



Mr Alvin Poh, 35, became a millionaire when he sold off Vodien Internet Solutions, which he co-founded, for \$30 million. He donated \$250,000 to SMU to start a scholarship for needy undergraduates. PHOTO: COURTESY OF ALVIN POH

Millionaire entrepreneur's \$250k gift of gratitude to SMU

At the age of 33, Mr Alvin Poh became a millionaire many times over when he and his business partner sold their Web hosting company, Vodien Internet Solutions, for \$30 million to an Australian technology firm. Mr Poh walked away with an eight-figure sum from the sale of the company he co-founded when he was 17.

He gave \$250,000 to Singapore Management University (SMU), his alma mater, to start the Alvin Poh Endowed Scholarship, giving financial aid to needy undergraduates.

It was a gift of gratitude for the doors SMU opened to him, the 35-year-old bachelor told The Straits Times. "I see great value in an overseas education and experience. It completely changed my world view, gave me new perspectives that I would otherwise have missed and it was an opportunity

that only SMU gave me at that time. I am absolutely grateful for that.

"Through my donation, I hope I can give the same opportunity to students from low-income families and similar backgrounds so that they can realise their full potential."

The eldest of three children of a driver and clinic assistant, Mr Poh started working part-time in secondary school to earn his own keep.

At the age of 17, while at Temasek Polytechnic, he started Vodien with a friend for extra income. The company today has about 150 employees in four countries.

After getting his diploma, he was awarded a scholarship by the then Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) to pursue a degree at SMU. He enrolled in a joint programme in which he spent his first two years at SMU and his third and fourth at Carnegie Mellon Uni-

versity in the United States.

He graduated with a bachelor's degree in information systems management from SMU and a master's in information technology (e-business) from Carnegie Mellon.

The scholarship was vital, for without it, he could not have afforded an overseas education. His stint at Carnegie Mellon was life-changing, giving him the chance to work with some of the brightest young minds in the world, he said.

"It was a defining moment for me. I realised that so much more can be done with everything in life, from the way we live to the way we do things. I wanted to push myself."

His education taught him to think critically, and develop problem-solving and other skills that help him as an entrepreneur, he said.

Last year, Mr Poh left Vodien. He is now travelling the world and among his pursuits is advising a social enterprise called NewYork.SG, which runs an overseas career development programme in New York City for young Singaporeans.

Theresa Tan