



PETER VESTERBACKA

JP/Dina Indrasafitri

even mighty eagles make mistakes

Dina Indrasafitri

THE JAKARTA POST/JAKARTA

Some might frown upon reading the title on Peter Vesterbacka's business card: Mighty Eagle, the print beside a picture of a beak.

An organization's top brass can go by many names, such as chief marketing officer, chief marketing director and so on, so Mighty Eagle might well be just another one.

The choice of words is much less puzzling when one becomes familiar with the company Vesterbacka works for. Finland's Rovio Entertainment Ltd. is the company behind the smash-hit game Angry Birds.

It took only a few months after its release in 2009 for the puzzle game featuring wingless birds with knitted eyebrows to steal millions of touch screen device users' hearts.

"Mighty Eagle" is also a character with extraordinary powers in the game, which involves the piqued birds trying to defeat green, google-eyed pigs who keep stealing the former's eggs.

Within two years, Rovio announced that over 500 million had downloaded Angry Birds across various platforms, making it "the most downloaded game in the history of gaming, with no signs of slowing down," the release on the company's website said.

Angry Birds being "the next Pac Man" hardly suffices as the company's target. "We want to be the next Mickey Mouse," Vesterbacka said confidently last week after the launching of Nokia's Asha 300 in Jakarta. The phones are equipped

with Angry Birds, of course.

Given the ambitious targets and already impressive achievements of Rovio, it's probably acceptable that Vesterbacka gets to have a unique take on the company's top titles, but the rockstar-like experience goes beyond that. He also wore a flaming red hoodie with a picture of an angry bird during their launch, when other speakers were dressed in office attire.

One might ask when it stops becoming a privilege, though. In December of last year, the online version of *The Telegraph* published a photo of his wife wearing an Angry Birds gown to the Finnish palace.

Vesterbacka said the game has had quite an impact on his life, "from my clothing to my travel but I don't think it changed my life in any dramatic ways in other regards. Still have a wife, two kids. I travel more than I used to. But it's not like a massive change."

His passion for work seemed endless as he described his plans for Angry Birds in the future, such as using Facebook to connect players and developing more merchandise.

"I think its exciting, it's fun ... It doesn't really feel like work," Vesterbacka said.

It might well be almost all fun and games for the man who has been into video games since he was young. He still remembers playing classics such as Pac Man on his Commodore 64, and of course Super Mario, which he said he plays with his children nowadays.

"I love playing games ... In every business you have to be passionate about what you do and I am pas-

sionate about games and entertainment," Vesterbacka said.

His enthusiasm for entrepreneurship and marketing is another reason to love his job. Although he studied marketing, he said his actual learning about marketing and branding is from his 20 years in the industry.

In his spare time, Vesterbacka coaches at Sauna, a local startup accelerator in Helsinki. He is also a founder of Mobile Monday, a community platform for the mobile industry.

Education in general intrigues him. "The way we will change the world at Rovio, and that is something very important for me as a person as well, is [through] education. Then you get more tolerance, people will understand better ... we started working on educational projects. There is no reason why we can't make learning fun," he said.

Among Vesterbacka's advice for those trying to make it in the creative business are "attention to detail" and, for game developers especially, equipping oneself with marketing skills as well as those needed to make a good game worth marketing.

During his days at Hewlett Packard, he started the branding of HP Bazaar, an innovation center for mobile e-services. "Everybody else needed competence centers and all those boring things. I said 'let's call our program the HP Bazaar', and then everybody asked what is HP Bazaar ... we wanted to capture the atmosphere of a bazaar," he said.

Living in Finland's capital Helsinki also plays a part in fostering his passion for the creative. According to Vesterbacka, the country produces

some of the best marketers and design experts and Helsinki itself is a good place for the creative industry.

"[Living in Finland] makes you a little bit crazy. It's cold and dark, but I think it's a good environment for companies like Rovio, Nokia. There are a lot of crazy people in a positive way. We do things differently," Vesterbacka laughed.

According to him, Rovio itself has the typical atmosphere of Finnish companies, with a fair amount of egalitarianism. The working method usually involves small teams that are quick on their feet.

Vesterbacka recalled that the company was founded by three winners of a developers' competition he organized. He advised the winners to start a company and make games. Six years and 51 games later, Angry Birds happened.

"What we want to be now, we want to be good at what we do and also [have] a great working environment, and people can be empowered to do things. People can make mistakes but again we learn from our mistakes. I cannot emphasize that too much. A learning organization ... we learn new things every day," he said.

Vesterbacka has had several stumbles in his journey as well. However, he said that one has to dare to make mistakes to be successful.

Accepting and even encouraging mistakes is something atypical for Finnish culture, he said. But such is the attitude that he is trying to instill in Rovio and also for the local owners of startups that he met with that day.

"If you are not failing, you are not trying hard enough," Vesterbacka said.

Angry Birds flying south to Indonesia

Dina Indrasafitri

THE JAKARTA POST/JAKARTA

The company most likely responsible for creating new correlations between pigs, birds and slingshots is looking toward Southeast Asia's largest economy as an inspiration and target market.

Peter Vesterbacka, the "Mighty Eagle" of Finland's Rovio Entertainment Ltd., said last week that the company behind the puzzle game Angry Birds would do this in a number of ways, including having a special launch for the Facebook version of the game in Indonesia, which has the second-largest number of the social networking site users after the United States.

According to Facebook, the website currently has over 800 million active users. The website www.internetworldstats.com cites Indonesia as having almost 42 million Facebook users in December of last year.

"The game [Angry Birds on Facebook] will be launched simultaneously all over the planet but we will have a special launch here in Jakarta ... Again for obvious reasons. Jakarta is the Facebook capital of the world and for us it's always very important to be where our fans are," Vesterbacka said.

According to Vesterbacka, the game already has a prominent place on Facebook with 12 million fans sharing Angry Birds-related content. "We are talking about making Angry Birds even more social ... [by] bringing the game to Facebook," he said.

Since its launch in 2009, Angry Birds has had over 600 million downloads. It is the number one selling iPhone paid application in 79 countries including Indonesia.

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Dino Adinoka, an engineering consultant who lives in Jakarta, said he plays Angry Birds almost every day on his Android-equipped phone. "It's simple yet difficult. It's good for killing time. I play three series, and on average I am on level 15," he said of the game.

He added that he would likely download the game on Facebook after the launch.

For those less familiar with the how-tos, Angry Birds basically involves hurling odd-shaped birds using a slingshot toward grinning green pigs usually seated on a flimsy construction made of materials such as wooden boards or boxes. The breakdown of the construction spells victory for the birds.

The question that one might ask eventually is, why are the birds angry? That is precisely why the game has social potential in the first place, Vesterbacka said.

"Angry Birds as a brand is very social because it begs for a question. Why are the birds angry? Because the pigs stole the eggs. And then the story, and that's actually how Angry Birds has spread," he said.

The Facebook version of Angry Birds is a full-screen experience, with a display more or less the same as existing ones.

However, the social networking site will allow interaction and competition among its users within the same network.

This is made possible partly

through a competition board where one can see how their performance in the game ranks among their friends. The top player will gain access to a crown.

"There are different features like earthquakes, TNT packages or power up goods but the point is this. When I compete with my friends ... I want to be the one who is actually doing the leader. ... I will make everything I can to make sure that I get the crown and I am going to be the first one. There is a leader board ... So not only there is exchanging messages but also giving you bragging rights," Henri Holm, the senior vice president for Rovio Asia, said.

Vesterbacka added that Angry Birds on Facebook would refrain from causing one user to spam the others with announcements of items purchased on their walls.

"Here it's more about that somebody beat you on level one ... It's not about tricking you into buying various things," he said.

The game is free to play, but users can purchase various features such as "power-ups". Vesterbacka also promised "great" products coming players' way.

"If we don't deliver a product that at least half of our friends want to buy, it's not a very good product. If only 2 to 3 percent want it, it can't be very good," he said.

Rovio's increasing engagement with Indonesia extends beyond the launch. Vesterbacka said that the company is planning to develop an Angry Birds version with an Indonesian feel.

To ensure maximum results, it is holding a competition for Indonesian developers to forward their best ideas about what Indonesian flavor should be added to the game. The winner of the competition will get a chance for a short internship at Rovio's headquarters.

"We will build an Indonesia specific version and we will produce and we will work with Indonesian people to do that ... as a company we want to be more Indonesian than the Indonesian companies. That's what we have been doing in China. We have worked with Chinese designers, developers, and that's how we make the game Chinese specific," Vesterbacka said.

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He added that the company is looking for something more than "batik and Bali" for the flavor. "We want to put more depth into the Angry Birds Indonesian experience and then we will take it to the world," he said.

Taking note that some Indonesians have little access to smartphones and tablets, Rovio is also making the game available on more affordable phones. Nokia's Asha 300, which was launched in Jakarta last week, has built-in Angry Birds games. It was priced at Rp 999,000 (US\$112).

"We want to make the experience seamless. So you have a feature phone then you can play Angry Birds on the big screen at home, at an Internet café, anywhere with your identity, your Facebook profile," Vesterbacka said.

According to the material distributed at the soft launch of Angry Birds for Facebook, Rovio is also planning to come up with Angry Birds Lebaran-themed games for Muslim majority countries, including Indonesia.

These birds are pecking hard.

