

# Putting your best foot forward

The founder of one of Singapore's most successful footwear, apparel and accessories brands shares his personal story on how he turned his love for shoes and athletics into a sporting empire. An advocate of local businesses expanding overseas, he is impassioned about Singapore businesses competing globally.

**"A**s a sportsman in my school days, I am trained, both mentally and physically, to set targets, persevere, excel beyond expectation and constantly challenge myself," says Andy Chaw, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Star 360 Holdings Pte Ltd. "By the same token, when I first entered into business, I set my sights to be successful in every venture," he adds.

Andy started his business 24 years ago. And as his own words suggest, his active involvement in sports during his youth had a profound influence on his career. In particular, he reminisces about his love of football, and how he would harbour a burning desire to score a goal upon every touch of the ball.

In a bid to keep challenging himself, he later ventured into athletics. In 1986, he represented Singapore in the Asian Junior Athletics Championships held in Indonesia, competing in the long jump, high jump and 100 metres sprint. During the games, he was sponsored by Japanese sports equipment company Asics, and was able to buy shoes at discounted rates which he then re-sold to friends to make some extra money. This marked the start of his enthusiasm for the business of shoes. Andy cites his passion for high-quality footwear as somewhat of a calling. "I love shoes. I enjoy cutting shoes apart and seeing how shoes are constructed," he enthuses.

## Industry excitement

His entrepreneurial journey began in 1989, where instead of enrolling in university, he began supplying duty free items to retailers in Myanmar and Indonesia. This led to him assisting a group of Batam-based businesses to import footwear from China and South Korea – the revenues from which Andy used to set up Star 360, a wholesale business in shoes.

At the age of 26, he successfully persuaded the president of Adidas Asia Pacific to let him handle retail for Indochina. He made his first million buying and reselling old stocks of Adidas to emerging markets in Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Furthermore, he also expanded his business to import large volumes of children's shoes into emerging economies in Eastern Europe, including Poland, Hungary and Russia.

"It's very addictive, going regional. Because once we've attained some success, our ambition grew larger. There were a lot of opportunities, and I do believe in building scalability," Andy says.

Over the next two decades, the business snowballed. Other than being a multi-brand distributor, Star 360 had the opportunity to acquire the brand Masai Barefoot Technology, better known as MBT, after its parent company filed for bankruptcy from incurring huge losses in 2012. It was a tough decision for Andy, but he made a bold move to take over the brand. He was challenged by the thought of turning around a failed business, remodelling and building it into a profitable brand again.

With the acquisition of MBT, the company expanded its distribution network into Europe and US. Today, Star 360 is present in 17 countries globally and employs around 1,000 staff. Moreover, with more than 12,500 point-of-sale outlets worldwide, the business represents more than 20 lifestyle brands, including Nike, Polo Ralph Lauren, American Eagle Outfitters, Cole Hann, Birkenstock, Patrick, Spingle etc.

The company has also expanded beyond wholesale distribution. It presently offers retail development, including the owning and operating of stores globally, as

well as the development and manufacturing of its own range of quality footwear and sports apparel. Andy has created a comfort footwear brand named Ergo-Lab and owns two patents for shoe design.

"It is important to own a brand, a patent or a certain kind of technology that is scalable to sustain profitability and competitiveness," says Andy. "Selling shoes is an exciting business, which has allowed me to travel around the world, see

on a digital journey to be an online player, and grow the channel's contribution to the company's bottom line.

"The Group is currently shifting its focus into omnichannel retail development in most countries. And we are gearing up to launch regional e-commerce sites for our footwear business," Andy says.

On his ambition for the business, Andy says: "I hope for Star 360 to be the shining star of

entrepreneurship for Singapore – my vision is for the company to be a global company with best business practices from the East and West."

To help take his business further, Andy's expectation of a strong banking partner is one with branches all over the world that can cope with Star 360's expansion. Yau Mei Yoke, Head of Mid-Market Enterprise, HSBC Singapore, comments, "With Star 360's extensive distribution footprints, coupled

with Andy's growing ambitions to tap on new opportunities and new markets, HSBC has been partnering the company over the last nine years to provide the global trade network and cash management expertise necessary to assist Andy with his business expansion. In particular, the scalability of our global online cash management platform has provided much convenience to Star 360 and continues to ensure the company stays in control of their finances wherever their business takes them."

When asked for a single piece of advice for aspiring entrepreneurs, Andy concludes: "Never give up and enjoy the challenges that arise during your journey. Know your strengths and your limits, and work hard towards your goals."

To learn more about Star 360's story, visit [www.hsbc.com.sg/itsneverjustbusiness](http://www.hsbc.com.sg/itsneverjustbusiness)



Since an early age, Andy Chaw has been drawn to high-quality shoes and sportswear, a passion that fuelled the growth of his sporting empire.

various places and deal with many different people," he adds.

## Thinking ahead, going beyond

The key to the success of Star 360 has been the company's achievements overseas. While Andy is a proud Singaporean, he nonetheless believes that in order for local businesses to reach their full potential, they must look for opportunities, both regionally and internationally. "Think global – that is how we have slowly expanded into new territories and launched new business lines. Star 360 is about thinking ahead and going beyond," he explains.

According to Andy, while international expansion across new countries can be immensely rewarding, it nonetheless comes with many challenges – the most significant of which include the ability to adapt to meet local business needs; understanding local demographics, culture and buying habits; and implementing new plans and execution strategies. For instance, Andy makes reference to the size ratio for footwear in each country. It is something so basic but yet so different for each country. He also cites how management teams from various parts of the world use varying operational methods to achieve the same outcome.

"We may not be the world's largest company, but we are still a global player," Andy says. "Currently we are recruiting talents globally to build the business. For example, our brands, our marketing agency and designers are based in the US; distribution is managed out of Europe; production is carried out of China; and finance is managed in Singapore."

## Future growth

Despite the company's achievements to date, Andy is eager to expand further. Not only is he looking to grow revenue streams in areas where Star 360 has found many past successes, he is also looking to new channels to complement sales in these markets. According to him, Star 360's management is currently re-evaluating the firm's key business pillars, its focus in each country, and subsequently the execution plans that will be needed to move the business to the next level. Having already established a global footprint, the company is also embarking

This is the third of a four-part series on the ambitions behind today's enterprising leaders.

This National Day, HSBC proudly celebrates the accomplishments of Singapore's homegrown enterprises.

**SOME WAKE TO AN ALARM. OTHERS TO A CALLING.**

For them, a new day means a new beginning. It's another opportunity to follow their passion. To build a business they believe in. Sometimes exhilarating, often frustrating – but always worth it.

At HSBC, we understand the passion and commitment that goes into a growing business. That's why we're here to offer the long-term support and expertise they deserve.

To find out how we can help your business, visit [www.hsbc.com.sg/itsneverjustbusiness](http://www.hsbc.com.sg/itsneverjustbusiness)

**IT'S NEVER JUST BUSINESS**

Issued by The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited, which is incorporated in the Hong Kong SAR with limited liability.

**HSBC**   
Commercial Banking