



MR STANLEY HAN XIAOYAN

Nominee 2008

Mr Stanley Han's childhood dream is to become a NASA scientist. But instead of launching space shuttles beyond the atmosphere, Stanley now ignites the imagination of tens of thousands of students from around the world, launching it beyond their wildest dreams. Stanley and his two partners Dr Ge Shuzhi and Dr Chen Xiangdong, build the company, Personal e-Motion, with the zeal, precision and most importantly, dedication of nothing less than a professional rocket scientist.

Company: **PERSONAL E-MOTION PTE LTD**

Address: **7 Prince George's Park**

Website: <http://www.koobits.com>

Interview with Mr Stanley Han Xiaoyan

by **Alison Wee Kim Shan** on **08-May-2008**. Student can be reached at alisonwks@gmail.com

Business Profile:

Personal e-Motion (PEM) offers one of the most intuitive authoring platforms, KooBits, for creating truly interactive e-books. PEM also provides a real-time publishing and networking portal for users to tell stories, publish e-books, share resources, build communities, and realize their personal dreams. Currently KooBits has been launched in more than 60 schools in Singapore, a few hundred training centres in Indonesia. KooBits is moving to China, Europe, Australia, Malaysia and Brunei in 2008.

Interviewer's Comments:

A philosopher, a risk-taker and a devoted entrepreneur, Stanley is certainly someone you can have a pleasant after-work chat with, and yet walk home with a mind full of serious, inspiring thoughts. With a huge poster of "The Last Samurai" hovering above his desk in the office, he derived many of his business philosophies from movies. After learning more about PEM and how much effort Stanley has put into realising his dreams, I only have a sentence to say to him: "Stanley, you are one heck of a Samurai!"

1. What is the nature of your business?

Basically we are in the interactive digital publishing business to serve the market with latest Real-time Interactive Digital Media Technologies. Our strategic technology is the KooBits platform that allows children to write and publish their own interactive e-books. Writing the first sentence is always the hardest. All of us have had that experience. What KooBits does is to let students use images, videos, animations, flash, 3D models and motion effects, instead of only words, to express themselves. It is not a surprise that with this platform, even the quietest student can unleash their imagination and present their thoughts effectively. Our technology is delivered based on the central motto of "when ideas come alive... THAT is motivation".

2. When and why did you decide to become an entrepreneur / take over your family business? NOTE: If it is not a family business, ask: Do your parents have their own businesses too? Have they inspired you in one way or another? (Select appropriate question according to the entrepreneur being interviewed.)

Well, initially it wasn't in my plan to be an entrepreneur. I always have a burning passion for inventing and once aspired to be a NASA scientist—to create and send a shuttle into space. In 2003, during the holiday right after my second year in NUS, I decided to work on a research project. That was when I met Professor Sam Ge, who is robotics professor and has a passion of teaching kids how to write, and Dr Chen Xiangdong, a post-doc researcher who loves computer graphics. The three of us shared the same enthusiasm in many aspects. We noticed that it had become harder and harder to get children to write and create something of their own. Many of them thought writing is a boring process. This is utterly not true. With all the multimedia technological advances, writing can be an extremely fun! With this motivation in mind, we set off to create an authoring platform to make students "more open" towards expressing their ideas.

3. What are your reasons for choosing to do business in this particular industry?

Since secondary school, I have been very fascinated by computer graphics. Through computer games and movies, computer-generated imageries had stroke my interest in various ways. It enables me to invent.

4. How did you put together all the resources needed to start your business? For example: getting the start-up capital, hiring staff, doing sales and marketing, advertising, etc.

Up until PEM started generating revenue at late 2005, we have been funding the company out of our own pockets. Our first revenue came from sales to four schools in Singapore. At that point, we felt that the potential of the company was finally been recognized and it was time to bring PEM to greater heights. There were many



developments that we hope to carry out, which called for external funding. We started talking to investors but were turned down several times. Looking back, we should have developed the business model further before thinking about getting investment. Timing is very important. To obtain investment, the first thing that you have to prove is that the business can generate money! Our revenue was not strong enough to convince the investors. We came back and worked extra hard on the marketing, sales and business model, and we managed to achieve a state that the sales can grow organically and take off on its own. It was then that we were invested by NUS Technology Holdings. Being our SEED round investor, they have added significant values to our business.

5. What are some interesting stories you have about your first few customers/first few years in business?

The first few customers were really hard to come by. We started by doing cold calls to schools. It's hard to earn a chance to get to demonstrate our products to customers—many of them just told us that they did not have time to meet us. There was once when we waited hours-long outside a Vice Principle's office for a chance to do a demo for him. Finally when we met him, he instantly liked KooBits! We achieved a 100% acceptance rate for the initial group of customers we talked to. Teachers were impressed by how KooBits effectively addresses their problems with multimedia authoring and how it encourages students to be creative.

6. What are some of the challenges you faced when you first went into business?

I always like to think that if I enjoy what I am doing, nothing is a challenge. For instance, some people work for 8 hours and feel very tired and unfulfilling, while others can work hours after hours but yet feel as energized as ever before. I think I belonged to the latter. I love solving problems and I always felt as if I don't have enough time to work on them! That said, if I am to actually name a challenge, I would say it is how to stay focused. There are so many unknowns and so many choices to choose from.

7. How did you overcome these challenges? Please share some specific examples of the action you took to overcome the challenges.

I was very fortunate to have my partners by my side. That's the beauty of working as a team. Both of my partners had provided me with great support along the way.

8. Can you remember your worst day in business or a time when you felt like giving up? What happened that made you feel that way and how did you triumph over it?

To me, there was no particular worst day in business. I think the worst day is actually the best day! It is during the worst that you can see yourself growing. For example, when I met

up with my mentors, I would seek their advice about our company. Sometimes they gave feedbacks such as "your payment cycle is too long", "your idea is not scalable" and so on. At first I felt a bit uncomfortable to be confronted with these comments. But once I sat down and had a good thought about them, I realised that they were actually very constructive. This was exactly when growing took place, because it was when I realized our weaknesses that I would strive to improve on them! Since starting up PEM, I've seen myself growing almost every day.

9. When was the moment you realised the business would work and support you?

Well, just as there was no "worst day" in business, I think there was no particular "moment of realization" that the business is working. As Aristotle had once stated, "excellence, is not an act, but a habit". We are just happy that we passionately toiled towards each and every milestone.

10. What are some of your proudest business achievements to date? And why are they so important and meaningful to you?

My proudest achievement was the positive feedback KooBits got from the teachers. One of them told me that prior to installing KooBits in the school's computer labs, students were apprehensive about writing. Some of the more mischievous students simply refused to write anything, because to them it was very difficult to start. But after having KooBits, these students were very motivated to write. It is very easy too. For example, if a student wants to express that a thief is being chased by a police, he or she can just drag and drop the image of the scene from the library, and it is done! Some parents even told us that their children couldn't get their hands off KooBits! Whenever I heard that KooBits had sparked such ingenuity in children, it was extremely satisfying.

11. How do you differentiate your business from your competitors? Please provide specific examples.

Actually I could safely say that there are currently no direct competitors to us in Singapore. We differentiated ourselves by focusing on a very niche market in e-books publishing for children, with a unique delivery mechanism—a client system that could be installed in school or household computers as well as an online publishing portal.

12. What are some business ideas you have implemented that created great results in your business?

I would say it is how we managed to engage our users. We started out by implementing KooBits as a client system that can be installed on the users' computers, so that they can write e-books from their own computers. Once KooBits gained a wider acceptance, we developed an online platform that can be used to design, create and upload these creations, be it graphic or video, for others to use in their e-books. In a sense, the resources are shared. These children are generating content for KooBits—our users became part of the company. By doing this, not only did we engaged users in an enriching process of creation, we also reduced the developments that we had to otherwise do, while greatly expand the potential of KooBits at the same time!

13. How did you strategize your business?

As PEM's founders, we usually don't "follow the book" when managing the company. We believe that business is no rocket science, and there are no definite "1"s or "0"s that can be applied everywhere. For me, I learned a very useful skill during my junior college years. At that time, to prepare for exams, the first thing that my friends and I did was not to open the textbook and start munching on the facts. Instead, we took past-year papers and read through all the questions. Once we had the questions in our heads, then only we opened the book and started searching for answers. Similarly, my approach in business has always been very problem-driven. I dived in to get my hands dirty, encountered problems, and started searching for answers—either from real life examples or from books—that can best be applied to that particular situation.

14. What do you see for your business in the next 5 years, and does it include any plans for expansion?

In the third quarter of this year, we will be venturing to China to set up a development branch over in Guangzhou. At the same time, we would evaluate the market potential in China. The aim for us is to target the "big markets"—the US and China, in the next couple of years. I foresee that the market would be saturated rather quickly in Singapore and SEA region. Hence it would be timely for us to move on to the next market.

15. What does entrepreneurship mean to you?

Initially I thought entrepreneurship is all about passion. An entrepreneur has to fall in love with what he/she is doing. However, after being one for almost five years, I realized that commitment is the actual essence. Managing a business is like maintaining a relationship with the company. When you start up a company, you have to make sure that you are committed enough to go all the way with it. No investor would bank money on an entrepreneur that says: "I'll try my best for a couple of years. If it doesn't work out I'll find myself a good job". When passion fails, commitment will make sure that you see the company until the very end.

16. What are some entrepreneurship qualities that you have which has helped you come this far?

I have once read in an article in the Executive which mentioned that successful entrepreneurs are usually all-rounders. I do believe that I am an all-rounded person. I don't focus only on the technology and disregard other aspects of the business such as marketing and planning. Nor do I ignore the technology that should be the backbone of the business. I think entrepreneurship involves various skills such as how to manage people, how to talk to customers, even simple yet very basic things like how to do the maths!

17. In your opinion, what other qualities does a person need in order to be successful

17. In your opinion, what other qualities does a person need in order to be successful in business? And why? (eg. Educational qualification, work experience, family influence, attitude, etc)

Commitment definitely comes first, followed by honesty then passion. The importance of commitment has been explained earlier. Honesty is another essential quality which defines the success of a business. This is very important in maintaining the delicate relationship with customers. When a customer asks about a product that is not ready yet, instead of trying to make it sound better than it is, it would be so much better if we just tell the customer truthfully that it is still under development but we will try our best to perfect it as soon as possible. Customers will definitely appreciate this kind of honesty. It is where you start building the foundations of customer relations. As for passion, I do think that a person should love what he/she is doing, and it makes starting a business a lot easier.

18. In your opinion, what does it mean to have the "spirit of enterprise"?

I would like to draw an analogy with the recent movie "the Forbidden Kingdom". In that movie, the Kungfu Masters (Jet Li and Jackie Chan) advocated the idea of "kungfu among the common people". Kungfu is a philosophy—not only do people who practice martial arts know kungfu, everyone know it, if they are able to pursue the spirit of kungfu in life, which honours commitment, discipline, honesty and passion. Similarly, the spirit of enterprise is a philosophy which draws its essence from qualities such as those mentioned above.

19. Who or what motivates and inspires you?

I look up to many successful entrepreneurs such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, the Google founders, Larry and Sergey and so on. But at the end of the day, I believe that motivation and inspiration comes from within. Just like the fundamentals in traditional Chinese medicine—health comes from maintaining the well-being of our internal systems. Therefore, the drive to success should come mainly from yourself!

20. What are some of your business values and what would you like to pass down to others, particularly the younger generation?

Same as question 17.

21. Can you share some of the more significant events / incidents that affected or shaped your business philosophy and the way you conduct your business? i.e. SARS, new competition or shifts in market behaviour and trends, etc.

Because of the fact that we are in the educational field focusing on the children's market, there is a stable and consistent demand, so far we haven't encountered any particular event that has a drastic impact on our business. If there are to be such events, I would foresee it happening when we enter our next market.

22. With the changes in the market today, do you think it has become harder or easier to succeed in business? Why do you say so?

Definitely easier. With the advance in internet technology and platform, the world is flat now. We have seen many start-ups such as YouTube and Facebook who achieved tremendous growth and have become a global brand in just a few years.

23. What advice would you give young people who want to start their own business?

The first thing is to just do it! Do not wait too long or ponder too much. Most people have difficulty in making the first decision to jumpstart their businesses. As I have mentioned before, the first step is the hardest. That is why it is crucial to get yourself past the first defining step. Secondly, I feel that building a business is a long term commitment. Think it like marriage, you don't marry a person, try it out a few days and marry somebody else if it doesn't work. Therefore, you have to be prepared to make the necessary commitments.

24. What are some of the interesting stories you have with the students (i.e. the users)?

Well, we were surprised to find out how empowering our tools are for students to materialize their colourful dreams. I was taken aback to see what the students can create with the functions that we have developed. Sometimes it is mind-boggling to see how they manage to combine some modular functions to make very sophisticated multimedia content. That is when I feel that we are losing out to our users! Their creativity is really without boundaries. I am very happy that they can utilize this platform to realize their personal dreams.

25. What is your dream after PEM?

At this moment, there is no "after PEM". It is all I have got, and all I want to do.

26. What are some of the important principles that you live by in life?

Commitment, Honesty and Passion.

27. Why the name Personal e-motion and KooBits? Any significant meanings?

We build our company to create value for everyone. Just like Personal Computer, we like our product and services to benefit everyone and be used in their daily lives. "e" means electronic; "motion" comes from motion picture and broadcast media. So "e-motion" refers to digital media. So we are a company that creates digital media products for everyone. For KooBits, it has got to do with interactive digital publishing. "KooB" is "Book" reverse, "Bits" means digital bits of information. And it's definitely something "cool".

