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Profile of Nongluck Phinainitisart

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Dr. Nongluck Phinainitisart, D. Eng., President of Thaicom PLC. since November 2000 and now she has also been responsible for Marketing and Sales of Thaicom Satellite. She was born in 1959 and employed by Thaicom PCL. since July 1991. She was reelected to be the President of APSCC (Asia Pacific Satellite Communications Council) for second term. She worked as a government official for more than ten years and worked for Intelsat during 1986-1987.

With a Doctorate Degree in Electrical Engineering, Chulalongkorn University, and a Master Degree in Electrical Engineering at University of Missouri, U.S.A., Nongluck has more than 20 years of experience in Telecommunications, Satellite, and Mobile businesses.

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1) How did you get started in the satellite business?

Well that's a long story. I dreamt of space ever since my father bought us a small telescope while I was still in my childhood. I looked through that telescope out into the universe for the first time and saw the moon, Mars, Venus and so many stars with distances so great that it was hard to comprehend. The subject of Astronomy became part of my early life which led me to reading science fiction novels.

I graduated from a convent school in Bangkok, in 1977 and enrolled at the Chulalahorn university in Bangkok where I got a degree in Electrical Engineering. While my interest was in Astronomy which would have lead me to a career in research, I felt that a more practical profession would benefit me in the long run.

I enrolled at the University of Missouri in the U.S. and received my Master's degree. Then returned back to Bangkok where I worked at the Ministry of Communication for the Thai government.

Intelsat (International Telecommunication Satellite Organization), which was based in the U.S. was an International Organization and consisted of 130 countries. Intelsat had started an internship program and I applied to go to Intelsat to work under this program for one year. I was accepted and left Bangkok. I started to work at Intelsat in Washington D.C. in August of 1986. I applied for a three month extension and it was approved, and I would leave Intelsat in Nov. of 1987.

While at Intelsat I was assigned to the communication section and got hands on experience on world wide satellite communication that you can't get from just

reading a book. It also brought me into contact with people from other countries who also worked at Intelsat. I returned back to Thailand and continued to work at the Ministry of Communications for the Thai. Government.

I enrolled in a PHD program at the Chulalahorn university and went back to the U.S. where I did my research at Intelsat on satellite communication. I returned back to Bangkok, received my Doctorate in Satellite Communication from the Chulalahorn university and went back to work at the Ministry of communication for the Thai government.

A Franchise was given to the Shinawatra Computer Company in Thailand to purchase, launch and operate a communication satellite. I was offered the job of General Manager of the Satellite part of the company and I accepted the offer.

2) How have you been involved in changes brought about in or by this business (innovations, technologies, services)?

I was involved in the transfer of all government / state enterprises to the private company for providing service to customers. We launched our country's first communication satellite in 1993. It was the first satellite with the Ku band frequency payload in the Southeast Asia area where there is a heavy rainfall. and was of serious concern as to the effect this would have on the received signal for the customer. We knew that only with the Ku band frequency, which required a small satellite dish to receive the signal, as opposed to the C band dish which was much larger, that the TV direct to home service (DTH) would be possible. We then started DTH service with the latest digital compression technology in Thailand, making Thailand the first country in Southeast Asia with digital DTH in the Ku band spectrum.

Later on we launched 4 more satellites for a total of 5. No one in Thailand has this kind of experience, so we had to find the best people, technically qualified, self motivated and able to adjust to the new environment as we navigated our way to success.

Our company holds patents related to satellite technology and ground equipment. Our fourth satellite is an all Internet Protocol (IP) satellite and the largest commercial satellite that had ever been built at that time. It was a challenge to everyone that was involved, commercially, technological, innovation, regulation and funding.

Changes were not limited to Thailand as we brought new service and technology to a few markets that we had entered.

3) What do you think was the greatest event/situation/opportunity you experienced?

For me it was a unique time. A time when suddenly the world opened up for me and I found myself in a unique position. A time when after 30 years the satellite communication was moved from the government of Thailand to a private company to operate and provide a service to customers for a profit. Interest in the satellite company became one of national pride through out Thailand and those who worked on the satellite project were not only highly qualified but also gave their time and effort with a deep sense of pride and would lead the technological development for the next generation of Thai people.

Even though there were so many events that took place here in Thailand and in the U.S., I would have to say that the greatest event that I have experienced was the successful launch of Thaicom 1.

Our princess presided over the launch at the launch site as well as people in Thailand as they watched the live broadcast of the launch. All the hard work of everyone involved had not been a waste of time and the people in Thailand shared with us the pride and joy of success.

4) What was the greatest obstacle?

The greatest obstacle was our own weakness and strength of mind. We had doubts and selfishness that had to be overcome. The more complex and difficult the task was to us, the stronger our weakness showed. I had to believe in myself and our team that there is nothing that we can not achieve. But belief in itself is not enough. We had to learn by doing and from mistakes that we made without giving up and repeating the same mistakes. Unfortunately in the satellite business we have to do it right the first time because there is no second chance. If building, launching and providing service fails, the financial and opportunity cost are so high and greatly impact the company.

5) What do you see happening in the next five years in this industry?

I see a slow down and careful planning with new investment as equity and loans become scarce. More partnership and consolidation around the world to improve the utilization of assets and more synergy.

Although there is some growth in the industry, companies will rely more on the source of revenue from downstream businesses, such as DTH service or consumer internet service, or diversify into other businesses.

6) What advice do you have for women interested in entering the industry?

Do not fall in love with technology for technology's sake thinking that having great technology will earn revenue from the consumer or can beat the competition. Satellite service can be an attractive investment at the right price and

the right time, but not now. or in the near future unless you have a captive home market with a strong demand for the service.