Online platform to reach out to customers

Gspot offers tools for firms to propagate branding and market wares and promotions, reports LIM WEI SHENG

MERCHANTS and businesses looking to achieve deeper connections with customers can perhaps score a home run now by harnessing Gspot.

The online marketing platform allows companies to propagate branding through the viral effect of social networks, and is the brainchild of Team Galaktikos, co-founded by 26-year-old Kent Hoie, along with his collaborators John Kueh, 24, Timothy Lee, 26, and Toh Chen Lim, 26. Entreprenurial exploits are not foreign to the four - Mr Hoie and Mr Kueh have previously worked at car rental services, working with about 20 cars, an endeavour that was "unfortunately not very valuable", according to Mr Hoie. For them, it was a lesson in learning to deploy his assets, as well as practical issues such as the managing of finances.

Mr Eo and Mr Toh had also set up a software solutions company, banking on Mr Toh's IT competencies. Mr Toh, who worked in tech start-ups in IIE, said: "There is a lot of tech start-ups in IIE, so there is that ecosystem, that support from the environment. Being in school is another advantage because we get to mix with people who are our potential clients or customers."

The platform offers a platter of tools for merchants to market their wares and promotions. For instance, Social Lucky Draws is a feature whereby one's Facebook friends can participate in a lucky draw which is shared on one's own profile. The draw is then featured on friends' profiles as well, enlarging the target audience pool for retailers. One is also incentivised to spread the message, since chances of winning increase with the number of referrals.

Beyond customised social marketing tools, Gspot also provides value-added monitoring solutions that help firms to understand the future of their business with an analysis of data. The platform serves to help merchants to market their wares through the use of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) methods to improve online visibility. This boiled down to an issue of "the user experience. Said Mr Hoie: "We launched our product in February during an exhibition at Startup Asia. From there, we validated that people do want discounts and promotions. The challenge is how you get them to participate when they're still used to the traditional method of filling up a form."

"This boiled down to an issue of "the user process flow", said Mr Kueh, referring to the exact sequence of actions users take when using the platform. One issue that the team faced was whether users should be able to access available promotions before logging in, or vice versa. "Ultimately, we thought that if you want people to participate, you should show them what goodies they want to get, so that they will be very interested and log in to participate. But our experience tells us that it is better to get them to participate first, because you want them to go through the "tough" part first, and then let them enjoy all the rewards," revealed Mr Hoie.

"It's very important for us to keep iterating and learning from our mistakes," added Mr Kueh.

On the technical front, the team pays much attention to the website interface, from design to content presentation. "We spend a lot of time asking users for feedback to see if they understand what is on our website, what is it about," said Mr Kueh.

The team has tapped on Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) methods to improve outreach. Mr Kueh commented: "SEO is the key for online businesses. The first time you hear about something, you would want to search it on Google. So we have efforts in attempting to make our platform appear at the top on search engines."

Gspot had attracted more than 3,000 users in four months since it was initiated. But Mr Hoie has more ambitious plans: "We hope to go to the United States by July," he said.

In fact, their enduring aspirations to start their own business underline that fiery commitment that comes with youth. "In the world of entrepreneurship, you really have to fight for it, strive for it. If you are doing something you are genuinely interested in, you would do it good," muses Mr Toh.

Mr Eo summed it up: "This is the time that we are able to choose what kind of experience we are able to go through and the future that we want."