Driving the digital economy

by Melody Tan

Technology enthusiast Huang Liang has his National Infocomm Scholarship (NIS), awarded by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), to thank for a career that puts him at the forefront of the technological developments in Singapore.

“I have been crazy about technology ever since I was young. When I was 13 or 14, my parents bought me a computer with Internet access, and I was amazed at the number of things we could do, such as reading the news and playing games.

“However, I didn’t do any programming until I was at Victoria Junior College, where I helped to build an SMS voting system for the student council elections. That’s when I realised that technology is so powerful and convenient,” said the 27-year-old.

After junior college, Huang Liang decided to pursue his interest, and signed up for the Bachelor of Science in Information Systems Management at the Singapore Management University (SMU). During his second year, he discovered the NIS, which was featured on a poster on his campus.

“The NIS offered me the opportunity to study at a world-renowned institution, Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), in a field that I have always been keen on.

“It also offered me the opportunity to obtain both my bachelor and master’s degrees in four-and-a-half years, which otherwise would have taken me approximately six years to complete.”

Huang Liang was also placed on the prestigious SMU-CMU Fast Track Programme. Scholars on this programme spend their first two years at SMU, taking courses in information technology (IT), business and liberal arts, following which they will proceed to CMU for the final year of their bachelor’s programme and embark on their master’s programme, which takes one to one-and-a-half years to complete.

For his master’s programme at CMU, Huang Liang chose to specialise in information systems management, and he graduated with a Master of Science in December 2008.

During his year-and-a-half abroad, he interned with investment bank Goldman Sachs for three months where he saw how technology could drive commerce and it sparked his interest in IT’s role in commerce.

When he returned to Singapore to serve his four-year bond, Huang Liang was offered the post of assistant manager of the Finance Cluster Team (Finance, Trade, Tourism and Manufacturing Cluster) at IDA. He is currently working on a project to enable e-payment from mobile phones.

While NIS scholars may choose to work at any of the 26 supporting organisations in the public and private sector, Huang Liang wanted to return to IDA.
“IDA is an organisation that works for the overall benefit of the IT industry. At IDA, I get to see the latest technology and learn what the industry is going after. On the other hand, I get to talk to clients, such as banks and telcos, to help them to identify their IT needs. The role for us at IDA is to build a bridge between both sides, which is a very exciting and dynamic process.”