Taking business into their own hands

Getting a head start while learning the ropes

BY ALVIN HUANG

ONG Kian Wee, 27, looks like any other student revising management theory in the school library.

Take a closer look and you’ll find the fourth-year Singapore Management University (SMU) business student scouring his company’s balance sheet or brainstorming a new marketing strategy.

Kian Wee belongs to a new breed of student who is starting and running a business while studying.

In recent years, the Government has encouraged entrepreneurship through initiatives like the Action Community for Entrepreneurship (ACE). But in a nation of reluctant entrepreneurs, people who take the road less travelled are often ridiculed for the naivete of their ideas and there is still a dearth of successful role models.

Kian Wee and his friends started two businesses — InterSponge and Paradigm Infinium — in 2001 and 2002 respectively. Together, the businesses boast an annual revenue of $400,000. InterSponge is a manufacturing company, while Paradigm Infinium is an Orchard Road shop selling board and card games.

Kian Wee’s father egged him on to turn his passion for games into a business. But it was his own enterprising drive that led him to start his own firm.

“Satisfaction comes from doing things your own way and taking responsibility for it,” he said.

Recent National University of Singapore (NUS) graduates Sourabh Sharma, 22, and Rina Rudyan- to, 23, wanted to be their own bosses.

They say support from government and university entrepreneurship initiatives were decisive in helping them start a company.

After graduating, they founded MicroApp, providing an online way to share mobile phone pictures.

They began making plans to start the company in their final year of study and went on to clinch the third prize in the NUS Mo-

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torola Technopreneurship Challenge, a business plan competition for technology start-ups.

Sourabh and Rina are currently under the NUS School of Computing’s incubation programme, which provides their company with office space and facilities for a small fee.

The students admitted that juggling studies and running a business affected their grades slightly, but they remained single-minded about their ventures because they knew what they wanted in life.

“Don’t worry about finding funding or marketing. Be passionate about your idea and don’t be disheartened. You’ll find success,” said Sourabh.

The writer is a second-year business student at SMU.