Creative Tech was the pride of Spore. Is there an equivalent today?

The next business powerhouse from Singapore Inc will need a strong business ecosystem, technological inventiveness and strategic marketing

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Creative Technology founder Sin Wong Hoo's death leaves behind a company that has produced hit movies and big shoes for others to fill. The enterprise was built around an array of technologies with its Sound Blaster sound cards that became the industry standard in desktop computers in the 1990s. By 1997, almost seven in 10 sound cards in PCs sold around the world were reportedly Sound Blasters.

Creative's global success became a source of national pride for Singapore, which was at that time not particularly known for its innovations in tech or its business inventiveness. The arrival of Creative Technology changed all that.

Yet, when it succeeded in technology, it still harbored on marketing. Apple's iPod took over the world in 2001, overshadowing any success that Creative's portable music player had. A brief war on intellectual property was waged. Mr Tim Tim and Apple parent infringements regarding the menu system used for the iPod and walked away with a settlement of about US$100 million.

But slowly, Creative dimmed into the shadows. The company relocated to the Nasdaq stock exchange in 2007. It is still focused on developing audio technology. Its Super X-Fi headsets, launched in 2017 with much fanfare and attention when launched a few years ago - and ever since - have landed as providing a "biometric audio experience" by tech publication PCWorld. But the company today is far removed from its former gilt-laden self.

Still, Creative, under Mr Singho's leadership, made huge contributions to the local tech sector. In today's world, however, companies need to create both disruptive technology and a creative marketing playbook to get ahead, as well as a strong and friendly business environment.

STRENGTHS IN BOTH TECHNOLOGY AND BRANDING

To compete in Singapore Inc have a chance as they do? Definitely. As a country, Singapore Inc has been good at technology and is known for its strong businesses ecosystems.

For decades, the Singapore Government invested heavily in research and development and this has paid off. The country is well known for its local technology and firm start-ups, including game-like Sea and Grab, and is also the regional headquarters for many big multinational firms, including those from Microsoft, German automaker BMW and French pharma firm Sanofi.

Singapore companies today are poised to succeed. Behind the development of local start-ups is national planning that supports their growth - with a billion-dollar Research, Innovation and Enterprise Fund, incentives for capability development and internationalisation, as well as access to skilled foreign talent. Former employees of the big boys say that the business ecosystem remains competitive and vibrant.

While technology is an important factor in a company's success, Singapore firms have realised that it is not the only factor. They must also focus on other business aspects to succeed in a very competitive market. Building a strong brand to differentiate themselves from the competition and stand out in a crowded and increasingly globalised marketplace.

A company's technology can be copied once its parent expires, but branding is often much more difficult to replicate.

A company's brand includes its reputation, values and personality, and is often closely tied to the experiences and emotions that customers associate with the brand.

This is where Singapore companies have an edge. They have built strong brands that are well known and respected worldwide.

For instance, Singapore's national airline, Singapore Airlines, is a global brand that is well respected for its quality and service. The airline's "flyers" are known for their warm and welcoming service, and their ability to provide a comfortable and enjoyable travel experience.

Similarly, the Singapore National Orchestra is a world-renowned orchestra that is known for its exceptional musicians and innovative programming. The orchestra's brand is built on a foundation of excellence and innovation, and is a source of pride for the country.

Singapore companies have also been successful in creating strong brands in other industries, such as technology and financial services. For example, the Singapore Exchange (SGX) is a global financial exchange that is well respected for its efficiency and transparency.

In conclusion, Singapore companies have a competitive advantage when it comes to branding. They have built strong brands that are well known and respected worldwide, and these brands provide a source of competitive advantage in the global marketplace.