

# S'pore start-up incubator sets up US hub

Block 71 San Francisco is  
a place for techies to  
network and brainstorm



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THE tech community around the world sat up and took notice when *The Economist* magazine dubbed Block 71, Ayer Rajah Crescent last year as the “world’s most tightly packed entrepreneurial ecosystem”.

Even as Block 71 – run by JTC Corporation and housing more than 200 high-tech start-ups and several incubators – is being expanded, it is also going overseas.

A slice of it is being taken to the South of Market district in San Francisco, California. The district, often just called Soma, which is in the city, is fast becoming another hotbed for start-up activity in the Bay Area, after Silicon Valley.

The National University of Singapore’s (NUS’) entrepreneurial arm and the investment arms of SingTel and Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) – which are involved in Block 71 – have set up an incubation space to enable Singapore student start-ups and other companies which they support to access the market in the United States.

The 5,000 sq ft facility, called Block 71 San Francisco, which started operating this year, provides co-working space, brainstorming rooms and a gathering area for community events.

The three groups will organise community events for Singapore- and US-based tech companies, professionals, students and investors to network and explore business opportunities. NUS Enterprise, Infocomm Investments and SingTel Innov8 will also have offices within the facility to provide backing and support to



The Soma incubation space set up by NUS Enterprise, Infocomm Investments and SingTel Innov8 will help Singapore student start-ups and other companies which they support to access the US market. PHOTO: NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

the companies they have invested in.

Dr Lily Chan, chief executive officer of NUS Enterprise, said: “We are happy to be partnering two of Singapore’s iconic investment entities to extend Singapore’s entrepreneurship community into the San Francisco Bay Area.”

The setting up of Block 71 strengthens the role of Infocomm Investments as an ecosystem builder to help local innovation-driven tech start-ups scale up fast, said its head, Dr Alex Lin.

He added: “There is no doubt that the Bay Area houses some of the best tech talents and communities, and we want to provide the collaborative space for our local tech start-ups to churn big ideas and push the boundaries further.”

Mr Edgar Hardless, chief executive of SingTel Innov8, noted a steady rise in the number of US-

based companies and venture funds seeking access to the South-east Asian market. Likewise, start-ups and venture funds in South-east Asia are looking towards Silicon Valley.

Mr Hardless said: “Beyond funding, SingTel Innov8’s mission is to nurture and develop a vibrant innovation ecosystem in the region. Block 71 San Francisco will help create synergies for the greater ecosystem.”

Indonesian-born serial entrepreneur Himawan Gunadhi, who is a consulting professor for NUS’ overseas college programme to nurture entrepreneurs, said that for some start-ups, the US, especially Silicon Valley, is the place to be.

“Very few places in the world have the concentration of talent that Silicon Valley has,” said Dr Gunadhi, who is based in the area.

Tech start-ups from Singapore are excited by this new initiative.

One company, NUS student start-up Patsnap, will be operating temporarily from Block 71 in San Francisco at the end of this month.

NUS biomedical engineering graduate Jeffrey Tiong, 31, who founded the patent search and analysis firm, said he and his staff plan to hot-desk at the new facility while they search for a permanent office to base their US sales and marketing team.

He said: “The establishment of Block 71 comes at an ideal time for Patsnap as we are now looking at the US market, specifically for clients, partners and investors. We expanded to China with the help of the NUS incubator in Suzhou, now we hope to access the US market, again with the university’s help.”

“I am excited. The US is a big market and San Francisco and Silicon Valley are where the action is.”

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