prevent such problems, GMM Grammy is planning to secure two or three licences to operate its own digital terrestrial TV channels.

But whatever the challenges are, Fahmai said he was ready to face them, with all the knowledge that he has learned from his father, from his own education and from his colleagues.

His early life was surrounded with the music. When he was a child, his father taught him how to play cassette tapes and how to pack a music cassette with a well-designed cover. Sometimes, his father shared his business experiences through a simple bedtime story with him and his brother.

After receiving a bachelor's degree in communication from the University of Southern California, he began his career at Sanamluang Music, a business unit of GMM Grammy, five years ago.

There he was taught how to manage a total music business, from recruiting and training artists, composing and arranging music, managing artists, and debuting an album to distributing music. He believes the unit helped him understand more about what his father had done and how he could apply the knowledge elsewhere. Now, after being appointed the boss of GMM Z last year, he is also the managing director of Sanamluang Music.

Fahmai did not think his father would retire soon, despite being 63. He sees himself as a young man who will help his father achieve millions of ideas.