


**THOSE WHO DARED 2**



Entrepreneurs from Ngee Ann Polytechnic

THOSE  
WHO  
DARED<sup>2</sup>



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535 Clementi Road  
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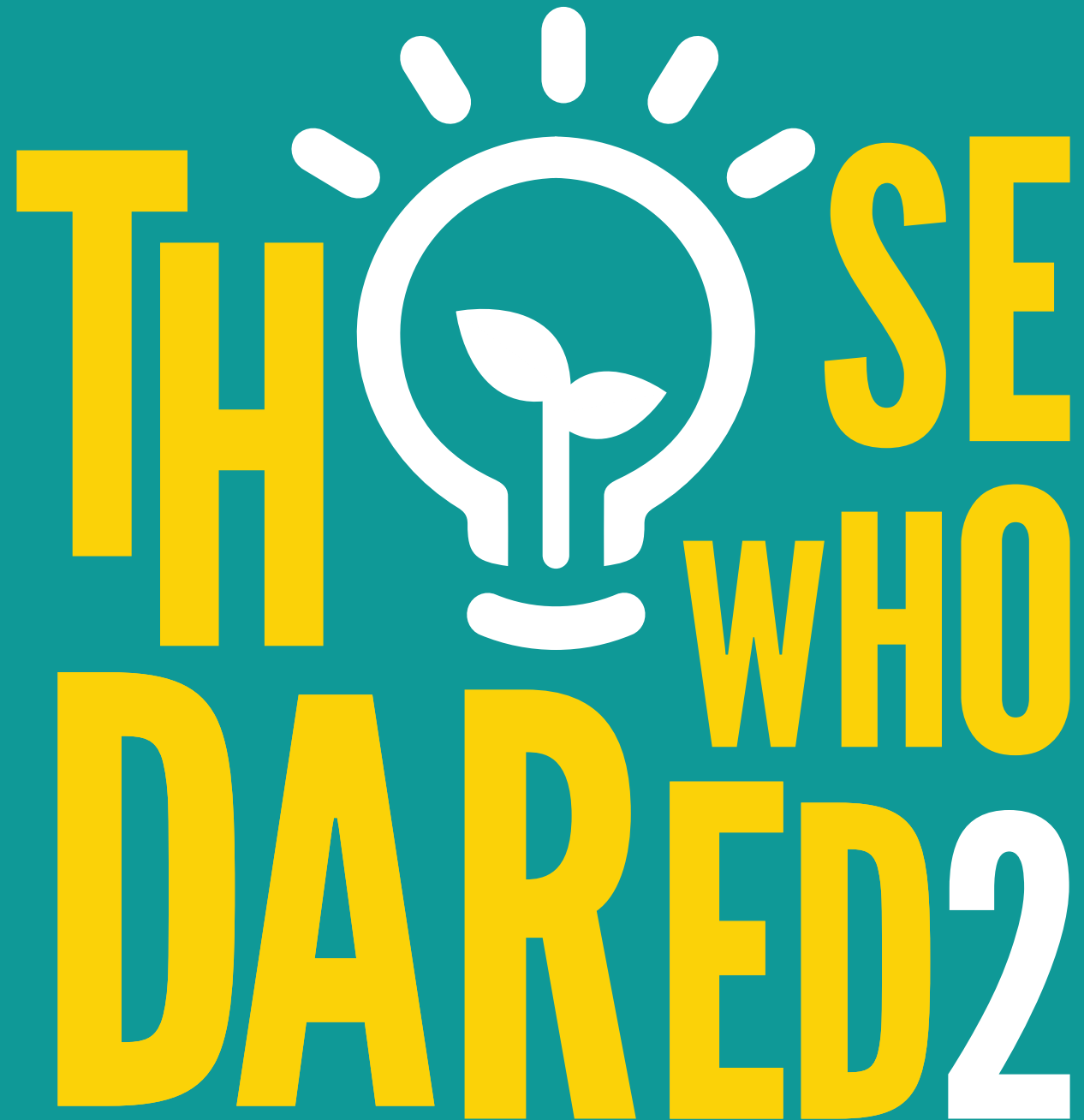
Designed and produced by Epigram

**National Library Board, Singapore  
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

Names: Hedgehog Communications LLP, editor. |  
Ngee Ann Polytechnic, publisher.  
Title: Those who dared. 2 : entrepreneurs from Ngee Ann Polytechnic /  
editorial by Hedgehog Communications.  
Description: Singapore : Ngee Ann Polytechnic, (2022)  
Identifiers: ISBN 978-981-18-5471-2 (hardback)  
ISBN 978-981-18-5472-9 (e-book)  
Subjects: LCSH: Ngee Ann Polytechnic—Alumni and alumnae. | Entrepreneurship—  
Singapore—Biography. | Businesspeople—Singapore—Biography.  
Classification: DDC 338.0409225957—dc23

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Printed in Singapore, November 2022.



# THOSE WHO DARED 2

**Entrepreneurs from Ngee Ann Polytechnic**

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## Foreword

Thinking out of the box, pushing boundaries and making a difference. These are some of the key traits of an entrepreneur. While the COVID-19 pandemic had brought about much turbulence and affected lives and livelihoods across the globe, many people also found new opportunities and ways of doing things, reflecting the ingenuity and tenacity of an entrepreneurial spirit.

The support for budding entrepreneurs in Singapore ranges from initiatives such as kickstart funds for ideas and prototypes, to incubation and acceleration programmes. In schools, students are being trained to go beyond the curriculum to gain real-life experiences and recommend solutions to challenges faced by the industry.

Our Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) play a key role in inculcating such an entrepreneurial spirit in our youth to prepare them for a changing world, including embedding innovation and entrepreneurship in the school curriculum and encouraging students to gain work experience at startups. For example, Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP)'s Innovation & Entrepreneurship Office "The Sandbox",

helps students realise their entrepreneurial potential through workshops, competitions and funding for student-initiated projects. Students can also pick up hands-on skills and bring their ideas to life at NP's Makers' Academy.

In an ever-changing work environment, students and learners need to anticipate and understand tomorrow's challenges and seek solutions for them ahead of time. In this spirit of being future-ready, we aim to nurture a culture of lifelong learning in our students and learners, to embrace reskilling and upskilling even after formal schooling years, in order to stay relevant and be ready to seize emerging opportunities.

I am glad that NP is celebrating its alumni through the second edition of "Those Who Dared". This collection of stories about inspirational alumni entrepreneurs will offer insights into how they navigated new frontiers and the skills that have helped them in their journeys.

I look forward to seeing more homegrown entrepreneurs emerging in the next decade and beyond.

## Principal's Message

As the poly for budding entrepreneurs, Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) has been fostering the innovation and entrepreneurship mindset in our students for the last 20 years. It has become part of our DNA. We aim to avail resources and programmes that inculcate innovation and entrepreneurship to everyone. We take pride in grooming our students to think out-of-the-box, critically and globally. As our students dabble in this sandbox, it is our hope that they develop attributes such as resilience, empathy and curiosity, which will serve them well in all areas of life.

To keep up with the times, we have also adapted the approaches we take to develop students in this area. In 2020, we launched the AGILE startup incubator on campus to host and support alumni entrepreneurs. A year later, we introduced the Personalised Learning Pathway Programme with an Entrepreneurship Pathway to give our students the breadth of knowledge to grow their own business. In November 2022, to enhance NP's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem, our students will now have their own campus startup incubator called SPARK!.

Over the years, it is heartening to see that many of our alumni have pursued entrepreneurship as their career of choice. While it has not always been a bed of roses for those treading the path less taken, many have said they would make the same decision if given a choice again.

As we approach NP's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year, "Those Who Dared 2" is a celebration of past successes and a reminder to embrace what is to come. We shine the spotlight on our alumni entrepreneurs who have been undeterred by struggles, setbacks and even successes, but kept on going and growing. And I hope their stories will motivate and inspire you in your personal journey—that you may carve your path to success in the days ahead!



**Mr Lim Kok Kiang**  
Principal & CEO  
Ngee Ann Polytechnic



## CAROUSELL

Established in 2013  
carousell.com

Ten years into the making, Carousell expanded to eight markets across Asia and entered the exclusive unicorn club with a valuation of S\$1.53 billion. But founders Marcus and Siu Rui are not spending too much time celebrating these accolades; they're focusing on continuing to serve the community's needs. Carousell recently acquired the Indonesian re-commerce firm Laku6, thrift store brand Refash, and sneaker marketplace Ox Street—all in the name of making second-hand the first choice.

**Quek Siu Rui**  
School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in Business  
Studies  
2007

**Marcus Tan**  
School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in Business  
Studies  
2007

RELENTLESS  
RESOURCEFULNESS

**Marcus: Carousell started as a way to solve a personal problem.** I have a lot of camera equipment and gadgets. In the past, selling these items was a very painful process that involved navigating classified ads and online forums. Carousell was developed to solve the problem and make selling easier. Now, our goal is to inspire people to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle by selling and buying second-hand.

**M: My early involvement in community service piqued my interest in entrepreneurship.** When I was at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), I spent a lot of my time with the community service group BA Cares, where I was introduced to social enterprise and volunteerism. I started understanding more about generating ideas, and through service-learning trips to Thailand and Vietnam, I began to see how these ideas can be used to create impact. NP was also where I learnt marketing strategies and tactics that are still helpful today—in fact, it was also through the school's marketing interest group that I met Siu Rui!

**M: Running a business is like playing a game.** Every time you clear one stage, there's a new one with a new problem to address. In our early days, we struggled with determining our target market. The stage after that was

about scaling our business and then building a team. You have to find ways to work around constraints and be relentless about it.

**M: At the start, we had no budget for marketing.** So we compensated with our energy and time. We would go to flea markets and reach out to sellers, share about what Carousell was and hope that we could get permission to send them an email to try our product. Conversions were maybe one out of ten, but it was good enough for us to start.

**M: One of my biggest lessons to date is about the importance of teamwork.** Different people from different backgrounds all have different styles of work, but they bring unique points of view that can help create better outcomes for the company. This is why one of the biggest questions we need to keep answering is, "How do we work with these people to fulfil or unleash their potential?" Finding the answer has been important over the last 10 years as we try to scale the company and build teams.

**M: It's been a real challenge to bring in people better than us and help them become successful in our company.** For example, we recently hired a new partner who is very senior. But he was used to the culture of a big company where you have a larger

support system. At Carousell, it's different. We're smaller, so even at the senior level, you're expected to be very hands-on, roll up your sleeves and be on the ground. So we wondered if there would be challenges adapting, and how we could help him adjust to our culture. Ultimately, giving honest feedback, providing encouragement and guiding him through early on in the journey smoothed the transition a lot. I'm proud to say that he's assimilated well and is now an invaluable asset to our team.

**M: My experience working with friends is that it's okay to disagree.** There will be debates, discussions and different perspectives, but disagreements are not personal. Ultimately, you want people to call out your blind spots and for yourself to gain clarity by articulating your ideas. The process of disagreement is important to help the company achieve the best outcome possible.

**M: There's always time to detox.** It's true that if you like work, it will be fun. But you can still find balance. For me, that comes from football. I have a group of friends in the tech space I play football with. I also watch football... I'm a sad Manchester United fan right now!

**Siu Rui: We've been living and breathing the**

**same mission over the last decade.**

We might not have been openly saying that we want to make second-hand the first choice at the start of this journey, but the core of our work has been to help get rid of the excess and underutilised stuff in everyone's lives and to make buying and selling second-hand accessible to others.

**SR: It's important to care enough about the problem you're trying to solve.**

I personally think the earth cries a little each time there's a 10.10 or 11.11 sale because people do so much shopping for things they might not actually need! So I believe in being able to present them with an alternative. On Carousell, people can sell their excess. They can also buy second-hand and get something fully functional at less than retail price. And really, it's like having a sale every day!

**SR: My work ethic today is very much shaped by the menial work I did at my internships.** I did an internship at Guilin, China, when I was at NP. I did everything from changing sheets to attending to customers. During another internship in Taiwan, I helped assemble office chairs and deliver them to customers. I believe that the whole "rolling up your sleeves" experience taught me that there are no tasks too small for me to do. This was really helpful when I eventually started building Carousell.



“

*Valuation is a by-product, not a priority. The real question is, how can we help grow the community we have?*

”

**SR: An exchange programme we did at Silicon Valley during university was life-changing for us.** There were startups everywhere, and we were completely immersed in tech culture. We had guest lectures where people like Jack Dorsey and Mark Zuckerberg shared their inspirations and founding stories. Hearing from these larger-than-life individuals with desires to solve problems—and who were dedicating their lives to make an impact—was just incredible.

**SR: I'm driven by my sense of privilege.**

Since Carousell started, it has been an incredible privilege to work with many passionate people along the way, as I build a product that I myself use and love and that tens of millions of people can benefit from. Of course, it also helps to have weekly rituals that keep me grounded, like going for a walk, listening to podcasts, having lunch with my family and even just having McDonald's every Wednesday!

**SR: I believe that constraints can lead to creativity.**

You can see this in our daily work at Carousell. When we run marketing campaigns, we try to get our teams to adhere to this principle of working with constraints, and we've found that they come up with very creative ideas. If you look at our office space, you'll also notice we haven't done up the floors. It's intentional—we believe that saving where possible is important, because each cent can then be reinvested into serving the community.

**SR: Partnering with Refash, Laku6 and Ox Street is key to solving the problems**

**our users face.** We kept hearing from the Carousell community that they struggle to find time to go into meet-ups and negotiate sales. They hoped we could help them to sell the items instead. Working with Refash, Laku6

and Ox Street will enable us to move towards providing such a service. For example, if you want to sell your mobile phone and upgrade to a new one, you can drop it off at Carousell, we'll pay you for it and then resell it on your behalf.

**SR: Partnerships will come naturally if**

**your missions and cultures align.** Take our partnership with Ox Street, for example. The problem our community faced was that while they didn't mind purchasing second-hand luxury items, they were worried about the product's authenticity. We met the Ox

Street team and found that they were very passionate about solving this problem of trust. Their mission connected with ours, so we thought, "Why not solve a common problem together?"

**SR: My advice to future entrepreneurs is to have the humility to understand that you**

**don't know it all.** There will be so many things that can go wrong. You constantly need to be a sponge, absorbing and learning from each other and even working with people better than you for the good of your mission.

“

*People tend to overestimate what they can achieve in two years and underestimate what they can achieve in ten or twenty years.*

”



Hear from Marcus and Siu Rui on resourcefulness and sustainability.

**CARRO**

Established in 2015  
carro.sg

**Aaron Tan**  
School of InfoComm  
Technology  
Diploma in Information  
Technology  
2004

**DRIVERS OF  
EXCELLENCE**

**CARRO**

Founded in 2015, Carro achieved unicorn status within seven years of its launch. The company's mission is to make buying and selling used cars online a transparent and hassle-free process. Present in six markets across the Asia Pacific, Carro is more than just another online car retailer—its platform covers every aspect of the consumer car ownership journey, including insurance and loan underwriting as well as aftersales. Co-founders Aaron and Kelvin are not about to rest on their laurels, however, preferring to set their sights on bigger ambitions ahead.

**Kelvin Chng**  
School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic &  
Computer Engineering  
2005

**This is just the beginning.**

**Aaron:** When we started Carro, the intent was never to build a billion-dollar company. It was to solve a real problem—there was a lack of transparency in the automotive space, and the whole customer experience wasn't ideal. Valuation is just one measure of success, but it wasn't our yardstick at the get-go.

**Kelvin:** It's been seven years since we started Carro. Achieving unicorn status is just a milestone. We want the brand to get even more recognised, go public and maybe even get to decacorn status (a valuation of US\$10 billion and up).

**K: The first year was really rough.**

There were five or six of us handling everything. We were pulling 18-hour days almost every day of the week, working from 7am to 1am. But we have grown very fast. Today we have more than 5,000 employees in six markets. It is a whole different set of challenges now, having to ensure the teams have the same aspirations and hunger to achieve our goals.

**A: Our hunger to win is stronger than ever.**

Every day, there are things to fix and progress to make. We're constantly striving to do better than before. I don't see this as a job but as a mission in my life to achieve something

of scale, solve a problem and make sure customers walk out the door happy.

**Delegation is important.**

**K:** When you hire the right people, they are extensions of yourself. You trust them to do the things you need them to do, so you don't have to micromanage.

**A:** I have no ambition to remain as the CEO, so I'm happy to let go of control. Without this mindset, we'd never have been able to scale up.

**We have a democratic hiring process.**

**K:** We need co-workers who are hungry, proactive and friendly to work with. This is certainly true for the engineering and product teams. Before anyone is hired, he or she has to go through a culture interview with their potential peers. If the majority of our colleagues vote no, we will listen.

**A:** And before we bring anyone into the management team, we do a group lunch. The existing management must be comfortable with the new person.

**It is the people who keep us going.**

**K:** The drive of my team motivates me. For instance, when I see Aaron putting in so much effort, sleeping only three to four hours each night, I get inspired to do my best.

“

*Without passionate teammates fighting alongside me, I wouldn't be able to do the things I do.*

”

**A:** I run on nothing, not even coffee. Honestly, Kelvin is one of the smartest and most versatile and adaptable people I know. If I have to go to battle, I'd definitely want him by my side. I like to think all the folks in our inner circle are trustworthy and know what they're doing.

**A: We still have so much to do.**

We have public ambitions, and it's a lot of work preparing for that. This year we just expanded into the Asia Pacific, such as Japan and Taiwan. Also, we are looking at how to improve our tech and AI every day, and identifying adjacent spaces we can explore further. For instance, automotive insurance, warranties and loans are areas that we can delve deeper into in the next couple of years.

**A: I'm not sure what I'll do if we ever sell Carro.** We are in it for the long haul. Our reputation is on the line, and we owe our success to more than just our shareholders (which includes Softbank and several sovereign funds), but also our partners, customers and everyone else that made it possible. So we have to ensure that this business succeeds and continues to be around in the long run. Hence, our focus has always been to build an enduring business and not one meant for sale.

**The opportunities and environment at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) were instrumental in our journey as entrepreneurs.**

**A:** My leadership and IT systems skills were set during those formative years at NP.

Most notably, the former director of the IT school put me up for the WorldSkills competition. I won the Singapore National Skills competition and later clinched bronze in WorldSkills Helsinki. This set off a whole chain of events, including receiving a government scholarship and the opportunity to study at Carnegie Mellon University.

**K:** Back in 2005, entrepreneurship wasn't a buzzword. But the story of Sim Wong Hoo, the founder of Creative Technology, was widely told. That helped us believe it was possible to start our own business and carry it to fruition.

**We went to NP for different reasons.**

**K:** I think I was quite the rebel back then. I thought going to polytechnic would allow me more freedom, and I did enjoy my years at NP a lot. I still have fond memories of hanging out and people-watching with friends in front of the library, a stretch known as the "Orchard Road of Ngee Ann Polytechnic".

**A:** I was the head prefect of the school, so I was definitely not rebellious! For me, it was very clear in my head that I wanted to learn more about programming, so going to NP provided the optimal conditions for that. I also got to mingle with people from all walks

of life. It helped me improve my EQ and made me more down-to-earth.

**K: Maybe I could have focused on the future a little more.**

If I had known at 18 that I could throw myself completely into starting my own business, I might have got on the journey earlier. I had so much more energy back then. It wasn't wasted time, though, because I had so much fun at school.

**K: I am now in a place to mentor young bosses.**

In general, we don't turn down any aspirant who comes to us for help or advice. We'll go out and have a coffee. It is now a great time to be an entrepreneur; there is so much more support from the ecosystem.

**Learning takes place mostly outside the classroom.**

**A:** If I had to give a young person advice, it would be to expose yourself to as many CCAs as possible. As the track and field president, I wasn't so good at throwing the javelin but I learnt how to lead a team of athletes. When I was president of the Red Cross Society at university, I had to overcome the awkwardness of asking strangers for donations. What you really gain is the ability to build a team and get people to rally

behind a cause. Humility and leadership is unfortunately something you can't learn from books.

**K:** I did not take a single CCA in NP, but I more than made up for it by being too active in student life at university!

“

*There's this constant desire to do our best and outdo ourselves.*

”



Hear from Aaron on what keeps him going.



## PIGEONLAB

Established in 2020  
pigeonholelive.com

Inspired by the pigeonholes in school where you leave messages for teachers, Lyon co-founded the high-tech version with his company PigeonLab. Their feather in the cap is Pigeonhole Live, which allows for live audience engagement through Q&As, polls and chats, and has since become a staple at conferences and events worldwide.

**Lyon Lim**  
School of Life Sciences  
& Chemical Technology  
Diploma in Biotechnology  
2004

# STARTING GREAT CONVERSATIONS

**We initially started our business in the education sector.** When we were students, my partner and I wanted to encourage interaction between students and teachers, so we created an interactive tool that lets students submit questions or responses to their teachers using their mobile phones. The timing was great because smartphone usage was on the rise. We have since pivoted to business conferences and events, where we found our niche.

**It was a steep learning curve for us when we first started.** My partner and I started PigeonLab while we were in the university, and we had never run a company or even worked in a corporate setting before this. At the start, it felt odd to have people reporting to me. One of the challenges was building a good team—finding good people, training them up and giving them opportunities to grow. Because at the end of the day, they were here to build their careers and families, so there was quite a lot of responsibility on our part to take care of them. At the same time, the development of the team needs to be an investment for the company, because as a business, we need to be profitable.

**I do not see myself as a boss.** We have built a collaborative culture in the company, and there's no room for arrogance. I have learnt

that when you are dealing with people, there needs to be open communication both ways. Human connections are important. Learn to listen to those around you, stay humble and always keep learning.

**“ You need to give trust to get trust. ”**

**My internship expanded my horizons.** When I was at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), I did an internship at a research lab in the UK for three months. It provided me with an experiential education that helped an introvert like me to open up and speak up. That was the first time I lived away from home and from my family. That experience taught me a lot about independence.

**My relationship with my lecturers at NP wasn't all about studying.** Their care for us students extends beyond just our academics. They want to know how we are doing in life as well. Even after I graduated, whenever I meet my former lecturers, they'll want to know if we're married or have kids.



Listen to Lyon's tips on retaining customers and team members.

## JSB TECH

Established in 2002  
jsbtech.com

When it comes down to world-class innovation, there are no two ways about it—one needs depth of knowledge as well as skill set, insists Jim. For decades, his firm has been churning out trailblazing products ranging from high-precision levelling instruments to IoT-enabled smart locks and novel reusable N95 masks. It counts among its clients NASA and the US defence forces. Today, he's grooming the next generation of talents to continue his legacy.



**Dr Jim Li**  
School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic  
Engineering  
1986

# THE REAL MCCOY

**Being an entrepreneur happened by accident.** I was only supposed to help take care of my elder brother's business for a year or two while my younger brother, who was working for him, did his MBA abroad. However, by the time my younger brother returned, the company had grown, and I had even started a new division in electronic manufacturing. I became addicted to running a business.

**There are no shortcuts to being cutting-edge.** Research and development are knowledge intensive. We need to invest and train new hires. Even the smartest people who come in need at least nine months to a year to really understand precision engineering and develop domain knowledge and skill sets.



**I put all my patents and certificates up on the office wall.** The competition for talents is stiff. When people come for interviews, they can see that being at JSB Tech means having an opportunity to build their profile. We compete on the leading edge; we don't copy things, make improvements and claim innovation. This is how we have attracted the kind of clients we have. If the young person is truly interested in being an innovator of world-class level, and entrepreneurship, there is a high chance I can tilt them to our side.

**Books can't tell us how to innovate.**

Years ago, as a PhD student in Cambridge, I was hoping to find some secret recipe in industrial revolution literature related to radical innovation and invention. I was disappointed to find little if not nothing. However, there are plenty of incremental innovation approaches which I was not interested in. That left me no choice but to try to develop my own method to radical innovation.

**Our business model is based on**

**transformative innovation.** This is a model that a PhD researcher friend and I developed about 10 years ago, and we've been applying it at JSB. I liken it to turning an ugly duckling into a beautiful swan. Essentially, it is about deploying new technologies to

traditional products with enduring market needs, resulting in new high-value creations with unparalleled performance and novel applications. For instance, we transformed the conventional bubble level tool into sophisticated digital levelling sensors and instruments. Military forces use it to develop precision defence equipment to hit high-value targets with low collateral damage.

**Having a model isn't a guarantee for success.**

To keep raising the bar, you need to be driven and dedicated. Just look at our national badminton champ Loh Kean Yew and his rigorous training. When you win repeatedly, it is a level of difficulty that requires a different mindset. At JSB, we don't just win an award once, we do so multiple times. This cannot be attributed to luck.

**I'm hopeful for the young ones.** We have a few guys here who have been with us for a decade. I would love to see them succeed and become key contributors to the next generation of leading-edge, world-class products and services without much intervention from me. Then I can play more golf!

**Reach for achievable goals.** Young aspiring entrepreneurs inevitably lack experience and may not have as much domain knowledge, and it takes time to forge a skill set—you need

these to compete globally. However, instead of aiming to create new core technologies and compete with the likes of Microsoft or Intel, they can look at peripheral innovation targeted to support the market leaders. One great example is the Creative sound card that elevates a computer's speaker to give high-quality sound beyond what any standard PC could offer during the 90's. As you deepen your knowledge and sharpen your skill set over time, you can take on the world.

**Balance is key.** I have never been interested in running a large-scale business. This leaves me no time for family, hobbies or pursuing intellectual interests. Money is important to serve one's needs and elevate one's lifetime purposes, but I need to also prioritise my other interests, particularly the quest for knowledge and spare time to disseminate my knowledge and expertise in educational institutions. Yes, I still teach some Master's and PhD students in universities. Also, the Transformation Innovation model I mentioned earlier was published in the Journal of Intelligent Manufacturing in 2017.

**I almost didn't attend Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP).** I came to Singapore from the Riau Islands, Indonesia, as a teen, determined to get a spot in a junior college. However, my high school certificate wasn't recognised

here in the early 80's. Eventually, I sat for an entrance test at NP and passed the interview; the rest is history. Looking back, my time in poly made me proficient in hands-on engineering work.

**I'm glad things turned out the way they did.**

I actually met my wife in NP. I socialised quite widely, so we crossed paths even though she was in accounting and finance. We have a grown-up daughter together now. I travel to most major cities of the world due to my business needs to give distributorship to potential companies in distributing our products and software services globally. I do enjoy a variety of local foods.

“  
*To push boundaries, you require passion, determination and focus.*  
”

## GLEE TREES

Established in 2016  
gleematic.com

Christopher and his team created their software, Gleematic A.I, with a dream to make working life easier for people all around the world by automating office processes in various Asian languages. Inspired by Creative Technology founder and fellow Ngee Ann Polytechnic alumnus Sim Wong Hoo, Christopher strives to bring this software to the global sphere. The competition is intense, but he is committed to keep innovating and improving.

“The person who understands and provides what the market needs is the game changer—the survivor.”

**Christopher Lim**  
School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic  
& Computer Engineering  
1998

TAKING ON  
THE WORLD

## AEVIC HEALTH

Established in 2017  
aevic.com

Aevic Health was born from Edmund's belief in how technology can solve healthcare problems. In the process of developing wearable stethoscopes to help patients with chronic respiratory disease, he has found that the key to success in a startup is diversity. "It takes a group of highly passionate team members of different skill sets to achieve your goals," he says.

“I'm a strong believer in learning through action and creating a collaborative environment for teams to work in.”

**Edmund Shao**  
School of Life Sciences &  
Chemical Technology  
Diploma in Chemical &  
Biomolecular Engineering  
2010

AN BREATH OF  
FRESH AIR



EEZEE

Established in 2017  
eezee.co

**Logan Tan**  
School of Business  
& Accountancy  
Diploma in  
Business Studies  
2008

Frustrations at his previous job led Logan to dream up Eezee, an online marketplace that aims to make procurement a breeze for businesses. After validating the idea through a prototype that was earning him five figures, he sought out tech co-founders who could join him on the entrepreneurship journey. Software engineer Jasper came on board, and with two other partners, Eezee began to fly.



**Jasper Yap**  
School of  
Engineering  
Diploma in  
Aerospace  
Technology  
2017

“

*Entrepreneurship isn't about copying and pasting business ideas. You need to study patterns, absorb the lessons and see how to apply them.*

”

**Logan: Finding a co-founder was like dating.** RedMart's founders met on LinkedIn, so I tried to do the same. I went online and took over 10 people out for dinner and drinks, but they all didn't work out. After one year, I was about to give up when I decided to reach out to a Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) incubation manager. She introduced me to Jasper. We had great chemistry and felt we could trust each other. The rest is history.

**Jasper: I asked Logan to quit his job.**

Before Eezee, I started and failed many startup projects. Then I realised it was because the founders lacked commitment; the projects were always a part-time thing for them. When I met Logan, I told him, "I like you. I like the business idea. But I need this one thing from you: start full-time on

this." Back then, I had just graduated from NP and was about to enter the army. Logan, this grown man, took a leap of faith on two young students (me and another co-founder, Terrence) and resigned from the construction company he was working at. That hit me hard. On his official first day of going full-time with Eezee, we all had lunch and cried together.

**L: We got our breakthrough when Shell emailed us.** We were dubious at first. When they came down to meet us, it turned out that Shell was launching a global digitisation project. They knew that Eezee could cater to their needs, including linking up to their systems and implementing certain procurement restrictions. They gave us a contract and became our first breakthrough deal. From there, we formed an enterprise team, and things went uphill.

“

*Fall in love with the problem, not the solution. Learn how to fail fast and move on early. Don't get too attached to any solution.*

”

EN-TRAK

Established in 2013  
en-trak.com

He may have been one of the “naughty boys” back in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), but Vincent is now leading one of the most successful proptech—property technology—firms with over 500 world-class clients across Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and China. In 2021, En-trak, which helps buildings reduce energy use, was named one of the Top 100 Companies to Watch by Forbes Asia.



**Dr Vincent Chow**  
School of Design  
& Environment  
Diploma in Building  
Services Engineering  
1994

# GREEN ADVOCATE

**We were notorious in polytechnic.** We were the “bike gang” back in the days. We used to ride our motorbikes—mine was a Yamaha FZR400—through the tunnel to Block 34. We did silly things like rev our engines and made so much noise. In the end, the school put up a “No Entry” sign and the sign is still there today! We hung out a lot at our usual spot at the staircase of Block 56, which we covered with graffiti. We repainted the wall and table back to its original state when we graduated.

**Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) is our client today.** I am now based in Hong Kong. Each time I visit Singapore, I return to NP for nostalgia's sake and to check in with the Estate Office. The school has deployed our award-winning smart lighting solution at several buildings to cut down on energy wastage and drive their sustainability initiatives. I think NP has changed, for the better. You can feel the youthful vibe, and the study areas look and feel like WeWork offices!

**My career was full of turns.** After NP, I went to the UK to do my undergraduate degree and ended up with a UK scholarship to read my PhD at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. After a brief stint as a university lecturer, I returned to Asia to start my first business. I became a shark fin trader for about two years. I then joined OOCL (Orient Overseas Container Line) and spent the next 10 years building up their China and Asia-Pacific cold chain business. All these times, I could not resist my urge for business. I decided to leave my comfort zone and start a new business.

**Sustainability became the heart of En-trak.** We started as a renewable energy company, installing solar panels for schools. Our intention was to educate students on sustainability. But due to health and safety concerns, the students never actually got

to see the actual system at the rooftop. Furthermore, most schools could not produce more than 3 per cent of their energy consumption due to space and investment constraints. This is when we decided to develop our first energy management platform for schools to educate students and staff on where, when and how their school is using energy. This proved to be very successful and today, hundreds of schools across Asia are using our system as part of their teaching curriculum.

**We moved from data to control.** Since then, our platform has expanded to enable building owners and occupants to control and personalise their office lighting and temperature. No more feeling too hot or too cold in the office. No more cooling empty meeting rooms and spaces. Reflecting on my shark fin trading days, I am now extremely proud to run a sustainable business that is making some positive impact on our planet.

**Entrepreneurship is a lifestyle.** To some, entrepreneurship is a sexy word. But I cannot explain enough in words how tough it can be. You cannot do it just for the money. It is something you have to fully commit yourself to. It is almost like becoming a monk. You cannot just give up after two or three weeks.

**The challenges are countless.** You name it, you have it! From software issues to managing customers and organisation politics, rallying and motivating people to align on a project, and letting go of people...the list goes on. It is an emotional roller coaster ride that you cannot quite imagine until you are in it.

**My team is my motivation.** This might sound cliché. I bootstrapped this company from a two-man show to one that has offices across Asia today. I could not have done it without my team. They are my motivation that keeps me going. Together we have dealt with countless issues, big and small. At the end of the day, I want to create a successful business and give my people a better life.

**My advice for budding entrepreneurs—plan for failure.** Yes, plan for failure. This might sound negative, but it is especially critical if you go into business with friends. While you are still indulging in the wonderful vision of success, make sure you have agreed on a plan on how to break up the relationship when things go south. People change. Life priorities change and so would their commitment when things go wrong. You need to plan for such a scenario.

**I spent an extra year in NP.** People often asked if I regret staying back an extra year

in NP back then. Well, you have to look at the positive side of things. I certainly did not put in the effort to study. That extra year hammered a sense of humanity and empathy into me. I learned to deal with 'failures' and I believe this helped me survive in the business world. After all, life's full of ups and downs.

**Yes, I still ride a motorbike.** I am not sure if it's a mid-life crisis. I recently got back into riding and got myself a beautiful Ducati. Life should be fun, right?

“

*Entrepreneurship is a lifestyle you have to commit to.*

”



## T05 TECHNOLOGIES

Established in 2013  
t05.sg

School of InfoComm Technology  
Diploma in Information Technology  
2013

They had no idea how to run a business, but these five friends from class T05 of Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP)'s Information Technology course who huddled in an empty classroom one fateful day dared to dream, and brought T05 Technologies to life. Nine years on, the startup churns out customised software solutions, systems integration, payment solutions and more to clients in both the public and private sector.

Tan Peng Hian

Hang Zhi Cheng

Chan Jun Yan

Loo Hong Chai

Han Yi Chou

# FIVE GUYS AND A (TECH) BABY

**Peng Hian: We felt our way around in the early days.** None of us actually worked in a corporate job before, and we had to build the company up ourselves. How does a company operate? What should be our standard processes? How do we do sales and marketing? These were all things we had to research, learn and apply.

**Jun Yan: Rushing into decisions did us zero favours.** We made rash decisions when we were younger. Once, we entered a new venture with a third party who turned out not sharing similar values. It took a few years before we were able to uncouple this partnership. That was one of the biggest lessons we learned, that we need to pause and think carefully before we make major decisions.

**Zhi Cheng: Sacrifices are par for the course.** We are completely self-funded so right after graduation, we were earning way less than what our peers were making. We also poured our time and effort into building the business. This meant sacrificing our weekends and sleep to meet tight project timelines. However, NP has been extremely supportive. Our incubator manager at AGILE helped us out so much with expanding our network and sourcing for project opportunities. We are forever grateful.

**Yi Chou: Details matter.** Running T05 has taught me to be more meticulous before we dive into any challenge, be it in product development or business management.

**Hong Chai: We had fun times too.** We definitely became closer after setting up T05, but there are memories made in NP that still stick with us. For instance, we used to organise Running Man-inspired games on campus for team building!

“

*It is important to take a step back before making critical decisions.*

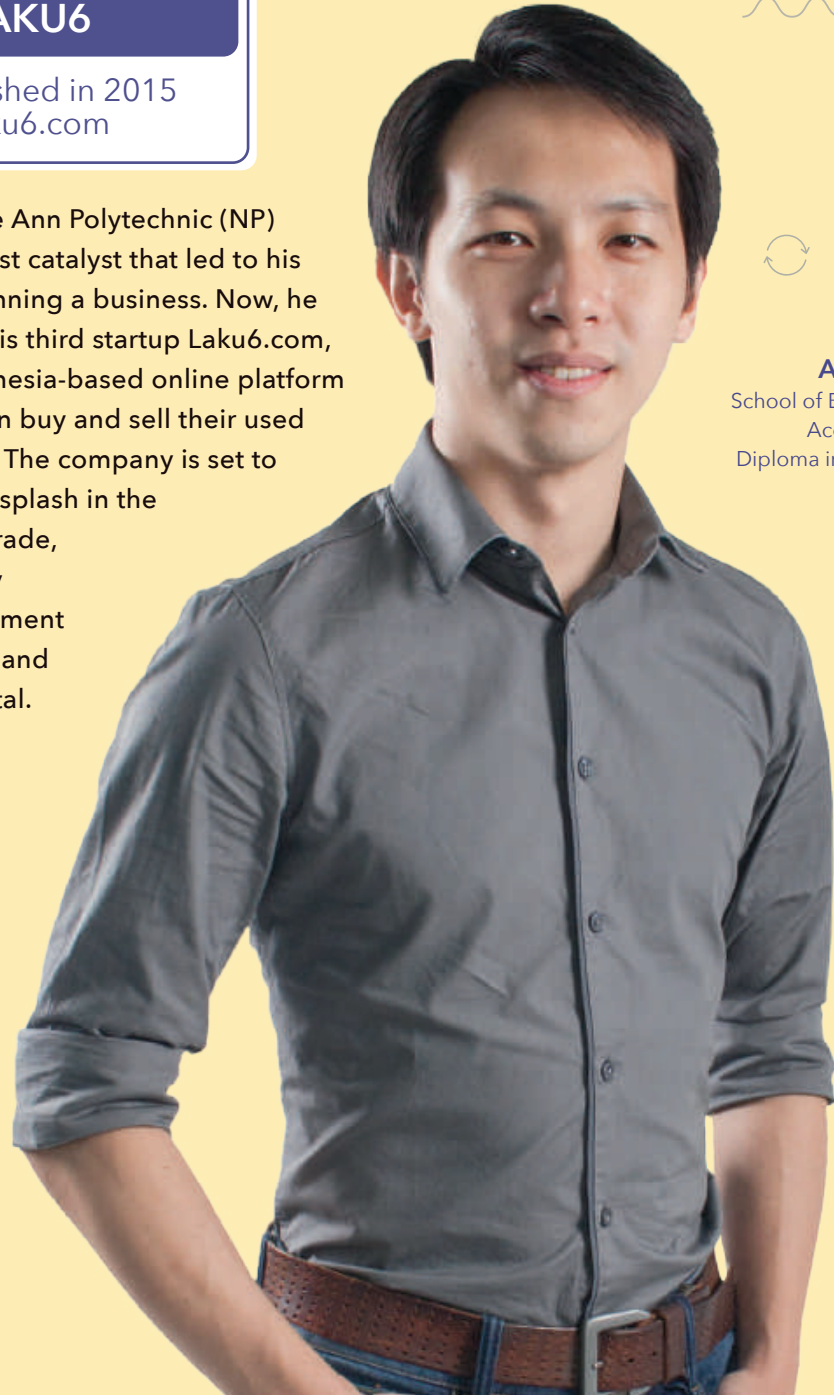
”



LAKU6

Established in 2015  
laku6.com

For Alvin, Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) was the very first catalyst that led to his first taste of running a business. Now, he is focused on his third startup Laku6.com, a leading Indonesia-based online platform where users can buy and sell their used gadgets easily. The company is set to make a bigger splash in the re-commerce trade, having recently received investment from Carousell and Heliconia Capital.



**Alvin Yap**  
School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in Business  
Studies  
2007

# BORN TO BUILD

A school trip to China was the start of my entrepreneurial journey. If that hadn't happened, I would have gone through three years of just chasing grades and passing exams without exposure to the world outside. My lecturer in NP took my classmates and me to see different companies, from the offices to the production lines. We were introduced to a company that printed stickers to be pasted on phones. That was how I started my phone-wrapping business when I was still in school.

**The flexibility I was granted at school helped me out a lot.** My teachers in NP allowed me some time off during my last semester to run my business and pegged some of my homework to the things I was doing. Without that level of understanding, I wouldn't have been able to have had that experience.

**At first, the absurdity of my first business didn't register.** I felt from a young age that I could build stuff, so creating a business somehow came intuitively to me. When you break things down into smaller steps, it doesn't seem so impossible. If you don't do that, you'll always be paralysed by the challenges.

**I was thrown into the deep end at 15.** I worked at McDonald's for two years in secondary school. I was the youngest crew leader, tasked with managing people in their 40s and 50s. Those were the formative years that probably made many daunting tasks more manageable afterwards.

**The process is everything.** Working at a fast-food chain at a young age also developed my mindset around processes. How do you make a hamburger taste the same across thousands of outlets worldwide? How long do you cook the patty? When do you insert the pickle? We even had to sit through training

to learn how to prepare French fries. This stuck with me. This is why when there are big challenges today, I know we can apply reverse engineering to make things happen.

**Step by step, Laku6 overtook the competitors.** When we first started, there were bigger and more established players in the second-hand phone market. Our job was to find opportunities to innovate in areas our competitors did not focus on. While they were able to conduct big roadshows, we developed our own AI-based diagnostics software—it evaluates the condition of the phone and derives the right price—that we could bring into retail stores. If you walk into any store in Indonesia that sells phones now, they would be using our solution.

“

*It's normal to make little incremental progress. The important thing is to keep moving forward step by step.*

”

**The pandemic has been tough on business.** We operate mainly through partnerships with retailers that were mostly offline shops. They were obviously affected by lockdowns. Thankfully at the start of Covid-19, we were growing our online business, so that made up for some lost ground. Our long-term plan is to sell directly to consumers.

**The goal is to make second-hand first choice.** If people have old devices lying around, they should resell them so somebody else can use them. There is a social and environmental impact to our business.

**It pays to start young.** You feel more tired the older you get! I was in my 20s when I ran TheMobileGamer, a gaming app that penetrated markets across Asia. I felt the excitement—maybe I was wired differently. We knew nobody, but we went to meet with the big telcos and felt our way around. There were fun times because there was nothing to lose. By the second year, I didn't feel the intimidation of entering a new market as much.

**Aspiring entrepreneurs should just try.** The barriers to entry now are much lower than before, and we have a stronger ecosystem. During my early years in the industry, we couldn't find counterparts. If a younger

version of me came to ask for help today, we would be willing to lend advice. Companies like Carousell can now even invest in a new generation of startups.

**There is no overnight success.** Progress often comes in small steps. You just need to keep going forward. At the same time, don't cave into the daily pressures. When we step back, we see that we have helped half a million people buy and sell devices. We started from zero. It is worth celebrating what you have achieved.

TRUE GLOBAL  
VENTURES

Established in 2015  
tgv4plus.com

# BEING A BUDDY TO BOSSSES

Can't stop, won't stop. Since 2001, Kelly has founded six different startups in the technology space. His latest business is the venture capital firm True Global Ventures, which sees him giving back to the ecosystem by investing in later-stage blockchain firms.



**Kelly Choo**  
School of InfoComm  
Technology  
Diploma in Information  
Technology (Computer Studies)  
2001



**Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) was where it all started.** I was in the entrepreneurship stream in IT, and that helped me build my foundations. Most notably, a school trip to Silicon Valley in November 2000 changed my perspective of the world. I met a Singaporean venture capitalist who sparked my interest in creating and commercialising a search engine together with two other friends. Google was a young startup at that time.

**I saw what it meant to bounce back from failure.** On the same trip, we visited Apple. That was shortly after Steve Jobs had returned to the company after reportedly being fired a few years ago. I was taken by how the entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley picked themselves up again and again. I would love to be able to influence students the way that Silicon Valley trip did for me.

**Perhaps I had been foolhardy in my previous ventures.** With my first startup, AllFusion Technologies, my team and I developed an aggregator that pulled results from various search engines, a content management system and even a MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role playing game). We were a bunch of “techies” who had no idea how to commercialise, market or sell our products to make money. We were doomed because the business wasn’t sustainable. Plus,

we had to do our National Service shortly after graduating from NP. Hence, we wound down operations.

**My sophomore experience wasn’t smooth either.** I was involved with two other startups while I was at university, and they allowed me to acquire more experience and skills. These companies did very well but I had to leave because of divergent visions held by the founders.

**Brandtology was a turning point.** With three failures under my belt, I was stubborn (or dumb) enough to try again after graduating with my degree. This time, I co-founded a successful startup, Brandtology, with partners who had much more experience than me. Together, we had a complementary mix of business acumen and tech smarts. During this time, I also met my mentor Eddie Chau, who founded the company with me. We sold the company in 2011.

**Timing is crucial.** Eddie taught me that the most important factors to a company’s success are the timing of its entry into the industry and the trends at that time. We need to identify strong trends that correspond to pain points that people are willing to invest into. After that, we need to build a strong team to solve that problem. Eddie

“ *Seeing the resilience of entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley really inspired me.* ”

was someone I could relate to because he had been trained as an engineer but he had chalked up many years of business development and sales experience on top of being a serial entrepreneur.

**Now I pay it forward from the other side.**

At True Global Ventures, we invest in serial entrepreneurs. For me, I feel like a “serial entrepreneur buddy” to founders. It has been an eye-opening journey for me too as we work with mostly later-stage companies that have varied needs ranging from business development to sales and more.

**The best is yet to be.** Seeing our earlier success investing in blockchain companies, this is a space we can’t ignore. Blockchain is still in its nascency; we will see many more innovations coming out in the next few years, and there will be mass adoption by both consumers and enterprises.

**You must know your why.** If you do what you do mainly for money, it is easy to get burnt out. This also applies to our staff. The team needs to feel that they are doing something meaningful, or their interest and stamina will wane. We are running a marathon here.

**Never say die.** Don’t give up easily because you never know if the next turn would be the right one. When in doubt, ask for help. Someone would have walked the path before you did and would be likely to guide you in the right direction.

## DATATURE

Established in 2019  
datature.io

Wanting to simplify AI programmes for people who lack coding experience, Denzel and his co-founder did something revolutionary: they started a platform that creates computer vision models for teams without a single line of code. The path to Datature's success today started off bumpy, but

Denzel soon realised that the best way to learn about entrepreneurship is by doing it. "Not all lessons can be learnt from textbooks," Denzel says.

*"It is paramount for the founding team to form a rhythm by quickly developing and fine-tuning repeatable processes, so that everyone can work together seamlessly."*

### Denzel Lee

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Aerospace Electronics  
2013



**BREAKING  
DOWN BARRIERS**

Bountie empowers gamers to earn by gaming. Five years in and counting, founders Lex and Desmond have run over 3,000 esports tournaments and have garnered a database of 300,000 esports fans in Southeast Asia. In the process, they have levelled up their skills in business and management. Their winning strategies? First, have compatible co-founders and teammates. Second, be laser-focused on your mission but flexible with your methods.

*"We had tried to be everything for everyone and ended up being nothing for ourselves. That almost cost us the company."*

### Desmond Tan

School of Business  
& Accountancy  
Diploma in Business  
Studies  
2009



**EARN BY  
GAMING!**

## BOUNTIE

Established in 2017  
bountie.io

*"My friends and I spent nights playing Dota 2, striving to win every single match. That passion and drive have shaped my work ethic today."*

### Lex Na

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic &  
Computer Engineering  
2007

ASEAN FINTECH  
GROUP

Established in 2017  
aseanfintechgroup.com

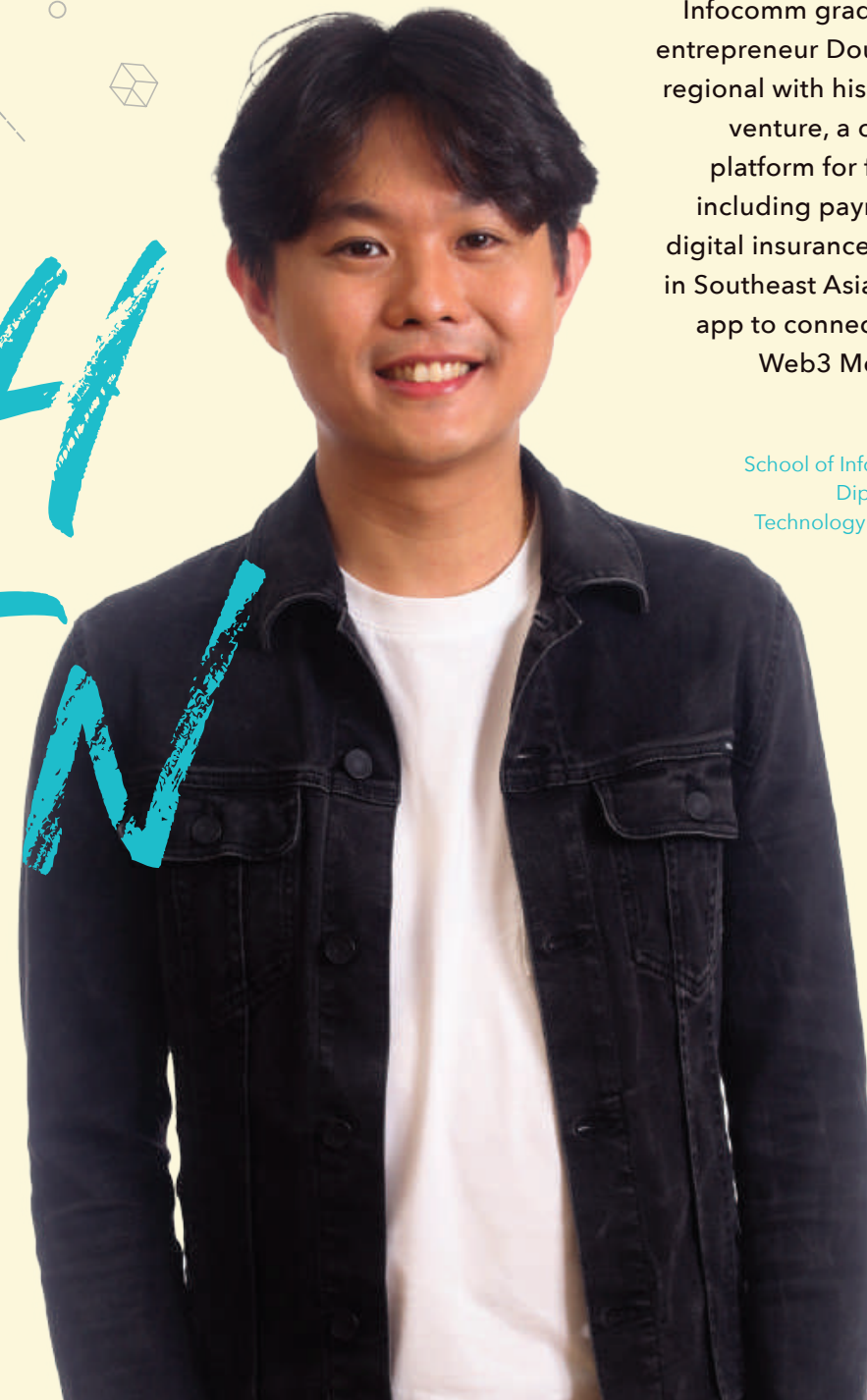
# FINTECH MAVEN

It was users on Internet Relay Chat (IRC) who first taught me programming. I first got on IRC to keep in touch with my cousins and extended family in different parts of the world. IDD calls were expensive back in those days. I was fascinated by the range of chat technologies available on IRC—robots, voice messaging, live chats—and wanted to learn more about them. That was how I picked up programming and other IT skills from the “wild west” days of the internet, before learning it more formally through my course in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP). I benefited from the best of both worlds. The discrete mathematics and various programming languages my lecturers taught me mirrored what I learnt online. That helped me draw connections between what I learnt in class to what was being used in the real world.

Infocomm graduate and serial entrepreneur Douglas Gan goes regional with his latest business venture, a one-stop digital platform for fintech services including payments, lending, digital insurance for companies in Southeast Asia and a SocialFi app to connect people in the Web3 Metaverse space.

**Douglas Gan**

School of InfoComm Technology  
Diploma in Information  
Technology (Computer Studies)  
2003







*Stay flexible and adaptable to take advantage of market opportunities or when dealing with challenges, but once you have decided on your direction, stay focused and persevere towards it.*



**Fortunately, I had the flexibility to juggle school and business.** I started my web-hosting business when I was 14. By the time I went to NP, I was already running two businesses and earning an impressive sum for my age. I remember approaching my mentor on my first day on campus to negotiate for more time to run my businesses. He patiently heard me out, and we struck a deal where I had to keep up my grades while juggling my business. He even informed my other lecturers about my commitments. They supported my entrepreneurial efforts from the get-go and throughout my time at NP.

**My lecturers were a stabilising influence on me.** I was a young hot-blooded kid who thought the world was my oyster. But my lecturers were always very patient, and they were a mature, calming presence in my life. Especially my mentor, who always sought me out to check on how I was doing. There was no pressure from him; he just wanted to make sure that everything was okay with me. There were also lecturers who encouraged me by telling me not to worry and just do what I want to do. They influenced the way I thought and behaved.

**I got sued while running my first business venture.** My first business was registered under my mum's name as I was just a minor. So, when I got into a lawsuit, she had to attend court on my behalf and argue my case in court. Because she was not familiar with what I was doing, I had to coach her on what to say. She did a brilliant job, and we won the case.

**I dropped out of university to focus on my businesses.** I started on a double degree in economics and management after polytechnic. However, I had to drop out after two semesters because of my busy schedule. No regrets because, to date, I managed to start and sell 10 businesses. Although it was not easy as I had to learn from my mistakes,

I'm always focused on what I wanted to do. Along my journey, I also met many mentors who taught me how to run a business which I felt is more valuable than sitting in a classroom.

**FinTech became my specialty after observing currency exchange problems in the region.** On my business trips around Southeast Asia, I saw that there was a real need for financial services in the border cities between Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia, where doing business can be unsafe, and the cost of transactions is very high. Technology provided a safe way for these businesses to carry out financial transactions, like paying their employees through digital transfers instead of cold, hard cash.

**Fincy, my last business, was started to solve these woes.** Fincy is a money and payments app I started with my co-founders to get around the unfavourable exchange rates and high transaction fees. The business was good because we delivered value to our customers. We held twelve licences issued by central banks across mainland Southeast Asia for e-money, e-wallet, currency exchange and remittance services. Early this year, Fincy was sold for a high two-digit million. After I sold the business, I saw an opportunity in the rest of Asia for such financial services, and

that prompted me to set up ASEAN Fintech Group.

**ASEAN Fintech Group is my latest business venture.** While we have plenty of competitors in each vertical, very few offer integrated services like us. Our payments business currently enjoys a transaction volume of five million US dollars per day, while our e-insurance business sells one insurance policy every four minutes.

**From early on, I made sure I knew what sort of entrepreneur I wanted to be.** In my view, there are two kinds of entrepreneurs. The first kind focuses on just one thing and perseveres in that direction. If they succeed, their name will be synonymous with the brand they built. The second kind of entrepreneur is constantly brimming with new ideas and trying them out. I am the second type because I want to keep doing different things.

**My wife is the reason for my success today.** When I had to go overseas to pursue business opportunities back in 2017, my wife Kanna had just given birth. Even though our baby was just six months old then, and I was headed to a politically unstable region, she supported my decision. Without her support, my business would not have taken off.

## PAYBOY

Established in 2016  
payboy.sg

### Nigel Lim

School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in Banking &  
Financial Services  
2011

When Terence and Nigel observed that SMEs were struggling to keep track of their employee data, they knew that the problem lay in inefficient HR systems.

To solve these companies' woes, they developed Payboy, a user-friendly HR management platform that makes use of cloud-based technology to automate human resource and administrative processes for businesses.

**PAYROLLING  
THEIR WAY TO  
SUCCESS**

### Terence Toh

School of  
Engineering  
Diploma in  
Electronic &  
Computer  
Engineering  
2011

**Terence: We went from army mates to business partners.** Nigel and I met at the National Service, but we didn't stay in contact after that, until a chance encounter at a cafe in Holland Village. At that time, Nigel had been running several side hustles selling Valentine's Day gifts and bak chang (rice dumplings), amongst other things, and he asked me to join him on these businesses. That was how we partnered up.

**Both: It was a struggle to find our first customers.** When we started, we were just two idealistic young punks, going around knocking on doors and cold calling companies to try and get them to use our product. But we knew there was a need in the market for an intuitive HR software like ours, and that kept us going. When the Ministry of Manpower made it mandatory for employers to issue itemised payslips to their staff, that was the push we needed to get companies on board. Within the past seven years, we went from renting an office the size of two toilet cubicles to having our own office with a staff strength of 43.

**Both: We learnt early on to filter through the advice that we got.** We received a lot of advice from well-meaning people around us, but we have learnt the importance of sifting through the advice and focusing on the ones

that were helpful. We have found that some people who offer advice may not be thinking of the same objectives as we do, so take it with a pinch of salt. On the other hand, we get more relevant advice from fellow startups who have been in our shoes or are at a similar stage of growth as us. When it comes to fundraising, for example, another startup that has been through the process can tell you what to look out for, investors' preferences, and so on.

**“ From the start, we were not trying to be a unicorn company but a small and nimble company with the tenacity to survive in a harsh business environment. ”**

**Both: The local startup community has always been supportive.** When we joined The Sandbox at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, we were working side by side with other startups at similar stages of growth. We would help each other out with presentations, business pitches and video productions. The sense of camaraderie and kampung spirit was priceless, and a few of the startups also became our earliest customers. Even today, we still get together and hang out to talk about our businesses!

## XINTESYS

Established in 2009  
xintesys.com

“*Self-discipline is the only thing that will get you from one day to another, and eventually to your destination.*”

### Shi Ruxin

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic &  
Computer Engineering  
1989

Ruxin started Xintesys after spotting a problem that almost all SMEs are still facing: there are many gaps in their business processes due to a lack of skilled resources and suitable systems. Her company differentiates itself from other IT vendors and systems by providing tailored and comprehensive business solutions for SMEs. When business grew, Ruxin began employing mothers and private university students with a flexible arrangement, and this strategy has become another unique factor of Xintesys.

A SIMPLE  
SYNTHESIS

**At 16, I was earning \$2,000 a month from giving tuition and from the Navy.** My mum was a hawkker and my dad, a taxi driver. To help with the financial situation, I would station myself at one of my students' house and tutor several of them to save time travelling. I did it seven days a week. I didn't realise it then, but I already had an enterprising mindset since I was young. At the same time, I also signed on with the Navy to get a sponsorship to study at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, despite having good grades to go to a top junior college.

**Starting my own company came about unexpectedly.** When the financial crisis hit in 2009, I was retrenched because our Asia Pacific office was being uprooted to Thailand. I sent out 100 application letters, but nobody wanted to hire me. Finally, I put up a \$35 advertisement in the papers to offer outsourced accounting services. One week later, a client contacted me. My cheque from him was in the five digits, so I was very happy. As I got more and more SME clients, I noticed that many of them were struggling with their processes and systems. The available systems back then were either catered to large enterprises or were too single-purposed to meet the needs of growing SMEs. My husband and I came up with the idea. We thought, "Why don't we develop something

to solve these issues?" So we started developing our own software to address the issues that we saw.

**As a business owner, I built a socially geared work culture based on trust even before the pandemic.** For a long time, I have been arranging my work to integrate it with my personal life, and I give my staff a similar flexibility. It's not just letting them work from home or wherever they want; it's about treating them like a mature and responsible adult. When I encourage my staff to schedule their work around their personal family needs or studies, they know that it is a privilege, and that if they did not get their tasks done properly, they would be giving up that privilege. Giving them the freedom to choose the way they work makes them more self-driven and accountable for their work.

**I don't feel lonely as an entrepreneur; I feel exasperated.** Sometimes, there's not enough of everything that I want. I would like to be faster, but circumstances won't allow it. I would become so exasperated that I'd forget I'm stressing everybody around me. I keep thinking, "I'm not putting stress on them, I'm just telling them the answer now." It was the Covid-19 pandemic that ultimately taught me to accept that some things simply need time to grow.



## SECRETLAB

Established in 2014  
secretlab.sg

When Secretlab's first 200 gaming chairs sold out within a week, Ian knew the company had a winning strategy. But he didn't stop there. Determined to make the best gaming chair possible, he and his co-founder ramped up R&D efforts to improve their product and take the brand international. Today, Secretlab chairs have won the favour of gamers, tech reviewers and even industry giants like HBO, Warner Bros and Blizzard Entertainment. Over one million chairs are sold a year, reaching customers in more than 50 countries.

**Ian Ang**  
School of Business & Accountancy  
Diploma in Business Studies  
2012

NO RISK.  
NO REWARD

**When I was younger, I liked sports and computer games more than studying.**

I enjoyed Counterstrike and Dota, and at 18 years old, I was so committed to gaming that I played StarCraft II competitively. I'd even wake up at 3am to play until I had to go to school! Naturally, my grades suffered. It was only after NS that I decided to get serious about my future. I stopped gaming and started my degree in business while working at a gaming laptop startup. I eventually dropped out of college to start Secretlab, and needless to say, my parents were not thrilled!

**There are many lessons you can learn from gaming.** Some games have real economies where you can buy and sell items, so you need to learn about concepts like demand and supply. There are also guilds and clans, which teach you about leadership and teamwork. Finally, to be good at games, like other things in life, you need to commit to self-improvement.

**Secretlab was born because of a personal need.** I had a mouse, keyboard, headset and monitor suitable for gaming, but not a chair. As I couldn't find a chair that would tick all the boxes for a gamer like myself, I decided to build one.

**My partner's skills complement mine.** I met Alaric, who co-founded Secretlab with me, at a local e-sports tournament playing StarCraft II in our teenage years, so we've known each other a long time. It helps that we have similar interests and passions. But it is also a benefit that he is good at things I'm not great at. I believe that this is the reason our partnership has been so successful.

**There was no way to know for sure that our business would succeed.** But I did know that in the worst-case scenario, we would have made a great chair for ourselves and our close professional gamer friends. I'm glad that our dream took off and we've become the world's premier gaming chair brand!

**A good product can speak for itself.** That's why, instead of diversifying into different product lines, we chose to pour so much into R&D to improve our existing one. For example, when we were developing the Titan Evo 2022 series of chairs, we went through over 40 iterations of the seat base alone, just to achieve the level of comfort that these chairs provide today. We believe that R&D will continue to be key to us as we strive to remain ahead of our competitors in the global market.

“  
**Most of the problems in life and business cannot be solved by IQ alone.**  
”

**To make it big in the long run, entrepreneurs need practical intelligence.** Success in business is not determined by your ability to solve maths sums or write a long and profound thesis. An IQ of 160 only allows you to have the instinctive answer to the problem; it doesn't guarantee that you'll have the right answers to all your questions immediately. Instead, you need to be able to deliberate on contentious issues and work through problems that are not straightforward.

**You also need to have a relentless drive.** Even if you possess practical intelligence, it cannot help you achieve real success unless you have an unwavering will to think. Many people stop thinking at 80 per cent of their capacity. After putting in a certain amount of effort, they default to their instinctive responses rather than adopting the discipline of first principles thinking. They want to

go home after nine hours in the office, rest during the weekend and have time when they can take their minds off work. It's understandable, but success comes with sacrifice. I believe that to succeed as an entrepreneur, you need to go beyond ordinary "hunger". Your hunger needs to be relentless.

**I don't think worrying is a bad thing.** Worrying or feeling stressed can indicate that you care a lot about what you're doing or that you're putting in the effort to think things through. That in itself places you ahead of many people!

**The practical approach of the business studies course at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) worked well for me.** Although I was not a good student, I enjoyed the course because of this approach to learning. I found the final year project in my entrepreneurship module the most interesting. In my journey as an entrepreneur, knowing the basic theories of accounting and marketing has also been very helpful.

**I have four words for fellow NP students.** Kaki Fuyong is awesome.

## SKIN INC

Established in 2007  
iloveskininc.com

Sabrina took a leap of faith when she went from working at tech giants like IBM and Oracle to starting a skincare company, but she did not start from square one. At Skin Inc, her mission is to reboot beauty with technology. Combining data, the latest technology and decades of research, Skin Inc offers bespoke products to give everyone exactly what their skin needs. The brand is now a global leader in high-tech skincare with over 150 awards to its name.



**Sabrina Tan**  
School of Business  
& Accountancy  
Diploma in  
Business Studies  
1994

# IN SKIN TECH WE TRUST

When Covid-19 hit, most of our stores and distributors' stores had to be closed. We were like, "How are we going to fulfil our customers' demand?" Then we saw a 400% surge in orders on our own website. Our products were quickly sold out. There was so much demand because our products addressed our consumers' new needs, especially during the pandemic. People needed anti-inflammation serums to treat their "maskne". At Skin Inc, our products are customisable, so we can give you what your skin needs. We got our foundation right from day one when we focused on catering to people's changing lifestyles.



**Feeling good is the new looking good.**

Since the pandemic, we also saw other trends emerging. The rise in online shopping, doing self-care at home, making your own face masks, DIY facials and so on. People were also taking up new hobbies such as cycling and yoga. Such consumer shifts show that it's better to shape your marketing approach around your consumers' lifestyles rather than around your product.

**Having the first-mover advantage is not a foolproof way to success.**

To succeed in the long-term, entrepreneurs must work on these qualities: one, be agile and always open to learning; two, build tenacity and don't give up too soon. Success is not a TikTok video which you can have in a minute. Some outcomes and desired results take time, and you must time yourself with the market. Dance with the rhythm of the market sentiment. Sometimes you will be ahead, and sometimes you will be behind. Always feel the pulse of the consumer and grow together with them.

**Nobody will mind a female leader if you create value for them.**

As long as you lean in and bring value to the table in a boardroom, being a female founder and CEO will not be a problem. But you'll need to be able to articulate and demonstrate your value. Women tend to take into consideration what

others think of us because we're more social and emotional. This can be a strength as we're able to read the room faster. I am who I am today because I'm intuitive—I can recognise consumer trends very fast and quickly develop something that addresses the market demand.

**To me, leadership is about customising my style to different individuals.**

When I talk to my creative team, I use a lot of visuals like PowerPoint slides. When I talk to my finance team, we'll be looking at Excel spreadsheets. Different strokes for different folks. My leadership style has also changed from leading myself to leading the leaders. For them, I try to watch out for burnout and also be mindful of their end-goal. I would ask myself, "What is the skill set they want to build when they walk out of this job?"

**It's important to recognise what energises you.**

For me, it's my kids. I had two young toddlers when I started Skin Inc, so I'd go home at seven o'clock to have dinner with them. That would be my recharge moment for three hours, then I go on my calls at ten o'clock. Beauty sleep also energises me and makes me look good. It's a priority because I'm in the skincare business, so I need to at least look decent!

**I believe in work-life blend rather than work-life balance.**

I wouldn't say that I "juggle" my family and my business; I tend to blend them together. I connect with my children through my work. So when they were learning marketing in school, or when TikTok was coming up as a trend, I was already using those tools in my business. I became a cool mum to them. I know all the different influencers and I can talk to them about their favourite music. My work has given me an advantage rather than a disadvantage.

**As Singaporeans, we tend to listen more than we speak.**

In China and some parts of the US, when you are reticent, people read it as you having something to hide. It's okay to speak up. Don't worry about whether you're right or wrong; speak up with your individual point of view. Then ask for the other person's point of view. This way, there'll be a fruitful conversation instead of you keeping quiet because you don't want to say the wrong thing.

**When I was in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), I did my internship with Chan Brothers.**

I learnt a lot, especially about seasonality in the travel industry. For instance, the factors that cause a high season for travel, and how we should differentiate our marketing approach when it's low season. What I appreciate most about

my time in NP was the applied learning. A polytechnic education leaves you enough space to explore, imagine and develop solutions for the market. It enhances your creativity on how to connect the dots and solve a problem. That's the biggest thing that NP taught me.



*In the startup world, it's very easy to start something. But being a strong finisher means so much more. It means holding on to your vision even after the passion and enthusiasm have died down.*



Hear from Sabrina on her leadership style.

## SOURBOMBE ARTISANAL BAKERY

Established in 2020  
sourbombbakery.com

“*To plan wisely means to think of the situation from all possible angles, have an exit plan and be prepared for a degree of failure.*”

### Genevieve Lee

School of Life Sciences  
& Chemical Technology  
Diploma in Biomedical Science  
2017

TRULY A  
BOMB(CE)!

At 18, Genevieve tapped on Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Be Your Own Boss programme to open a cafe selling homemade bread on campus. Today, she is the brains behind Sourbombe Bakery, specialising in bombolonis, a sourdough take on Italian stuffed doughnuts. The bakery's popularity during the launch took her by surprise as she did not expect the overwhelming demand. This test of her resilience only made her stronger, and now the bakery has opened its second outlet in Jewel Changi Airport.

Struggling to find a way to soothe her husband's sensitive skin, Ashley decided to develop a skincare formula herself. Its success led her to launch Two Halves, a vegan skincare line suited to those with sensitive skin. Her initial excitement soon gave way to self-doubt, but she pressed on and drew on all her skills. "It was helpful to be able to tap on the marketing, public relations and copywriting skills I learnt at Ngee Ann Polytechnic to stretch every dollar," she shares.

## TWO HALVES

Established in 2018  
twohalves-skincare.com

“*I learnt to pace myself and keep working no matter how rejected or demoralised I felt. Celebrating the milestones, no matter how small, motivated me to keep going.*”

### Ashley Yong

School of Film &  
Media Studies  
Diploma in Mass  
Communication  
2013

FINDING  
BETTER  
BALANCE



## POKE THEORY

Established in 2016  
[poketheory.com.sg](http://poketheory.com.sg)

Siblings Vanessa and Joey Lee opened their first Poke Theory store in 2016, offering healthy grain bowls with marinated raw fish. Since then, their brand has grown to 15 outlets and cloud kitchens through franchising. Their goal is to make healthy eating accessible to all.

### Vanessa Lee

School of Film & Media Studies  
Diploma in Mass Communication  
2011

### Joey Lee

School of Film & Media Studies  
Diploma in Mass Communication  
2014

POKE'S HERE  
TO STAY

**Joey:** It was during my overseas internship in Los Angeles that I discovered poke. I was lucky to land what Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) Film & Media Studies students called the "Hollywood internship". I travelled around the US to cover tech events. That was when I started collecting F&B business ideas, and poke felt like something that could work in Singapore. I chatted with Vanessa about it, and we gave it a go. I was still in the army back then, and Vanessa was working in a creative agency. Whenever I booked out of camp, I would spend my time doing R&D for Poke Theory.

### J: We were sold out on our launch day.

Vanessa had put together a social media strategy with teasers of our store. It went viral online, but we weren't certain if people would really come down. After all, our Boon Tat Street store wasn't in a mall but in the Central Business District (CBD). At 10am, a queue started forming and eventually snaked out to the road. By 12pm, we were sold out. Vanessa had to ask customers to return on another day and promised that we'd be better prepared next time.

“ From the very start, I was firm on paying ourselves a salary. If we can't, I will be lying to myself that our store is successful. ”

**Vanessa:** Branding has always been a big part of our business. This goes from social media to the way we interact with customers, to the way we style our shops. We put effort into taking really good photographs of our food. Back then, the F&B industry was lacking in branding. This was before food Instagrammers exploded onto the scene, so people hadn't really seen someone put so much effort into launching an F&B brand before. Branding has contributed to our success as a franchised business. We're fortunate because we've never had to hunt for franchisees. They come to us because they believe in our brand and have been positive advocates from the start.

“ Stay humble when you succeed because there's always the next milestone. ”

### V: Since I started working remotely, I've learnt to let go of control over the business.

After getting married, I moved overseas but continued to run the business. I'd fly back to Singapore every two to three months to get certain things done. Then, Covid-19 happened, and it forced me to learn to let go and hire people to do the work since I couldn't physically be there. Now that we have a strong team, there's actually no need for me to fly back so often anymore.



## ANGIE'S TEMPEH

Established in 2020  
angiestempeh.com

It started as a one-woman kitchen, but Angie's Tempeh is now Singapore's fastest-growing plant protein startup valued in the millions—a feat that Angeline achieved through masterful fermentation techniques and overcoming challenges such as business uncertainty and stepping into leadership. "It helps to have a community of friends and mentors who have been in the position before and lean on them for advice," she says.

QUEEN  
OF  
TEMPEH

“*Opportunities come to those who seek them, so don't be afraid to take the leap of faith.*”

**Angeline Leong**  
School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in International  
Business  
2013

Frustrated with the expensive, unreliable in-ear monitors (IEMs) for musicians available in the market, band buddies-turned-business partners Aaron Tan and Ivan Cheong decided to repair and make IEMs on their own. What started out as an experiment became a fully-fledged enterprise when requests for customised pieces started to come in. FATfreq is now a go-to place for world-class IEMs used by multiple international artists.

## FATFREQ

Established in 2016  
fatfreq.com

“*Starting a business is never easy. You will come to realise that you do not know many things. The key is to do your best and enjoy the process.*”

**Aaron Tan**  
School of Engineering  
Diploma in Mechanical  
Engineering  
2015

“*Build consistent habits that will set a culture in the business. Be disciplined in updating your 'to-do' list.*”

**Ivan Cheong**  
School of Engineering  
Diploma in Mechanical  
Engineering  
2018

MUSIC TO  
YOUR EARS

## AKRIBIS SYSTEMS

Established in 2004  
akribis-sys.com

Akribis Systems may not be a household name, but Yong Peng is proud of the fact that the company he built touches our daily lives. The direct drive motors and precision systems they design and construct play an indispensable role in manufacturing familiar hardware such as our iPhones, TVs and household appliances, as well as the data storage devices we find in our computers.

### Leow Yong Peng

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Mechanical  
Engineering  
1990



# ENGINEERED TO PRECISION

I have always been fascinated by hardware. Many of the things we see around us are made up of hardware and software components, but people are usually less aware of the amount of work that goes into constructing the hardware. I came from a humble background and grew up making my own toys, so the desire to build things by hand has always been in me.

But it was not immediately obvious to me that I could pursue this passion in school. Initially, I didn't know what course was right for me. There was no internet back then for us to research the best courses to take after our O-Levels. We relied mainly on word of mouth. I had a friend whose brother was studying mechanical engineering at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), and he

told me this was the best course to take, hence I enrolled for the course. It turned out to be a good decision. Mechanical engineering was a good fit for me with its hands-on focus on making products.

**The course gave me a good foundation to be a technopreneur.** It equipped me with technical skills and a strong foundation in machine building. When I graduated with a certificate of merit and a silver medal from NP, I headed to Nanyang Technological University with a clear goal in mind. I made sure that every course I took at university helped me to excel at machine building.

**Some of the things I built for school projects were used in the real world.** One of my more memorable projects at NP was building an air filter for the Trans Island Bus Services (TIBS). A simple square box installed within the engine would clean the air for bus passengers at the touch of a button. It was successful, and TIBS was so pleased that they even painted the box to resemble their bus. You can imagine the attention we drew during an exhibition to display our student projects! For an 18-year-old, that kind of early exposure to industry projects was invaluable.

We were also assigned projects during our term break, and I remember there was once

when my classmates and I had to make a metal dustbin. Imagine our surprise when we returned to school to find our dustbins deployed for use around the campus! With our names neatly labelled on each bin, no less. We were teased by the rest of our schoolmates for that.



*If I had a chance to relive my poly years again, I wouldn't change a thing. There was no internet, so we had to interact face to face. Those were happy days for me.*



**I never imagined myself starting a business.** When I was young, I only knew I had to learn as much as possible to escape poverty. But when I was working for A\*STAR, I had a

chance to be seconded to a local company. It was an eye-opening experience. I realised that my skills and knowledge were in shortage. The opportunities were there. All that was needed was a leap of faith on our part. Together with three other partners, I started Akribis Systems.

**The company has now gone global.** We made the decision to expand outside of Singapore because we knew it was necessary for the growth of the company. We set up a factory in China very early on. Today, they make up the bulk of our headcount with about 1,400 staff. We are also in Malaysia, Thailand, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Israel, Germany and the United States. Our total headcount stands at around 2,000 employees in 10 countries.

**We do things the Singapore Way.**

It can be a real challenge to reconcile operations across so many different countries. As a Singaporean company, we promote the Singapore Way. In China, for example, you usually address your boss by his title, but my people over there call me Yong Peng. We want to be straightforward, so we forgo the formalities. We try to bring them over and show them, this is the way we do things in Singapore. In the earlier years of our business, it was all about getting the product out there. But as the business grew in size, it was about

getting the best out of my staff. That, to me, is the most challenging but best part of running a business.

**Recruiting and retaining good people is key for SMEs like us.** A small company like ours has to compete with big multinational corporations for talent. In many of the recruitment drives we participated in, we were the only hardware-based company. While that has helped us to stand out from our immediate competitors, many potential recruits remained daunted by the hardcore engineering aspect of our work. To get around that, we are redesigning our internship experience. Interns from various disciplines will come together as a team to work on a single project. That is how we see ourselves building a talent pipeline for the company.



Hear Yong Peng's top three tips for aspiring entrepreneurs.



## WIZLOGIX

Established in 2000  
wizlogix.com

### Angeline Lee

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic &  
Computer Engineering  
1994

Husband-and-wife team Shawn and Angeline took the gutsy move to start their own printed circuit board (PCB) design, prototyping, and high-mix low-volume manufacturing business in 2000. When demand dwindled during the 2007 economic crisis, they turned the challenge into an opportunity by diversifying their services to organise training courses in PCB design and manufacturing for MNCs and SMEs. Certified to AS9100-aerospace standard, their company has established a name in the industry serving big-name clients like Hewlett-Packard, Rolls-Royce, Intel and Dyson.



### Shawn Ng

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic &  
Computer Engineering  
1993

**Angeline: I had to pick up different skills to run the business.** Having studied electronic & computer engineering at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), I had an aptitude for designing PCBs, which spurred me to start the company. But the other aspects of running a business, such as human resources, accounting and administration, I had to pick up along the way. Some were through trial and error, others I learnt from consultants or my staff, and even through YouTube!

**A: Both of us were complete opposites as students.** Shawn was the model student while I was the one skipping lectures. He would stay at school during term breaks to work on special final-year projects under the tutelage of our lecturers, while I would be hanging out with friends.

**Shawn: We started the business out of our HDB flat.** We were course mates at NP but only got together as a couple when we met at Creative Technology. After we got married in 2000, I continued working while Angeline struck out on her own. Wizlogix started as a one-man operation out of our HDB flat that year. Four years later, I joined the business to help it grow to the next stage by providing PCB quick-turn prototyping and eventually low- to mid-volume production.



*If I could give my 18-year-old self some advice, it would be this: learn to speak up and share your opinions. Don't worry about how others might judge you.*



**Both: When we started the business, we realised the need to establish our reputation.**

Reputation matters a lot in our industry, so being an early mover gave our clients assurance about our product and service quality. Today, Wizlogix has a revenue of \$5 million a year with more than 150 clients, and 80 per cent of our business is through referrals. Consider what the customer wants, and think about what you can provide that would make the customer choose you. They will stick with you if you can solve their problem.

CLOSING  
THE LOOP

## GRATEFOOD

Established in 2014  
gratefood.co

While flying around the world as an air stewardess, Jacqueline found herself becoming a fast-growing purveyor of cookie butter, eventually supplying to the food services sector in Singapore and Dubai. The entrepreneur then chanced upon acai berries, which is now the main ingredient in Gratefood's range of premium plant-based products. While Gratefood continues to grow in profile, Jacqueline remains humble: "I'm still learning and building my brand in the frozen superfood scene."

GRATEFUL  
FOR  
GRATE FOOD

“Not all obstacles are bad. A trademark dispute in the past led me to create a refreshed brand that truly speaks our ethos.”

**Jacqueline Koay**  
School of Business  
& Accountancy  
Diploma in  
Business Studies  
2006

“You need grit to run a business, that 'never say die' attitude. Persevere through the hard times, and eventually you'll see your hard work pay off.”

**Daryl Tang**  
School of Engineering  
Diploma in Marine &  
Offshore Technology  
2013

(SOLAR)  
POWER  
UP!

## PMCE (GLOBAL)

Established in 2016  
pmce.sg

A desire to tackle global warming drew Daryl straight from national service into the world of solar panel installation. PMCE became a pioneer in the local industry, but surprisingly, it wasn't securing funding that he found the most difficult—it was working with his business partner! "Ultimately, we complement each other, and once we got past our differences, we managed to achieve so much," he shares.



## GRAND VENTURE TECHNOLOGY

Established in 2012  
gvt.com.sg

Julian and his partners grew Grand Venture Technology (GVT) from 10 to 1,200 employees over the span of just 10 years. The company, which provides various precision manufacturing services, has been hit by the current labour crunch, but it has stayed strong by constantly innovating its operations. Now, Julian has his sights set on further transforming the industry to carve out a name for Singapore as a world-renowned precision engineering brand.



**Julian Ng**  
School of Engineering  
Diploma in Shipbuilding  
& Offshore Engineering  
1993

# ON THE CUTTING EDGE

My course of study in polytechnic was unrelated to my current industry. I chose shipbuilding & offshore engineering because it had a small cohort, and I felt that I could get more attention in class. While I found ship and rig building interesting, I did not quite enjoy my internship experience. All I did there was welding work. To learn more about the industry, I would stay back after work to shadow my colleagues at the company. That is why I try to make sure that the polytechnic interns we take in at GVT now do fulfilling work during their stints with us.





## *Refresh your team with young talents even while you draw on the experience of the old guards.*



**The first few years of the company were tough.** When my partners and I started GVT, we brought two to three decades of experience to the business. We had to do everything ourselves in the beginning—from sales and marketing to customer service. It took nearly four years for us to break even. Now, we have 150 employees in our Singapore headquarters, while the bulk of our headcount is in Malaysia and China.

**We managed to build customer loyalty by solving their pain points.** Many of our customers came to us because they were unable to localise some of the key technologies provided by their overseas contract manufacturers in Europe and the US. We seized the opportunity to demonstrate our capabilities. Today, we are one of the few manufacturers in the region with ultra-precision and advanced material machining capabilities.

**This year, we were included in Forbes Asia’s “Best Under a Billion” list.** The annual Forbes list recognises 200 small- and mid-cap Asia-Pacific publicly listed companies with consistent revenue and profit growth. GVT is one of just seven companies in Singapore to win the accolade in 2022. That accolade has helped us gain mindshare among the younger generation.

**Going for runs helps me to make better business decisions.** There was an occasion when I was grappling with a big problem at work. I decided to go down to the nearby park connector for a run. My original intention was to run three rounds, but I ended up running fifteen. After that, I was hooked. Now, I try to run three times a week for 5 to 15km. In 2017, I completed the Standard Chartered Marathon. Next on my bucket list is an overseas marathon.

**Running a business is like running a marathon.** Every phase is a different challenge. It’s not about the run itself but what you have learnt from the journey. You need to know how to keep yourself going and continue striving forward. If you let up, complacency will set in. I have seen it happen in other businesses after they have reached a certain level of success. They lose their loyal customers.

**The talent crunch is a real problem for me.** It’s not easy to find young people with the right skills and work ethic. Which was why the invitation from Ngee Ann Polytechnic about this entrepreneur feature came at the right time. I thought it’d be a good opportunity to return to my alma mater and see if I can woo some students over to join me!

**Our industry needs different kinds of talents now.** To attract them, we need an image overhaul. Our industry is not a glamorous one. When you think of a traditional factory, you think, “dark, dirty and dangerous”. Nobody wants to work in a job like that. That’s why we are remaking ourselves into a “factory of the future”. Digitalisation has made a huge impact on the manufacturing industry. It’s different when you have a digitalised factory with robots. When you come in, you’re working with tech. We have coders and

software engineers on our team now. One of the new interns who joined us can code even faster than our coder—that’s how fast skill sets have changed.

**I am who I am today because of my mum.** I come from a single-parent family. My mum worked as a cashier at a canteen to put me through school. She had a strong work ethic, and that has rubbed off on me. She would tell me that I need to earn the things I want in life through my own hard work. That is something I abide by even today and a quality I look for in the people I employ.

**ROGER&SONS**

Established in 2014  
rogerandsons.sg

In 1988, Morgan's late father began JR&P Industries, a manufacturing company specialising in office furniture. When Morgan and his two brothers took over the company in 2014, they rebranded it to Roger&Sons. Today, it is a woodworking design studio building custom furniture, bespoke objects and premium corporate gifts, with a focus on sustainability.



**Morgan Yeo**  
School of Business & Accountancy  
Diploma in Business Studies  
2008

**CRAFTING  
CHANGE**

**When my brothers and I inherited the company from my father, we wanted to preserve what he had started.** The company was a manufacturer of office furniture, supporting the building of new offices as Singapore's economy was growing. It did well up until the early 2000s, when Malaysia and China's markets opened up, but my father worked hard to keep the business going. When I was in my mid-twenties, my father was diagnosed with cancer and passed on within six months. My younger brothers and I wanted to carry on our father's legacy, so we took over the running of his company.

**But we needed to move away from the old business model.** In order to sustain the business, we switched our focus from mass produced furniture to small batch production and bespoke furniture. If one carpenter can only build ten pieces of furniture instead of a hundred, we will stick to ten pieces and make them as best we can. It wasn't easy; our long-time employees didn't get the concept of bespoke services at first. It took me one to two years to convince them.

**Sustainability and education also became the cornerstones of Roger&Sons.** We started the Local Tree Project when we learnt that Singapore cuts down 50 to 100 trees a day. Through this project, we try to reuse waste

products from local trees that have been cut down, instead of importing wood from overseas. We're researching how we can reduce our waste and transform every part of the tree, including sawdust, into furniture. Another priority of our business is to educate the public on carpentry. We want to keep this craft alive and show people the value of handmade goods.

**Much of my identity was shaped by my extra-curricular experiences.** I was very active in CCAs at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, and they allowed me to be open to other people. I felt free to be myself and chase my dreams. I learnt to be comfortable in my own skin, and that set a strong foundation for me as a person even until today.

“

***Our goal is not to be the best carpenters in Singapore, but to be better carpenters than we were yesterday.***

”

## AIDRIVERS

Established in 2018  
aidrivers.ai

Back in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), Soon Chong was active in taekwondo and dragon boat. Decades later, the same discipline and tenacity he learnt from these sports have served him well as he powered through the pandemic constraints to develop AI-powered autonomous vehicles for port operations. "My goal is to help ports to overcome the manpower crunch and improve efficiency at container terminals," he declares.

“One of my best memories at NP is from 1986, when our NP team won the Gold Medal in the first-ever dragon boat competition!”

**Tok Soon Chong**  
School of Engineering  
Diploma in Mechanical  
Engineering  
1986

AN  
INTELLIGENT  
SOLUTION

At One Good Team, their goal is to change the way people connect, interact and relate to one another through innovative technologies that are relevant in today's digital world. One Good Card allows one's digital profile to be displayed with a tap on the phone. Over 30,000 happy customers worldwide have converted, and the team continually looks for new innovation and improvement opportunities.

“Businesses need to continuously innovate and improve. Starting a business is not hard, building it into a successful company is.”

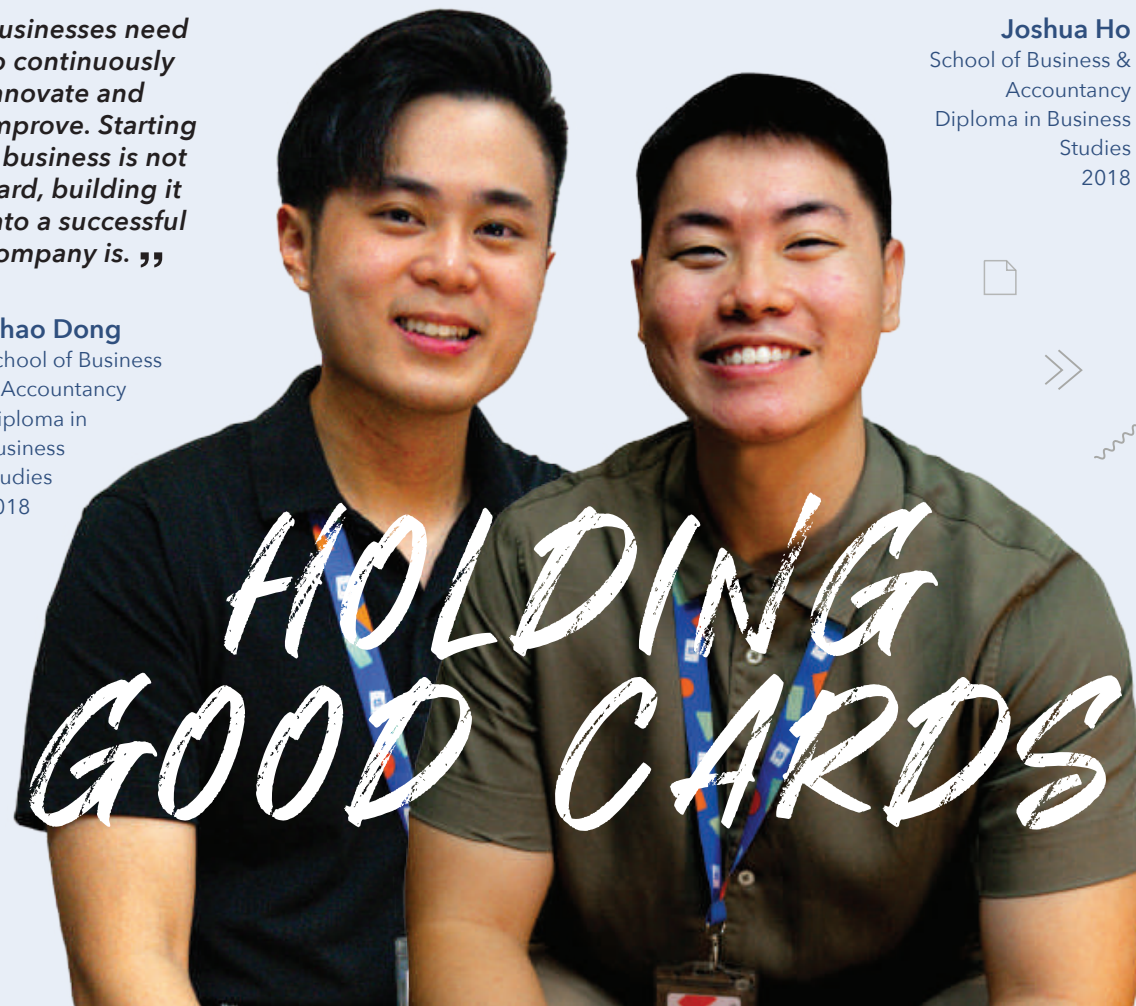
**Chao Dong**  
School of Business  
& Accountancy  
Diploma in  
Business  
Studies  
2018

## ONE GOOD TEAM

Established in 2020  
onegoodcard.com

“We tackle challenges by being open-minded and taking ownership of our blind spots.”

**Joshua Ho**  
School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in Business  
Studies  
2018





IUGA

Established in 2016  
iuiga.com

When housemates-turned-business partners Lai Xin and Zang Hao first started IUGA, they had only an idea and a business model—but it proved to be a disruptive one. In offering premium yet affordable home and lifestyle goods, the brand received plenty of pushback from existing industry players. The partners fought hard for their vision, and IUGA has since established a firm footing in the market and continues to appeal to a new generation of customers.

**Zang Hao**

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic  
& Telecom Engineering  
2007

**Lai Xin**

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Mechanical  
Engineering  
2007

# AFFORDABLE QUALITY

Lai Xin: Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) was my introduction to Singapore. I was from Chengdu, China. Fresh from high school, I had never been overseas. For the first two and a half months at NP, I had no idea what my lecturers were talking about, and I really doubted my English language proficiency. Over time, I slowly learnt about the culture here and started to localise.



**LX: When did I first know that I wanted to be an entrepreneur?** My first job taught me a great deal about how a business is run, but it also showed me the limits of my career progression. That was not what I wanted. I wanted to set my own ceiling, my own limits. That was when I decided to quit my job and start my own e-commerce business. I gave myself three months to come up with a business plan, so I got in touch with a few ex-classmates from NP to toss around a few ideas.

**LX: IUIGA started from my search for high-quality products to furnish my first HDB home.** I discovered that if you want to buy high-end items of good quality, they are usually very expensive. While there were plenty of affordable alternatives available, their quality was typically not that great. There was no middle ground. So, I thought, maybe there is a market here for quality products at more affordable prices.

**LX: Don't overthink it.** Many of my friends hesitate to start a business because they worry too much. But there's really no perfect time to start. So my tip for aspiring entrepreneurs is to just take a risk, move now, and adjust as you go.

**LX: We were nobody when we first started, so we struggled with suppliers.** The original design manufacturers (ODM) we approached were suppliers for top brands in the market, and the order volumes they asked for were huge. We spent one and a half years knocking on doors, trying to convince these manufacturers to take a chance on us. So it was really tough for us at the beginning.

**LX: Lucky for us, our timing was right.** We got into the market at a time when the manufacturers had spare capacity, because their customers—mainly big brands serving the US and European markets—were not doing well. That made them more open to working with us. IUIGA started in 2017 with 174 products from 78 manufacturers.

**Zang Hao: Life was stressful when I first moved to Singapore to study.** I couldn't get used to the food, and language was an issue for me. But over time, I adapted. I learnt how to cook for myself, and I became a regular patron at the NP Canteen Two's Western food stall, which served my favourite chicken chop. Interactions with my local classmates also helped me improve my English tremendously.

**ZH: Choosing my course of study also marked my first step towards independence.** At first, I turned to my father for his advice on

what I should study. He told me that at 18, I was capable of making my own decision. That was the first time I made decisions for myself, and I have never looked back.

“  
***There is no perfect time to start. Start first, then adjust along the way.***”

**ZH: I did not initially intend to stay in Singapore for the long term.** After polytechnic, I worked for a short period of time before going to Nanyang Technological University. I had a chance to travel a lot during those years for work and study. My experiences abroad made me see Singapore through fresh eyes. I realised I preferred living here, so that was why I eventually decided to set up my life here.

**ZH: It is always tough in the beginning when you start a business.** As a startup, you lack many things: funding, experience and manpower. But don't let that stop you from following your passion. Be positive, especially when facing uncertainties. If you are determined, you will find a way.

**ZH: When you make a decision, have the tenacity to follow through.** It can be tempting to backtrack midway and try a different path, but it is important to be able to stick to your vision and carry it through.

**ZH: It's okay not to be perfect in execution.** We learnt a big lesson when we opened our first permanent store following the success of our pop-up stores. We spent a lot of resources trying to make the store experience perfect. But we soon realised that it didn't make good business sense. So, we learnt to focus on what our customers really care about—product quality and price.

“  
***If you have a passion, you should follow it. I believe where there is a will, there will be a way.***”



On success as a journey, being yourself and other tips from Lai Xin and Zang Hao.

## PAPER CARPENTER

Established in 2013  
papercarpenter.com

### Irene Ng

School of Business & Accountancy  
Diploma in Business Studies  
1998



Irene and her husband founded Paper Carpenter with the goal of creating a more sustainable world. Everything from its craft products to furniture and even 3D exhibition structures is made from cardboard, which is more sustainable than wood and 100 per cent recyclable. Naysayers may doubt the longevity of cardboard, but with the company's proprietary PaperConnect building system, every structure has the strength and durability of wood!

THINKING OUT  
OF THE BOX

“ *Passion is what fills your soul, but a career is what fills your stomach. The two need to go hand in hand.* ”

**Although my background is in marketing, my true passion is in art.** I didn't go to art school because I thought art would not be secure for a career. But over the years, I picked up Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arrangement, and even spent a while doing flower styling for events. Looking back, art has always been a part of my life, so joining Paper Carpenter is sort of like having come full circle. I've returned to the area I'm most passionate about.

**Sustainability is not just a business strategy; it's part of my lifestyle.** At home, I turn old envelopes into rough paper to take notes. I also wash old plastic bottles and use them to store things like soap powder. And when my husband and I paint, we reuse old cardboard instead of plastic palettes. These are little gestures, but they go a long way in helping to reduce waste.

**My favourite moment in the business so far was when Paper Carpenter made it to the Singapore Book of Records.** For an exhibition

at Changi Airport Terminal 3, we created 3D structures of architectural buildings from Central and Eastern Europe entirely out of cardboard. We were actually going for the Guinness World Record!

**It's not all about the money.** My team consists of a group of passionate cardboard artists. We enjoy what we do, and the satisfaction comes from seeing products made entirely from cardboard. It excites us to design solutions that benefit the environment.

**Invest in what it takes to deliver better products.** Every time our product does not sell well or when we lose a deal, we look for the reason. We ask ourselves if it is because our design is not good enough, or if our prices are not competitive enough. Entrepreneurs should never doubt themselves because that is the greatest downfall.



## CLAIR OBSCUR

Established in 2020  
clairobscur.com

“It’s imperative that you stay in learning mode, no matter where you are on your entrepreneurial journey.”

### Carylyne Chan

School of Film & Media Studies  
Diploma in Mass Communication  
2011

Wanting to revolutionise the sun care market globally, Carylyne created a full spectrum of sun protection products that are equally functional and stylish. Having previously exited two digital technology companies, she now applies her tech expertise to Clair Obscur’s patent-pending sun care suite. Her drive and innovative spirit can be traced back to her time in Ngee Ann Polytechnic. “We constantly challenged ourselves to create something new and exciting,” she shares.

(SUN) SCREENING  
OUT THE BEST

## WAISTLAB

Established in 2018  
waistlab.co

Waistlab was inspired by Alif’s mother, who lamented about limited shapewear options in Singapore. With a loan from his parents and a kickstart fund from The Sandbox - Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Alif began manufacturing his original shapewear designs that help women (and men) stay in shape despite their hectic lifestyles. Under the Global Entrepreneurial Internship programme, The Sandbox secured him an internship with a fashion startup in Jakarta, and the experience was fundamental to this venture.

“Networking is very important. Even if I was equipped with the right knowledge and resources, it was being a people person that helped me get to where I needed to be.”

### Alif Adam

School of Film & Media Studies  
Diploma in Advertising & Public Relations  
2018

IN GOOD  
SHAPE

## THE POWDER SHAMPOO

Established in 2021  
thepowdershampoo.com

Never thought the simple act of washing your hair can save the earth? Well, think again. Concerned about the pervasive plastic pollution to our planet, haircare entrepreneur Lynn Tan turned her expertise into the perfect eco-friendly solution—a powdered shampoo that promises guilt-free (but squeaky clean) hair for a new generation of “woke” customers.



**Lynn Tan**  
School of Film & Media Studies  
Diploma in Mass  
Communication  
1999

FEEL-GOOD  
BEAUTY

**Do you know that in 2021, we recycled only six per cent of our plastic in Singapore, while the rest is burnt?** The amount of damage we are doing to the environment with our plastic pollution really scares me. As a distributor of haircare products, I was deeply aware of how I am contributing indirectly to the problem. It made me rethink the way we do things in the haircare industry.

**The Powder Shampoo mirrors how I live my life.** As a mum of two, I have become more conscious about how I live my life because I want to leave behind a better world for them. So I made a few changes to my lifestyle: I try to compost, recycle, and bring my own containers when I pack food home. The Powder Shampoo came about because I wanted to create a product that is truly sustainable.

**Many of us actually want to live an eco-friendly life.** But we do not have many choices in the market because everything is in plastic. I was pleasantly surprised to find a growing customer base in Singapore that is into sustainable living. The amount of sales that I have garnered since I launched my product has been very good.

**Be bold and just go for it.** My tip for aspiring entrepreneurs is that if you know what you

want, don't wait for consensus from everyone. There will be naysayers everywhere; the important thing is to do what is in the company's best interests. Surround yourself with the right people. Look for like-minded, non-judgemental individuals who can support you through your highest highs and lowest lows.

“

*You cannot please everyone, so just do what is best for the company. Those who understand it will appreciate it.*

”



Find out Lynn's tips for aspiring entrepreneurs.



## THE MEATERY

Established in 2019  
themeatery.sg

Struggling for growth in its early days drove The Meatery to expand its focus on halal-certified, high-quality cuts and offer culinary-themed workshops, supper nights and curated barbecue experiences. Today, as competition in the industry intensifies, Sophina continues to see challenges as opportunities—ones that will only compel the team to keep innovating.

CARVING  
OUT A  
NICHE

“Resist the temptation to do everything. While hustling is admirable, try to let go before you burn out and focus on things that bring the most impact.”

**Sophina Smith**  
School of Film &  
Media Studies  
Diploma in Mass  
Communication  
2002

“Always expect the unexpected, as every day is a challenge when running a business. The business must constantly evolve with external market forces.”

**Victor Koh**  
School of Life Sciences &  
Chemical Technology  
Diploma in Biotechnology  
2003

## ETTE TEA COMPANY

Established in 2014  
ettetea.com

When Victor set up Ette Tea, the first challenge he faced was to convince people to try his chicken rice- and nasi lemak-flavoured tea. Then, it was finding time to create new flavours—his true passion—while dealing with the business aspects of the company. Over time, he has struck a balance. “I make sure to give myself one day a week to relax and get creative with tea blending,” he says.

A WINNING  
NOVEL-TEA



## PROGENIQ

2005 to 2012

Darran's first taste of entrepreneurship came from the founding of Progeniq, a cutting-edge hardware development firm that eventually merged with a larger tech company. He is now putting his smarts into Morph Audio, an offshoot from Creative Technology offering customisable earphones for millennials and Gen-Zs.



**Darran Nathan**  
School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic &  
Computer Engineering  
2000

# ENGINEER OF SUCCESS

“

*A business plan is good as a snapshot of the current state of thinking, but anyone who has run a business knows that plans will always change.*

”

**My first startup was incubated at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP).** That helped get things off the ground in the earliest days. I still remember spending a lot of time at the Digital Signal Processing (DSP) Centre while creating the technology that would go into Progeniq. I would be there on weekends and during my National Service whenever I had the chance to book out of camp.

**Almost everything is a challenge in a startup.** This ranges from people to product development to sales. When I hit a snag, I have found this framework to be useful: The first thing to do is to get as much information as possible from all perspectives. Next, I'll evaluate the pros and cons of each potential solution. Then I give myself time—maybe a day or two—before making any decision.

**Nothing works as planned.** A business plan is as good as a snapshot of your current state of thinking. It will always change along the way.

**No man is an island.** I believe in surrounding myself with teammates who possess qualities I lack. Another thing I learnt from running a business is to always keep an eye on revenue generation and cash flow.

**You must be passionate about what you choose to build.** The journey is never going to be smooth sailing. You have to endure many twists and turns. I wish the younger me knew that building a business was much more time-consuming and costly than projected.

## KRAKAKOA CHOCOLATE

Established in 2013  
krakakoa.com

Sabrina might have been a greenhorn to the chocolate industry, but that did not stop her from embarking on a mission to solve issues faced by cacao producers. Today, her 40-strong team at Krakakoa Chocolate has turned cacao farming into a more financially and environmentally sustainable endeavour while showcasing the artisanal quality of Indonesian chocolate to customers domestically and abroad.

**Sabrina Mustopo**  
School of Life Sciences &  
Chemical Technology  
Diploma in Biotechnology  
2004

SETTING THE BAR  
FOR MINDFUL  
LEADERSHIP

**You can figure anything out if given the time.** During my time as a business consultant, I always started off knowing very little about each industry. It was the same before I started Krakakoa. I didn't know anything about chocolate or have connections in the sector, but I knew I was fascinated with agriculture. To get a foot in, I read a lot, hit people up on LinkedIn and made cold calls.

**Grades are not everything.** I say this as someone who did quite well in school. Some of my friends may not have been the best students but they're doing so great right now. The real world calls for tenacity, resourcefulness and the ability to network. These things may not translate to the best academic outcomes.

**Work is just one part of life.** I try to help people as a whole and take care of them in the best way possible. This way, they produce their best results and can thrive in other aspects of life. That's a great gift you can give as a leader.

**I had my first taste of leadership through a team sport.** Some of the most powerful memories I took away from Ngee Ann Polytechnic were my days in Magnum Force, the cheerleading team. It was the first time I had done a competitive team sport, and I

was the president. We trained like crazy—five days a week for a few hours each time. I learnt how to work as a team and push through challenges. I took this experience and applied it to my entrepreneurial journey.

**It wasn't all just work, though.** Some of us cheerleading girls liked to hang out in the open-air space above the gym. There was this corner from which we could see the pool. We used to check out the water polo guys from there!

“

***For every “yes”,  
you get nine “nos”,  
and that's okay.  
I had to learn  
that rejection  
means that I'm  
on the right path  
and pushing  
boundaries.***

”



## THE WOK PEOPLE

Established in 2009  
(sold in 2019)  
thewokpeople.com

# LET GO TO LET GROW



In Alfred Chua's experience, sometimes to let a business grow, one needs to let go. This is why in 2019, after a decade of running The Wok People, a business that runs staff canteens, he made the difficult decision to sell the business to Green House, an international conglomerate from Japan. Today, he remains Managing Director of The Wok People, leading his team to scale new heights in the international world.

**Alfred Chua**  
School of Engineering  
Diploma in Mechatronic  
Engineering  
1996



**I'm passionate about my work but I'm not sentimental.** I'd be very happy if one day I went to Bangkok and saw The Wok People van on the streets, or if I went to Malaysia and read an article in a newspaper talking about us. If I tried to do it alone, this vision would take longer to fulfil. It makes me very proud today that I've found a partner to help me take my business to the next level, and I'm glad that even though I don't own the business, I can still help it grow.

**Finding a business partner is like marriage.** It's not easy. Over the past two years, we have met a lot of potential partners and investors, ranging from companies in Asia to Europe and even the USA. I eventually chose Green House because they told me they would take care of my staff and that no one would be retrenched. They seemed to share the same philosophy of treating staff well, and I felt they would be able to provide more career opportunities than I would if we stayed as an SME.

**We had never seen anything like the pandemic before.** When the border with Malaysia closed, our staff had around 48 hours to decide if they would stay or return. One hundred of them went back, but we did our best to support them. And for those in Singapore who were not working, we sent them for courses and training.

**Difficult decisions are inevitable.** In 2021, we had to reduce our staff's pay by five per cent for a few months. But we were committed to doing this only for a short time, and once we could, we reinstated their pay and also gave what was deducted back to them. I think we've managed to survive and, in fact, have come back much stronger.

**My philosophy is to never take advantage of anyone.** People will appreciate it and lend a helping hand when you need it. I believe this is why my staff have not left and are staying with us even during the current labour crunch.

**Back at school, I wasn't the brightest or most diligent student.** After class, I'd go hang out at the Business School in Ngee Ann Polytechnic because there were more girls there—that's the kind of thing we did in the past.

**I cried when my close friends told me they were going to Australia for university.** We didn't have much then. I knew that the best my mother could give me was a diploma and that she was already struggling with three jobs just to get me through school. So instead, I became stronger and hungrier. I became more independent and learnt to manage my time better because I wanted to do well, find a job and ensure my kids would have more opportunities than me.

**Networking was the biggest struggle for me.** I've never liked speaking in front of people and mingling, but I knew that I needed to do something to keep my business from going down. I realised that if people did not know about us, I might lose contracts. I would also have more difficulty finding partners to work with.

**I don't worry about being judged.** Canteen operators might be the lowest on the F&B hierarchy, but we've managed to differentiate ourselves. We might not be as cool as a café, but we have technology that some major restaurant chains don't even use!

**It's important to be authentic.** When I won the 2014 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year for Food and Beverage award, one of the judges told me that I spoke with passion, and although I did not have much experience, he could tell I spoke from my heart. I felt really proud to know that even with my background, I could still receive such an award. It taught me that it was time for me to try to give back as well. I realised that maybe my journey has lessons for younger generations, and that knowledge gives me the confidence to share my story.

“

*If you know what you want,  
you should go for it—but  
never be greedy.*

”



Hear Alfred's advice on reciprocity and more.

**MONEYSMART  
GROUP**

Established in 2009  
moneysmart.com

# MONEY SMART. PEOPLE DRIVEN!

## Vinod Nair

School of InfoComm Technology  
Diploma in Information  
Technology (Computer Studies)  
2002

Vinod founded MoneySmart to make financial decisions easier for people. In over a decade, he has grown the company from a mortgage comparison website to Southeast Asia's largest personal finance portal, serving people in Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Philippines. His latest project? Expanding MoneySmart's reach with its own brand of financial products.



**I wanted to be a doctor, but I didn't do well enough.** Looking back, I realise that what attracted me to medicine was how I could help people solve problems. If you think about it, I'm doing that now, just using a different skill set. So I definitely have no regrets!

**A module on technopreneurship got me interested in business.** I took the module when I was in Ngee Ann Polytechnic and was very intrigued by it. I'd never been exposed to business before taking the class and was pleasantly surprised to receive a distinction for the module. The hands-on learning style suited me, which is why I was able to do well.

**Silicon Valley set me on the path of entrepreneurship.** During university, I spent a year interning at a Silicon Valley startup while taking business classes at Stanford. It was a year of being close to exciting companies like Facebook and YouTube—basically just immersing myself in the tech culture. I was so inspired by all the people I met that when I came back to Singapore, I decided that I wanted to start my own business.

**My first venture, HomeSpace, failed.** It was a real estate search engine, and long story short, we couldn't compete with companies like PropertyGuru. It was very upsetting to

have worked so hard on something for over a year and then come to the conclusion that it wasn't going to work out. I spent a few days reflecting on what I learnt and took these lessons to MoneySmart.

**One of the biggest lessons was that it is crucial to build a customer base.** With HomeSpace, I had focused too much on building a great product without caring enough about getting to know our customers and what attracted them to our products. I also had not thought about how to generate revenue and become self-sustaining.

There is a mantra at Silicon Valley: "Build it, and they will come". This was based on the idea that customers will come to you as long as you have a great product. But that isn't necessarily true. In the US, the market is huge, so if you can even attract a small portion of it, you will survive. In Singapore, the population is much smaller, so a tiny fraction of our market isn't enough for a company to take off.

**Company culture is a competitive advantage.** People stay in companies when the culture is great and when they have strong social ties. This gives them a sense of belonging—a sense of being part of a tribe. One of the ways we reinforce company culture at MoneySmart is by organising company retreats, to help

“

*Go your own way and take it one day at a time. Accept that not everything will go the way you want it to, and know that there is no one to compete with.*

”

the team get to know each other as people. During one of them, there were many tears as people shared their stories and problems in their personal lives. It was a defining moment for me to see that they care a lot for each other. Covid-19 has weakened those social ties. Now, we are trying to bring people back together with events so they can reconnect on a personal level and hopefully also remember why they liked the company and came to us in the first place.

**Real learning comes through action.** I think you can get 70 to 80 per cent of the knowledge you need just by reading the top three books on a given subject. After that, it's a matter of putting theory into practice and trying it out. You will not really internalise the knowledge until you have done that and seen the impact.



## THE WOKE SALARYMAN

Established in 2019  
thewokesalaryman.com

“*Entrepreneurship is way more hardcore than a nine-to-five job. But you don't start a business to do less work; you start one to do more on your own terms.*”

### He Ruiming

School of Film & Media Studies  
Diploma in Mass Communication  
2009

STAY WOKE.  
SALARYMAN

Ruiming and his partner founded The Woke Salaryman, a personal finance blog that helps Singaporeans make better financial and life choices through educational webcomics. Through their accessible webcomics, they break down complex and seemingly boring topics of the financial and economic world for the curious. Ultimately, they believe that when people are financially stable, they are more able to make rational and wiser decisions. Not just for themselves, but for society.

“*The biggest challenge is finding talent whose values align with your company's. Their performance is irrelevant if they do not share the same values.*”

Joewin Tan  
School of Business & Accountancy  
Diploma in Business Studies  
2007

BUSINESS  
BUILDER

Established in 2012  
lineardots.sg

An internship stint set Joewin down the bumpy path of entrepreneurship, but the close friends she made at Ngee Ann Polytechnic cheered her on and kept her going. Now she has several successful businesses under her belt, including video production company Linear Dots Production, creative meeting and event space provider Huone, and SME lending and corporate advisory firm Quant Investment.

Joewin has also ventured into the social enterprise space with HoneySpree, an artisanal gifts business that hires underprivileged stay-at-home mums.

DSTNCT

Established in 2014  
dstnct.co

Matthew believes that a good advertisement is not the one with the “punniest” language or the most awe-inspiring image—it must simply be able to speak to people. This conviction led him to start DSTNCT when he was fresh out of national service. Today, his people-first approach has enabled the company to hold its ground in the competitive agency space, earning it long-term clients like AIA, CapitaLand and more.

PUTTING  
PEOPLE  
FIRST

**Matthew Zeng**  
School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in Tourism &  
Resort Management  
2012

“  
*The key to a good client relationship is to be a partner to your client. You need to know what makes their life easier and what bothers them in order to be able to help.*  
”

**Polytechnic is a time for finding yourself.**

Students around 16 to 19 years old are at a stage of life where they are defining their identities. For me, Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) was a place that showed me a glimpse of what adulthood and the real world would be like. The way the courses were structured encouraged independence, and the classes I took made me realise I might want to be an entrepreneur, so I’d say it really defined me.

**At 17, I knew I wanted to create the best advertisement in the world.**

It was unexpected because I was studying tourism and resort management. However, I realised that the modules I excelled in and enjoyed the most were those pertaining to advertising or marketing and communications. Looking back, I think those days in NP were where my passion started.

**I learned about resourcefulness while doing an internship in China.** The experience made

me realise that as long as you are resourceful and obsessed, you can do anything you want. This is what motivated me to start my business at the age of 20. I still believe in this today—that it’s not about talent, but hard work and obsession. If you can be obsessed about what you do, you will go far.

**It was difficult to be the underdog.** As a startup, we were pitting ourselves against bigger companies. We did a lot of “cold-emailing”, and the minute an opportunity presented itself, we’d go to the company and really try to sell our services and show them we had the right attitude. I call this the underdog mentality. It’s where you go the extra mile to provide value and differentiate yourself. It paid off over the years—in fact, our first client is still our client today, even though she’s changed companies!

”



## MYFINB GROUP

Established in 2016  
myfinb.com

### M Nazri Muhd

School of Business & Accountancy  
Diploma in Accountancy  
1995

Nazri is the chairman and founder of MyFinB Group, AIV50 and VSC Portfolio Investments. He started these companies based on his belief in artificial intelligence as a powerful tool to make sense of complex data fast. As a group, the three companies develop and implement AI solutions for public, private and non-profit organisations across various industries, helping them to achieve higher performance and social innovation goals.

AN EYE  
FOR A.I.

**The seeds of my entrepreneurial journey were planted very early on.** I was fortunate to have met dynamic lecturers at Ngee Ann Polytechnic who helped to mould the way I think about business and entrepreneurship. One of my business studies lecturers advised me on management consultancy and taught me forward-thinking skills. Another accountancy lecturer presented stories around data and changed my perception of financial figures. Finally, the numbers were making sense!

**Thanks to National Service, I was able to develop my interest in numbers.** I was in the manpower division helping to analyse the performance of police officers. There was a lot of data to analyse—about 30 to 50 variables. This was in the late 1990s, where we did everything manually, so it would be tedious. But my seniors and I managed to build an automated database system that could filter and analyse the criteria scores instantaneously. It was very exciting, and it made our lives so much easier.

**The beauty of AI is that it's industry agnostic.** Once you've built a robo-advisor, for example, you can build an AI robot for other industries such as education, sports and healthcare. That's how our AI integrated group expanded from only fintech to include other verticals,

“

*I like to understand how human minds think, behave and act. It's fascinating!*

”

which now come under MyFinB. We've also diversified our business to include ventures, investments, training, consultancy and certification.

**As an entrepreneur, I need to think about everything related to the business.** After graduating from university, I spent years in the corporate world as a financial analyst, so when I decided to start my own company, I had to get used to making many decisions. I needed to consider facilities, rent, salaries—things that were previously taken care of by other people—in addition to thinking about the AI models I wanted to build. Reflecting on my decisions became a normal activity for me. That's why I think entrepreneurs shouldn't say that they are over-analysing or overthinking. It has become our daily habit to always be thinking about what and how we can do better.



## BOOM DIGITAL MEDIA

Established in 2020  
boomdigitalmedia.com

When the pandemic dashed Olympic hopeful Ng Ming Wei's dreams of representing Singapore in taekwondo, he turned to creating videos for social media with his dad. After seeing the power of social media that brings joy to people and raises awareness about social issues, Ming Wei started Boom Digital Media to help brands and influencers grow organically through the power of relatable vertical videos.

# HELPING BUSINESSES BOOM

“The work I've done is important, but the connections and relationships I've formed are beyond valuable. I cannot put a price tag on them.”

**Ng Ming Wei**  
School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in  
Business Studies  
2014

“All the books, theories and new approaches to success are not a holy grail. There is always a better way of doing things.”

**Wellson Lo**  
School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in Business Studies  
2004

# THE ROBO WAY TO INVEST

## BIBIT

Established in 2019  
bibit.id

Want to invest but unsure how to get started? Meet Bibit, a robo-advisor with big goals of making investing easier and more accessible for people in Indonesia. It's designed to support those who are inexperienced, uncertain or afraid of investing. “We believe in inclusivity and want to help everyone build the habit of investing for the future,” he says.

## HIGHSPARK

Established in 2015  
highspark.co

After sitting through multiple dull presentations during business pitch competitions, Eugene and Kai Xin started experimenting with their own visual presentation designs and sharing them online. The designs attracted an international audience for their ability to communicate complex ideas simply. Inspired by this, the duo founded HighSpark, a training and consultancy company to help executives to deliver more effective presentations and pitches.

### Koh Kai Xin

School of Business  
& Accountancy  
Diploma in Business  
Studies  
2013

### Eugene Cheng

School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in Business  
Studies  
2013

A SPARK OF  
ELOQUENCE

“ Put your heart and mind into finding something you enjoy, and give yourself permission to take the path less travelled. ”

**Eugene: Age was a problem when we first started.** We were just 19 when we started the business. When you are selling knowledge and expertise, age becomes an issue. Although we faced a lot of pushback, we were also fortunate to meet people who gave us advice. Someone even bought me a pair of glasses—fake ones with no prescription—to help me look older!

**E: I learnt about entrepreneurship mostly from books.** When we first started, I read voraciously. We didn't have much money as students, but I would set aside a hundred dollars each month to buy books. I would go through five to six books. I read so I could learn from people smarter than myself and to pick up their best practices.

**Both: To get the best out of our team, we give them our best too.** The people who join

HighSpark are individuals with their own lives, dreams and aspirations. They are our best investment so we want to provide them with the right mentorship and space to grow, to empower them to think on their feet or even challenge our ideas at work. We find that when our people are motivated, it drives our business forward.

**Kai Xin: The business is no longer just ours.** We had no roadmap when we started our entrepreneurial journey. We had to learn everything on our own—from who to hire first, to rebranding ourselves so that we're seen as more than just slide designers. Now, our business has reached a stage where we want to build a legacy. Eugene and I want to take a more advisory role and let the talented team we've built up take the business forward and chart the direction ahead.



## PAWJOURR

Established in 2019  
pawjourn.com

Husband-wife duo Sijun and Jane started Pawjourn, an online marketplace that connects brands to content creators, with a focus on the pets category. As first-time founders, they received a lot of advice on how to run their business, but not all applied to them. "It's important to filter diverse and even conflicting advice and make your own decisions," they share.

*"The entrepreneurship specialisation I took at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) really set the tone for my future and got me interested in starting a business."*

**Jane Peh**  
School of Business & Accountancy  
Diploma in Business Studies  
2013

SEEING  
OPPAWTUNITY

*"My experience at NP taught me to see things from a global perspective. My lecturers have also been a great inspiration and continue to support me today."*

**Tay Sijun**  
School of Business & Accountancy  
Diploma in International Business  
2013

## CLICKR MEDIA

Established in 2009  
clickrmedia.com

Clickr was conceived in 2009 to fill the gaps in digital marketing and web technologies. It has since expanded to Yangon, Tokyo and Paris, helping many prolific brands engage their customers online. Musing on the journey, Derick shared his challenges in managing projects, resources and clients. The experiences have led him to emphasise the synergistic value of client-agency relationships, building trust with his customers, allowing his team to play to their strengths, and delivering higher-value work.

*"Care for your people because that helps with retention, work performance and, ultimately, a happier workplace and clients."*

**Derick Ng**  
School of InfoComm Technology  
Diploma in Information Technology  
2004

PEOPLE-FIRST  
CULTURE



## THE MAJORITY TRUST

Established in 2018  
majority.sg

With almost two decades in the non-profit sector, Martin is now setting big goals for The Majority Trust, a philanthropic organisation that uses research data to highlight underserved areas and inform donors about the social impact of their contributions in Singapore.

**Martin Tan**  
School of Film &  
Media Studies  
Diploma in Film,  
Sound & Video  
1997

# MISSION FOR CHANGE

**I have been a firm believer in the power of storytelling since young.** In the Film, Sound & Video course at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), we may have been trained to be technical, but the most important thing I took away from it was the ability to tell stories through moving visuals, stills and words. This is important in the non-profit space. We put information together to create a compelling case for our stakeholders and the media. I'm not an expert in dementia or youth mental health, but I am a storyteller.

**At school, I relished the opportunities to try different things.** I was able to represent NP at Outward Bound in Australia, coach the NP Football Club, run the Film, Sound & Video Society and even design my own work attachment at one point. It was a really nice time in my life.

**There is a different way of doing philanthropy.** Philanthropy in Singapore is very much network-based—the ability to raise money hinges on who you know, so good ideas and new, smaller charities don't always get funded. The aim of The Majority Trust (TMT) is to democratise philanthropy. We bring donors together, aggregate their resources and direct them to areas of need that we identify through research.

**We need to professionalise the industry.** In our early days, we were asked about our staff cost and growth because we hired good talent for specific roles. The social sector wasn't as used to being competitive in hiring. However, the mindset seems to be slowly shifting towards the social sector and philanthropy as a profession. Over the next few years, it won't be about the willingness to pay competitively; it'll be whether we have enough of the right talent to join the space.

**I know I'm adding value...**

...when donors say things like, "I've never heard of this organisation before, and I've been in the dementia space for a long time." Sometimes donors are unable to see the needs on the ground because of how far removed they can be. This is where TMT comes in to help. Surfacing needs that are unseen and raising the profile of smaller charities that are unknown.

**Generosity breeds success.** We can't worry about others running away with our ideas. That's the thing about being a pioneer—you need others to adopt what you do. The more you share, the more your ideas are adopted, and the more awareness it brings about your work.

**Results are only as good as the risks we are willing to take.** We are very risk averse in Singapore because we are afraid of failure. If the corporate world didn't take a risk, we would never have had the iPhone. There is no societal change without pushing the boundaries. I admire the Americans who have this "go do it" spirit. They have created some of the most lasting organisations you can think of.

**The early days were hard.** When I got married, I only had \$500 in my bank account. My in-laws asked me when I was going to

“ **Without the willingness to fail, people won't want to try anything, and nothing gets done. ”**

finish my non-profit work and get a corporate job. They changed their mind two years later, though. They came to an event that my first non-profit startup, The Halogen Foundation, organised for 2,500 students. They then realised, okay, the scale at which this guy runs things isn't a piece of cake.

**I care deeply about raising leaders.** With Halogen, what drove me was my passion for the young leaders. If guided the right way, they can make tremendous change. Now at TMT, my passion is building an ecosystem of societal leaders who will lead and make change. There's a large part of me that wished the world would be more embracing of social entrepreneurs.

**Maybe another door will open for me.** By the time TMT turns 10, I'll be 50. I'm not sure what's next for me. I've only ever gone for one job interview. I'm fortunate enough to have opportunities that present themselves. In each of my jobs, I've always been driven by

milestones. I'm now working towards TMT's 10th year milestone. Hopefully, by then, the ecosystem will be more robust and self-sustaining. At some point, I need to relinquish my role, so the young ones have a chance to lead. If we can achieve our big audacious goal of aggregating \$20 million a year by our 10th anniversary, I'd consider that a personal success. When that happens, that's one more milestone reached.

**If you want work-life balance, don't be an entrepreneur.** If you take entrepreneurship as just a job, you will never succeed. The organisation has to be your number one focus. That does not mean you don't balance time for your family. But you build your life around what you want to create. On almost every vacation with my family, I have meetings with people because I want to learn how things are run overseas. My family has gotten used to it. Maybe this book should be titled *Spouses Who Dared instead*.

## LEGATCY

Established in 2019  
legatcy.com



**Dennis Poh**  
School of Business & Accountancy  
Diploma in Accountancy  
2010



# PROFESSIONAL SUITE OF SERVICES FOR STARTUPS

Dennis founded Legatcy to fill the gap of professional compliance needs for startups. The consultancy firm eases the uprising governance and strategic requirements for startup founders by providing outsourced C-suite support (i.e. Chief of Staff and Chief Finance Officer support) and corporate secretarial and accounting services. Dennis is also the current entrepreneur-in-residence with The Sandbox at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP).

**Legatcy was inspired by the struggles I observed in startups.** I made friends with many founders who were running their own startups, and I noticed they were asking me questions about corporate governance and compliance. I helped them pro bono initially. Then I realised that there was a gap in the professional corporate services space. Startup founders were willing to pay but couldn't find advisors who understood them well. I started Legatcy with 10 to 20 clients, but now we have about 500 companies under us.

**The best lesson I learnt was from a failed startup.** After years of working for law firms, I joined a startup, but that only lasted for six months as the startup soon failed. I was working for the founders as a key employee, and I saw first-hand how important it was for startup founders to incentivise employees. At that time, there were no clear guidelines for startups on how to structure employee benefits. Today, this is one area I encourage my clients to look into.

**One of my favourite leadership sayings is, "being kind is being clear".** Be clear in communicating your expectations to your team, even when you need to push them. Holding back and being unclear is, in fact, being unkind to someone. It can feel harsh to push your team, but sometimes you cannot avoid making difficult decisions as a businessman. In Legatcy,

we always seek growth. Sometimes it's telling a team member to make tough choices in their career, or advising a client to look for something more suitable when the values they seek differ from ours.



*If you're thinking of starting a business, come to AGILE at NP and we can talk about it!*



**In NP, I picked the road less travelled.** I was an accountancy student, but my favourite modules were in law, such as business law and company law. This eventually led to my first polytechnic internship with one of the four big law firms in Singapore and later contributed to my career and business.

**My earliest taste of entrepreneurship involved selling keychains.** I used to run a pushcart in school for an entrepreneurship module. I stitched toys to keychains. To my surprise, everything sold out. The satisfaction was sweet, and it left a lasting impression on me about the fulfilment of running a business.



Hear from Dennis on how growth is applied in his company.



## SAFE SPACE™

Established in 2017  
safespace.sg

When Antoinette started Safe Space™ in 2017 to provide mental health services online, few believed she would succeed. But she persisted, pursuing this cause while holding a full-time job. She's no stranger to this balancing act: back in Ngee Ann Polytechnic, she had to work to support herself, and it was her classmates' empathy that kept her going. Fast-forward to Covid-19, her resilience has paid off as demand for mental health solutions grew.

MIND  
OVER  
MATTER

“ Entrepreneurship is a wild but rewarding ride. Don't forget to enjoy the ride as much as the destination. ”

### Antoinette Patterson

School of Film & Media Studies  
Diploma in Mass Communication  
2008

“ Back at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, I juggled seven CCAs along with my studies. Those fun times were when I learnt to give 100 per cent in everything that I did. ”

## SURGE ADVERTISING

Established in 2020  
surgeadvertisingagency.com

Alex Lee believes one should always “aim to achieve more by doing less”, valuing productivity and results. He has translated his conviction into Surge Advertising's highly effective customer acquisition strategy. The lead generation agency, connecting businesses with buyers online, generated over \$400 million in trackable revenue in the first two and a half years of its founding.

NO  
MEAN  
FEAT

### Alex Lee

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Marine & Offshore Technology  
2011

CIALFO

Established in 2017  
cialfo.co

Cialfo is an online platform that helps students all over the world in their career and college discovery journey. This includes searching and applying for their ideal degree programmes in overseas universities. It recently raised a Series B round of \$60 million in funding. Their vision is to make education accessible for 100 million students. Today, it serves more than 2,000 high schools in 85 countries and works with 1,000 universities.

**Stanley Chia**  
School of Business  
& Accountancy  
Diploma in  
Accountancy  
2007

# MAKING EDUCATION ACCESSIBLE

**The first time I thought of becoming an entrepreneur was in Secondary Three.** I was in the best class in a neighbourhood school, and all my classmates were very smart. My oldest sister, too, did really well in her studies. But I wasn't doing as well. I asked myself, "I'm not stupid, right? Why can't I do well like them?" Eventually, it dawned on me that if I can employ people who are smarter than me, then maybe I can still have a competitive advantage over others. That got me to attempt to pursue this path of entrepreneurship.



“

*If you leave yourself with backup options when running a startup, then you're not 'all in'. You must be 'all in' to give your best shot for the startup to work.*

”

**Then, my leadership experience at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) further motivated me.**

In every CCA I participated in, I took on a leadership role. Being a leader challenged me to grow in a certain way that other people don't and gave me access to opportunities that few people get. As president of the entrepreneurship club and vice president of the social enterprise club, I met and learnt from many entrepreneurs.

**My best memories were the times I spent with my friends in the entrepreneurship club.**

Back then, the entrepreneurship club was called SIFE—Students in Free Enterprise. It was a small club of around 10 to 15 of us. It was a high-performing team where every member led an entrepreneurship project. We would prepare for business plan competitions until 2am, then we would go home to sleep and come back for class at 8am. We did that for

months! Working hard is not difficult when you work with people who are as passionate as you. All of us thought about our careers in a different way from the peers in my classroom. Being in that environment of people who were willing to think outside of the norm was very inspiring and motivating. One of the members was Quek Siu Rui, who eventually founded Carousell!

**Although I studied accountancy for seven years, I have never worked in an accounting firm.** I spent four years studying accountancy at NP, during which I interned with a bank, and then three years at university. After earning my diploma, I couldn't decide between wanting to become an investment banker or an entrepreneur. I was leaning towards the latter, but I had never run a company. So, I decided to give entrepreneurship a shot while at university. I founded my first startup

at the end of my freshman year. For me, going into university was about acquiring a technical skill that would help in whatever I do. That's why I continued to study accountancy, even though I didn't plan to be an accountant.

**Cialfo's predecessor was "Cialfo College Counseling", a B2C company that served students directly.** It was labour intensive, and there were only so many students we could serve. In 2017, we sold this business, retained the brand name of "Cialfo" and partnered with a tech co-founder to build out the tech platform. We're now a B2B tech company championing students, by partnering with their schools and universities.

**Somehow, I've always had clarity in what I want to do.** I think it's because I have a strong desire for clarity. If I don't know what's next, I get very uncomfortable. I will keep asking myself and do some soul-searching until I find the answer. This has helped me stay focused on what's next, and to forge ahead with decisions even when everyone around me disagreed. Basically, I had the guts to disagree with everybody around me. I guess that makes me either a genius or crazy!

**Entrepreneurship is a lifestyle, not a career.** If you want to be an entrepreneur, there's no such thing as work-life balance. It becomes

your life. There isn't even integration because everything will be about your business. You need to have the confidence to convince the people around you why you're doing this. From your parents and your friends to your life partner, you must get them to understand your conviction.

**I enjoy volunteering with student entrepreneurship clubs and initiatives.**

Not just with the clubs at NP, but also with those at the National University of Singapore and for some entrepreneurship competitions. My own experience of pursuing entrepreneurship hasn't been easy. Having said that, it's a worthwhile journey of pursuing your own aspirations instead of working for someone else and helping them to achieve their aspirations. I strongly believe in people who are willing to think for themselves, and I want to encourage people to do that.



Find out how Stanley overcame challenges and more.



## LEMONFRIDGE STUDIO

Established in 2017  
lemonfridge.sg

### Jeffrey Lee

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic &  
Computer Engineering  
2006

THE ART OF  
CUSTOMER  
SATISFACTION

Jeffrey ventured into the renovation industry quite by accident, but stayed on to co-found his own interior design company, Lemonfridge Studio. With a background in sales, he places customers' needs at the forefront of everything the team does, from project planning to after sales services. And the customers have responded favourably—today, the company is popular among young homeowners for its functional, minimalist and Scandinavian-chic designs.

**An unexpected opportunity brought me into the world of interior design.** Being in the industry, people may think I studied design or something related to it, but I was an engineering student at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) and I studied business management at university. I was working as an insurance agent when a friend asked me if I wanted to invest in his new interior design firm. I had always wanted to run a business, so I jumped at the chance. I sank my money into the firm and learnt the trade from him. Unfortunately, our partnership didn't work out, so I moved on and started Lemonfridge Studio with two other partners.

**We take pride in our customer service and after-sales services.** I always remind my team to give timely updates to our customers and be prompt in replying to their messages. These efforts have made our customers feel more comfortable working with us. Besides being confident in our designs and renovation services, we also put a lot of emphasis on after-sales services. We have a dedicated team to manage requests for touch-ups or adjustments after projects have been completed. This approach has set us apart from our competitors.

**As a leader, I feel that I must be an achiever and lead by example.** This is the reason

I continue to bring in the sales for the company, while managing other aspects of the business. Entrepreneurship is not about waiting for other people to do the work for you; it is about leading people by example. I make sure that my team knows my work ethic and how I work with our clients, so that they can learn to give our clients the same level of service.

**Much of my tenacity today came from my experience as a dragon boater.** Being in the NP Dragon Boat team changed my life. Our training was tough because we badly wanted to become the champions. Even when training got unbearable, we pushed through and persevered. We were so committed that we would also find time to train on our own outside of team sessions. This experience taught me a lot about effort and hard work. It's just like the saying, "Tough times don't last, tough people do."

“

**The most common newbie mistake is overpromising. There's no need to say yes to everything.**

”

## CROSSWORKS

Established in 2018  
[crossworks.info](http://crossworks.info)

Crossworks started as a solution to solve Jeshua's personal problem—he needed to hire help for his multiple companies, but he faced difficulties with the high cost in Singapore and with retaining freelancers. He decided to build an offshore team in Myanmar, and soon, other employers wanted his help with hiring too. Today, the startup has hired over 50 remote developers/designers and other team members from Myanmar for more than 20 companies for foreign companies.



**Jeshua Soh**

School of Film & Media Studies  
Diploma in Film, Sound & Video  
2015

WHEN RISK  
DAYS OFF

**I was a school dropout.** It had been a huge gamble for me to drop out of a six-year Integrated Programme at an elite school to enrol in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) with nothing more than a PSLE certificate. However, it was a key turning point for me—it catalysed a series of endeavours during and after my years in NP that shaped who I am today.

### **I first visited Myanmar on a school trip.**

Our Burmese lecturer organised the trip in 2013 for us to hone our photography skills. I ended up returning to visit the country several more times over the subsequent years before deciding to start Crossworks.

“

*My time in NP shattered the notion that learning takes place within four walls.*

”

### **We saw the silver lining in a crisis.**

The combined economic shock of Myanmar's military coup in February 2021 and the pandemic caused many people in Myanmar to lose their jobs. However, the high unemployment rate meant that many top talents became available on the market, which happened in tandem with an accelerated growth in our client base. We were in a unique position to not only help startups with their manpower needs, but also provide much-needed job opportunities to the local people amid the current disruption.

### **The world is our classroom.**

At NP, not only did I get the opportunity to go overseas six times in six semesters, but most of the practical work I had to do as a film student happened outside the classroom. I'm thankful to the school for taking a chance on me, giving me opportunities to grow and supporting me even after graduation through my entrepreneurial pursuits.

**Pick a hard problem to solve.** This is my top tip for aspiring entrepreneurs. Solving problems is hard, so if you want to be an entrepreneur, consider picking a hard problem to solve where the potential value created will also be outsized as few are attempting to do the same thing. Play to win and don't just play not to lose!

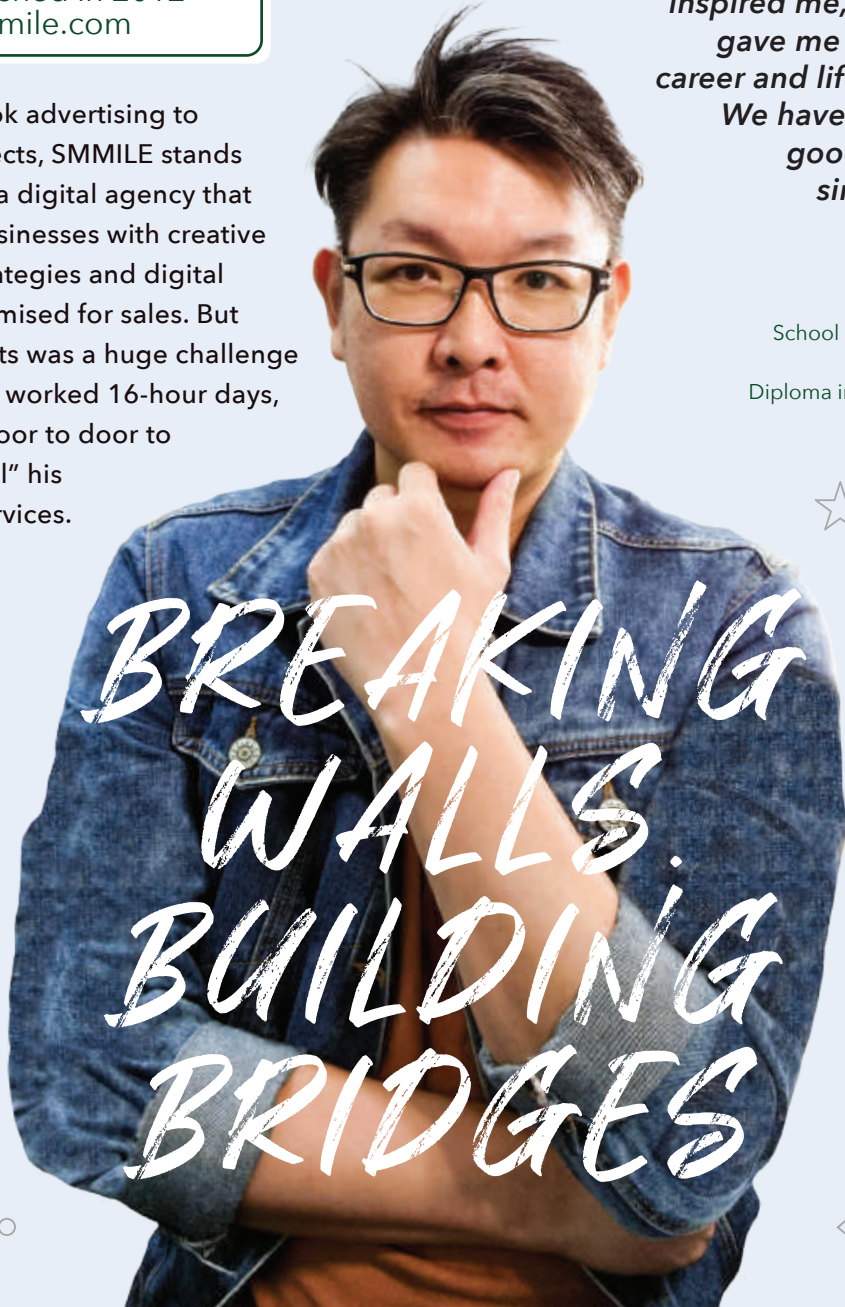


## SMMILE DIGITAL

Established in 2012  
smmile.com

From Facebook advertising to Web 3.0 projects, SMMILE stands out for being a digital agency that empowers businesses with creative marketing strategies and digital solutions optimised for sales. But securing clients was a huge challenge initially. Bryan worked 16-hour days, often going door to door to physically “sell” his company’s services. His biggest takeaway is to never burn bridges. After all, you never know who your next customer, partner or investor will be.

**BREAKING  
WALLS.  
BUILDING  
BRIDGES**



“ My mentor during my Ngee Ann Polytechnic internship not only inspired me, but also gave me valuable career and life advice. We have become good friends since then. ”

**Bryan Ho**  
School of InfoComm  
Technology  
Diploma in Information  
Technology  
2006

“ I’ve overcome many challenges with a strong mindset to not be just an employee who seeks to achieve someone else’s dream instead of my own. ”

**Josh Ching**  
School of InfoComm  
Technology  
Diploma in Information  
Technology  
2013

**FROM ZERO  
TO HERO**



## SOLARDEX ENERGY

Established in 2019  
solardexenergy.com

Josh dropped out of Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) in 2008 due to poor attendance. Post-national service, he returned and excelled academically. In his final year, he started Tri-Niche, a social enterprise, and sold it in 2021. Today, Josh focuses on SolarDEX Energy, a company he built to resolve energy issues in Indonesia. He began his entrepreneurial journey with many worries, but his NP lecturer encouraged and helped him overcome his fears.



ACHIEVE GROUP

Established in 1990  
achievegroup.asia

# SHAPING CAREERS. IMPACTING LIVES

I went back to school when I was 51. After graduating from Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), my attention was largely on growing my business and I did not give much thought to furthering my studies until around 2007. I applied to a number of universities but was rejected. In 2015, I tried for Nanyang Technological University's Executive MBA programme. I thought to myself at that time, "If I don't get through, then I'm not destined to have an MBA." Fortunately, I was accepted. It gave me an opportunity to experience formal learning and apply the knowledge gained in my business. Graduating in 2017 was truly a new beginning for me, and it has been an exciting journey taking my company forward on an expansionary programme!

**At this stage of my life, I aim to bring out the best in people.** My life is meaningful when I can impact people's lives. As a leader, I aim to bring out the best in my team by instilling in them values and competencies, so that they can inspire and uplift the candidates they work with.

Joshua founded Achieve Group in 1990 as an answer to the mounting manpower needs of MNCs and SMEs in Singapore. Since its founding, the company has been growing steadily in strength despite having encountered several economic setbacks and has even won several prestigious awards, including the Enterprise 50 Award and ASEAN Business Award, with the most recent being the Singapore Prestige Brand Award (Heritage Category) 2020/21.

**Joshua Yim**

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Mechanical  
Engineering  
1983



When these candidates are placed in jobs that are the right fit with their skills and personalities, they are well-positioned to help their companies achieve the goals and objectives set. This triangular relationship is needed everywhere. Its uplifts not just individuals, but entire communities from within, bringing people forward together!

**Achieve Group has been around for 32 years.**

I started the company with a mission—“shaping careers, impacting lives, one person at a time”. Right from the beginning, I wanted the company’s focus to be on helping our clients be successful in their business, our candidates achieve their professional goals, and our consultants succeed in their profession. This mission has served us well and it gives us great pride that as a homegrown brand without the resources that MNC recruiters have, we have been winning over the wider business community in Singapore who know they can count on our dedication and consistency of delivery.

**Then came the economic crises and my near-bankruptcy.**

First, it was the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, and soon after, the September 11 attacks in 2001 and the SARS outbreak in 2003, I almost went bankrupt because I wasn’t attuned to the global economic situation. I was young, ambitious, and had exhausted my

resources. Nonetheless, those times made me a stronger person. When the financial crisis of 2008 erupted, I was better prepared. I read widely and learned from several business gurus how to navigate the challenges.

**Shortly after, I was honoured with the “Entrepreneur of the Year” award.**

Achieve Group was recognised as well by the business community with a number of prestigious awards, the Enterprise 50 Award and ASEAN Business Award in 2011, the HR Vendors of the Year awards in 2012 and 2014, to name a few. I’m humbled by these recognitions and invigorated too as they are testaments to our tenacity and resilience to rise above whatever challenges that come our way. In the first half of 2022, we were further affirmed when we were accorded the rare honour of being conferred both the Human Capital Partnership Programme for Employment Agencies (HCP) by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the Singapore Prestige Brand Award (SPBA) (Heritage category) by the Association of Small and Medium Size Enterprises (ASME).

**There was nothing like the Covid-19 crisis.**

Being an entrepreneur for over 30 years has made me wiser and given me the fortitude to deal with the multiple challenges that the pandemic brought. This time, we had financial

reserves and diverse streams of income. Alongside our search and selection placement and contracts placement businesses, we pivoted to become marketing agents of certified training courses. We also placed contract workers in positions that were in high demand, such as temperature screeners and safe distancing ambassadors. Throughout those tough times, we managed to keep our heads above the water, and with the help of government assistance schemes, we could also upskill our team to prepare for the better times ahead.

**Having a stable team was crucial for our survival.**

One lesson I learnt over the years is not to let go of people when the economy is slow, otherwise we will have difficulty getting them back. Sooner or later, all crises will pass. What we did during the Covid-19 pandemic was to keep everybody but reduce their salaries instead. Many of them were happy because they could keep their jobs. This is what being a team is about—going through hard times together.

**In a company, not everybody is equal.**

Some employees have high aspirations; others put their families first. Different people have different goals in their lives. For those who are more ambitious, we try our best to give them opportunities to take on greater

responsibilities. We send them for courses and invite them to be part of the management team. By appreciating and giving importance to what our employees value, we have happy employees who are willing to go the extra mile time and time again.

**There’s a book I came across when I was 18 that deeply inspired me.**

The title was *Life Is Tremendous*, and I read it when I was studying at NP. The book gave me a lot of energy. It was by a spiritual leader, but mostly, he was trying to help readers organise their lives—from their careers to their personal relationships, finances, health and so on. It made me realise, at 18 years old, that life has many opportunities. Forty years later, I still think that’s true. Think positive, go out and explore things. The world is waiting for you.



*Try different things, especially when you’re young. If you fail, just try again. When you finally find something that works, put your very best into it.*



SVESTED

Established in 2021  
svested.com

**Casper Peh**  
School of Business &  
Accountancy  
Diploma in Business Studies  
2006

Over 13 years in the startup ecosystem, Casper observed that many local startups lack the knowledge to use the tools out there to attract and retain talent. To bridge this gap, he launched Svested, which provides specialised advice and services to help other startup founders leverage employee incentive schemes such as shareholding and employee stock options. In order to provide a more comprehensive solution, Svested also expanded to include corporate secretarial services. Casper is also the current entrepreneur-in-residence at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP).

STAYING  
INVESTED

“ *As an entrepreneur, you must not only be prepared to respond to the unexpected, but also be able to adapt and strategise. When you are in a pinch, it is important to find a way to get out of it and move forward.* ”

**The entrepreneurship course I took at NP was very formative for my career.** I learnt how to run a business and draw up a business plan. The course helped me understand that when starting a business, I need to make certain decisions: Do I want to take the SME route and aim for slow and steady growth? Or should I choose the fundraising startup route and go for hypergrowth? The ability to draft a good business plan and make financial forecasts came in useful, because when I had only an idea and no actual product, such plans were the only way for VCs to understand my thinking. As the saying goes, if you cannot even make the numbers work in an Excel spreadsheet, there is no way to make it work in real life.

**My lowest low as an entrepreneur was when I was in negative cash.** But I held on because I saw the light at the end of the tunnel. During that period, I had creditors chasing me for money every day, and I did not draw a salary for close to six months. These days, I draw from my experience in riding out messy situations, sharing my experience to let other

entrepreneurs know that they are not alone, and to provide support. My advice to them is to have one eye on your revenue and two eyes on your costs.

**Start your business as early as you can.** Preferably while you are still in school. The opportunity costs are lower, and people are more forgiving of failure when you're young. Spending one year in a startup is almost equivalent to spending three years in a corporate environment. Also, be prepared to take the financial hit, because you'll see your fellow classmates who are not running a business earning a fat salary while you are trying to make ends meet.

**My principle in life is to have no regrets.** I do not regret any decisions that I have made. In my view, they were the best decisions I could have made in that given situation with the available information I had at that point in time. For the ones that did not turn out well, I take the failures as lessons and avoid dwelling on the what-could-have-beens but focus on how to move forward.



## VICINITY STUDIO

Established in 2017  
vicinity.studio

Having volunteered as a videographer and photographer during his school days, Kevin Ng started Vicinity Studio to continue serving the community and telling stories that matter. Despite being hit hard by the pandemic, he has grown his company from a one-man show to a team of 45 with employees spanning Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Myanmar.

# FINDING FOCUS



**Kevin Ng**  
School of Film & Media Studies  
Diploma in Film, Sound & Video  
2015

### **At first, I didn't plan to start a company.**

I have always enjoyed making video montages and volunteering with charities. When I joined Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), I found a lot of volunteering opportunities which allowed me to develop my skills as a videographer and photographer. Upon graduation, I knew I wanted to work in a video production firm that focused on volunteer work and non-profit organisations. As I couldn't find one, I decided to start my own!

### **It's tough when you're the new kid on the block.**

A major challenge was trying to convince clients I could do the work. Gaining trust was hard, but with hard work and the right attitude, I eventually proved them wrong and won them over.

### **What keeps me going today is knowing that the work I do can help and inspire people.**

For example, a recent advertisement we did for a client helped them recruit a lot of volunteers. Knowing that we played a part in it and that our work actually made an impact was a meaningful moment for me.

### **I love being able to learn about different industries through the production process.**

Whether it's a corporate video or a short film, we get a chance to see how different businesses operate. Some would even re-

enact a few of their processes for the camera. I've gained a lot of insights on how different industries function, and that keeps my work interesting.

“

***Everyone's journey is different—you just need to start and see how it goes.***

”

### **By giving me opportunities to go overseas, NP literally showed me the world.**

The overseas school trips I went on exposed me to a variety of cultures and to the way production is done in different countries. I found these trips incredibly insightful as they opened my eyes to different ways of thinking. I actually referred to a few of the lessons I learnt back then when I was developing some of the roadmaps that Vicinity Studio uses today.

## THE SOCIAL BUTLERFLY

Established in 2016  
[thesocialbutlerfly.com](http://thesocialbutlerfly.com)

Social media may seem like a flighty business to some, but digital strategist and resident busy bee Noel Tan is dead serious about the value it brings to SMEs and startups. He worked hard to persuade the traditionalists, and today, he supports a growing list of customers in the F&B, finance and property sectors to extend their reach and gain mindshare in the digital space.

# THE BUTLERFLY EFFECT



“ You need to know how your business operates. You can outsource the work, but never become reliant on a third party, because you are the only one you can fall back on. ”

### Noel Tan

School of Engineering  
Diploma in Electronic &  
Computer Engineering  
2003

“ The mass communication course I took gave me opportunities to experience multiple facets of the media industry and pushed me to do more than what I thought I could achieve. ”

### Charmaine Teo

School of Film &  
Media Studies  
Diploma in Mass  
Communication  
2014



# STAY HUNGRY

## CHOW

Established in 2017  
[chow-social.com](http://chow-social.com)

When she was an F&B owner and marketer, Charmaine found a lack of marketing agencies specially catered to F&B entrepreneurs. She and her team decided to start one to help their friends in the industry and gradually, it grew into an independent entity supporting F&B and hospitality businesses. The pandemic and other challenges pushed them to improve CHOW's processes, and today, the agency's impactful visual content draws clients from all over Singapore and Thailand.



**ÜNIK STUDIO**  
Established in 2017  
unik.sg

Xavier launched his first streetwear brand at the tender age of 16. During his internship stint at a London fashion company, he met many young designers who aspired to start their own fashion labels. Inspired by their ambitions, this Global Young Entrepreneur Awardee started ÜNIK STUDIO, a platform with a global reach for talented creatives to showcase their work, build a network and learn the ropes of the trade.

“Always try different perspectives to discover different solutions. If one does not work, go on to the next one. Just keep trying, and don't be afraid to go out of your comfort zone.”

**Xavier Tan**  
School of Design & Environment  
Diploma in Product Design & Innovation  
2020

# ÜNIK EXPRESSIONS

# MORE ALUMNI ENTREPRENEURS



**Adam Ihsan**  
Biomedical Science, 2018

**Joe Kawai**  
Information Technology, 2019  
*SUBX*

**Anthony Chen**  
Film, Sound & Video, 2004  
*Giraffe Pictures*

**Cedrik Lim**  
Marine & Offshore Technology, 2014  
*uWave*

**Chan Jia Jun**  
Business Information Tech, 2009

**Ogus Goh**  
Aerospace Technology, 2010  
*Legacy Dance Company*

**Chew Choon Keat**  
Computer Studies, 1997  
*Hobnob.ai*

**Cho Ming Xiu**  
Chinese Studies, 2009  
*Campus PSY*

**Clayton Lee**  
Horticulture & Landscape Management, 2002  
*Arborleaf*

**Coco Choo**  
Business Studies, 1988  
*Millenning*

**David Chen**  
Biotechnology, 2005  
*AgriG8*

**Edric Ong**  
Biomedical Engineering, 2019  
*PlasticEVO*

**Elynn Phang**  
Biotechnology, 2003  
*Spectrumedics International*

**Ernest Tan**  
Business Studies, 2010

**Samantha Quek**  
Business Studies, 2010  
*Cupplets*

**Frederick Chng**  
Information Technology, 2017

**Bryan Sim**  
Sustainable Urban Design & Engineering, 2018  
*Rhine Digital*

**Goh Zheng Teck**  
Business Information Technology, 2018

**Kwan Hao Wei**  
Information Technology, 2018  
*KatoKato*

**Ho Chang Jun**  
Business Studies, 2014  
*Gram*

**Ho Huiming**  
Aerospace Technology, 2013  
*HEXA Systems*

**Hong Wei Ting**  
Business Studies, 2012  
*Fortune Food*

**Jerry Neo**  
Clean Energy Management, 2014  
*Scratchbac*

**Jessica Lim**  
Biomedical Science, 2008  
*JPlatform*

**Joshua Ow Yong**  
Film, Sound & Video, 2017  
*Imaginary Films*

**Keith Ng**  
Information Technology (Computer Studies), 2002

**Damon Widjaja**  
Information Technology, 2004  
*Gametize*

**Lu Di**  
Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering, 2010  
*MIPS Innovations*

**Maddy Barber**  
Business Studies, 1995  
*MADLY*

**Marvin Kang**  
Business Studies, 2008  
*The Astronauts Collective*

**Mervin Foo**  
Business Studies, 2016

**Quek Kaizer**  
Information Technology, 2017  
*HomeMatch*

**Rina Loh**  
Accountancy, 2006  
*Ui Ux*

**See Xuan Hao**  
Molecular Biotechnology, 2014  
*Red Dot Penguins*

**Shirley Tan**  
Biotechnology, 1993  
*SDT Molecular*

**Soon Kin Mun**  
Multimedia & Animation, 2012

**Ryan Yeo**  
Animation & 3D Arts, 2019  
*TrueWorld Studios*

**Tan Si En**  
Film, Sound & Video, 2013

**Kris Ong**  
Film, Sound & Video, 2013  
*Momo Film*

**Tony Ang**  
Multimedia & Animation, 2010  
*Dantar*

**Trevor Tham**  
Molecular Biotechnology, 2014  
*STUDIOMONKI*

**Uwais Hatta**  
Mechanical Engineering, 2018  
*Randomly Relatable SG*

**Vanessa Tan**  
Film, Sound & Video, 2016

**Kirill Stetsyuk**  
Psychology Studies, 2015  
*Position Five*

**Wayne Goh**  
Accountancy, 2012  
*Glife Technologies*

**Wee Soon Keong**  
Molecular Biotechnology, 2012  
*Nullspace Robotics*

**Winnie Low**  
Banking & Financial Services, 2007  
*JoyfulPerson*

**Wong Zhi Wei**  
Mechatronic Engineering, 2006

**Rachel Seah**  
Product Design & Innovation, 2010  
*LoveSignia International*

**Yvonne Kwek**  
Film, Sound & Video, 2008  
*Humble Scoop*

# OUR INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP MILESTONES



# sandbox

As the drivers and nurturers of Innovation & Entrepreneurship (I&E), The Sandbox is the place for Ngee Ann Polytechnic's learners and alumni to realise the potential within themselves.

The Sandbox supports and spreads the I&E spirit through our repertoire of funding, events, workshops, programmes and incubator spaces. Our programmes and initiatives aim to provide mentorship, guidance and resources for learners, alumni, budding innovators and entrepreneurs. This second edition of "Those Who Dared" was curated by The Sandbox.

[np.edu.sg/thesandbox](http://np.edu.sg/thesandbox)



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TheSandboxatNP



The Sandbox  
Ngee Ann Polytechnic



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