

Start-ups get pointers from US experts

FOUR Singapore start-ups have been given the chance to be mentored by American experts as part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week.

The mentors, who spoke to the entrepreneurs via video-conferencing links, included Dr C. Alexander West, a consultant with several US organisations, and Mr Andre Hinton, an executive coach.

The start-ups - 2359 Media, Zimplistic, Zopim and Play Moolah - are incubatee companies under the National University of Singapore (NUS) Enterprise cluster.

Mr Zhou Wenhan, from 2359 Media, which has created a mobile advertisement platform called MobDis, said the mentors were thorough in their questions regarding



Mr Zhou, a co-founder of 2359 Media, says the mentors were thorough in their questions about the company's plans to enter the US market. ST PHOTO: SAMUEL HE

2359's plans to enter the US market.

"They suggested that we get referrals from Singapore subsidiaries of the global agencies so that we can land in the US with our feet running and ready to meet potential customers there," said Mr Zhou.

Play Moolah's Audrey Tan said the session was a valuable experience.

"Such an experience allows us to inspire

more young and aspiring entrepreneurs to perhaps think about starting their own creative start-ups," she said.

The mentoring was held last week as part of the Urban Entrepreneur Partnership programme run by the US-based Kauffman Foundation. NUS Enterprise is the local partner in the programme.

DHEVARAJAN DEVADAS

Student's get-up a winning move

Gingerbread man costume helps group attract passers-by for entrepreneurship challenge

By DHEVARAJAN DEVADAS

A FRIENDLY gingerbread man greeting Orchard Road strollers last Saturday proved to be a winning entrepreneurial move by a group of Singapore's secondary school students.

The students from Hua Yi Secondary School tagged along with the eye-catching character - a fellow student in a costume - and urged passers-by to buy wares from their nearby stationary pushcart.

They were taking part in the inter-secondary school National Pushcart Challenge organised by Republic Polytechnic (RP). The competition's final was the last event of Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW), organised to promote entrepreneurship among youth in Singapore and around the world.

The leader of the Hua Yi group, Hayden Chan, 15, said they decided to bring in the gingerbread man to attract passers-by to the pushcart. They sold joke books, novelty pens and coin banks that they either designed or bought from suppliers.

For their efforts, they emerged as the champions of the Pushcart Challenge, and were presented with a \$2,000 cash prize by guest of honour and an MP for Ang Mo Kio GRC, Mr Inderjit Singh.

He is also deputy chairman of the Action Community for Entrepreneurship (Ace), which aims to foster an entrepreneurial culture in Singapore.

In his speech at last Sunday's prize-giving ceremony, Mr Singh encouraged students to step up to become entrepreneurs. "You must not treat your failures as a loss, but as an opportunity."

In second place was Northland Secondary School, with its idea of selling flattened beer bottles as picture frames and cheese plates. They also won the award for the most creative business idea.

Cynthia Ann Compuesto Francis, 15, leader of the Northland team, said they got the idea from the Internet. "My mother helped us collect used beer bottles from coffee shops. We then heated them in the school oven at 800 deg C to flatten them."

A total of 24 schools participated, with 15 short-listed for the competition's final.

RP, organising the challenge for the fourth time, said this year's participants had taken more initiative than ever before.

For the first time, the students were required to market their products on Facebook.

Mr Leslie Sim, RP senior manager of entrepreneurship, said this was to expose them to increasingly important online marketing mediums.

Mr Singh said he has noticed that the entrepreneurial spirit in Singapore's youth is growing.

"In the past, most students said they want to join the civil service or multinational companies. This is still the case, but more are now willing to embrace entrepreneurship," he said.

He added that the GEW was able to reach out not only to entrepreneurs, but schools as well.

Noting that Singapore has participated in it since 2007, Mr Singh said: "Looking forward, I think it is important for us to expand beyond Singapore and work with entrepreneurs across the world."

About 18,000 people participated in 30 GEW activities held from Nov 15 to 21.

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