

Giving 3D vision to architects' drawings

S'pore start-up's tablet software allows design, layout of interior objects in 3D

By **VICTORIA HO**

TODAY, architecture firms take the better part of a day to render a set of static still drawings to show clients what their home might look like.

The process is often described as a tedious one, and inflexible because changes suggested require re-rendering and some measure of imagination to be exercised by the client.

But a start-up in Singapore is looking to change that, by allowing home owners to look through their iPads as a 3D lens to their dream home.

Sheer Industries has come up with a software called Oombra, which uses augmented reality to place 3D objects in an existing space when viewed through the tablets. The software is compatible with a wide range of existing 3D object formats common to architectural firms, and interior designers will be able to import their textures and furniture sets to show clients.

The objects can be moved and rearranged on the fly, as the software overlays them against the backdrop captured by the device's camera.

The company's co-founder, Benjamin Chia, 25, told BizIT the start-up had begun by speaking to architecture firms, and found that many found it difficult helping clients envision the designer's layout. Processing the still images was also the cause of wasteful downtime,



Co-founders: Mr Chia (left) and Mr Loh moved Sheer Industries into NUS Enterprise start-up incubator after getting a Spring S'pore grant

and changes to designs often resulted in many subsequent meetings to discuss revisions before customers could sign off on the project.

Started a year ago, Sheer Industries was incorporated less than half a year back in June. It moved

into the NUS (National University of Singapore) Enterprise start-up incubator the month after, having received a grant of S\$50,000 from Spring Singapore.

Mr Chia is joined by 24 year old co-founder, Shawn Loh and Imran

Nabhan, who serves as the company's chief technology officer. Together with two software engineers, the lean team of five is ready to push out its first product in December.

Last month, it announced a partnership with augmented reality company in the US, ARToolWorks, which grants Sheer Industries the licence to use the former's technology in its product. Additionally, the Singaporean firm also has exclusive distribution of ARToolWorks' products here, providing another revenue stream for the firm.

The nod of approval from the long-time augmented reality player points to the need to find more practical, industrial applications for the technology, said Mr Chia.

Mr Loh noted that Oombra's value proposition is likely to appeal to architectural firms of all sizes. "We're speaking to big firms in Singapore right now, and we've also spoken to small to mid-tier organisations - all of them have expressed the same need."

While there are augmented reality firms in the country right now, the firm is moving fast while no direct competitors in the same space exist yet.

Future plans include the renewable energy space, and helping green players come up with efficient ways to design and build, said Mr Chia. The company is also planning to market its product to exterior architecture firms, and is looking to neighbouring Asean countries, he said.