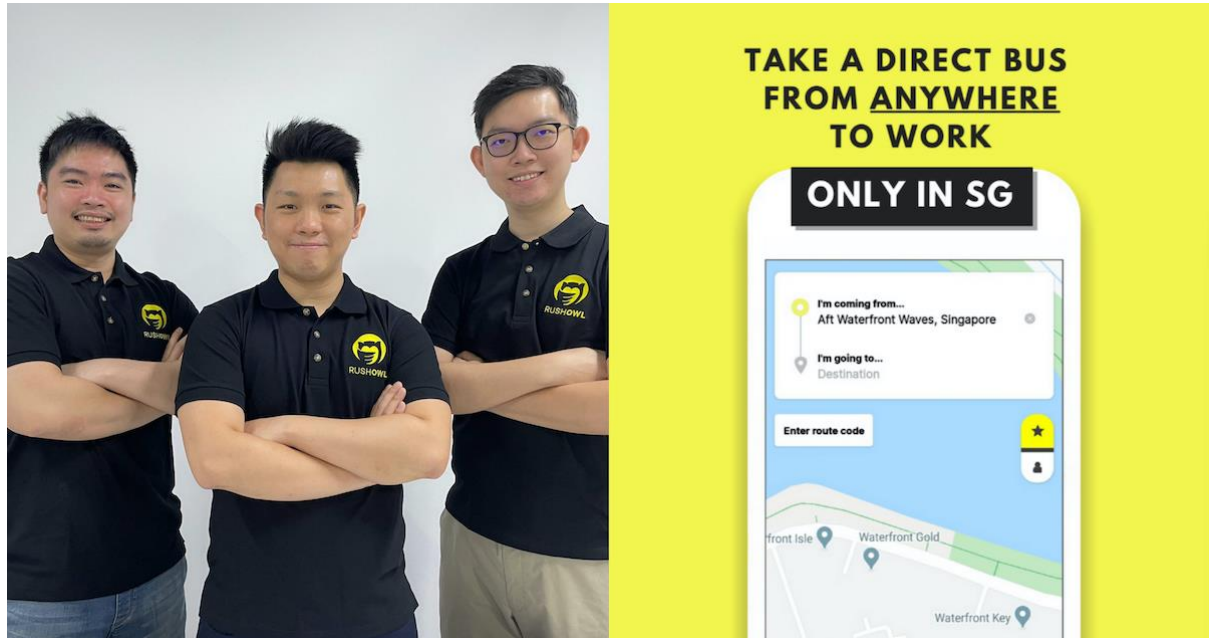


Publication: Vulcan Post Online

Date: 30 September 2021

Headline: This 28-year-old's mobility tech startup offers on-demand bus sharing for as low as S\$2/trip

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After Shin Ng graduated from Singapore Management University (SMU), he started up his very first business venture.

RushOwl was established in 2018, but it started out as more of a “passion project”.

“Back then, the idea was to develop a digital public transportation for anyone, anywhere to create their own commuting plans without waiting for city governments to build one for them,” shared the 28-year-old, who serves as the CEO of the company.

RushOwl, from the day of its inception, was always going to be a public transportation solution for the world, where communities — especially in masses — can create their own transport services through our platform. With that being said, RushOwl solves the lack of transportation connectivity in towns and cities.

Through our platform, we are able to meet the needs of basic mobility. We may not be able to see the impact entirely in Singapore, but in countries like Vietnam (and) India, the lack of public transportation creates deep societal issues like income equality.

– Shin Ng, CEO of RushOwl

He was inspired by Hong Kong's minibuses

Starting up in the mobility industry wasn't easy.

“Every single one of my friends, family (members), and mentors was constantly reminding me of how Grab and Gojek (will) destroy our business growth.”

In the initial phase of their pre-app launch however, RushOwl continued to be under intense scrutiny.

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We were deemed as an unscalable product and criticised for being in a market (that's) too small for growth. Many potential partners like big transport operators, both public and private, gave us cold shoulders (and was) unwilling to support us.

– Shin Ng, CEO of RushOwl

Regardless of what others had to say, Shin and his team forged ahead with their vision and continued developing their product.

In fact, the criticism thrown at them served as fuel for them to work harder alongside their group of 200 super users to improve on their product features, reliability and customer satisfaction levels.

The marked improvement in attaining a product market fit boosted their traction in the market, attracting the attention of various operators.

“Fast forward to today, we are one of the leading bus-sharing apps in Singapore,” he declared proudly.

“We partner with up to 30 to 40 per cent of the bus operators here in Singapore, with notable transport operators such as SMRT and BYD Singapore, being our transport partners. We also work with JTC to implement and scale up smart mobility solutions through most of their industry parks across Singapore.”

The very idea of a bus-sharing app, or a “ride-sharing app for the masses”, was conceived when Shin went on a family trip to Hong Kong back in 2018.

“I saw people from various small communities commuting across cities with a minibus despite the existing extensive train network. One of the bus drivers, who was fluent in Chinese, told me that these minibuses help bridge inaccessible regions in Hong Kong to the city centre, where many people work.”

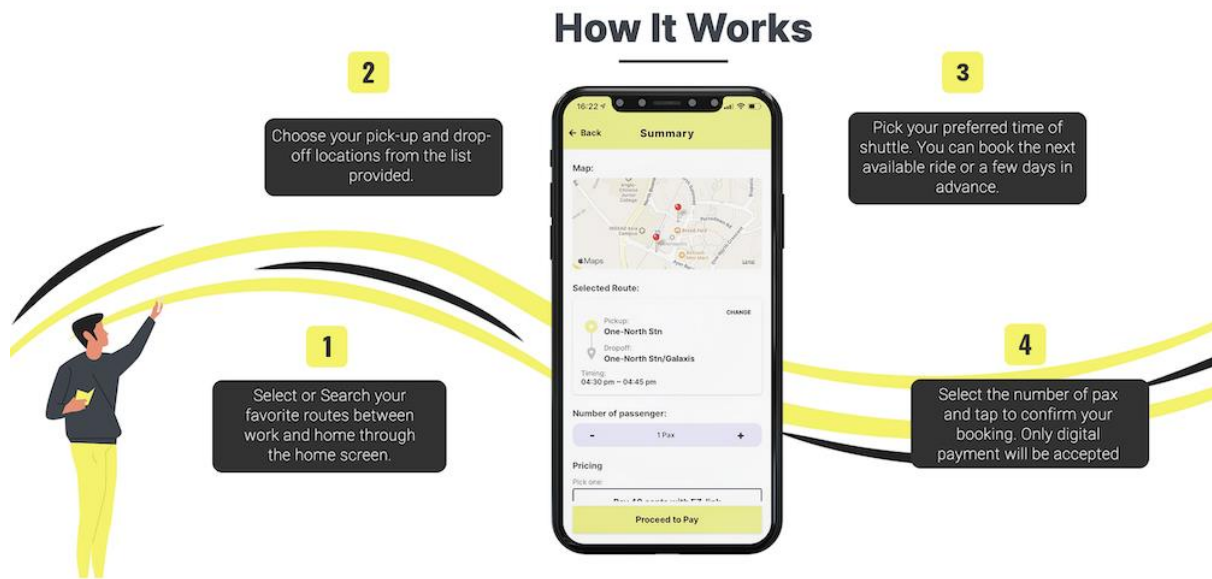
He found it impressive that a minibus can be deployed anywhere at any time instantly, serving as a public transportation service. Moreover, this meant that billions of dollars spent on building public transportation infrastructure can be saved and redirected to other sectors of the economy.

Inspired by this concept, he went ahead to build the company's very own bus-sharing app RushTrail.

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Understanding the pains of long commutes to work, RushTrail was developed to allow users to commute easily and directly from region to region with a guaranteed seat.

Commuters islandwide can request pick-ups and drop-offs conveniently at any of the labeled bus stops, and choose the preferred time of shuttle.

“We charge anywhere between S\$2 and S\$5 per ride for B2C passengers,” shared Shin.

Is bus-sharing a need in Singapore?

When choosing a transport mode, commuters often think of two factors: pricing, and convenience (or speed).

For commuters who opt for affordability, Singapore already has an efficient public transportation system, in which our buses and MRTs are all well-connected. If convenience (or speed) matters more, there are also plenty of cab and ride-hailing options available.

That said, where does RushTrail sit on this spectrum?

RushOwl is directly positioned in the middle, where passengers can look for reliable transportation at an affordable price. Today, we see a huge issue in the supply of drivers, affecting both public transport operations and ride-hailing services.

– Shin Ng, CEO of RushOwl

Due to the lack of drivers, passengers are significantly more impacted by longer transport intervals and high rejection rates.

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This is where RushOwl comes in handy. Passenger can turn to them for a dedicated and reliable transport network that sends them directly to work, be it rain or shine.

“Most importantly, we are positioned to create connectivity. We deploy bus services in areas where no transportation services exist, such as the Sungei Kadut area.”

However, several on-demand bus services like Beeline and GrabShuttle have ceased operations over the years. Does this in any way signal a death knell for the service, and is RushOwl deterred by this?

Shin simply said that getting high usage demand for a mobility app is not instantaneous. “There’s a lot of pre-ground work like having a solid operational flow, supply chain, and go-to market strategies to consider. Most importantly, a mobility app like this has to constantly work on enhancing customer experience,” he added.

They saw over 400% increase in ridership since Covid-19

Covid-19 has negatively impacted many businesses across different verticals, and the mobility industry is not spared either.

However, RushOwl found that their RushTrail app saw “over 400 per cent increase in ridership” since the pandemic happened.

They found this surprising, and went on to conduct an extensive interview with their users to find out what led to this surge.

(We) realised that passengers are using our services for a more direct commute to their workplace. This is because they do not want to use multiple modes of transportation in a single commute (ie. changing MRT lines and switching from MRT to bus).”

– Shin Ng, CEO of RushOwl

The fact that sustainability has become a buzzword has also helped their cause.

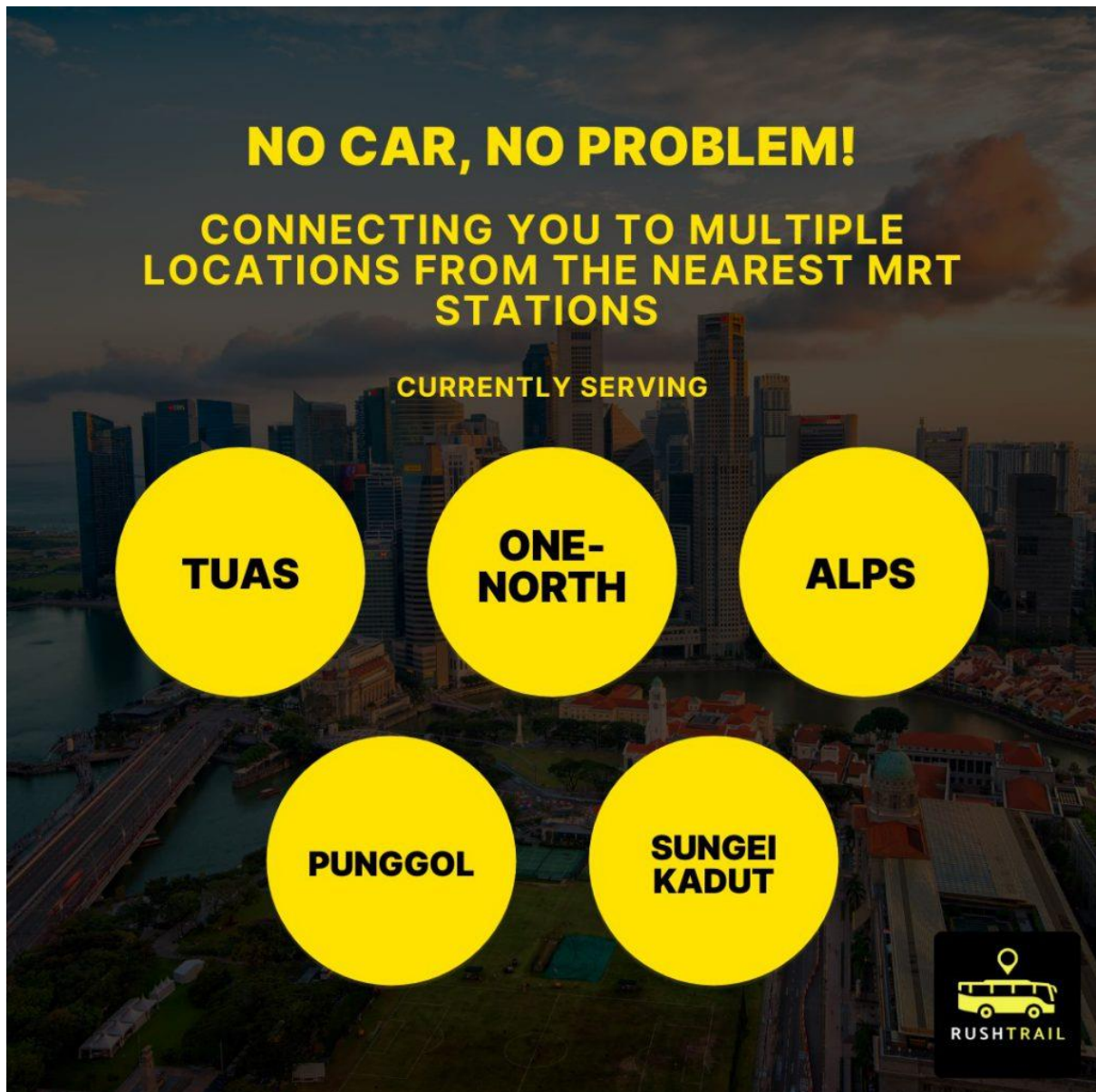
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According to Shin, commuters are looking for an “attractive alternative” to going public and buying a car. For the latter, the cost of car ownership in Singapore is getting increasingly expensive.

This has propelled commuters to turn to more environmentally-friendly transportation modes. “We appeal to young working adults who are looking to go car-lite and environmentally-conscious passengers.”



From their 200 beta users back in 2019, RushOwl currently has over 17,000 users. They're currently working on launching one-north on-demand shuttle bus service and Sungei Kadut Eco Bus service, with more upcoming projects in the pipeline.

“While we look up to our vision of connecting cities of the world, the next thing we want to work on will be to further reduce our carbon emission footprint, and solve the severe driver shortage faced across the globe now.”

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"This is why you can expect passengers, city governments, and businesses to rely on RushTrail to start providing new services like electric and autonomous bus rides in our future product offering. You can also expect RushTrail to venture into the Mobility-as-a-Service space, where multiple forms of mobility offering integrate together in one app."