

MAY-JUN 2011

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**NEXT GENERATION
NATIONAL INFOCOMM
INFRASTRUCTURE**

MAY-JUN 2011

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A LASTING CONNECTION

BY
EILEEN NG,
EDITOR



Singapore held its general elections on 7 May, and the preceding political campaigning has put the spotlight on the key concerns of ordinary Singapore citizens. I am sure some of you must have relished the opportunity to hear the diverse opinions on topics that, in some way or other, will affect your lives as residents or future residents of Singapore.

Amidst the groundswell of public discussion and debate, the online channel was particularly active. For the first time the rules for online political advertising were relaxed and campaigns went viral, popping up on emails, podcasts, webcasts, on photo sharing sites, social networking sites and the like.

Singaporeans, especially the younger generation, have demonstrated a lively connection to their future in Singapore and a willingness to engage their political leaders on issues they consider important. Their enthusiastic voices bode well for a young country that has been working hard at nurturing knowledge-intensive industries – the very industries that require independent, innovative thinking.

This issue, our industry spotlight is on interactive and digital media, a sector that depends very much on creativity, risk-taking and entrepreneurship to thrive. In Culture Spot, we also look at another creative outlet – the vibrant arts and culture scene in Singapore.

Last but not least, the smooth and orderly conduct of this election has reinforced Singapore's reputation for stability. Indeed, the benchmark Straits Times Index rose 1.2 per cent on the first day of trading after the elections. Such unwavering business confidence has been a key factor in Singapore's ability to attract billions of dollars in foreign capital investment.

Whether as individuals or multinationals, we all share a vested interest in Singapore's economic future. The Singapore Day 2011 event in Shanghai (see story inside) showed that even overseas Singaporeans continue to be closely connected to home. At Contact Singapore, we hope that *Synergy* will continue to strengthen and add relevance to your own connection to Singapore.



WE HOPE THAT SYNERGY WILL
CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN AND
ADD RELEVANCE TO YOUR OWN
CONNECTION IN SINGAPORE.

BIRD'S EYE VIEW

A SANDCRAWLER TO CALL HOME

Lucasfilm, which has increased headcount to almost 500, is getting too big for its current home at Changi Business Park. In April, it broke ground at the site of its first purpose-built building outside the United States, at Fusionopolis. The building was christened Sandcrawler, after a Star Wars vehicle, and is expected to be ready by next year.

WORLD'S FIRST GREEN DATA CENTRE STANDARD LAUNCHED

Singapore's Infocomm Development Authority has launched the Singapore Standard for Green Data Centres: Energy and Environmental Management Systems, said to be the first of its kind in the world. Also called the SS564:2010, the standard's arrival is timely as power consumption comes under increased scrutiny worldwide. Research shows that as much as 12 per cent of a data centre's operating cost is spent on energy usage.

SPANISH WIND GIANT GAMESA OPENS NEW RESEARCH LAB

Gamesa, a world leader in wind energy technology, has chosen Singapore to set up its latest advanced materials research centre. It has signed off on three R&D projects to be conducted jointly with the Agency for Science, Technology and Research, Nanyang Technological University and the National University of Singapore. By 2014, the lab expects to employ 30 engineers.

US\$3.7 BILLION IM FLASH SINGAPORE PLANT OPENS

IM Flash Technologies, a joint venture between Intel Corporation and Micron Technology, has unveiled a state-of-the-art facility for manufacturing NAND Flash memory chips, primarily used in smartphones and tablet PCs. Once fully operational, the plant will boast the largest semiconductor wafer production capacity in Singapore.

Entrenching Singapore's Position at the Cutting Edge of IDM Technology



SPEAKING AT THE WSQ DIGIPEN-UBISOFT Campus Programme Graduation Ceremony on 5 April 2011, Mr Lee Yi Shyan, Minister of State for Trade and Industry said that the interactive digital media (IDM) industry in Singapore has added over 2,000 jobs between 2007 and 2009. In his exact words, "It is a promising industry where many opportunities await."

While the setup of operations in Singapore by the leading global IDM companies, such as Tecmo Koei, Ubisoft and LucasFilm, reinforces Mr Lee's point on the abundance of opportunities within the industry, it is the availability of a talent pool that can support the fast-growing sector that underpins the real growth of the industry.

In line with this vision, Contact Singapore arranged for a group of 14 students specialising in Visual and Information Communications and various Design disciplines from Taiwan and Korea to visit Singapore in February under the Experience@Singapore programme organised by Contact Singapore.

As part of the five-day itinerary, the students visited some of the biggest IDM players and rising local enterprises in the industry, key tertiary institutions that

offer IDM courses as well as places of interest in Singapore. This proved to be an invaluable experience for many of the participants who professed to know little about Singapore and its IDM industry prior to the start of the journey.

"This trip has been better than expected in every sense. The career opportunities here are abundant, the environment is friendly and welcoming and a future here suggests to be equally wonderful. I am definitely keen to explore the possibility of a career in Singapore!"

... Miao Ping Hong, Taiwanese

"Before the trip, I did not know much about Singapore except that the weather here is very warm. Now, I know that Singapore is really a very technologically advanced country; and its people are smart and nice."

... Kyungho Lee, Korean

"This has certainly been a great experience for me. I am particularly surprised and impressed with the work environment in Singapore. Although the people here seem to be more relaxed at work and speak their mind freely, they are really very professional in the kind of work they do."

... Heeyun Ku, Korean

SINGAPORE DAY 2011 AND CAREERS@SINGAPORE IN SHANGHAI

On a picnic perfect spring day in Shanghai's Century Park on 16 April this year, the crisp air filled with the aromas of satay, nasi lemak, roti prata and chilli crab, to the bewilderment of regular park goers. Yes, it was unmistakably Singapore Day, the fourth such annual event in a global series that has so far been held in New York City, Melbourne and London by the Overseas Singaporean Unit, Prime Minister's Office.

What better way to attract overseas Singaporeans than the promise of authentic Singapore hawker food, this time served up by no less than 16 celebrity street chefs who jetted in for the day? The park soon thronged with 5,500 Singaporeans and their families from cities all over China.

The food went fast and the on-stage banter from homegrown hit TV shows, like *Phua Chu Kang*, *Under One Roof* and *The Little Nonya* rose above the prevalent Singlish chitchat. But the event was not simply about celebrating uniquely Singaporean loves and habits; it was an invitation to overseas Singaporeans to stay in touch.

The crowd could wander through exciting experiential showcases that provided the latest updates on housing, national defence, education and the Singapore economy while children played in a Kids Zone – the first time the Singapore Day organisers set up one.



As part of the programme, Contact Singapore set up a Careers@Home booth. Hirers, including several government agencies, Singapore's biggest banks, such as DBS, UOB and OCBC, and leading property developer Far East Organization, dangled a total of 90 job opportunities at the 1,500 overseas Singaporeans who visited the Contact Singapore booth.

The following day, Contact Singapore held one of the largest job fairs in Shanghai this year, showcasing over 200 positions in electronics, finance and real

estate. Opportunities in Singapore's electronics sector, at companies like Mediatek, Panasonic and Uni Connect, attracted a large majority of the 1,000 people who came. To reach out to a web audience, Contact Singapore also tied up with Sina.com, a popular web portal in China, to manage live interactions between its team on the ground, the hiring companies, participants and web users using its Sina Weibo Live (a microblogging platform). Like Singapore Day 2011, the Careers@Singapore jobs fair held in Shanghai was a huge success.

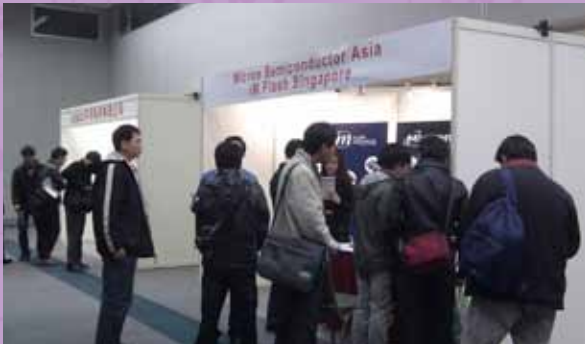


CAREERS@SINGAPORE SERIES

CAREERS@SINGAPORE: ELECTRONICS 2011 IN TAIWAN

Contact Singapore's recruitment drive for skilled engineers in Taiwan – its third since 2008 – drew over 200 jobseekers to the Taipei International Convention Centre on Saturday 12 March.

Ready to meet them were representatives from ASM Pacific Technology, Micron Semiconductor Asia & IM Flash, and UMC. Large semiconductor-related companies like these have reported facing a shortage of skilled engineers as Singapore's electronics sector rebounds. The companies were thrilled that the event attracted experienced, good quality engineers from both the private and public sectors, and many were subsequently shortlisted for interviews.



The Singapore contingent also participated in campus recruitment drives organised by the three top universities in the country – the National Taiwan University, the National Chiao Tung University and the National Tsing Hua University.

Taiwanese engineering talent is well-regarded in Singapore and their numbers have grown steadily. A key factor is the improved level of English competency amongst mid-level working professionals in recent years, which has made them all the more in demand.

Singapore – a good fit for Taiwanese talent

In conversations with Taiwanese jobseekers, Contact Singapore found that these are the top draws of Singapore.

1. Excellent bilingual education for children
2. Affordable cost of living
3. A familiar Asian work environment
4. A good work-life balance

CAREERS@SINGAPORE: HEALTHCARE IN THE UK AND IRELAND



The search for qualified healthcare professionals to work in Singapore's public healthcare sector continues to take Contact Singapore far and wide. In late February, Contact Singapore embarked on a whirlwind two-week recruitment drive with MOH Holdings (MOHH) that covered London, Wales, Nottingham and Manchester, in the United Kingdom, and Dublin, in Ireland.

The scope of the trip included meetings with experienced Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) as well as recruitment talks at numerous campuses. Besides logistical support, Contact Singapore was also involved in extensive pre-trip publicity to generate interest.

The recruitment exercise was well-received, with more than 350 participants attending the various sessions throughout the trip. MOHH continuously seeks to recruit outstanding AHPs from all around the world to contribute to Singapore's healthcare industry to meet the growing challenges of Singapore's aging population and demands from the rapid expansion of its healthcare industry.

AHPs are highly valued in Singapore's robust healthcare system, where each and every individual plays an integral role in providing seamless continuum of care to patients. Singapore strongly believes in providing AHPs with an open and conducive learning and working environment where best practices in the medical industry are exchanged and where they can benefit from a multi-faceted approach towards advancing their careers in Singapore.

**AHPs cover a wide range of professionals including MOHH's website: <http://www.ahp.mohh.com.sg/careers.html>*

WORLD MUN 2011

Singapore played host to future world leaders and global policy makers who descended on the city in mid-March to attend WorldMUN 2011 – the first time this model United Nations (UN) conference has ever been held in Southeast Asia in its 20-year history.

Some 2,600 delegates from over 65 countries, including undergraduate and graduate students, faculty members, alumni and staff, took over the hallways and conference halls of Singapore's Suntec Convention Centre for a week. With each university team representing the interests of a selected country, students debated and passed resolutions on complex global issues as delegates would at real UN conferences.

Contact Singapore provided support for the participation of almost 50 students from three universities – University Heidelberg, University Mannheim and ETH Zurich. It also hosted a lunch workshop at the conference site, which was attended by 80 students mainly from Germany and Switzerland. It was a fantastic opportunity to spread the word about initiatives such as the Work Holiday Programme, Experience@Singapore as well as other avenues open to undergraduates and graduating students who are keen to explore career and study opportunities in Singapore.

Thumbs Up For Singapore!

"We had our sessions in a wonderful and modern convention centre; the (former) Minister for Foreign Affairs held a speech for us at the Opening Ceremony; the coolest places were reserved for us to visit, party etc. To see how the opinions of the youth are valued and respected means a lot to me. There is openness, acceptance, and definitely professionalism."

... Alexander Naydenov, Bulgarian student at University Mannheim

"Debates were held at a remarkably high level and the discussions were smoothly facilitated thanks to the host team and all the volunteers who helped to make the experience remarkable. Another unique aspect of the conference was its amazing venues in Singapore, for example, the beach where the closing ceremony was held."

... Sebastian Zilch, German student at University Heidelberg

"There is a high possibility that I will return to Singapore to work. Besides having family and friends in Singapore, what I love most about the country is that it is constantly evolving. Singapore is perpetually changing, striving to be better."

... Shubei Wang, Singaporean student at University Heidelberg

WHAT IS WORLD MUN?

WorldMUN is the short reference for Harvard World Model United Nations, an annual college-level simulation of the United Nations (UN) conference. Founded in 1991 and led by a committee of Harvard undergraduates, this conference attracts the best and brightest young minds from universities and colleges all over the world. It is currently the largest international university conference.

"I would love to do an exchange semester or an internship in Singapore in the future. I believe that it would definitely be a great opportunity, especially since Singapore is also a very good networking place, where a lot of cultures and many successful entrepreneurs meet."

... Vince Moens, Belgian student at ETH Zurich



University Heidelberg student delegation representing Saudi Arabia at the conference. (Photo courtesy of Shubi Wang.)



ETH Zurich students in a group photo with students from their sister university in Lausanne. (Photo courtesy of Vince Moens.)



Christopher Koh from Contact Singapore (third from the left in the front row) posing with student delegates from University Mannheim. (Photo courtesy of Alexander Naydenov.)

GRADUATE SCHOOL PROJECTS@SINGAPORE

Graduate School Projects@Singapore offers graduate students an opportunity to form a team of at least three persons and propose a project that is relevant to any of the key growth sectors in Singapore.

Open to graduate students of all disciplines with at least two years of working experience, the selected teams with the winning proposals will receive funding for a study trip to Singapore to gather information for the project as well as a stipend to cover associated expenses for the project.

Interested to take part?

Cycle three is taking place right now and cycle four will be starting in September, so keep a lookout for it on Contact Singapore's website www.contactsingapore.sg/gsp

Here, Synergy finds out more about the three winning proposals from cycle two.

FIGHTING HAIs WITH BETTER HAND HYGIENE



Hospital Acquired Infections (HAIs) are a major global healthcare problem affecting millions of people around the world and one of the major sources of HAI (or nosocomial infections) is the improper hand disinfection of medical staff.

In November 2010, Singapore's Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) announced its collaboration with National University Hospital and Changi General Hospital to combat HAIs, called Project Safe Hands.

Eyeing the opportunity, a group of three students from Hungary created a prototype called Stery-Hand – a unique, portable and objective metric for measuring the sterility of the hands. It works by giving repeatable and immediate measurements of hand washing quality through UV-marked soap under non-invasive UV light excitation and advanced digital image processing.

The team first came to Singapore in March for their study trip and subsequently, returned in May to collaborate with the National University Hospital for further testing which involved more than 1,000 participants who had their hands measured after washing. Currently, the team is working on improving the sensitivity and functionality of the device. They are also looking for possible partnerships with research labs to bring the patent-pending device to the next level.



From left to right: Tamás Haidegger, Melinda Nagy and Ákos Lehotsky

Stery-Hand was conferred the "Best Innovation Solution" by the 9th Innovact European Campus Award 2011. The project stood out as the most ingenious business idea among the 160 submissions by students from 27 different countries.

WHAT OUR PARTICIPANTS SAID

"I am very glad that this project brought me to Singapore. This trip here has given me great insights to Singapore and I am inspired to explore the possibility of coming back here to pursue a postgraduate degree in Epidemiology."

... Ákos Lehotsky

"Having enjoyed the last Singapore experience tremendously as one of the participants in Experience@Singapore, I was excited to be able to come back. I am seriously considering to settle down in Singapore for the long-term."

... Tamás Haidegger

"This being my first time in Singapore, there are many things that I observed to be different from Budapest. It is definitely quite an experience – the food, the people, the culture and the environment."

... Melinda Nagy

A NEW WAY OF POWER GENERATION: PYROLYSIS OIL

Four young chemical, biological and environmental engineers from Germany, France and Hungary came to Singapore for their bioenergy-related proposal to study the current developments in deriving pyrolysis oil from biomass, as well as to evaluate opportunities and challenges involved in replacing fossil fuels with pyrolysis oil in existing power plants in Singapore.



Patty Woo from Contact Singapore (second from left) posing with the team (from left to right): Diána Szabó, Eszter Tóth and Judit Kaknics

Their findings noted that Singapore could potentially secure cost-effective biomass residues for pyrolysis oil from Malaysia and Indonesia. Currently, however, as Singapore incinerates most of the biomass residues generated, there is little room for pyrolysis technologies implementation in this sector.

Also, with no set target on the implementation of renewable energy and little bio-energy incentives for companies, as well as the scheduled completion of a new liquid natural gas (LNG) terminal in 2013, the trend in Singapore is to migrate towards the use of LNG.

In order for pyrolysis oil to become a viable energy source here, it would need to be cost competitive with fossil fuels and existing generation units would need to be modified to work on pyrolysis oil.

The study concluded that although it is cost-prohibitive to consider pyrolysis oil as an alternative energy source for Singapore at this point, it is too early to determine whether pyrolysis oil does have a future for the Singapore energy market. After all, if the technology proves to be sustainable, it is just a matter of time that it will win the cost battle.

WHAT OUR PARTICIPANTS SAID

"It is an honour to have our project selected amongst the various entries that Contact Singapore must have received. With our project being selected, I hope to encourage our fellow mates back in Hungary – to let them know that living the Singapore dream is possible!"

...Judit Kaknics

"Having been to Singapore once before, this trip has once again reinforced my positive impression of Singapore. The interaction we had with the companies for the project was invaluable as I got to see how professional the people and the companies here are."

...Eszter Tóth

"I was a little apprehensive before the trip as this was my first trip to Asia. However, as it seems, Singapore is actually a very easy place to get around. The MRT system is comprehensive, and when in doubt, we could easily ask for directions since everyone here understands English."

...Diána Rita Szabó



"We have learned a lot during these few months and without any doubt it is an important experience in our career. Working on the project after work or university courses and organising the team work at a distance really stretched our nerves at times. But luckily our youth provides us with a lot of energy and we managed to pull it through."

...Alex Jordan

Quick Fact:

Pyrolysis oil or bio-oil is a dark-brown liquid made from plant material by a thermo-chemical process called fast pyrolysis, whereby biomass particles are heated in the absence of oxygen, vaporised and condensed into liquid. Assuming a dry feed basis, the process typically yields 65-70% liquid pyrolysis oil, 15-20% char (a black charcoal-like powder) and non-condensable gases.

BIOMEDICAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT IN SINGAPORE: LESSONS FROM A*STAR AND BIOMEDICAL STARTUPS

A team from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard assessed Singapore's success in commercialising our biomedical sciences research efforts to-date. The team of three found that progress for this industry has taken off rapidly in the span of a decade. However, success stories of commercialisation are limited and metrics are not well defined although the government is putting in significant resources and focus to improve commercialisation rates. As new programmes are implemented, one can expect the development of more uniform and rigorous metrics and a significant investment in improving the biomedical ecosystem to make it more suitable for commercialisation and entrepreneurship.

Based on the insights gained, the team recommended three areas for further action. Firstly, A*STAR should continue to increase its network of global research collaborations. Secondly, there is potential to nurture a more entrepreneur-friendly environment at A*STAR by wooing more private sector talent, especially venture capitalist types, to join its ranks. Finally, A*STAR should also capitalise on its resources and respected global standing to encourage more businesses to set up in Singapore, by positioning the country as an entryway for start-ups to launch in Asia.

WHAT OUR PARTICIPANTS SAID



"I am impressed with Singapore's excellence in both long-term economic planning and execution, and talent attraction. The challenges to me seem more as opportunities for improvement, rather than impenetrable walls. I'm quite excited about the prospects of Singapore's biomedical industry."

...Wendi Zhang



*"Singapore has shown promising growth and development within the past decade in its biomedical venture. We hope our findings may shed some light on the important role of A*STAR in commercialisation of research, and help more scientists and medical workers realise their aspiration of saving human lives while relishing an academic utopia in the hub of Asia."*

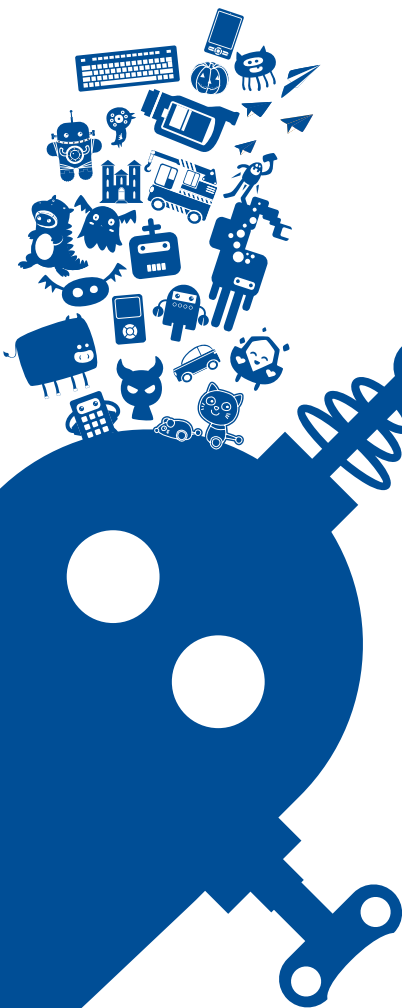
...Claire Lee



"It was incredibly insightful to also learn about the biomedical R&D and commercial units in the U.S., France and Germany. We gained a deeper understanding of how these biomedical counterparts invest in local talent as well as leverage foreign expertise, and suggested best practices for Singapore's research and enterprise community. We are thankful for the privilege to participate in this exploration and are amazed at the opportunities for Singapore."

...Alex Shih

RIDING THE DIGITAL WAVE



Straight-laced and business-like, can Singapore summon up the street cred to cut it in the progressive, globally converging multi-billion dollar arena of interactive and digital media? It has been over five years since Singapore announced its ambition to be a global capital for IDM and backed it with a S\$500-million seed fund to jumpstart a practically non-existent industry. *Synergy* takes a look at the state of play and the road ahead.



With the proliferation of smartphones, interactive TV, ever faster broadband speeds and a general shift towards wired lifestyles, the global interactive and digital media (IDM) industry is evolving at top speed. And, it is worth billions. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, the global videogames industry alone is expected to be worth US\$68.3million by 2012. Asia, particularly China and India, is where the growth markets are, and Singapore has shown excellent timing, and the astuteness to woo the big players to set up their Asian bases in the city.



Photo courtesy of Ubisoft Singapore

Game developers like Ubisoft, animation companies like Lucasfilm Ltd Singapore, information services firms and publishers like Thomson Reuters and broadcasters like ESPN Star Sports, HBO and SONY Pictures Entertainment are among dozens of multinationals that have invested millions in facilities here to take advantage of Singapore's geopolitical position for direct access to these growing markets.

Singapore also offers all the important pluses – good network infrastructure (most networked nation in Asia and second in the world according to a World Economic Forum Global Information Technology Report 2010-2011), strong intellectual property protection laws, political stability and an open door talent policy for attracting top foreign talent.

INCREDIBLE ECONOMIC GROWTH POTENTIAL



Early indications from Singapore's fledgling industry have been modest but very promising. The IDM sector reported revenue of S\$1.5 billion in 2009, which is less than one per cent of Singapore annual Gross Domestic Product, but the real achievement is that it survived one of the worst global recessions alive and kicking. In the year 2009 when

Singapore's GDP shrank 3 per cent, the IDM sector expanded 15 per cent and hired 15 per cent more people, according to a survey conducted by Deloitte and commissioned by the Media Development Authority of Singapore (MDA). Now, with the Singapore economy back on track, the push is on for IDM to become one of the key new

economic drivers, alongside high value-added sectors like biomedical sciences, and environment and water technology. It is already one of the fastest growing sectors with double-digit growth projected well into 2015. If all goes as planned, the Economic Development Board targets that the IDM sector will add 10,000 new jobs by 2018.



SEEDS OF A LOCAL IDM ECO-SYSTEM

Central to Singapore's IDM strategy is nurturing homegrown companies and local talent amidst the multinationals, so that a sustainable eco-system may be established. Since 2007, over 160 homegrown IDM companies started business, making up 80 per cent of the total number of IDM companies in Singapore. While the multinationals have much larger operations with bigger headcount – Lucasfilm Ltd Singapore has 500 people – the small startups have been hiring consistently and now employ about 70 per cent of the over 8,000 people working in the IDM industry.

The three main sub-sectors that are driving most of the growth are rich media publishing, mobile media, and the virtual worlds and games sector. Rich media publishing, which covers interactive TV and other online media companies, is the largest of the three at the moment, while mobile media earns the most revenue. However, the virtual worlds and games sub-sector

is catching up fast, with the most number of start-ups and the fastest employment growth.

While it is still too early to draw conclusions, a quick survey shows there is a rising trend of regional telcos like SingTel, Telkomsel and Maxis adopting locally created mobile applications and, it must be noted, some of these applications are growing significantly large pools of international users. Names like buUuk, Mozat and Garena are often held up proudly as examples of successful homegrown IDM entrepreneurship. (See 'Homegrown Hits' box featuring their success stories.)

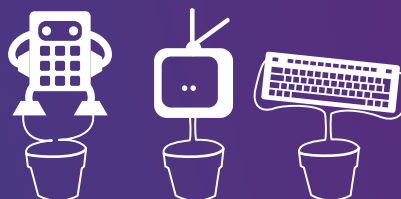


Photo courtesy of buUuk

A PUSH FOR MADE-IN-SINGAPORE CONTENT

Another aspect of Singapore's IDM strategy has been to encourage a steady stream of made-in-Singapore content for global consumption. The idea is that with the world's focus on Asia, and Asian audiences becoming the fastest growing consumers of global content, Singapore has the well-placed combination of western influence and a modern Asian perspective to evolve a globally palatable type of New Asian content.

In this respect, the virtual worlds and games sub-sector has risen to the occasion. International companies like Tecmo-Koei developed a massive multi-player online game based on its key intellectual properties, Romance of the Three Kingdoms Online, here. Another well-known example is The Secret of Monkey Island 2: Special Edition for iPhone, developed by LucasArts Singapore. Local companies like Mikoishi have also produced a steady stream of innovative games, such as its forthcoming title, Dark Grounds, for global markets.

Aware that hands-on experience is crucial, Singapore offers many training and internship opportunities as



Photo courtesy of Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab

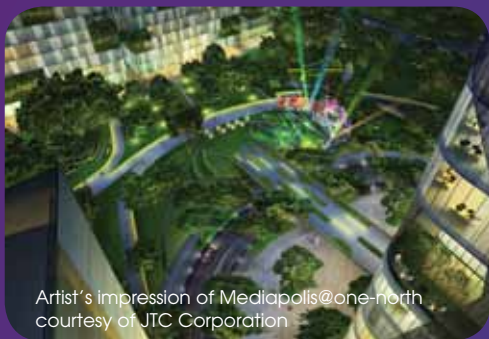
well as financial support to groom a new generation of IDM talent. The Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab is one such initiative. Its latest game, a puzzler called Symon which was developed by its 2010 summer team of interns, took home the Kongregate Award for Best Browser Game at the 2011 Indie Game Challenge. And thanks to an MDA grant, up-and-coming indie games developer, Ratloop Asia, created Rocketbirds: Revolution!, a browser game which was nominated for Excellence in Audio, Excellence in Visual Art, and the Seumas McNally Grand Prize at the 2010 International Games Festival. A bigger and better version, Rocketbirds: Reloaded!, has been licensed for Sony Playstation and is due for release by the end of 2011.

In June this year, Singapore will also debut a new content showcase called ScreenSingapore, an event that will undoubtedly raise the international profile of made-in-Singapore digital movies and animation. Strategically timed between the Cannes Film Festival and the lucrative summer box-office season in North America, ScreenSingapore is another overt attempt to grab the world's attention for its offerings.



Photo courtesy of Ratloop Asia

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT PAVING THE WAY



Artist's impression of Mediapolis@one-north courtesy of JTC Corporation

The level of government support and funding for the industry remains a main contributor to its success. The MDA runs an impressive range of funding programmes and business matching and mentoring schemes to help would-be local

entrepreneurs transform their ideas into viable businesses. Concurrently, the Interactive and Digital Media Programme Office (IDMPPO) offers numerous support schemes for industry and for start-ups with innovative IDM solutions.

With only part of the original S\$500 million fund for the media industry disbursed, there is a lot more work to be done. In April, MDA announced a new incubation programme called Blk71. It is essentially a one-stop location where IDM start-ups can gain access to all the resources needed to develop and market their solutions to customers.

Mediapolis@one-north, the purpose-built media cluster that has taken years of planning, is also finally taking shape. A ground-breaking ceremony for its first building was held in February. The 10-storey building, called Infinite Studios, after its main tenant Infinite Frameworks, boasts over 24,000 square metres of space and is targeted for completion in late 2012. It will host Singapore's first two fully operational soundstages and facilities to support high-quality media productions, especially films with high digital content and strong visual effects. Another major tenant is media service provider GlobeCast Asia, which will occupy over 2,000 square metres.

FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY DEFINED BY RESEARCH



Noting the global trend towards greater convergence of technologies and the high rate of innovation in the IDM industry, the government has zeroed in on the potential of research to define the future of Singapore's IDM industry. The IDMPO has been furiously matchmaking local universities with internationally renowned institutes, like Carnegie Mellon in the United States and Tsinghua University in China, to set up research centres that explore exciting IDM applications for new technologies.

The most recently launched facility is the BeingThere Centre, a S\$23-million investment that partners Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, Switzerland's Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich

and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the United States. It is working on advanced forms of interactive real-time 3D communication known as telepresence and telecollaboration.

Adding even more fuel for the fire, the IDMPO has been tasked to manage a new S\$100-million research funding scheme for universities, polytechnics, and businesses called the IDM Futures Funding Initiative.

So, Singapore's remarkable journey to start an IDM sector is already taking an interesting twist. With time, innovation and talented professionals, it has the potential to change the way the world sees, uses and experiences digital media.

HOMEGROWN HITS

Garena

Started in April 2008, Garena is an online game platform provider based in Singapore. In just two years, it expanded its user base more than tenfold, from 4 million to over 60 million in 210 countries.

buUuk

An online provider of localised food and beverage content for mobile users, buUuk's service today spans almost 26 countries and 80 cities including Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, India and Dubai boosting a large user base of about 250,000 users.

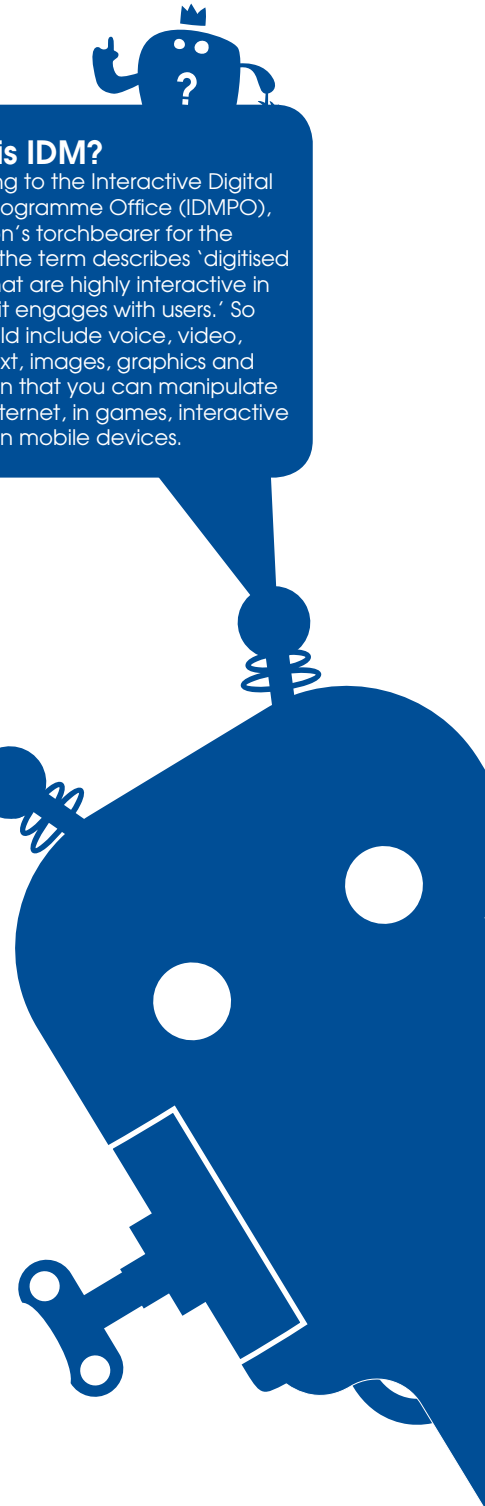
MoZat

A provider of mobile social network and community services, MoZat has made significant inroads in many Islamic markets in the Middle East and ASEAN through partnerships with major telcos and handset manufacturers. To date, it has registered 16 million users in over 50 countries.



What is IDM?

According to the Interactive Digital Media Programme Office (IDMPO), the nation's torchbearer for the industry, the term describes 'digitised media that are highly interactive in the way it engages with users.' So that would include voice, video, music, text, images, graphics and animation that you can manipulate on the internet, in games, interactive TV and on mobile devices.



GAMING

SIAN YUE TAN

Producer

Head Of Studio Ratloop Asia



Sometimes, the search for the best place to launch your wildest ambition takes you right back to where you started. That seems to be the case for Sian Yue Tan, the founder of Ratloop Asia, and mastermind behind *Rocketbirds: Revolution!*. His band of malevolent birds have been engaged in all manner of fowl play in his head and across the pages of his sketchbooks since he was a teenager in Singapore, but he had to go halfway across the world, and back, before he found the right place and more precisely, the right conditions to introduce them to the real world.

That winding path started off with a period studying architecture in Holland from 1992, which led him to discover 3D software and an interest in designing video games.

That led to him moving to the United States to set up Ratloop, Inc. a game development studio with several partners. He then made a detour to the United Kingdom to study law and finance before eventually coming back to Singapore in 2002, suitably equipped with skills to help his father list the family's environmental engineering business on the Singapore Exchange.

All was good but those fowls harboured dreams for global dominion. Incidentally, the International Game Developers Association, or IGDA, a global non-profit organisation for the interactive and digital media (IDM) industry, has a large and very active chapter in Singapore. Through regular meetings, Sian Yue found out about grants that Singapore's Media Development Authority was

giving out to fund ingenious plans for global takeovers of digital gaming territory. He applied, won them over with his game idea and Ratloop Asia was started.

GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT GAMES

But seriously, Sian Yue was impressed with the changes he saw in Singapore when he returned. He saw how economic strategies that were set when he was growing up in Singapore have created important competitive advantages for businesses like his, particularly the sophisticated fibre optic network infrastructure and the skilled and bilingual workforce. These have aligned Singapore for 'the worldwide paradigm shift towards China as a market' and proved that Singapore had 'tremendous foresight in trying to predict and anticipate what will be important in the future.'

"There is a general shift towards creativity and creative thinking," he said, citing the diverse range of culture, arts and entertainment events showcased at places like the Esplanade and the Integrated Resorts, as well as events like the Singapore F1 Grand Prix. "And the deeper impact of this creative push has been the drive to encourage entrepreneurship and to help start-ups."

Conditions are particularly ripe for an IDM company like Ratloop Asia; it belongs in one of the three sectors,

alongside Biomedical Sciences and Environmental and Water Technology, whose success will shape Singapore's economic future.

"Everyone I've worked with and met from the government institutions has been truly committed to making this industry a relevant one in Singapore," he said.

ALWAYS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

It took him less than a month to get work visas approved, less than a week to set up his company, and less than ten minutes to file personal income taxes.

He points out that in today's market, this business-friendly environment is what counts.

"Due to the shift in the markets towards downloadable content that can be purchased from anywhere, it is now possible for smaller companies to get their products to end consumers without going through publishers, so in a sense, it no longer matters where the products are made."

He admits that one challenge he faces is finding experienced staff since the industry is still nurturing its talent, but he believes that time will solve this.

"The ecosystem is right over here," he explained. "The presence of major players like LucasArts, Ubisoft and Koei indicates they must have tremendous faith in Singapore's support and capabilities."

TO WIN

LUCAS POPE

Programming Lead

Actionauts, bloodthirsty vampires and raving mad chickens! It's a good thing that Lucas Pope – an award-winning indie games programmer and part of the Ratloop Inc. team in the United States – set aside his studies in computer engineering to pursue his passion for developing indie games instead. Together, Ratloop Inc. and Ratloop Asia, have clinched Independent Games Festival (IGF) nominations three years in a row. In September 2010, the young American and his wife, Keiko, moved to Singapore to work on *Rocketbirds: Reloaded!*, Ratloop Asia's debut game on Playstation network.

HOW DID YOU END UP BECOMING A GAMES DESIGNER?

I started playing Nintendo avidly in the late eighties but I always thought I would be a musician – I played in a band while in high school. Then a friend of mine got me hooked on robotics so I went to college to study electrical engineering. With some programming knowledge, I got part-time work developing games and along the way, I realised that this job would allow me to combine my love for music, computers and games.

WHAT WERE YOU UP TO BEFORE ROCKETBIRDS?

Keiko and I had just relocated to Japan after years working full-time for

established game developers in Los Angeles. We are both passionate about making independent games; in the last couple of years we created two puzzle games, *Mightier*, in 2009, and *Helsing's Fire*, in 2010, both under Ratloop Inc. Both were IGF nominees, and the latter just won 'Best Mobile Game' at IGF 2011.

WHY DID YOU AGREE TO COME TO SINGAPORE?

I have always known that Sian Yue wanted to create *Rocketbirds*. It is one of those game ideas that just had to be realised, so it was frustrating that the first time he asked Keiko and I to help out on *Rocketbirds: Revolution!* in 2008, we were both involved in other stuff and couldn't work out the logistics. The timing was right this time, so we jumped in.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR ROCKETBIRDS: RELOADED!?

I am the lead programmer on the project. We are adapting aspects of the original browser version so that it works better for console play, as well as adding new game levels. Also, *Revolution!* was in 2D but *Reloaded!* is going to be in 3D.

SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF SINGAPORE?

I've visited Sian Yue here twice before and I've always known that it was very western-friendly and that it would be



easy to adjust to living here. I am also often impressed by how prosperous it is.

WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON SINGAPORE'S INTERACTIVE AND DIGITAL MEDIA SCENE?

It has managed to attract a lot of good companies and great people and it just needs time to mature. Currently, the local games industry seems to depend on experienced foreign talent, but this setup is critical because it greatly shortens the learning curve in an industry that is evolving very quickly globally. Singapore seems to be doing the right things to grow local expertise. Even before I came to Singapore, I knew about the MIT-Gambit Labs initiative, which has released some interesting games and is a great way to nurture local gaming talent.

ABOUT RATLOOP ASIA

Originally started in the United States in 1998 as Ratloop Inc., Ratloop Asia is an independent game studio that opened in Singapore in July 2008 to create computer games. Its first game, *Rocketbirds: Revolution!* went on to become a finalist for three awards at the 2010 Independent Games Festival, including Excellence in Audio, Excellence in Visual Art and the Seumus McNally Grand Prize. The game also caught the attention of Sony Computer Entertainment, and Ratloop became one of the first local studios in Singapore to become licensed developers for Sony. An international team based in Singapore is currently working furiously on a console-friendly version of the game, called *Rocketbirds: Reloaded!* for Playstation 3, due for worldwide release in end 2011.



ART IN THE CITY

There is so much happening in Singapore's contemporary arts and cultural scene today; it is hard to believe that Singapore's own National Arts Council (NAC) was only set up 20 years ago in 1991.

Whether you are an arts aficionado, an occasional concert-goer or a practitioner, there are options and avenues aplenty. Read on as *Synergy* gets you started on exploring the scene.



Photo courtesy of Singapore Tourism Board

RENAISSANCE IN THE CITY

The 1990s was a time of arts renaissance in Singapore, when many of Singapore's local artists, performers, and other art practitioners as well as theatre companies and art collectives started out on their creative journeys. To nurture these entities, NAC launched a pivotal arts housing project where vacated government buildings were identified and re-purposed for arts-related use. The projects breathed new life into once-derelict colonial structures in the central district and more significantly, provided much needed physical space for creative incubation, exploration and practice. Backed by government funding in the form of grants and schemes, a growing public interest, and a sense of optimism in the arts community, this was an exciting time when Singapore's contemporary arts and cultural scene took root.

Many of these arts centres remain in operation today, such as ONE-TWO-SIX Cairnhill Arts Centre, YMS Arts Centre, Telok Kurau Studios, Sculpture Square,

the DBS Arts Centre – home of the Singapore Repertory Theatre, the Waterloo Street Arts Belt and the Little India Arts Belt. A visit to one may just reward you with a glimpse of an emerging artist at work, or a cutting edge performance that may never be staged at a larger commercial venue.

It was also in the early 90s that the groundwork was laid for the construction of Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. The S\$600 million performing and visual arts complex, completed in 2002, is the most prominent icon of Singapore's arts and cultural identity today.

Simultaneously, another government body, the National Heritage Board (NHB) launched a masterplan to ignite interest in Singapore's history and cultural heritage. The NHB oversaw ambitious heritage projects like the establishment of the Singapore Art Museum, the Asian Civilisations Museum, the National History Museum, the Singapore Philatelic Museum and the Peranakan Museum in a short span of about 15 years.

Today, the Esplanade, and the arts centres, museums, theatres and galleries in the surrounding areas, form the nexus of Singapore's thriving arts and heritage district. On any given

day, you can enjoy an evening at a blockbuster Broadway musical, a concert by a Grammy award-winning musician, a show by celebrated homegrown acts or an exhibition of priceless art and treasures.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Venture beyond the environs of the Esplanade and you will be surprised at what you can find too.

The National University Cultural Centre in Clementi, on the west of the island, is a gorgeous new performing arts venue with a hall that seats 1,700 people and a more modest theatre for about 450. Within the complex is the NUS Museum, home to three important collections – the Lee Kong Chian collection of Chinese art, the Ng Eng Teng collection featuring important works by Singapore's foremost sculptor, Ng Eng Teng, and an extensive collection of ceramics, textiles and artefacts from South and Southeast Asia.

Further west in Jurong is the fascinating Heritage Conservation Centre, a state-of-the-art, purpose-built facility for the storage and conservation of all the artworks and priceless artefacts that the NHB manages – over 150,000



Photo courtesy of EDB



Photo courtesy of Singapore Tourism Board



Photo courtesy of EDB

pieces presently. A guided tour reveals Singapore's ambitions to build an internationally noteworthy collection. The Singapore Art Museum already boasts the world's largest collection of contemporary Southeast Asian art.

Out by the docks, cutting edge fine art hang in the five or so art galleries that have been set up within the nondescript expanse of the Tanjong Pagar Distripark. Well-known galleries like ReDot Gallery, which specialises in Australian indigenous art, and Valentine Willie Fine Art add professional cache to this well-kept art insider's secret.

Besides visual art groups, more theatre groups are beginning to stage original and adapted plays in the suburbs of Singapore, as the facilities to support stage productions become more plentiful. Of late, productions are popping up at the community centres found in heartland estates as well as at well-equipped theatres in educational institutions like Republic Polytechnic. One early pioneer is The Necessary Stage, which has made its home at Marine Parade Community Building since 2000. There, its black box theatre space has entertained many with original and critically acclaimed plays with themes poignant to the Singapore experience.

These are just a sampling of places off the beaten track and you will find a lot more diverse and exciting offerings once you start looking.

ART OUTSIDE

Speaking of looking, the next time you take the MRT, take a few minutes to survey the walls and hanging installations instead of hurrying through the gantry. The MRT stations, particularly those on the Circle Line, display a sizeable collection of specially commissioned artworks by renowned artists, so you may be inspired wherever your journey takes you.

The work of well-known international artists can also be found at busy pedestrian areas, such as the colourful Roy Lichtenstein sculptures at Millenia Walk, the hand-painted Alkaff Bridge by Filipino artist Pacita Abad and the towering Momentum Sculpture at Finlayson Green by David Gerstein. Even shopping centres are getting into the act – Orchard Central has a playful fantastical rooftop orchard by avant-garde Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama.

A key initiative of NAC's arts masterplan was to make art more accessible to ordinary citizens. Besides public installations like those above, every major festival in its stable, including the annual extravaganza called the Singapore Arts Festival, offers free public events that are presented in open atriums, plazas and even on the pavements. One of the most successful platforms has been Concerts in the Park – a variety of free concerts that are performed at parks all over Singapore.

Singapore's year round tropical climate and typically breezy evenings are perfect for such casual outdoor events. The Singapore Dance Theatre's annual Ballet Under The Stars programme on the historic Fort Canning Green has been a hit for many years, as much for being an excuse for an evening picnic as for its dazzling breakthrough performances.

DO-IT-YOURSELF

Inspired? Singapore's position as the gateway to Asia makes it the perfect place to start exploring and learning about the arts and cultural heritage of the region. The country's foremost

fine arts and performing arts institutions are the LaSalle College of the Arts and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. Both institutions have a long established reputation and attract students and teaching academia from all over Asia and the world. A new addition is the School of the Arts – an independent, pre-tertiary institute for students who are keen to pursue an arts-oriented education.

The last two decades have seen the development of a young arts-loving generation and the proliferation of private schools that teach everything from classical music to traditional dance, 3D computer animation to oil painting, performance art to art therapy. Whether you plan to immerse yourself as a full-time student or dabble in enrichment courses, there is a mind-boggling range of classes. Your first difficulty is likely to be in making a choice!

So take the plunge, wander the streets, scan the listings (there are many), there is no better time to discover art in this city.



Photo courtesy of EDB

{ RE-PURPOSED }

FOR ART'S SAKE

Before the Esplanade, the Singapore Flyer and Marina Bay Sands transformed the skyline, it was the City Hall Building and former Supreme Court Building, fronted by the tranquil expanse of the Padang, that appeared on many a Singapore tourism poster. These historic colonial buildings are the most iconic buildings in Singapore's path to nationhood, bearing witness to the surrender of the Japanese to the British in 1945 and Singapore's declaration of Independence in 1965 by then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. In 1992, both buildings were gazetted as national monuments, and sometime in 2014, they will re-open as one National Art Gallery, hosting the world's largest public collection of modern Southeast Asian and Singapore art. Hip, hip, hurray for art lovers!

This may be the biggest, most ambitious project to re-purpose a space for art's sake, but it's not the first. *Synergy* gives you a run-down (no pun intended) of some of the cosiest nooks of Singapore's arts and cultural scene, ensconced in colonial era buildings with a very different past.



// THE SUBSTATION

www.substation.org

Was... Literally a former power sub-station, this building along Armenian Street dates back to 1926 and was used by the Public Utilities Board for over 50 years until it was vacated in the mid-70s.

Now... Singapore's first independent, and perhaps its most diverse, contemporary arts centre, The Substation, was set up in 1990 and had a seminal role as an incubator of local art and culture. Stroll through and you are as likely to see traditional dance performances as you are to hear a rock band belting out original tunes, or both performing together! Expect the experimental, the alternative and the original!

Must-do: Join one of the courses or workshops on offer; there's writing, drawing, photography and voice training. It doesn't matter really what you take, the idea is to meet the artists and explore your creative impulses in one of the most encouraging and experimental places in Singapore.

Photo courtesy of Singapore Tourism Board

// THE ARTS HOUSE

www.theartshouse.com.sg

Was... Built in the 1820s by an Irish architect named George Coleman as a residence for a Scottish merchant who rented it out to the colonial government for 500 rupees a month. The colonial building, tucked along the banks of the Singapore River, became Singapore's first Parliament House from 1965 until 1999.

Now... A multi-disciplinary arts centre dedicated to promoting mostly experimental works about or from Singapore. Besides a fast-changing calendar of installations and performances, it hosts many important seminars and forums on the arts, often in a charming space called the Living Room, once the nerve centre of Parliament. There is also the Earshot Café, a venue that holds regular open-mic sessions and champions local music and literature via a well-stocked book and CD shop.

Must-do: Check out the old Parliament chamber that has been cleverly turned into an intimate concert venue, perfect for recitals.



Photo courtesy of EDB

// DEMPSEY HILL

www.dempseyhill.com

Was... Originally the army barracks of the British colonial government, this complex of concrete blocks was used by the Singapore Armed Forces as its Central Manpower Base for many years. Coming here was a rite-of-passage for many young Singapore men when they entered compulsory national service at the age of 18.

Now... Better known as a lush, decidedly up-market F&B haunt on the outskirts of Orchard, this last entry would not have made the list had it not been for a new opening with the lofty name, Museum of Contemporary Art, Singapore. It is a whitewashed colonial building surrounded by rainforest on Loewen Road. Once you are on Dempsey Hill, a couple of galleries worth a mention include Red Sea Gallery and Linda Gallery. The latter regularly hosts fine art auctions attended by collectors from all over the region. Of course, what fun also to ogle at (and shop for) beautifully crafted wood furniture on the pretext of viewing Asian-themed photo exhibitions at John Erdos Gallery.

Must-do: Try to get on the guest list for an invite to any opening night at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Singapore. Catch the artworks of cutting edge Chinese artists that will quickly find their way to fine art collectors worldwide. Even if you are no contemporary art fan, the intriguing architectural elements in this old building make it worth a stop.



Photo courtesy of Singapore Tourism Board

// SINGAPORE TYLER PRINT INSTITUTE

www.stpi.com.sg

Was... A musty old grain warehouse on the banks of Robertson Quay, where by day a constant stream of coolies (Chinese labourers) would unload sacks from bumboats and stack them all the way to the ceiling.

Now... The Singapore Tyler Print Institute is a hidden gem that houses a light filled fine art print gallery, a full print studio staffed by a professional crew of paper and printmakers, a fully equipped apartment for its artist-in-residence, and the largest western-type paper mill in Asia. Check out the output of eminent global artists after intense residences where they are pushed to explore the boundaries of printmaking and paper sculpting. STPI artist residency programme have attracted internationally well known artists such as Do Ho Suh (Korea), Tabaimo (Japan), Trenton Doyle Hancock (USA) and Thukral and Tagra (India) to experiment with new mediums and create groundbreaking works.

Must-do: Join a regular Saturday afternoon tour that is free to the public, and offers the only chance to tour the sprawling basement studio and all its wondrous printmaking and paper making equipment. You may even catch a rare glimpse of artworks in progress.



Photo courtesy of Singapore Tyler Print Institute

// OLD SCHOOL

www.oldschool.sg

Was... Home of one of the top secondary schools in Singapore, the Methodist Girls' School, which occupied the six buildings on Mount Sophia since the mid-1920s. The hill was named after the founder who was an Australian missionary named Sophia Blackmore.

Now... Transformed into a mixed-use development that has attracted too-cool-for-school establishments, including ad agencies, photography studios, game development studios, record labels and publishers. Lots to explore if you are a keen observer of Singapore's urban culture. There is Sinema, a 136-seat screening hall that ardently supports independent Asian and local films with strong social messages, as well as slick contemporary art galleries like Osage, Ode To Art and 2902 Gallery.

Must-do: Grab a drink and bite at the rustic, open-air Timbre bar, one of Singapore's biggest supporters of local music, and hear some of Singapore's best indie talents.



Photo courtesy of Singapore Tourism Board

NEXT GENERATION

NATIONAL INFOCOMM INFRASTRUCTURE

Connectivity – high-speed, reliable and secure – is so much a part of the Singapore experience that it tends to be taken for granted, and maybe that is a testament of the success of the Intelligent Nation 2015 (IN2015) masterplan so far – that infocomm technology has been so seamlessly integrated into all aspects of our lives, our work and our play.

Mobile phone penetration has shot way past the 100 per cent mark and as of 2010, over eight in 10 households have broadband Internet access at home. Singapore is the most network ready city in the world for the fifth consecutive year, according to the Global Information Technology Report 2010-11, published by INSEAD and the World Economic Forum.

Now, the Infocomm Development Authority has begun the next stage of IN2015, called the Next Generation National Infocomm Infrastructure, or NGNII. This involves launching a nationwide ultra high speed fibre

access infrastructure called the Next Gen Nationwide Broadband Network (Next Gen NBN) and a complementary pervasive wireless network. The wireless component includes the very popular Wireless@SG Wi-Fi service, which is free to the public until 31 March 2013.

The Next Gen NBN will be deployed nationwide by 2012, and promises to deliver broadband access at speeds of up to 1Gbps and beyond. This means that you and I will be able to enjoy services such as high-speed Internet access, Internet Protocol television (IPTV), HD video conferencing and cloud applications in our homes and businesses. These developments are also crucial to the growth of new industries like digital media and biomedical sciences.

To experience the potential of next gen services firsthand, head down to the Infocomm Experience Centre, called iExperience Centre, located at the Esplanade Exchange and open from 10am to 8pm daily. Check out www.iexperience.sg

DID YOU KNOW?

- Approximately 3 million SMS messages are sent out by Singapore mobile phones every hour.
- Broadband access in Singapore is among the most affordable in the world.
- 82 per cent of Singapore households have access to broadband internet at home.



RAISE YOUR HANDS, THOSE OF YOU WHO

- leave home with only a vague idea of the address of the place you are going to because you use the GPS on your mobile?
- prefer to have meetings at cafes, laptops in tow – plugged in and online?
- shop online, buying everything from books to groceries, movie tickets to kitchen utensils?
- store photos and videos online to show family and friends wherever you go?
- work round the clock, teleconferencing with colleagues and clients all over the world?





FRANK REPPEL

MANAGING PARTNER, REPPEL & PARTNERS PTE LTD

Frank Reppel is a natural born entrepreneur. In the late nineties, upon reading 'something about the Asian tigers' in a local German newspaper, he wrote up a business plan for his boss at the data management company where he worked, advocating for corporate expansion in Southeast Asia, and for himself to be based in Singapore, a particularly active 'tiger' economy. Sure enough, he was sent here in July 1997 to head up a Singapore branch office.

In 2002, when he had an opportunity to return to Germany, Frank chose to stay in Singapore to launch Reppel & Partners. He saw that there would be a rising demand for information and communications technology, or ICT, services as Singapore's reputation as a business hub hinges on its communications infrastructure, so tapping on his own regional experience in software development, professional services and sales, he formed an independent consultancy to help businesses manage their increasingly complex ICT needs.

"It was so easy setting up a company here," he recalled about his experience. "But one must be careful not to confuse the ease of setting up a company with running one successfully."

Having gone through the trials of starting a business from scratch, Frank appreciates the merit-based system that Singapore prides itself for.

"Singapore does not have a 'social cushion' for its citizens," he said. "What I like is that it rewards the efforts that people put in, not just success."

While the global market has gotten more challenging, Frank feels that the environment for doing business in Singapore has become even easier.

"The whole business environment is so friendly, from the low corporate tax rates to the speed of doing business," he noted, adding that companies here benefit from clear economic policies and measures to support businesses."

"For example, when my company first became liable for the Goods and Services tax (GST), a value-added tax, I found out I could apply for GST offset grants offered by a government agency called SPRING Singapore, which was helpful," he recounted. "In fact there are many grants to help companies offset the costs of innovation and capital investments."

Currently a five-man team, Reppel and Partners is expanding fast and expects to hire more people this year. Their clients typically have offices all over the region and Frank makes regular business trips to Japan, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Australia as well as back to Germany.

Hectic as that sounds, he professes to have an ideal work-life balance. His office is a short commute from his home in the east coast of Singapore, and he makes a point to join his family for dinner, and even lunch, most days of the week.

His children – two girls aged two and five – were born in Singapore and are already picking up Mandarin at kindergarten. The family speaks German at home and the girls use English in everyday life. Growing up speaking multiple languages is a trait that is common in Singapore and Frank believes it will be very useful for their future. Fourteen years since he arrived here, Frank has no immediate plans to return to Germany and is seriously considering sending his daughters to public school here.

"Things are going well for us now," he said, referring to the positive trend in the ICT industry and the number of business leads he has had in recent months. Indeed it was – just as the interview wrapped up, another lead popped up in his email inbox.



LIM TZE MIN

DESIGNATION:
AREA DIRECTOR, NORTH AMERICA

CHARACTERISTICS:
MR NICE GUY

NG CHEW WEE

DESIGNATION:
AREA DIRECTOR, NORTH AMERICA

CHARACTERISTICS:
SPEAKS WITH A TWINKLE IN THE EYES

BONDED BY A COMMON CAUSE

Not a single trace of jetlag was evident in either the face of Chew Wee or Tze Min. Despite time differences and close to a 20-hour flight, both individuals look perky and fresh. Synergy decided to find out the motivation behind the ready smiles and the professional appearances of these two Area Directors for North America.

BEYOND THE DESIGNATION

Chew Wee: A typical day for me involves interacting with many different people from various backgrounds and industries. I draw inspiration and energy from these encounters – especially when I think about how, through these, we are able to contribute to the growth of Singapore’s economy and at the same time, really touch people on a very personal level.

Tze Min: My job and Chew Wee’s are quite similar in terms of scope. I cover the east coast and Chew Wee covers the west coast. That said, the unique talent mix of each of these areas necessitate a different area of focus. For instance, being based in New York, I tend to focus more on the finance sector and the Singaporean students studying in the east coast universities.

Chew Wee: For me, in the west coast, I see a higher concentration of talent in the interactive and digital media as well as researchers and professionals in the biomedical field.

A PHYSICAL CONSTRAINT

Chew Wee: Tze Min and I cover a huge geographic area. Furthermore, the talent in US is not always concentrated at the areas where both of us are stationed in. In fact, they are more often than not dispersed throughout the whole of North America. So the challenge is to work out a strategy that allows us to reach out to as many talent as possible over a wide geographic space.

TRIUMPHING THE CHALLENGES

Tze Min: Fortunately, despite being physically separated from each other by a six-hour flight, we have between us a strategy that has somewhat yielded success. For instance, between the Singapore office and us, we try to overcome the issue by using virtual platforms more actively. This includes having a presence in the social networking space such as Facebook and Twitter.

Chew Wee: In the recent times, we initiated the idea of a virtual career fair. This platform allows us to take shifts to leverage the different time zones to engage our talent – the west coast team takes one shift; the east coast team takes another; and then the Singapore team will take over. Such a strategy effectively allows us to have a 24-7 presence over the internet and reach out to everyone dispersed throughout North America.

FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

Tze Min: To me, it is all about preparedness. In the US, there are many unexpected things that might just happen. On one occasion, a snowstorm caused the flights to be cancelled. Just when it seems like it will be impossible for me to get back to New York in time for my next appointment, I met this other Singaporean who was also there to attend the same career fair from New York on behalf of his employer. In the end, we shared a car to drive back, taking turns at the wheel. As a result, I made a good friend. And, as it turns out, many of his friends come to learn of us from him. Therefore, it is important to be able to think on one’s feet and resolve the situation at hand. If handled well, great opportunities could come out from such twist of events.

Chew Wee: Although I have been in North America for a relatively much shorter time, I did not have much problem adapting to the environment. My strong ability to adapt came from my staying in Singapore, a very cosmopolitan environment. The bilingual education system in Singapore means that

I am conversant in English with the local people on a day-to-day basis. At the same time, the ability to speak Mandarin has enabled me to engage the Asian talent based here in a very personal manner. In addition, with the presence of many multi-national companies in Singapore, I am familiar with the corporate culture of these same companies. Such factors make it easy for me to assimilate into any environment.

GRATIFYING MOMENTS

Chew Wee: I feel great satisfaction when I successfully place a talent in a job based in Singapore, where the employers find that they have found a great candidate and likewise, the candidate feels that he/she has arrived at a career destination that fulfills his/her career aspirations.

Tze Min: It is exactly the same for me. We are here because Singapore needs talent and at the same time, we are helping these talent make better decisions in their lives. This is a win-win situation for Singapore and the talent.

THINGS THAT NEVER CEASE TO AMAZE PEOPLE ABOUT SINGAPORE

1. How being able to communicate in English is enough to get by in Singapore. As the working language for Singapore, being able to speak English means that one can easily buy food, take a cab or talk to people.
2. How cosmopolitan Singapore really is. With the ratio of foreigners to locals – one in four – it means that in one organisation, there can be multiple nationalities.
3. How friendly and warm-hearted Singaporeans are. Singaporeans tend to be very reserved and polite at first. However, when one breaks into the circle of trust, it is easy to discover that Singaporeans are very friendly and welcoming.

UPCOMING EVENTS

ORGANISED BY CONTACT SINGAPORE

CAREERS@SINGAPORE This recruitment programme brings together Singapore-based employers, global professionals and graduating students who are interested in working in Singapore. In addition, there are also specific recruitment events targeted at overseas Singaporeans called Careers@Home. Participants at these events can find out more about working and living in Singapore, and network with local industry professionals and employers.

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
1 Jul	Careers@Singapore: Interactive & Digital Media in conjunction with Seoul International Cartoon and Animation Festival (SICAF)	South Korea
16 - 17 Jul	Careers@Singapore in conjunction with Graduan Aspire Career Fair	Kuala Lumpur
28 - 31 Jul	Careers@Singapore: Interactive & Digital Media in conjunction with China Game Developers Conference	Shanghai

CONTACT SINGAPORE WELCOME SESSION This pre-departure briefing, held in various cities around the world, provides those who are in the process of, or are considering, relocating to Singapore. This session offers a broad overview of topics about moving to and living in Singapore – from accommodation and education, to transportation and career opportunities for spouses, etc. For further information, visit www.contactsingapore.sg/welcome_session

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
2 Jun	Contact Singapore Welcome Session (Melbourne)	Melbourne
10 Jun	Contact Singapore Welcome Session (Shanghai)	Shanghai
10 Jun	Contact Singapore Welcome Session (Mumbai)	Mumbai
17 Jun	Contact Singapore Welcome Session (Chennai)	Chennai
17 Jun	Contact Singapore Welcome Session (South Korea)	South Korea
28 Jun	Contact Singapore Welcome Session (London)	London
7 Jul	Contact Singapore Welcome Session (Sydney)	Sydney
21 Jul	Contact Singapore Welcome Session (London)	London
23 Jul	Contact Singapore Welcome Session (Redwood City)	Redwood City, CA

OTHER CONTACT SINGAPORE EVENTS

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
Jun - Jul	Experience@Singapore: Summer Research Internships with NTU	Singapore
Jul	Experience@Singapore: Electronics	Singapore
6 Jul	Networking event with Work Holiday Programme participants	Singapore
Jul - Sep	Experience@Singapore: Summer Research Internships with A*STAR and NUS	Singapore

OTHER EVENTS Here are some other events which Contact Singapore is participating in.

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
21 - 23 Jun	15 th Annual Green Chemistry Conference	Washington DC
28 - 30 Jun	IKOM Career Fair	Garching (Munich)
12 - 14 Jul	InterSolar Conference and Exhibition	San Francisco



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