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Wake Up Call

In only a decade, Mobitel has gone from a telecommunications start-up to one of the top 200 companies in Turkey.

Images by Muhsin Ergun

In the twenty-first century, the ability to connect to family and friends halfway around the world is so easy it's almost taken for granted. Technology has advanced so quickly in the last two decades that it's nearly easy to forget the days when you could only make a phone call from a landline, and the internet was only a pipedream. While the first mobile phone was invented by the Motorola company in 1973, it wasn't until the late 1990s and early 2000s that phones became small enough and cheap enough for the average consumer to start buying them.

Mobitel was one company in Turkey that was quick to realise the potential of mobile phones and how to capitalise on their use. Started in 2001, the company is now one of the biggest sellers of mobiles and smartphones in the country. It is an authorised seller of all of the big names in phones today: Apple, Blackberry, HTC, Huawei, LG, Microsoft Devices, Samsung, Sony, and ZTE.

Yücel Kubanç was appointed CEO of Mobitel in 2011. Having

previously worked for other telecommunications companies in Turkey such as Motorola and Vodafone, Yücel has a wealth of experience in the industry and was appointed to lead the company through a period of change and professionalisation. While the company had done well and expanded in the 10 years since it was established, it was decided that the culture needed to change. "We've been through some important changes. We've changed the culture within the company. The culture had to change and this is why I was brought on," Yücel says.

"We wanted to transition the company into a corporate one. For this change to be effective, someone with broad corporate experience was needed. What we have tried to do is create this corporate culture within the company. When I started, we didn't have any structure, we didn't have an ERP system, and work processes were not well defined. All of these things and more have been built from scratch. When I look back, I see that significant changes have happened

within the company. Now we have a company which is ready to go public, which was not a possibility even two and a half years ago. Don't get me wrong, we have no immediate plans. What I am trying to say is if we were to go public then we could do it. Four years ago, it was not an option from my perspective. Now, if we wanted, we could do it."

The process was not easy. As with any change, there was some resistance within the company. Mobitel had been operating in a particular way, with a set culture, for a decade, and some employees were not comfortable with the prospect of change. "Not all the employees have reacted the same way, or not all the employees have been affected in the same way. There were many people who resisted the change, because they worked in a certain area and they didn't want to leave their area. They were not open to trying new things. Many colleagues chose to leave the company. We had newcomers, and now when I look at the company, the majority of our people now embrace all these changes. Even some of our >

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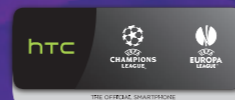
let them stare



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colleagues who showed some resistance in the beginning—now they are happy.”

One of the key strengths of Mobitel, which has allowed its fast growth and the trust it has gained from the consumer, is its partnerships with large multinational phone companies. Having good relationships with these companies is essential to ensuring these partnerships are successful. “We are in distribution; we are the distributor for all the main mobile phone vendors. We are not a production company. We are working for a joint success with our partners.

“What we are trying to do is to work with our partners in a way so that we understand their goals. By understanding their goals we try to add value to their operation. We don’t want to be a regular distributor who just moves boxes around but we want to understand their targets. For example, we want to understand how they want to attack the Turkish market. We can tweak our operation to support our vendors in their goals. We are not representing a single brand; we are representing all the major brands.

This is one of the challenges we are facing, because we want to be fair to all our partners. We are trying to help them to achieve their maximum potential out of our sales team. We do this by trying to understand their goals, their KPIs, and reflecting these KPIs to our team. We are working with over 10 vendors; we are representing over 10 vendors in the Turkish marketplace.”

One of the ways that Mobitel has improved not only its relationships with these partners, but also its operations and processes is by investing in new systems for operations and data exchange. This not only makes communication easier, but also provides an extra layer of security for Mobitel and its partners. “What we are doing is, we are trying to get engaged with our partners in an electronic environment,” Yücel says, “so that all the flows of information are secure, and protected from human failures or human errors.”

Mobitel prides itself on being the best telecommunications distributor in Turkey. It is constantly monitoring the market for any developments, and

predicting future changes that might affect the company. “I think the major difference is being able to act very quickly. Agile could be the correct word for it. We are trying to foresee changes in the market; we are trying to take actions before we see those changes happening in the marketplace. We are trying to be proactive. This is what I think sets us apart from the competition.”

This has helped Mobitel achieve extraordinary growth in the past five years. Now one of the top 200 companies in Turkey, it is looking to grow bigger and bigger. “Our growth is obviously a very strong result for us. I don’t know of any other company in Turkey, not in our industry nor in the other industries, that has achieved such growth. In 2009, the revenue of our company was 118 million Turkish lira, and by the end of 2014 we closed at over 1.2 billion Turkish lira. That’s over €400 million.

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“I think this is a really strong message for us. We are a very strong growing company and we have done this in a profitable way. From my personal perspective, I see the key drivers of the change have been enabled by the information systems. We can see everything; we can see every result very rapidly. And even more importantly, we can foresee the risks before they happen in the marketplace. I think this is the key factor which has helped myself and the whole company to achieve the results that we have today. We are focused on growth in our own country because we still see an immediate opportunity. We have a vision to grow further outside of Turkey, but we still have some things to do in our country. In 2015, we’ll still be focused on Turkey. Maybe after that we can look at growth outside of Turkey.”

“Working with Mobitel is having an extremely professional and dedicated partner on your side, supporting you on each and every step of your operations with their highly qualified team, working with you to reach the goals you mutually agreed on.” - Canan Taşar, Country Manager, HTC Turkey