

STARTING YOUNG

A lifeline for live music lovers

Bandwagon's app makes it easy for gig-goers to find out where live music is playing, reports **LEE MEIXIAN**

THE idea for Bandwagon.sg was born during Clarence Chan's final semester in Singapore Management University in April 2011. Mr Chan wanted to put all information on live local music performances into a one-stop database. He hoped his "online Lonely Planet guide for live music" would connect music creators with music enthusiasts, and encourage greater participation in the live music scene.

Online information on gigs in Singapore had been dispersed and mostly available only on individual venues' websites. He also used to play with an alternative rock band and knows first-hand how difficult it is for musicians to get publicity.

Another reason came from one fateful night in Helsinki, Finland in 2009, when he Googled for a jazz club to visit. An hour's journey later in subzero temperatures, he found himself shivering before a fishing shop, no trace of music anywhere. "It dawned on me that, hey, we need some reliability in this live music search. We can't just count on these one-off websites giving us information and they don't even update their sites," he recalls.

Search engine optimisation that displays places long closed and events long past high up on the list of search results can really mislead people, says Mr Chan, 27, who graduated with first class honours in economics and business.

His Web app, called Bandwagon, hopes to solve the problem. A researcher updates gig information on the app regularly, so gig-goers can get a snapshot of the live music going on in Singapore on any given day without the hassle of comparing multiple websites.

A Web app, unlike a website which is more static in nature and has limited functionality, allows users to interact dynamically with its interface. The Bandwagon app presently contains a whopping 15,000 pages of information on venues, artists, and gigs.

Mr Chan says he chose the name Bandwagon as a modern take on the 19th century vehicle that ferries musicians to different countries to play music. His app, by housing information about bands and gigs, likewise connects modern musicians with their audiences, he says.

Idea to implementation happened from April to October 2011 after a series of divine interventions and blessings, he says. "I started with no team members, nothing. Then slowly they just started coming together in ways that just amazed me. Some others came

and went. At a point in time when I needed help, they just provided that guidance that took me on to the next step," he says.

Through the introduction of a friend's mother, he met a "multimillionaire technopreneur with a Nasdaq-listed company" who pointed him towards his crucial first step. "He told me, 'You need to know how to code. You don't need to learn enough to build a rocket ship but at least learn how to patch the holes.'"

Mr Chan thus bought books on coding and downloaded coding exercises from the Internet and spent two months in his room learning the language of the Web. He then made a Hungarian friend from a local hacker group who became his tech mentor and worked with him coding late into the wee hours of many mornings.

He tried his hand at coding and designing his Web app but friends said his interface looked terrible. Finally, one design-savvy friend took pity on him and offered to help. Today, she is still a designer with Bandwagon. Some coders from the hackers group then offered to build subsequent versions of the app.

At a musical festival, Mr Chan met a girl who had just earned her masters in journalism. He managed to pique her interest enough into coming onboard to run an online music magazine on Bandwagon's app. Together with another editor, she recruited 20 writers to produce daily content for the magazine.

His team currently comprises one designer, one researcher, two editors, and two developers. He believes they are still around because they share his vision for Bandwagon.

"As an entrepreneur, it is important to enthuse people about the idea, because you're doing something new, creating new value in a cloud of great uncertainty, so you need to be able to communicate your idea with your team members and get them excited. Often there is going to be a cost for them to get involved with you, so there'd better be certain good clarity in the vision," he says.

The Bandwagon Web app was launched in October 2011 and the company incorporated at year's end. But Bandwagon only started earning revenue a year later, in November 2012. "For the first 10 to 11 months, we were just surviving on funding," Mr Chan says. Funding was a \$50,000 grant from Spring Singapore that was released gradually in tranches, a modest investment from his parents, and his savings.

His app now runs on a simple advertising



Mr Chan: 'I started with no team members, nothing. Then slowly they just started coming together in ways that just amazed me.' PHOTO: ARTHUR LEE

business model. He hopes to clinch a few more advertisers this month to help cover monthly running costs. Once that is taken care of, Mr Chan says he will look into raising funds for development costs for both his Web app and another platform: a mobile app. "That will be very costly, so we are now looking for investors," he says.

Development will bring new revenue streams. Mr Chan plans to partner ticketing agencies and add a ticketing function to his Web app. Each time the app successfully refers a buyer, it will earn a cut from the ticketing agent's commission.

In the longer run, he also plans to develop a mobile Bandwagon app which would enable them to push deal notifications out to app users in the vicinity of music venues. Every promotion claimed would earn Bandwagon a commission.

Then, he hopes to replicate what Bandwagon is doing here in two other cities, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta, while taking care to tailor the apps to each city. He has scouted both places and found them feasible, given both capitals' strong support for local music and their bustling yet fragmented music scenes.

For now, Mr Chan will keep ploughing on and telling himself there is no alternative plan. "When I hit a brick wall, I tell myself there is no Plan B, don't think about it, just carry on. And because there is no Plan B, you will make it work, you will find ways and means just to get it done," he says.

If you are between the ages of 17 and 30 with an interesting personal finance, investing or entrepreneurship story to share, do e-mail btyjf@sph.com.sg with 'Starting Young' in the subject heading