

ADVERTORIAL

Grooming IT talent for Singapore

SIM Global Education supports skills development for this fast-growing sector

SINGAPORE may be a small nation but it counts itself as one of the world's most technologically advanced economies. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Information Technology Report 2013, Singapore ranks as the second most network-ready country globally and the first in Asia. Singapore is currently home to more than 80 of the top 100 software and services companies. Many of them, including the top 15 software companies, have based their regional or Asia-Pacific headquarters here.

A chief reason for the infocomm technology (IT) industry's success is due to its human capital. Latest figures from the Singapore Economic Development Board show that there are more than 143,000 IT professionals in Singapore today, and of this number, over 83 per cent of them have at least a tertiary education.

Quite a number of these professionals entered the industry after completing their studies via the transnational education (TNE) route at private education institutions (PEIs), and industry leaders say that the quality and capabilities of such graduates is commendable.

"PEI graduates are products of TNE which is as credible, rigorous and affordable as a tertiary education in the local universities. The TNE graduates we have encountered are grounded, willing to learn and resilient in their positions at all levels," said Singapore Computer Society (SCS) President Howie Lau.

The 30,000-member society actively partners major education institutions in Singapore on a regular basis, including SIM Global Education (SIM GE).

"We have been impressed by the PEI graduates we have engaged so far and find them committed, practical, resourceful and global-ready. We believe this is because TNE also provides students with industry-relevant curriculum and life skills which lines up well with what's required in the modern workplace today," he said.

But with the IT sector becoming even more essential for many companies to thrive today, the challenge lies in attracting, developing and retaining key IT talents for the long haul.

Industry-ready graduates

SIM GE is an institution where IT professionals in Singapore today can build their foundation to do well in their careers. SIM GE, one of the largest PEIs here, offers a broad range of over 70 academic programmes – diploma, bachelor and post-graduate degrees – from 11 renowned universities in the UK, the US and Australia.

The lure of working in the ever-changing IT industry, and at a renowned brand such as Dell, was why Jasmine Tan joined that company six years ago after spending nearly a decade working in the public sector.

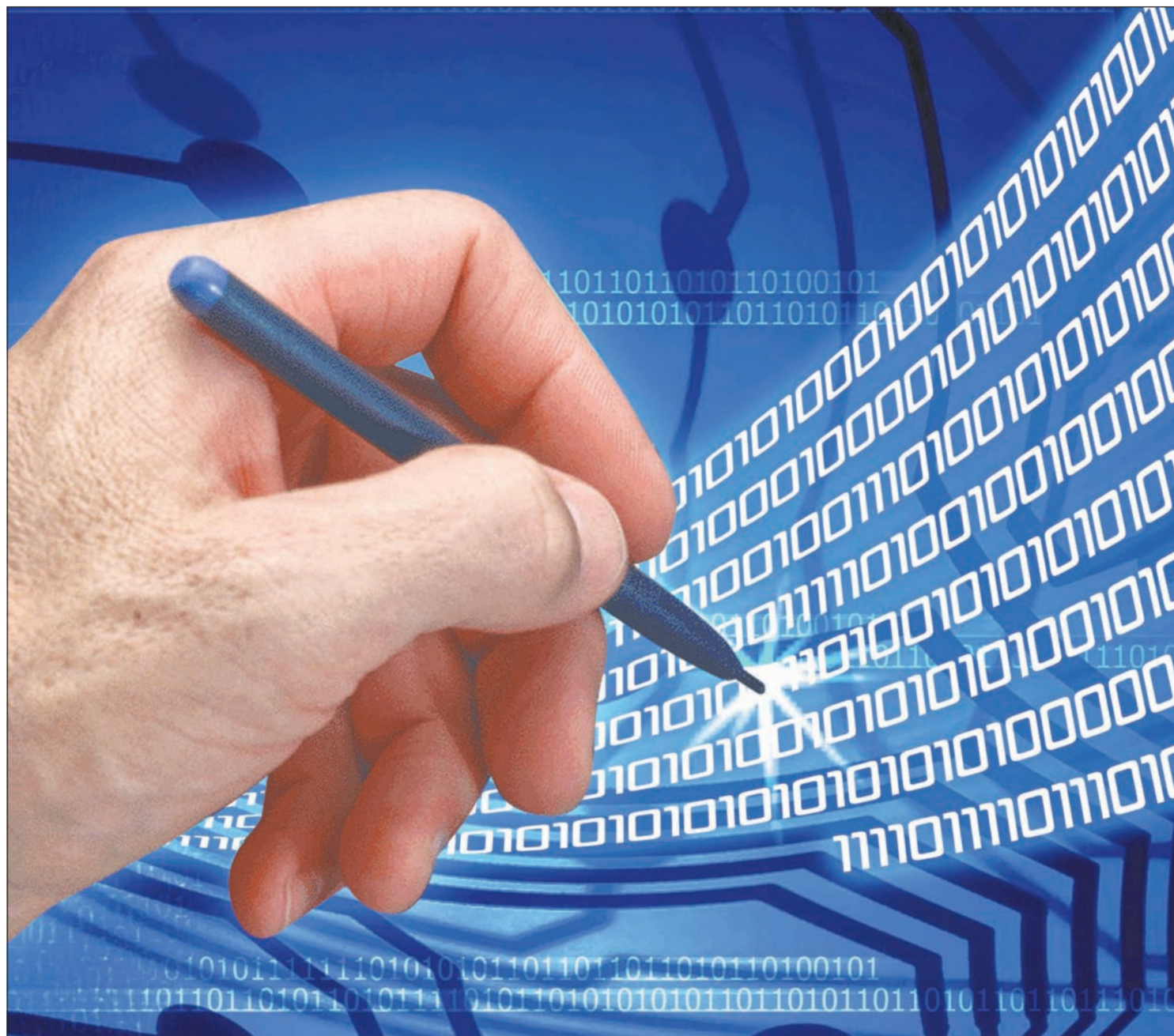
Ms Tan is a Regional Lead at Dell in charge of driving business development in the areas of video surveillance and digital forensics for the South Asia region, which includes more than 20 countries.

She chose to leave her government job – where she had been working for a decade – about two years after she completed a Master of Business in Information Technology from the SIM-RMIT programme in 2006.

"I decided to go back to school for my Masters to pick up new skills, as well as to gain greater exposure to different perspectives from other people. I appreciated the diversity in the classroom and interacting with students and lecturers from other cultures and backgrounds," she said.

Similarly, New Yi Qing, who works at the Singapore office of global enterprise software company SAP, says he enjoys working in the IT sector because of the ability to be part of the many technological advances in the industry and see the positive impact they have on people.

"Every industry is now more efficient and productive because of the presence of IT. Without IT, there are many disruptions to innovation and many of the older companies out there have had to adapt in order to survive in today's competitive business world," said the 30-year-old, a Bachelor of Computer Science in Digital Systems Security graduate from the SIM-University of Wollongong (UOW) programme in 2010.



Latest figures from the Economic Development Board show that there are more than 143,000 IT professionals in Singapore today, and of this number, over 83 per cent of them have at least a tertiary education. Quite a number of these professionals come from SIM Global Education (SIM GE).

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Nicholas Gerard, a Business Development Manager at Peatix. He is responsible for growing the use of the mobile ticketing platform in the Singapore and Malaysia markets.



Jerold Hoong, a Senior Security Consultant at KPMG Singapore. He does security assessment engagements involving penetration testing and vulnerability assessment for clients.



Jasmine Tan, a Regional Lead at Dell. She is in charge of driving business development in the areas of video surveillance and digital forensics for the South Asia region.

"That is why I love and appreciate the presence of IT as it enables businesses to move faster and stay more connected. The industry never fails to excite me."

While there were many options to study Computer Science at other institutions, Mr New said he chose SIM GE because of its Digital Systems Security focus.

"In the IT industry, the most important yet often neglected part is in IT security. By majoring in Digital Systems Security, I became a more all-rounded IT professional," he explained.

Nicholas Gerard chose another popular SIM GE course in order to pursue his career as an IT professional. He graduated in 2013 with a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Management from the SIM-University of London (UOL) programme, and is now employed at the Singapore office of Peatix, a Japan-headquartered mobile event and ticketing start-up. Peatix is a mobile

ticketing platform for organisers to manage every aspect of their event using their mobile devices.

As a business development manager, the 29-year-old's responsibilities involve growing the use of the platform in the Singapore and Malaysia markets.

"I chose an IT-related job because I became interested in the buzz of Silicon Valley and all the start-ups there. I observed that mobile phone and app usage was becoming a global trend and I wanted to be tap that wave as early as possible," he said.

Mr Gerard attributes much of his success in his career so far to his time at SIM GE. He said he chose to take up a management degree because he intends to establish his own company at some point. "I felt that the course offered by UOL had the ideal components and modules to help prepare me for when I eventually run my

own business. What's more, the degree is examined and conferred by the London School of Economics (LSE) at UOL, a prestigious institution, and that makes the qualification even more valuable," he added.

Another graduate who is busy working his way up the ladder in the IT industry is Jerold Hoong, a senior security consultant at KPMG Singapore. He says he enjoys fiddling with computers and programmes since he was young, and he is now living his dream by being in a job that allows him to fulfil his passion for IT.

He graduated with a Bachelor of Computer Science with Distinction in Digital Systems Security from the SIM-UOW programme.

"As a security consultant, the thing that excites me the most is the moment when I discover a security vulnerability in an application that I am testing. The nature of my job ensures that I will find more vulnerabilities as I test more appli-

cations and I find this to be a very rewarding experience," he said.

Before joining KPMG last September, Mr Hoong worked as a security analyst for Fairchild Semiconductor, where he deployed and configured security information and event management systems as well as various security solutions such as web-application and network firewalls.

Lyon Yang, another SIM-UOW alumnus, is also a senior security consultant at Vantage Point Security. His job scope involves hacking into financial institutes – legally, of course – to test their vulnerabilities and protect them from security breaches.

Mr Yang, too, completed the Bachelor of Computer Science in Digital Systems Security in 2013, and he said the course gave him a strong foundation for his current job.

"I would say all the modules were useful for me, whether it's to learn more about the different operating systems or programming languages out there. There was also a heavy focus on IT security, and these gave me the necessary skills for this type of work," he said.

Hard and soft skills

Sugiharto Gozalie, an assistant vice-president in network infrastructure support at OCBC Bank, said one main takeaway from his time at SIM GE was to never stop learning, even after entering the workforce. The 30-year-old earned a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Information Systems and Management from LSE back in 2008.

"IT has always been my passion and interest since I was in high school," he said. "I recall how my lecturer told us in our freshman year that whatever we were learning at that point in time would become obsolete in a matter of months. He stressed the importance of lifelong learning to survive in the fast-paced IT world."

As for Chow Kin Keong, he joined a US IT multinational corporation eight years ago after graduating with a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Computing and Information Systems from the SIM-UOL programme, and he has never looked back since.

Now working in technical services sales covering the South-east Asia region, the 34-year-old's job often requires him to interact with colleagues and clients from all over the world. That's why he is grateful his experience at SIM GE helped him to build up his communication and presentation skills.

"As a student, I managed to hone my public speaking skills as well as build my confidence. My course allowed me to gain knowledge from all across the world. I got to interact and learn from lecturers flown in from the UK, and classmates that come from different countries like Vietnam and even Latin America," said Mr Chow.

Even after he entered the workforce, he continued to be involved with his juniors at SIM GE. He wanted to set up an IT Club, and he managed to get enough support and members to do so.

"It's a form of giving back to my alma mater," he said. "Since I have received something useful from the school, which is my education, I wanted to have this IT Club in place so that others can benefit too."

SCS' Mr Lau shared that companies in Singapore are looking at hiring graduates equipped with all the relevant hard and soft skills from local universities and PEIs.

"We also see more companies investing more in employee training. There is a recognition that continuing education and training is necessary to retain critical IT talents, but to also stay relevant and competitive with the fast-moving technology cycles," he said.

Whether it is hard skills or soft skills, the TNE route produces aspiring graduates with the essential attributes to be both career- and workplace-ready.



This is the third of a five-part series on the employability of graduates from transnational education programmes

About SIM GE

- ◆ SIM GE is one of Singapore's largest private education institutions and offers over 70 full-time and part-time academic programmes such as IT, retail marketing, banking, finance, economics and management from 11 reputable global universities.
- ◆ Its total student enrolment is 22,000 where 19,000 are full-time and 3,000 part-time students. There are 124,500 local and overseas graduates from SIM GE to date.
- ◆ SIM GE students often score top honours in its partner universities programmes. For example, 167 SIM-UOL students graduated with first-class honours in 2014; the highest number of achievers in the world for UOL International Programmes.
- ◆ SIM GE and its university partners run diploma and undergraduate programs in IT such as information systems management, computing, digital systems security, multimedia and game development.
- ◆ SIM GE has been voted by the public as "Best Private Institute" at the annual AsiaOne People's Choice Awards 2015, its 7th consecutive win since 2009.

SIM GE's University Partners



www.simge.edu.sg