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**Headline: Clarence Chan transformed offline music gig directory into the region's most influential music website**

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Bandwagon founder amplifies local music and talent with his independent media company.  
**CHARMIAN LEONG**

On a quest to find a jazz club while on a vacation in Helsinki, Clarence Chan braved sub-zero temperatures, and spent an hour on a bus and then on foot to get to it, only to discover that it had been turned into a tackle shop. He was gobsmacked. The club was the top hit on Google, but its address hadn't been updated. He never did find the venue, but he found something better: the inspiration to start Bandwagon.

Today, Bandwagon is an independent music media company and website that music lovers turn to for concert and event listings, and articles that spotlight local and regional acts and artistes. It has organised its own events, from music-focused pop-up markets to festivals on riverboats. It also recently worked with the National Arts Council to launch Hear65, a national movement to promote local music. Plus, it has full-time staff in offices in Singapore and the Philippines, and works with freelancers based in Malaysia, Indonesia and Taiwan. These are significant achievements for a company that's only eight years old, and it all started with a simple Excel spreadsheet.

After the disappointment in Helsinki, Chan realised people needed a gig directory that was dependable and informative. "I went online, searched 'live music Singapore' and took note of everything I could find. Facebook wasn't big then so I had to crawl through forums and poorly designed websites," the 33-year-old says. "I put all the information into a spreadsheet and shared it with my friends who liked music."

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The spreadsheet proved so useful that friends encouraged him to put his listings on a website for easier reading and updating. The site launched in 2011, and upon graduating from Singapore Management University, the economics major decided to turn his passion project into a full-time career. "I made my first \$800 by approaching (the now closed) Beer Market to buy a premium listing for its live music nights," he recalls. "For the price of three beers a day, we can bring more music lovers there and hence, more business to a bar."

The rest, as they say, is history. Chan managed to turn that \$800 into enough revenue to bring in legendary guitarist Slash from Guns N' Roses for a concert, gain clients like DBS Bank,

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Marina Bay Sands, Sportshub and Zouk, and win the Best PR Campaign: Government/Public Services for Hear65 at this year's PR Awards – the first time a music campaign has won in this category.

How has it succeeded in a market so niche that former music publications like BigO and Lime have failed? Setting up online is the obvious answer, but the company's founder is really the magic ingredient. If you cut Chan open, you may find pompoms and batteries where his organs should be. "I'm blessed with a lot of enthusiasm," he says. "My strength lies in pulling people together and getting them excited about what we're doing." Then, there is his tenacity. "I didn't have a plan B when I started Bandwagon. I just had to make it work. If one pub says no, I head to the next one. I will invite my clients out and ask them how I can be more effective for them. When I have an idea, I'll e-mail it to them and ask for opinions," he says.

It's been an amazing run for Bandwagon so far, but Chan thinks it is still a work in progress. "We want to be the champions of the local music ecosystem but we're still trying to break the mould. Performing music is still not the top choice for many as a career. It's not enough for the ecosystem to have good musicians. We need good lawyers, accountants, coders and analysts, so the challenge now is to get more of these people into the industry. But I think we're getting there."