Striving to build smarter systems

By Joanne Kotzena

Technological has been a driving force for Mr Aaron Tan, 22, since he was a little boy. He still recalls tinkering with the computer in the kindergarten and now has four of them at home.

At 13, he founded a company developing web designing for businesses while at Tuck Whye Secondary School. The ambitious teen then geared his business towards software development during his years at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Today, the former entrepreneur turned National Infocomm Scholarship (NIS) holder is taking his vision for the future of infocomm a step further.

Since receiving the scholarship last year, he has enrolled in NIS's fast track programme, which will enable him to graduate in about four years with both a Bachelor of Science in Information Systems Management degree from the Singapore Management University (SMU) and a master's degree in IT from the world-renowned Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in Pittsburgh in the United States.

"I heard from a friend that scholars usually have to push paper all day and do not get many opportunities to practise what they have learnt. I am a hands-on person and what I really liked about this scholarship, as opposed to other government scholarships, is that it allows me to work in multinational companies and gain real-life experience," says Mr Tan, who is currently a first-year student at SMU.

Mr Tan appreciates the benefits of the business-oriented education that he is receiving at SMU, where he is learning project management and other soft skills that will take him further than a regular engineer. He also anticipates that the Master's in Very Large Scale Information Systems at CMU will give him the advanced technical knowledge needed to pursue his dream of taking the local infocomm industry to greater heights.

"NIS provides students like me the opportunity to widen my horizons by studying overseas in one of the best computer science schools in the world. At CMU, there will be a good chance to network and build contacts with the leaders of the future infocomm industry. Not only can I develop technological knowledge, but also learn to look at situations from different perspectives. I think this will help to mould me into a better leader," he says.

Mr Tan is also looking forward to an overseas internship with his parent company, Singapore Computer Systems (SCS). He will be bonded to SCS for four years upon completion of his education.

"I feel lucky to be selected by SCS. It is one of the biggest industry players in Singapore. Most importantly, I will get a chance to put my skills into practice after I graduate from CMU," he says.

When he is not busy with classes or completing his duties as a national serviceman, Mr Tan busies himself with golf, community work and expressing his ideas through programming.

"If I see that there is an application that is needed and yet unavailable in the local market, I start programming if I think the program will be useful to people," he says.

He is also incorporating his vision into community service. As the operations director on the Youth Expedition programme at SMU, he is planning a trip to Vietnam to teach students and villagers in the province of Dan Ngang how to harness technology to make a living.

"I see infocomm as a key enabler. The Internet as not only a tool for e-mail and paying bills, it can also be used to make our lives easier and more productive," he says.

"Currently, Singapore has really taken the right steps so that we have grown rapidly and quickly as an information technology hub. Our Government has also taken that one step further by providing one of the best e-government portals in the world. It has always been my dream to come up with intelligent systems and I would like to apply my knowledge in this area to help build smarter systems. I want to help build better scalable and more efficient systems for current Singaporeans and the generations to come."