



◀ LOOK EAST

Founded by (from left) Mr Ho and Mr Tan, Viddsee offers a library of Asian short films

Mr Ho: Our marketing strategy is mostly word-of-mouth and online publicity from filmmakers, actors and film festivals, unlike movie houses which still largely depend on traditional means such as physical posters and outdoor media for marketing. In-house, we also use analytics to find out what users like to watch and use that to improve user experience.

Mr Tan: For instance, we would try to understand what type of stories appeal to different communities. Filipino viewers are found to enjoy stories about relationships, so we will recommend Chinese relationship dramas to them. We've also discovered that the highest viewership is during lunch and commute hours after 4pm. Notably, 60 per cent of views are on mobile.

Mr Ho: We adopt a mobile-first and digital strategy, allowing users to watch our films on their smartphones and desktops. But at the same time, we're very active in the offline space, travelling and attending film festivals around the region, meeting filmmakers and audiences, and building a physical community of film-lovers.

Mr Tan: We believe in a hybrid model – online and offline – and that both are complementary approaches.

AS THEY SEE IT

Forget YouTube and Vimeo, a Singapore startup is quietly but firmly building a video empire of its own. Viddsee, which entered the scene in 2013, is a curated online library of Asian short films that can be watched by anyone for free. Founded by film enthusiasts Ho Jia Jian, 28, and Derek Tan, 30, Viddsee hopes to share the region's best stories with the world, and features two new films daily. The startup recently moved from a co-working space in Geylang to its new office in Block 71 at JTC LaunchPad @ one-north to be at the heart of Singapore's startup action. **AS TOLD TO JACQUELYN CHEOK**

WHAT IS VIDDSEE?

Mr Ho: We see ourselves as a mobile cinema for Asia. We want to feature independent, high-quality short films from Asia, and make them discoverable and accessible to the whole world.

Mr Tan: We believe that there is a market for high-quality short films, which in my view, are shareable and accessible content.

Mr Ho: Having a background in filmmaking – Derek and I were from NUS' film club nuSTUDIOS – we saw a growing problem in video discovery as high-quality content constantly gets drowned in the midst of user-generated content. What's more, YouTube and Vimeo have very little Asian content, and we're seeing the potential and demand for local stories in Asia with the growth of Internet connectivity in Asia.

WHAT ARE VIDDSEE'S VIDEOS LIKE?

Mr Tan: We have a wide range of genres and topics. We cover narratives to documentaries and animation as well. And we have films that feature inspirational stories, genre films like horror or thriller, and thought-provoking ones around very real local communities.

For example, *Tudung* is a narrative film that asks whether a Malay girl should wear the *tudung*. This has stirred many conversations among both Malays and non-Malays in exploring the issue, I think,

because they are real stories.

In general, stories are effective in touching the lives of people when they are inspirational and emotional. Our short film *Ripple* – which revolves around kindness – talks about paying it forward and has touched the lives of millions.

HOW IS VIDDSEE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER VIDEO PLATFORMS?

Mr Ho: Every film on our platform is curated, and we market each film. We work with an in-house publishing arm and editorial team to write about our films. Unlike other sites, we do not treat our films as just another number in our catalogue. Above all, we take an Asian perspective in the way that we curate and market our films.

Mr Tan: The 1,000-odd films on our platform are either submitted or selected through global film festivals. Of these, three films were made in-house.

WHO ARE VIDDSEE'S USERS?

Mr Tan: Currently, we have about 1.5 million users from around the world – a huge jump from just 30,000 a year ago. Most of them are 18-24 year olds who are digital natives and movie-goers. Interestingly, they are not just your art or indie lovers, but individuals who have grown to love our short films and want to share content with their friends.

DO YOU MISS MAKING FILMS?

Mr Tan: For someone who has been making films since secondary school, I do wish we had more time to make films. But through building Viddsee, I think we kind of found our role and that is to empower and support filmmakers. For example, we recently partnered Nikon to sponsor our monthly Viddsee Shortee award for filmmakers. The prize was a camera for the creator of the most popular video of the month. This will help filmmakers with their production.

Mr Ho: It is also a native advertising deal that we have signed with Nikon. For now, we will be looking at collaborating more with brands to create and distribute branded short films, as part of Viddsee's business model.

Mr Tan: This also speaks to our ambition of becoming a platform for brands to find good filmmakers to tell their story.

WHAT ARE VIDDSEE'S THOUGHTS ABOUT THE MEDIA INDUSTRY IN GENERAL?

Mr Ho: Traditional media companies have been geographically challenged in terms of the medium of distribution and also business models. With the Internet, this opens us a level playing field with the rest of the world. The question is how does a new media company become a global player and not be

capped to just a local market? Having said that, while we do face challenges in new markets, we have also seen how successes can outweigh the challenges. ■

