

◆ Venturing in Asia

Most of us would have heard a lot about the potential and business growth in Asia. One of our investees, iCo-op.net, (www.ico-op.net) shares their personal experience in setting footprints in the region. How did iCo-op.net started to venture into new markets? What were some of their key observations in doing business in Vietnam, particularly?

The Business

iCo-op.net focuses on offering governance, risk management and compliance (GRC) software solutions to targeted customers. Their solutions help clients in the financial services industry, government institutions and other enterprises to comply with regulations for Anti-Money Laundering (AML) acts and other risk management systems within the GRC domain such as fraud detection. The demand in Asia for such solutions is expected to grow as industry players adopt international compliance and risk management practices.



Going Regional

Engaging new markets for expansion requires careful planning and allocation of resources. In its initial go-to-market plans as a start-up, iCo-op was aware of its finite capital and chose to embark on countries within reasonable travelling time from Singapore.

This helped to set a clear focus on immediate markets such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, South Korea and China. Today, iCo-op has established good relationship with customers in these countries, including major financial institutions and banking facilities.

More importantly, how did the team manage to penetrate nearby markets that contributed to the growth of the company? Founder, Dr Jerry Ng and Director, Ong Sang Bin shared more on their channel partner strategy.

Integrating technologies and collaborating with global players such as IBM and CA Inc, was critical in gaining greater credibility and be regarded as valued business partners. Being part of a larger network of partners with ready-to-market products also accelerated opportunities to expand to other parts of Asia quickly.



Vietnam Experience

Through successful execution of its technology integration with IBM Innovation Center, it opened doors to overseas customers. iCo-op's participation in one of IBM's industry events for Singapore companies in early 2008, helped to gain market access in Vietnam when they received optimistic response of their GRC products. These initial interests have paved the way in developing inroads to major public and state-owned banks there.

"The Vietnam market is in high growth phase and many of its state-owned, joint stock and private enterprises are keen to adopt technologies that assist in their rapid expansion," shared Dr Jerry Ng.

Ong Sang Bin added, "In terms of human capital, many mid-level executives in Vietnam are relatively young and educated. They are generally eager to learn and willing to adapt new processes to improve growth process."

It is also important to be able to engage customers on technical aspects, participate in business level discussions as well as interact with key decision makers to understand their operating concerns and gaining acceptance. They added that having local staff in Vietnam would also help in any communication or language barriers.

"Working closely with our channel partner reduces lead time to get into contact with the right people in the targeted market segment. Our channel partner also provides a great third party validation to our products," said Dr Jerry Ng.

Based on their experience, Singapore companies are usually well-perceived by overseas counterparts and the enthusiasm to collaborate has been encouraging.