

I.T. LEADERS AWARD

IT Leader of the Year

Ms Tan Yen Yen, 45
Senior vice-president of Applications, Asia Pacific, Oracle and chairman of the Singapore IT Federation

Ms Tan amazes friends, colleagues and business partners. A mother of four, she is a senior vice-president of applications for Asia Pacific at software giant Oracle and one who works from the plane seat 60 per cent of the time as she shuttles between different countries.

She is an industry cheerleader as chairman of the Singapore IT Federation (SiTF) and an ardent triathlete who cycles all over Singapore on weekends.

To an oft-asked question on how she finds time for all her activities, she said the trick was to involve people who mattered in her daily life. So the children, for example, are also taking part in cycling and triathlete events where mother and kids can bond.

But no matter what, she must have her six hours of sleep to be able to function well, she said.

Ms Tan has been going against the norm in her 20 years in the IT industry. She was the first female managing director of Hewlett-Packard Singapore. She was also the first female chairman of SiTF.

In an interview last week, she said that there is no short cut to success – one just has to work very hard.

On Singapore's infocomm tech industry, she said the sector has gained from the pioneering projects the Government has introduced, like the wireless hot spots and the Next Generation Broadband Network.

"The market has opened and that means more business for industry."

Fellow industry leaders who

worked with her said she has worked tirelessly to ensure that the industry has room to expand.

Mr Stephen Lim, chief executive of local company SQL View, said: "As chairman of SiTF, Yen Yen has been a diligent champion of the Singapore Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) industry, providing both foreign and local ICT companies with a voice in key issues and an invaluable resource in market creation."

"Her term in office spanned not only the toughest economic years in recent decades, but also an important technology evolution stage as cloud technology and shared services gain momentum. Yen Yen's leadership united our industry to brave these challenges together."

Yet Ms Tan feels that not enough is being done for local companies here, like creating partnerships in which IT multinationals (MNCs) and local companies can "hunt as a pack".

While there are schemes for MNCs to help local companies to go overseas, more can be done. The SiTF is working closely with the Government to do this now, she said.

For the IT industry to continue to expand quickly, more people are needed. Hence, her interest to see more students pick up IT as a career.

"IT is more than code writing. There are so many jobs available from sales and marketing to being a techpreneur and artists in game development," she said.

"At SiTF, we do career talks and we try to put up role models, but we need to do more. SiTF is in discussion with the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore and Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts on how to make IT a sexy career."



It is a winning feeling for (from left) Mr Gan, Ms Tan, Mr Lee and Mr Vishnu.

ST PHOTO: DESMOND LIM

Four of tech's best

They were honoured by the Singapore Computer Society last week; GRACE CHNG speaks to the quartet

Young Professional of the Year

Mr Douglas Gan, 28
Founder and chief executive of ShowNearby

Mr Gan is the founder and chief executive officer of ShowNearby, a leading location-based service provider. The site now has more than 20,000 active mobile users per day, while ShowNearby is among the top five location-based applications on the Android and iPhone.

Founded in March 2008, the company attracted a \$3.5 million investment last year from Global Yellow Pages.

A serial entrepreneur, Mr Gan forged his first start-up in 2000, when he was just 16 years old and waiting to enter Ngee Ann Polytechnic. With US\$30, he started up PureHostings, a pioneer webhosting firm.

Within a year, PureHostings had over 1,000 customers. In 2005, he sold the business for an undisclosed sum.

When he was still studying at Ngee Ann, he started OhGenki.com, a discussion forum which he sold in 2006.

Inducted into the SCS Hall of Fame

Mr Lee Kwok Cheong, 56
Chief executive officer of SIM Global Education

A veteran and stalwart of Singapore's IT scene, Mr Lee was inducted into the Hall of Fame by the Singapore Computer Society for his almost 30-year contribution to IT development here.

His career started in 1983 with the National Computer Board (NCB) – the predecessor of the Infocomm Development Authority – where he was involved in computerising the civil service.

"We're evangelists when we started at NCB. We didn't know that many things cannot be done but what we didn't know couldn't hurt. We just did what we wanted, which was to change the world and we found ways to do it," said Mr Lee, better known as KC to those in the industry, in an interview with Digital Life last week.

In 1989, Mr Lee headed the civil service computerisation programme (CSCP) which eventually led to the nationwide IT2000 masterplan which was to use IT not only to increase efficiency but also as a competitive advantage for Singapore.

He was already itching to leave the NCB when an opportunity came in 1995 to spin-off the CSCP into a commercial company called National Computer Systems (NCS). Mr Lee built NCS into a systems integrator (SI) powerhouse with 12 offices in the

Asia-Pacific. He quadrupled revenue in the decade he was at NCS. When he left in 2005, the revenue was more than \$600 million.

A fresh opportunity to do something similar but in a different industry arose in 2005 when a headhunter came calling on behalf of the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM). That year, he became the chief executive officer of SIM Global Education, a private educational institution. Under his watch, student enrolment doubled to 20,000.

At SIM, he continued to be involved in IT. Among other things, he was chairman of the Infocomm Manpower Council, and president of the Singapore Computer Society for three terms from 2005.

Currently, Mr Lee is also the chairman of the Technology Advisory Committee of the Casino Regulatory Authority of Singapore as well as a Board member of the Defence Science & Technology Agency.

The Hong Kong-born Singaporean is a firm believer of Singapore's foreign talent strategy. He recalled that when he joined the NCB in the early 1980s, there were only 800 IT professionals in Singapore then.

For such an ambitious project as the CSCP, the NCB needed more people to plan, develop and implement the systems. It had no choice but to recruit from overseas. He said: "Foreign talent is necessary for Singapore. Every time Singapore wants to venture into new areas, inevitably we open

Singapore to the world to get the best talent."

Foreign talent, he said, would not replace locals but would join Singaporeans to make the country's dreams and plans happen, he said at the SIM headquarters in Clementi Road.

A graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the use of IT in management, Mr Lee has been regarded by the IT industry as a people builder.

Said Mr Lee: "The way I've been successful is I focus on people's strengths."

Nurturing and mentoring people was not a conscious effort, he said, adding that he always try to energise people around the visions that he draws. "I think when people know what is in front of them, they know how to do things," he said.

IT remains close to Mr Lee's heart and he is concerned that not enough students are taking up IT in universities.

"Our message to students must be fine-tuned to show that IT is much more than just programming."

"We should focus on innovation. Look, people are excited about the iPhone, social media and YouTube. No one will say that these new gadgets and services are not sexy. We should encourage people to want to create something new so as to change the world. We should challenge people that you can build a company that is worth hundreds of millions of dollars," he said.

chngkeg@sph.com.sg

IT Youth

Mr Vishnu Prem, 19
National serviceman

Mr Vishnu has a deep passion for computers and smartphones.

The passion started when he was 12, when he picked up a book from the library on C++ programming.

It spurred him to begin writing programs. Years later, hanging out at Hackerspace in Bussorah Street – a place frequented by geeks and developers – he landed his first programming job.

"I developed mobile apps for people and worked as an intern with Chalkboard, a Singapore start-up doing a location-based mobile ad

network," said Mr Vishnu, who finished his studies at the NUS High School of Math and Science.

He was a key member of the NUS' Infocomm Club and was the vice-chairman of the Media Club in 2009. He was also an Infocomm Development Authority (IDA) Infocomm Ambassador where he provided assistance to other

Infocomm Clubs. He has also been sponsored by the IDA for a 10-day Infocomm Club Study Trip to Silicon Valley in 2008.

"I hope to study computer science at Stanford. After that, I would like to work in a big company like Google or Apple or even start my own venture. It's too early for me to decide," he said, after he received the award.