



PHOTO: KELVIN CHING

MAXIMISING HUMAN POTENTIAL WITH CHATBOTS

Wong Hong Ting (above), founder and chief executive officer of enterprise chatbot solution Botbot.AI, aims to combat under-employment in the market by moving people from repetitive, menial tasks to higher value-added work through the use of technology.

AS TOLD TO VIVIEN SHIAO

WHAT IS BOTBOT.AI?

It is an enterprise chatbot solution that leverages on artificial intelligence to automate repetitive, transactional and menial tasks. Operating out of Singapore with a regional language niche, Botbot.AI aims to tackle the problem of underemployment through moving people to higher-value work.

Our goal is to automate as much low-value work as we can. Our chatbots are microservices that are built for scalability, with specific products that are plug-and-play solutions for the food and beverage, human resource and healthcare sectors.

The business is founded on the principles of maximising human potential. I started Botbot.AI in 2017 to transform the way that people live and work through technology, creating workplaces where people can thrive with meaningful work.

HOW DO YOU FILL A GAP IN THE MARKET?

The structure of today's economy necessitates the brilliance of technology professionals who are also well-versed in business and design. We spent the past eight years building a team that can work with innovation teams in top multinational corporations and government-linked companies to architect and design innovative products that improve the way that people live and work.

Armed with these rich experiences, we now build

enterprise systems, business to consumer (B2C) apps and artificial intelligence systems to help enterprises increase productivity through automation of conversations or digitised workflows.

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO BECOME AN ENTREPRENEUR?

In 2004, after the tsunami struck, I was involved in the Singapore Armed Forces' humanitarian efforts in Meulaboh, Aceh. It was there that I experienced firsthand the impact that entrepreneurs could have on their community. The way that they could directly impact lives through job creation and supply of goods and services to those in need nurtured a deep desire to do the same for my community back in Singapore.

During my year in Silicon Valley as part of NUS Overseas College, I rekindled my love for technology that I found at the age of nine, as I was coding my first website. When we returned, we became some of the first iOS developers in Singapore and embarked on our first startup ideas. Mobile was not popular back then, but with everyone beginning to acquire mobile devices of their own, we felt that it was a matter of time before it became commonplace.

The initial days of developing SG Malls, our first mobile app, were exciting as there was inherent utility in the apps that arrived early on the scene. With traction of over 50,000 downloads within the first months of launch – without marketing! – we were even more convinced of the potential

of mobility solutions, and that led us to transform our project into a proper company.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR LATEST DEVELOPMENTS?

One driving force behind why I do what I do would be the aspiration of being able to maximise human potential. Through conversing with other entrepreneurs in Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO) over the past four years, I came to realise that many PMETs (professionals, managers, executives, technicians) are, in reality, bogged down by extensive paperwork and processes – all of which seem necessary and unavoidable.

While enterprise software has helped us tremendously, the sheer number of enterprise tools available results in a huge learning curve for employees, which consequently leads to low adoption rates. This got us building Botbot.AI, a chatbot creation platform that focuses on building bots for enterprises. Specifically, we have ready-to-deploy bots in various business functions, including human resource, finance, trading back-offices, facility management, and of course, customer service.

Chat within enterprises has become the biggest collaboration tool, and the automation of conversations allows for enterprise software to be adopted easily, without the learning curve that accompanies a new user interface.

WHAT DOES YOUR COMPANY DO TO STAND OUT AND COMPETE WITH ITS RIVALS?

At the heart of our company are our people, and we invest in giving them a good foundation in business, technology and design, allowing us to implement solutions that create value in their businesses.

As a lifestyle, we also practise rapid iteration and strive to stay on the cutting edge of technology. With a core mission of leveraging on technology to improve the way that people live and work, we do not implement technology for the sake of implementing technology – we look to engineer solutions that have high usability in addition to utility.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR CHALLENGES?

Talent acquisition has become increasingly challenging – talents can no longer be specialised, and need to develop transferable, cross-functional skills that can empower them in both the technical and business side of things.

At this moment, our journey with chatbots also closely resembles our beginnings in mobile apps, where educating the market that the adoption of this particular technology – ie artificial intelligence – will accelerate them as professionals and give them a competitive advantage, and that it is not going to take away their jobs but rather, augment them.

Lastly, a happy problem: Due to the nature of how technology evolves, the opportunities and possibilities are countless, so selecting and figuring out which ones build our vision of impacting a billion lives in a shorter timeframe has become crucial.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR BUDDING ENTREPRENEURS OUT THERE?

Mentorship – learning and then sharing that learning – is key to growing as an entrepreneur. As the sub-committee chairman for Mentorship at the Action Community for Entrepreneurship, I make an active choice to keep investing back in the system, just as it has invested in me.

It originates from the deep belief that every entrepreneur – no matter the stage in their journey – should have at least one, if not more, mentors; and at the same time be willing to mentor people who might be a few steps behind them in the entrepreneurial journey.

Only then can we build a sustainable ecosystem where ideas and skills are primed to succeed – which, in turn, sets the foundation for the next 50 years of growth in Singapore. ■