

# NUS ace chases start-up dream round the Carousell



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Each time Mr Quek Siu Rui found himself at an important point in his life, he chose the chancy byway rather than the more obvious high-way to success.

When he aced his O levels, he opted against junior college and chose Ngee Ann Polytechnic's business studies course instead.

"I wanted to do lots of projects which required me to think of ideas," he said.

He did so well there that he went on to the National University of Singapore (NUS), one of two students awarded the inaugural NUS Global Merit Scholarship in 2007, for those who have demonstrated academic excellence, leadership potential and a passion for creativity and innovation.

He won three gold medals for academic excellence this year when he topped his NUS business administration class.

But instead of pursuing his honours degree or taking up a job offer at Silicon Valley in California, the 25-year-old chose to form a start-up and develop an idea for a digital flea market called Carousell.

Becoming an entrepreneur had

become his dream after he spent a year at Stanford University under the NUS Overseas College Programme and worked at a Silicon Valley video conferencing start-up.

Describing the energy he felt while there, he said: "Everywhere I went I saw people talking about business ideas or busy programming on their computers. You see many small teams of 10 to 20 people using tech to create an impact on millions of people. It was really exhilarating."

Not many fresh graduates take the road less travelled. Others before him include Mr Darius Cheung, who co-founded a mobile security company that was later sold to software security company McAfee; Mr Mohan Belani, who co-founded tech blog e27; and Ms Audrey Tan, who co-founded PlayMoolah, a financial portal for children.

Professor Wong Poh Kam, director of the NUS Entrepreneurship Centre, said young people are now more comfortable with the idea of turning down stable jobs or further studies to follow their start-up dreams.

Family and friends are also encouraging such risk-taking, though Mr Quek said convincing his parents was tough.

"I must have given them a heart attack. I told them I would not be able to contribute financially to the family for a few years," said Mr Quek, the younger of two sons.

"For a minute or so, they didn't want to look at me. But they finally gave me their support," he said. It helped that his elder brother Siu Rong, 27, supported his dream and encouraged him to pursue it.

Carousell had beaten 40 other ideas to take the top prize in NUS' Startup Weekend competition, an intensive 54-hour crash course in



PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

**Carousell co-founders (from left) Lucas Ngoo, Quek Siu Rui and Marcus Tan at their Ayer Rajah office. The three friends were helped in their start-up by a \$7,000 ideation grant from NUS Enterprise.**

entrepreneurship that brought together teams to develop business ideas.

The prize was three-month free tenancy of a start-up workspace, Plug-In@Blk71 in Ayer Rajah, run by NUS Enterprise, which promotes entrepreneurship in the university.

Work on Carousell started immediately after his exams. Mr Quek and his two co-founders – close

friends Marcus Tan, 28, and Lucas Ngoo, 24 – were helped by a \$7,000 ideation grant from NUS Enterprise. He met Mr Tan at Ngee Ann Poly; Mr Ngoo shared a house with him while they were in Silicon Valley for the NUS Overseas College Programme.

The idea for a digital used-goods listing came from Mr Quek's observations.

"I've an old Apple laptop, but I

haven't got round to selling it. The process of getting it listed on used sites was quite tedious. Carousell grew out of this observation."

For the last three months, the three have been developing their application, which is available for free download from Apple's App Store. He is piloting the app in the Singapore App Store first, before releasing it to the world.

The Carousell app is more than

## Digital flea market

"Open the app, snap a photo with the phone camera. Use the built-in filters to add colour or to highlight the photo to make it stand out. Click to list it.

"Each seller will have a mini home page to list his goods. If you like what he is selling, you can follow him to discover what they have. We're turning selling into a social discovery."

**MR QUEK SIU RUI, on how easy it is to use his Carousell app on the phone**

a listing of used goods for sale. It is a site where buyers can follow their favourite sellers, and share goods they have discovered with friends.

It is also easy to use, said Mr Quek: "Open the app, snap a photo with the phone camera. Use the built-in filters to add colour or to highlight the photo to make it stand out. Click to list it.

"Each seller will have a mini home page to list his goods. If you like what he is selling, you can follow him to discover what they have. We're turning selling into a social discovery."

Sellers set a price, but buyers can counter-offer with a lower price.

A key priority in the coming weeks would be for the partners to form a company.

It may be Mr Quek's pot of gold. But if it is not, he will simply try the next idea in his quest to be an entrepreneur.

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