

Your Springboard to Greater China and the US



Springboard-Harper Investment Pte Ltd is a JV management company, formed by equity partners Singapore-based Springboard Worldwide Pte Ltd and San Francisco-based WI Harper Group. With S\$120m of funds, it invests in the ICT, semiconductor and biotech sectors. Leveraging on a network across Beijing, Taipei, San Francisco and Singapore, its vision is to bridge high growth businesses worldwide, especially between the US and Asia.

Springboard Worldwide Pte Ltd was co-founded in 1999 by Mr Ng Song How and a group of shareholders, including Messrs Koh Boon Hwee, Murthy Nuni, Tan Chow Boon, Seow Kiat Wang and Ng Cher Yew. Song How, an ex-Colombo Plan scholar, started off with GIC Special Investments (investing in traditional industries and fund-of-funds in India and S. E. Asia), followed by a stint with NIF Management Pte Ltd (Daiwa Securities Group's VC arm)

Earlier, Song How had served his scholarship bond in the Singapore Navy as Head of Electronic Systems Branch. It was a very sharp transition from the 'black and white' world of deep engineering to the diverse world of finance with its 'shades of grey'. In NIF, he had seen how Taiwanese and Israeli investee companies, mostly SMEs, grew into world leaders. He believes that Springboard can help create similar world-class SMEs locally.

Singapore as a springboard

WI Harper is one of the first US-based high-tech VC firms focused, exclusively, on creating a bridge between Silicon Valley and China. Founded in 1996 by Mr Peter Liu (ex-managing partner of Walden International Group), WI Harper has since raised five venture funds, managing some US\$220m and invested in over 100 companies. Their signature

deals include Commerce One (60X returns), Intraware and ICSI.

Springboard-Harper Investment manages two funds: the US\$20m Springboard Harper Technology Fund Pte Ltd and US\$50m Springboard-Harper Technology Fund (Cayman) Ltd. These parallel funds co-invest, in the same ratio, in all deals. Despite the technology and economic downturn in 2000 & 2001, the fund raising was successfully closed in August 2002. Among the investors were IBM, Silicon Valley Bank, Lite-On Group, Taiwan's South-East Soda, DBS Bank and NTUC Group. TIF Ventures (ex-

the DVD manufacturers market in N.E. Asia. They produce a compression-decompression (CODEC) technology that shrinks a content-rich file to a minute percentage of the original size."

"We see ourselves as good partners in our deals, vis in helping investee companies to raise money and look for market opportunities. An e.g. is NESS Display Co., in which we were instrumental in securing a first commitment of US\$12m for a huge US\$50m series C fund raising exercise (which is expected to close soon).



Co-founder Ng Song How and his investment team
(from left: Carrie Chew, Yee Chi Yan, Ng Song How, Phillip Yeo & Foong Chong)

NSTB), its first investor, matched the amount raised with US\$20m from the Singapore government's Technopreneur Investment Fund (TIF).

The Springboard-Harper team of eight in Singapore is linked to WI Harper's network. It is this dynamic global network of investment professionals, investors, business partners and connections which enables the team to do diverse deals. So far the funds are invested in Singapore, China, Korea, Taiwan, US, Malaysia and India.

Investment philosophy

Song How says, "We invest in companies with technology that can be applied globally. At least it should have a regional market. The management team must be excellent. Preferably, if we could add value to it, as this gives us a sense of ownership and makes our job more interesting.

"An e.g. is DivX Networks Inc., of San Diego in which we helped them enter

"NESS Display, an Organic LED display maker, is setting up a mass production plant with up to 300 high grade engineers. We have been funding it in the three rounds since start-up. I still remember how we had braved the heaviest Korean snow-fall in 30 years to meet a group of top tier researchers under Dr Kim Sun Wook, in their laboratory in the snow-covered foothills of Yongin,"

he recalled.

Global linkage

Besides their JV with WI Harper, Springboard-Harper has also co-operated with Giza Venture Capital, Israel's leading VC fund. The latter has opened its first Asian office here. The objective is to share co-investment opportunities and utilise each fund's network.

On the local VC industry, he believes there is room to develop more local VCs, hopefully for a few to be among the elite, top tier VC fund managers. "Like the Olympics, it takes years of hard work, skills training, self-discipline and - yes!, even failures arising from competition - to develop world champions. VC teams like ours, that are strung up across regions, need to learn 'to pass ball' before we can compete as a team. All of these takes time. It also helps when we have a seasoned partner like WI Harper's Peter Liu," he said. Website: www.sbharper.com