

# Staying focused on his future



Mr Thomas relished the exchange of opinions with his coursemates who worked in different industries and had diverse experiences. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

## An Executive MBA programme equips Mr Jean-Marc Thomas to handle more responsibilities in his career

MARY LIM

MR JEAN-MARC Thomas, 47, aspires to maximise his potential by making the best of his 17 years of corporate experience.

As a regional business director with iProspect, a digital marketing agency under media and digital company Dentsu Aegis Network, Mr Thomas manages and develops digital strategies for clients from industries such as beauty, hospitality and finance.

His responsibilities also require him to work closely with colleagues in other countries, in addition to overseeing business development and revenue management.

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MR JEAN-MARC THOMAS  
regional business director  
iProspect

“To help me prepare for more responsibilities in my career, I felt that it was crucial to gain a better understanding of how businesses work, for example, in areas such as corporate finance, supply chain, analyses and acquisition of new companies. So I decided to pursue postgraduate studies,” he says.

A friend who had completed her MBA at Singapore Management University (SMU) introduced Mr Thomas to Professor Philip C Zerrillo, dean of postgraduate professional programmes at SMU. Meeting Prof Zerrillo and reviewing the programme curriculum in detail convinced him to pursue an Executive MBA at SMU.

### Hectic but enjoyable

The year-long course is modelled after similar programmes at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, in the United States, one of the world’s leading names in business management education.

Students not only explore and examine business, political, social and legal issues, but also tap the experience and knowledge of top academics, speakers and thinkers from all over the world.

They spend six weeks at SMU in Singapore, as well as a week each at Wharton, The Washington Campus, in the US, the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad, India, and the Peking University in Beijing, China.

Mr Thomas’ course started in May last year, and his class had 28 students. From Monday morning to Saturday afternoon, students worked through case studies based on the curriculum, interspersed with individual and group assignments.

When classes first started, Mr Thomas admits he found the going “very intense, with lots of assignments and preparations, and a lot to learn”.

His last experience in a classroom setting was in 1994, in Montpellier in the South of France, where he studied mathematics and physics. So hitting the books again after so long was “a shock” to him.

Support from his company and his boss reduced his workload until he could cope with both studies and work. He also discovered quickly that focus was the key to enjoy learning effectively.

Says Mr Thomas: “Every module is very interesting. When we began the Political Economy segment, I didn’t know what to expect.

“But Prof Augustine H H Tan made the topics, say, the economic crisis in Greece, interesting and fascinating with his insights and perspectives. I wouldn’t have minded if the course ran longer.”

### Convergence of global views

Mr Thomas also relished being able to exchange opinions with his coursemates who worked in different industries and had different experiences. Several were from India, with one each from Australia, Italy, France and China, while the rest were Singaporean.

“To our multifaceted content and points of view, the professors sought to value-add to our reflections and discussions,” he says. “Such guidance made the case studies relevant to the current context, so I found them very fun to work on.”

The immersion trips to partner universities in the US, China and India also boosted his learning experience. While he found the US memorable because he used to live near Philadelphia (where Wharton is located), China and India yielded the most insights for him.

Says Mr Thomas: “These countries offer so much business potential, but I’ve always found them difficult to understand.

“Now I understand how their culture affects business etiquette and attitudes. Picking up the business do’s and don’ts from professors based in these countries was an excellent way to finish the programme.”

A month since completing his Executive MBA studies, he says he can now frame better approaches and thoughts for his clients and colleagues, thanks to the knowledge he picked up in modules such as corporate strategies and marketing.

The effort to stay committed and disciplined has paid off for Mr Thomas, who saved up for several years to pay for the programme, which cost \$106,000.

“You must be very motivated or you might find it tough to handle all the different assignments. If you ask me, I would say it is worth all the hard work,” he says.

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