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ICT start-ups lick lips over S'pore statrters; 40 are taking on the world from base here with IDA help

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(SINGAPORE) They got come-hither looks from Singapore and a brash new pack of Infocomm Technology (ICT) companies answered the call.

They are not giants like IBM or British Telecom or new superstars like Facebook or Skype. Instead, they are start-ups from all over the world, driven by innovation, invited to Singapore and putting money on the table.

According to Andrew Khaw from the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), the regulator is trying to attract start-ups to set up engineering centres in Singapore. It is also providing the platforms necessary for start-ups based here to find success not just locally, but internationally.

Since 2008 IDA, together with its subsidiary, Infocomm Investments Pte Ltd (I IPL), has attracted more than 40 global infocomm start-ups to Singapore to set up their engineering centres. These companies are from countries as diverse as the US, China, Finland and Israel, and operate in different sectors like gaming, mobile apps, cloud computing, Web 2.0 and business analytics.

'These start-ups inject innovation into areas such as cloud computing, business analytics and mobility and shared IT services. They are projected to trigger an estimated \$100 million in project spending and employ an estimated 500 development engineers over the next few years,' says Mr Khaw, IDA's senior director of Industry Development Group. One such firm is US-based ViVOtech, which offers solutions that enable the use of mobile phones for making payments.

Mohammad Khan, president and founder of ViVOtech, says Singapore serves as a key centre for the company. The privately-held company was set up in 2001.

'We are able to form a strong multinational team with very good technology backgrounds. Being in Singapore enables us to be at the heart of where the action is.'

Carmen Benitez of FetchPlus Asia, a social media and mobile applications company, is from Chicago. Yet she started her company in Singapore last year.

Explaining why, she says: 'Our target markets for growth are geographically diverse, but given the ease of doing business in Singapore, we are excited about the prospects of growing using Singapore as our base.'

Arnaud Blandin, Apac MD of Intalio, a cloud computing services provider, feels the business framework here makes it easy for US companies to settle in. Also, IDA helps promote Singaporean companies within Asia. 'So we find it easy to tap into other Asian markets by being based in Singapore,' he says.

AKR Jeeva, CEO of Electron Database Corporation, which specializes in what is known as OLTP (Online Transaction Processing) database management, adds: 'Financial contribution and commitment from IDA played a very vital role in our decision to set up our engineering centre here.'

Mr. Khan of ViVOtech was particularly happy that IDA had hosted several events where the company could make its presence felt. VIVOTECH was also encouraged to expand its sale and support network.

Ms. Benitez of FetchPlus noted that due to help from IDA and Spring SEED, the company was able to reach out to its target audiences in a much more 'amplified way than if we were to try it alone'.

IDA's Mr. Khaw says the regulator, along with industry partners, provide platforms for all Singapore-based start-ups to pitch to potential investors or mentors from all around the world.

Last year, IDA organized a pitching session when Matt Marshall, CEO of Venturebeat and president of DEMO, a renowned event in Silicon Valley that has seen the launch of Salesforce.com, Adobe Acrobat, Java and iRobot, was in town.

'Start-ups were invited to pitch their products to Mr Marshall to be featured at DEMO Fall 2010, and eventually, Foound and GoToCamera were selected as part of the 70 companies to launch at the event and they have received great responses, including being voted as the '15 hot products at the event' by ComputerWorld UK,' notes Mr Khaw.

IDA has also provided pitching platforms at renowned events like last year's SingTel Accelerate and Echelon 2010.

More recently, IDA helped secure Seedcamp, a UK-founded event that brings together seed stage tech start-ups with experienced entrepreneurs, investors and developers from all over Asia and Europe to Singapore for a one-day intensive mentoring, discussion and presentations event.