Manga Castle – building games, growing a community

"Being a huge manga fan since primary school, as well as a social gaming enthusiast, I am extremely excited to set up a company that merges my two passions. There is currently a lack of manga-styled social games, and by creating Manga Castle, we aim to fill this gap and provide never-ending fun!" said 21-year-old Sylvia Yao, Manga Castle's founder. Together with another manga fan, Wu Di, Sylvia set up Manga Castle, which started off as a blog and is now developing its first manga-styled social game, called Magic Castle, due to be launched in June 2010. Although the company was formed earlier this year, it already has some 14,000 fans on their blog site, in over 20 countries, including Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

A graduate of the National University of Singapore (NUS) School of Computing, Wu Di is the chief technology officer spearheading the game development. He is a serial technopreneur with vast experience in technology innovation in start-ups, this complements Sylvia’s marketing skills, as she continues her studies at the Singapore Management University (SMU). In November 2009, the duo joined the ideas.inc. Business Challenge, organised by Nanyang Technological University’s Nanyang Technopreneurship Centre and SPRING Singapore. "ideas.inc. has given us tremendous business insights. It accelerated our plans by motivating us to take action faster. The entire process gave us tangible results. Through the business clinics, I acquired practical skills, such as how to execute a feasibility test and manage intellectual property, which would have otherwise taken me a lot longer to learn. For a first-time entrepreneur like me, ideas.inc. has been a fantastic platform to learn how to run a business," said Sylvia.

Through ideas.inc., the Manga Castle founders were introduced to mentors like Allan Lim of Alpha Synergy, a Singapore company that produces biosheets. He provided perspective on their business model, helping them explore additional revenue streams. Manga Castle now has a two-pronged revenue model: firstly selling virtual goods to Magic Castle fans, and secondly through partnering mobile gaming companies, who will develop mini games that feed into Magic Castle. Manga Castle is also working with Andrew Cammody, Andrew Shields and Wendy Gannon from A2 Partners, a business accelerator, to gain a strong foothold in the gaming industry.

“Our main focus now is to gather more fans and to roll out Magic Castle," explained Wu Di. "However, I want to do more than just deliver a fun game. I am interested in looking for different ways to transform technology, psychology and fan behaviour in a growing Manga Castle community. We aim to dominate the manga-styled social gaming industry."

Soyato – A better, tastier choice

Soyato is founded by two entrepreneurs who love desserts. 23-year-old Verleen Goh is from NUS’ Applied Science in Food Science and Technology, while 26-year-old Alan Phua studied business management at the SMU. They put their heads together and the result is a frozen dessert made from soymilk. With no cream, milk or eggs, Soyato is a better alternative to ice cream and yet is as tasty, with a range of flavours.

“I attended a professional ice cream technical workshop and did an internship with an ice cream guru, to better understand how to create our product,” said Verleen. “Soyato currently has 16 flavours and we are still developing more. We created favourite extrusions, such as Chocolate and Strawberry, as well as unique Asian flavours, such as Original Soy and Green Tea.”

In November 2009, Verleen and Alan joined the ideas.inc. Business Challenge. After writing the first draft of their business plan, they were determined to make the idea work. They conducted market tests and found that people enjoyed their frozen soy dessert and were willing to pay for it. In December 2009, they registered the company.

"By making it to the finals of ideas.inc, we received $65,000 in funding. This has been used to develop the Soyato brand by creating a logo and coming up with marketing collaterals and a website. The rest will go towards setting up the kitchen and retail outlet," said Alan. "The best part of this challenge has been the networking opportunities. The ideas.inc. platform gave us the right contacts and networks, to grow our business faster and smarter.”

One of these contacts was their mentor, Mr Douglas Foo, Chairman & CEO of Sakae Sushi. He provided Soyato with industry insights, which has helped to shape their concept. Soyato plans to build up the Singapore market, and then venture overseas to regions with high soy milk consumption, such as Japan, China and Taiwan.

"We plan to roll out a series of events, before launching our first retail outlet. Hopefully this will be around end 2010 – so do look out for us!” said Verleen and Alan.