

WORK WHENEVER, WHEREVER

Need to find work at the eleventh hour? Local tech company MyWork Global has an app for just that. It was launched in August 2016; and with 15,000 downloads within its first five months of operation, the firm is fast gaining traction. BT speaks to sister duo Rachael and Rebecca Chiu (left to right) to find out how they intend to reinvent shift work in the age of digital transformation.

AS TOLD TO RACHEL MUI

COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT MYWORK GLOBAL AND THE WORK THAT YOU DO?

Rebecca: MyWork is a platform that connects workers with on-demand jobs. If businesses need to find someone to help them at the last minute, they just need to post the job on the app. Thousands of jobseekers looking for gigs or jobs on the platform will look through and pick up suitable ones. They'll go to work, finish their job and be done with it. They don't have to have a continuous relationship with the businesses.

Rachael: Conversely, it's also for businesses to find on-demand workers. Even for myself, I tend to forget that I've a lot of data entry work which I don't really want to do. So I post on the app and someone comes in for that, which frees up my time for more value-adding work. Nowadays, our response rate is pretty good. Within an hour, I usually get responses. Within a day, I can get up to 10-15.

Rebecca: I do the strategy and business planning. After we come up with a strategy, Rachael implements it. We split the company into users, which are job seekers and businesses. So I'll handle users and marketing, and Rachael handles sales for the business side.

Rachael: We're quite lean. Basically, Rebecca thinks about how the company should move forward. But these require execution and monitoring. The platform is a marketplace, and we need to ensure that there are enough jobs and job seekers. My role is more on monitoring these numbers, and how everyone is working together to achieve the targets agreed upon.

PHOTO: KELVIN CHING



HOW DID MYWORK GLOBAL GET STARTED?

Rebecca: How it started was that Rachael and I run a F&B chain called Soi55 and found it difficult to find workers. When we spoke to others in the industry, we realised that everybody was having a big problem finding staff, and that something needs to be done about it. We realised that if we break down tasks and specialise them, you can easily find extra workers at the last minute.

Rachael: This really helped Soi55 because we used to recruit by relying on group chats. But that group is limited, and I can't keep bringing in people. So why be dependent on this group of 30 when I can depend on 11,000 – which is the number of users we have on the app right now.

Rebecca: Hiring for what you need also allows businesses to be more agile, because businesses have variable demand cycles. You can't hire for the times you're up, and then fire for the times you're down.

HOW MUCH WAS INVESTED INTO THE BUSINESS?

Rebecca: We managed to raise S\$1 million in seed funding from private investors.

WHAT IS IT LIKE WORKING WITH EACH OTHER?

Rebecca: I think it's challenging. The con is that we get emotional at times because we're siblings, but we try to remember that with the cons, come more pros.

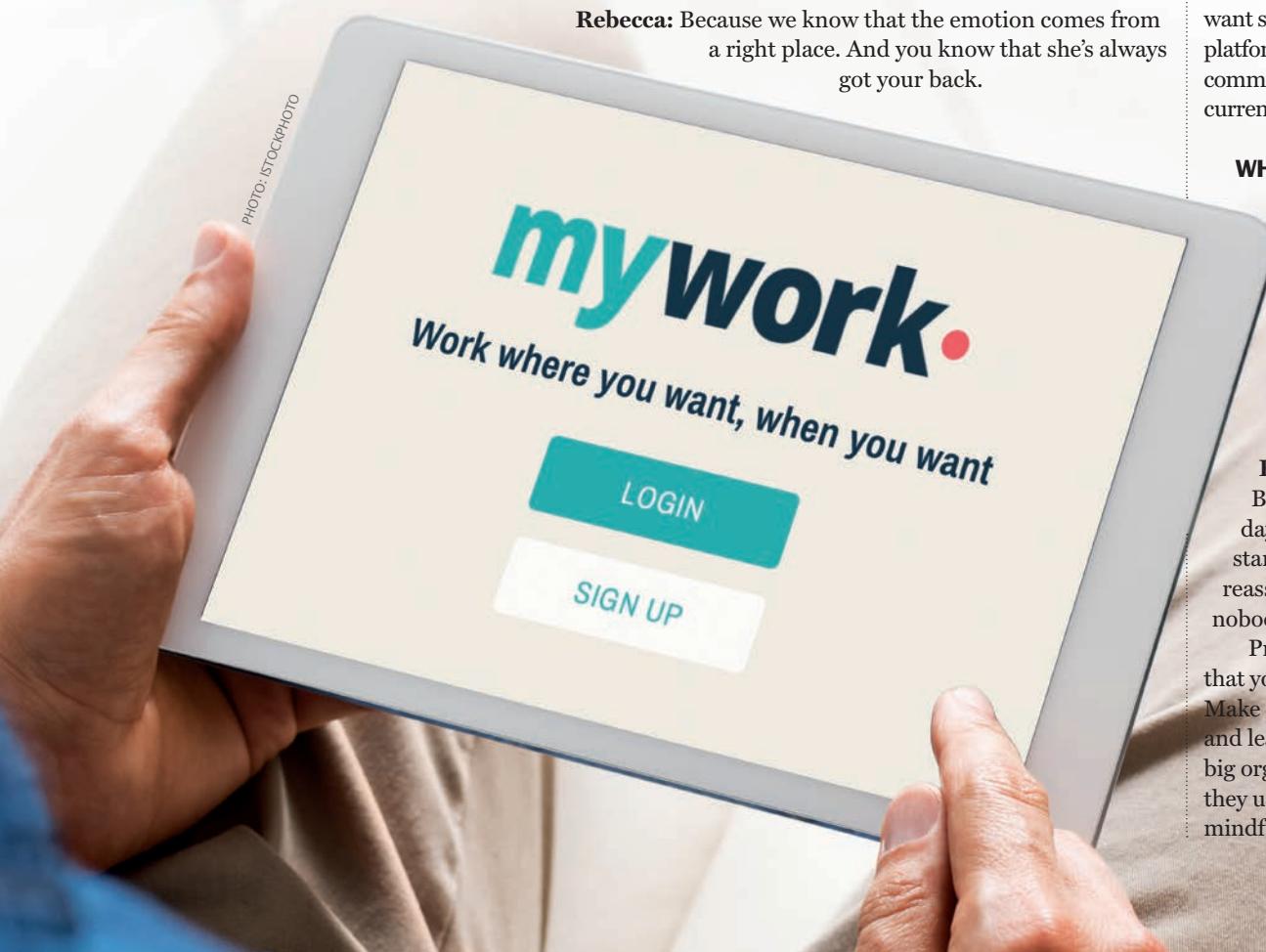
Rachael: One of the biggest pros is that you always know you can trust the other person.

Rebecca: We can't really run away from each other.

Rachael: Exactly, where can I go? Home – oh man, she's there. So talking openly is an advantage. With all the problems we have, we can just lay them out without fearing negative feedback or pressure. The con is that we're more emotional towards our business, but the good thing is that we put a lot of passion in it.

Rebecca: Because we know that the emotion comes from a right place. And you know that she's always got your back.

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WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES YOU'VE FACED AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Rebecca: Re-educating employers of the benefits that on-demand hiring can bring is a challenge. When we speak to people, especially businesses, they think: 'I have a recruitment model I'm familiar with, why do I want to shift to something else?' So our job involves speaking about cost savings and productivity that can increase revenue.

How we overcome this is that we speak to government agencies and different organisations, because they know that companies should embrace technology. We work a lot with the SMCCI (Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce & Industry). For SMEs, we held a talk for SMCCI members on job redesign. It sounds complicated, but it's really not.

Another challenge is a fear of the unknown, of the gig economy. Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam mentioned that this trend needs reviewing. I think a lot of people will call this disruptive technology, and I agree that it's something worth looking into. But we shouldn't let the fears of this hinder the benefits that it can potentially bring.

If there are certain concerns, then let's try to address them. For example, if the concern is CPF, let's think about CPF policies that will include freelance workers. If the concern is tracking, then the digital world is the place to be tracking. If it's insurance, we can look at national insurance. The thing is, MyWork as a company wants to help traditional workers get on board the new economy.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE ON-DEMAND ECONOMY IS EVOLVING?

Rebecca: The on-demand economy as a whole is really fast. Just a few years ago, you wouldn't think that you would have food delivered to your doorstep in 20 minutes. If it's food, it's transport, then why not jobs?

Rachael: I think not so much in Singapore yet, but in the US definitely, there has been a shift towards the freelance economy. People talk about millennials who have different ideas about work, how they can have flexibility, yet not compromise on the stability of their income or job.

I was just talking to NTUC and they mentioned retirees who want something to do, but don't want to work all the time, and this platform is perfect for them. For others, some may have existing commitments or can't find a part-time job, so the app benefits parties currently marginalised by the traditional way of hiring.

WHAT ARE SOME VALUABLE LESSONS YOU'VE LEARNT ALONG THE WAY?

Rebecca: Something that someone told me which I resonate with is to really enjoy the journey, because as an entrepreneur sometimes you just think of the final product. But every step along the way you're learning something, you're building something. There's a lot of stress, a lot of tears, a lot of hard work, so the important thing is to enjoy the process.

Rachael: When I was in a corporate job, it was very routine. By doing this, I'm exposed to different functions, and every day I feel that I'm not doing well. I've talked to friends with startups and asked why I'm failing, but a lot of them have reassured me that many startup founders feel the same. Because nobody really knows what's right in a startup.

Previously, I used to be more close-minded, but now I feel that you must make full use of every opportunity to talk to people. Make conversations more purposeful in terms of asking questions and learning from people, startups or big organisations. From big organisations, you can find out their needs; and for startups, they understand your pains – so I think it's just about being more mindful of the conversations I have. ■