



Made-in-Singapore brackets to embrace world market

It all began with a S\$40,000 grant given by the former National Science and Technology Board (NSTB) of Singapore. As part of the national funding plan called Innovator Assistance Scheme (IAS), this modest state-sponsored incentive could prove to be "seed money" that helped to grow Singapore's largest dental company yet.

By Danny Chan

The IAS beneficiaries were Dr Lim Hong Meng and Dr Tan Kok Liang, also the collective brainchild behind Singapore-based Innobraces Orthodontics Pte Ltd – possibly the first full-service orthodontic manufacturing company in Asia, outside Japan.

Former dental faculty mates and now business partners, Lim and Tan made the successful NSTB pitch, based on an idea to manufacture orthodontic brackets using a then relatively unknown production technique called "Metal Injection Moulding" or MIM.

That was about five years ago, before this revolutionary technique caught on and slowly gained wider acceptance for its orthodontic applications. Today, the enthusiastic pair is brimful with expectations to market their locally-produced wares in the global dental arena. Meanwhile, they have also roped in two other varsity pals – and orthodontic practitioners themselves – as investors.

Dr Hong Yong Hui and Dr Alfred Cheng were former course mates at the National University of Singapore. "We were the pioneer batch to graduate from

team-mates, all beaming with alumnus pride.

With the exception of Hong – a Malaysian dentist who runs two clinics, one on each side of the causeway – the rest of them are Singaporeans. It is thus fitting that these pioneer graduates are also the ones to spearhead the Republic's foray into orthodontic manufacturing.

In the driver's seat

Interestingly, they are all in their 30s, and who belong to that age group their government leaders are referring to as "3G" or third generation Singaporeans.

In his recent National Day rally speech, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said that because the country was going through a 'generational change', it was time for the younger generation of Singaporeans to take over the 'driver's seat' to steer the Republic to greater heights of economic success. Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew calls them "the result of a new generation educated after Independence", and wondered about their chances of surviving the dy-

advise on the need to keep pace with the exploding Internet world: "If we do not change fast enough, we're going to miss so many chances, we'll kick ourselves for it."

Despite the uncertainties awaiting Singapore and Singaporeans, SM Lee can take heart in the educational and social framework he himself had painstakingly laid the foundation for, that has not only yielded an Internet-savvy bunch but also a sizeable crop of IT-realistic, global-minded individuals who are capable of giving the world's top technopreneurs a run for their money. Examples like Sim Wong Hoo of Creative Technology and Ong Peng Tsui of Interwoven may be few and far between, but the trend is definitely not bucking yet.

Whether Singapore's health sector –

