

UOB-SMU Entrepreneurship Alliance Centre

CommGate (S) Pte Ltd: Providing More with Less



The office computer system is down, and your external IT vendor is not picking up the phone. When you finally do get through to them, they tell you the earliest an IT specialist can be dispatched to your office is tomorrow afternoon! In the meantime, no work gets done. Because IT is so entrenched in today's modern office that without it, all work processes are disrupted.

What you crave is a good IT service provider akin to a magician – one who can appear on command, and magically make the problems disappear by casting a “spell”, that is, solutions that work. Not surprisingly, given the fast pace of life in corporate Singapore, most CIOs also want the same attributes in their IT vendors, except such vendors have proven to be a rare species. This is where CommGate (S) Pte Ltd comes in, to fill the much-needed role.

Established in 2005, CommGate is a local SME which specialises in IT systems integration and managed IT services. It is a one-stop IT vendor that provides complete IT infrastructure, security, management and business and productivity systems and applications with comprehensive IT support services based on a monthly pricing model.

In keeping with the latest in industry changes and innovations, CommGate is also a hybrid cloud computer service provider, offering a secure and integrated IT platform with cloud-based business applications and systems, and IT technical support. The comprehensive range of services frees its SME clients – the bulk of its clientele – from licensing, scalability and maintenance hassles, thus allowing them to focus on their core business operations.

Sorry, no technician available

More than any other industry, the IT industry is extremely dynamic and characterised by rapid technological innovations and advancements. Though the fast pace spells exciting opportunities for growth, it can be a source of frustration for companies that do not have the in-house resources or reliable external vendors to sustain its current systems at optimum performance, let alone keep up with the innovations.

Anecdotal exchanges and conjecture aside, a survey by SMU students provided empirical evidence of what companies want to have in an IT vendor – from the type of IT solutions to levels of service, cost thresholds, contract types and preferred bundled packages. The survey logged their most common headaches and compiled their wish-list. Such on-the-ground market knowledge, complemented by the fact that CIOs are spending more money on technology each year, corroborated CommGate's own perceptions of the IT business landscape.

The survey report also reveals the emerging business and marketing trends among SMEs, such as engagements in social media management, mobile commerce and business intelligence and analytics. Significantly, the findings show that CommGate has been spot-on in fulfilling the expectations of its core SME clientele; the data also pave the way for the company to execute its marketing strategies to bolster its next stage of growth.

Abacadabra, it works!

Through the SME Consulting Programme managed by the UOB-SMU Entrepreneurship Alliance, CommGate had expected only market insights on its hybrid cloud computing services. “We wanted to explore which is the best and most cost-efficient marketing platform to adopt,” explains company owner

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Mr Moonshi Mohsenruddin. But the three student-consultants went beyond expectation to provide a comprehensive review and competitive analysis, together with sound recommendations for an affordable marketing strategy.

CommGate was pleased with the results. Within a month of the project completion, it was executing the recommendations made by the consultants, and achieving sterling results. The company enhanced its presence in the cyberspace, and the hits on its website jumped three-fold. "I got a lot of value from this engagement," reveals Mr Mohsenruddin. "The SMU students understood the latest technologies such as marketing via SEO, social media, writing and publishing articles and whitepapers, and engaging the prospects using online blogs and forums." Expressing his satisfaction with the collaboration, he declared himself "a believer" that "such techniques will bring results as I continue to build trust with my prospects".

For the consultants, the project was not without its challenges. At the midpoint of their 12-week engagement, they had exhausted their four-week "buffer" time due to a temporary breakdown in communication with the client, who was handling other pressing matters. "We resolved it by reworking our entire schedule, and also scheduled some tasks concurrently." They also felt a "higher level of pressure as the risks were significantly higher than in our academic projects, where we used hypothetical situations and data". But all three students said they valued the "exposure, experience and confidence in working on a real-world project"; in particular, the opportunity to interact with the client, and managing a project with pre-set parameters were "huge learning points".

Move fast, but note the details

Project Adviser Mr Steven Chan found the three students "very knowledgeable and capable". After having determined the deliverables for the project, he encouraged them to actively communicate with the client to clarify uncertainties, especially in the initial stages. "I also insisted that the team maintain a proper Gantt Chart (a bar chart that illustrates a project schedule) to manage the progress of the project so that they can deliver on schedule," he says. This advice proved prophetic as the team did have to adjust their schedule after six weeks. But as delays are very much a part of real life, the team viewed it as another opportunity for a taste of a world outside the confines of school.

The client commended the consultants on their "high level of independence in approach and execution" as they required "very little engagement from CommGate," says Mr Mohsenruddin. The Project Adviser may have something to do with this. When the client did a "disappearing act" but the project had to push on, he had stepped in to show the way.

Underlying the confidence he has in the team – he called them "the best team that I have had the privilege to work with so far" – Mr Chan did not verify their research findings before the report was shown to the client. So although the consultants would have liked his input, it forced them to self-evaluate and take ownership of their work as well as the attendant risks... just as they would be expected to do when they join the workforce.

Project Advisor: Mr Steven Chan

Student Consultants: Aneesha Madhur Daswani
Bachelor of Science (Information Systems)
Ishan Chatterjee
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