



10 startups in Hong Kong to watch in 2012

What are the hot companies to keep an eye in the Year of the Dragon? Find out as krisana Gallezo reports

It could be a rough economy this 2012 as most economists would say but the market has plenty of interesting newcomers and probably new leaders. Some had been there for a year or two raising more funds and building a niche that it was only in the latter parts of 2011 that they slowly gained momentum. Some of them are even increasingly becoming popular abroad. *Hong Kong Business* worked with Hong Kong Investment Network, the largest angel investment community in the world to bring you some interesting startups across industries. They are arranged in no particular order.

► 1. REALGOLDX

FOUNDER: J. Bradley Hall
FUNDING: The founder, management and certain seed investors have invested USD 2 million. Initial fund-

“De Dominicis represents established artists and promotes emerging talents from Italy and other parts of Europe”

ing completed in December 2011. The Company intends to raise up to USD 60m in equity and issue USD 500m in gold backed bonds in Q2 2012.

REALGOLDX is a Hong Kong-based operator focusing on ultra high net worth investors and family offices who desire to enhance and preserve inter-generational wealth utilizing physical gold bullion. According to founder J. Bradley Hall, the company generates a market arbitrage and fee-based income stream that ensures pricing efficiency, peerless execution and world-class security. Members are offered insured vaulting in secure non-bank, free-port facilities in Singapore and Switzerland. The company will start its operation on the first quarter of 2012. Website: www.realgoldx.com

► 2. Kidztown

FOUNDER: Alex R. Key
FUNDING: HKD 8 million which was completed in December 2011 through investment from local and overseas.

Kidztown bills itself as the first Japanese style indoor role play centre in Hong Kong, providing exciting school trips and days out for kids aged 2-14. According to founder Alex R. Key, at Kidztown, kids get a chance to dress and take on the role of different jobs from doctors to football stars. It promises to deliver an educational yet entertaining experience for both children and parents alike. “A 25,000 sq ft built area will provide a huge indoor forum for kids to let their imagination run away with them,” said Mr Key. Mr Key said that Kidztown is opening summer this year with unconfirmed sponsors like a premiership football team. Website: under construction but will be www.kidztown.hk

► 3. De Dominicis

FOUNDERS: Andrea De Dominicis, Isabella Mazzanti, Anne Kristin Knabe, Ottavio Lugin

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FUNDING: 50,000 EUR completed in May 2011, with major investor Andrea De Dominicis.

According to co-founder Andrea De Dominicis, De Dominicis is a response to the huge request of high-quality arts. "It is a new and high-profile arts agency in Hong Kong showcasing a selection of the best of European talent in visual arts. With a strong focus on fine arts and illustration, it represents established artists and promotes emerging talents from Italy and other parts of Europe," she said. The agency started operation in November 15, 2011. Its mission is to provide an interdisciplinary platform for outstanding European artists and foster cultural exchange between Asia and Europe by organizing exhibitions, workshops, seminars and cultural exchange programs by working closely with galleries, curators, art critics and arts organizations in Hong Kong, Asia and Europe. Website: www.dedominicisagency.com

➤ 4. Ecopoint Asia

FOUNDERS: Jeff Smith and Jochen Kleef

FUNDING: HKD 250,000 which was self-funded by co-founders.

Ecopoint bills itself as Asia's first web-based collaboration platform and resource hub exclusively for professionals working in the fields of climate change, environment, clean technology and sustainable business. "Whether it is an entrepreneur breaking new ground, an employee trying to change big business from the inside, an individual mobilizing a community through volunteer work or a policy maker in government – Ecopoint enables us all to pull together and change our world for the better," said co-founder Jeff Smith. It held its soft launch on February 26, 2011 but fully operated only in January 2012. According to Mr. Smith, it is now focusing on building business directory and jobs board. It is also launching this year EcoDeal, a platform to provide a network and visibility to match both Investment companies and Entrepreneurs/Startups within the Environmental space in Asia. Website: www.ecopoint.asia

➤ 5. Vibrant Communications

FOUNDER: Dave Arnold



FUNDING: HKD 1.6 million from accredited investors from 11 countries.

Vibrant is a Hong Kong-registered company publishing multiplayer online games in South Asia, South America, and the Middle East. Its game content includes massively multiplayer online games, social games, and mobile multiplayer games. According to founder Dave Arnold, Vibrant licenses AAA titles from top tier game developers in China, Korea, and Japan and localizes and markets them in the fastest growing social media markets in the world. "There are 20 companies in China, Korea, and Japan that are publicly traded using the same 'free to play' games making excellent profits selling virtual items in microtransactions. Vibrant expects big success in 2012 with proven titles targeting over 200 million people in its fast growing underserved markets where it can give its development partners additional market reach," said Mr Arnold. The founder noted that the company just completed a financing round that will provide marketing



"The Chinese Timekeeper is the first exclusive Chinese watch brand"

muscle to back its best products and low cost global operations in Beijing, Bangalore, Lima, and Alexandria. Website: <http://vibrant3g.com>

➤ 6. The Chinese TimeKeeper

FOUNDER: Adrien Choux

FUNDING: the brand was launched with just HKD 500,000 but the founder was able to raise funds and now has 5 independent business angels who have invested HKD 1.2 million in exchange of 18% of the company. Funds were completed in November 2011.

The Chinese Timekeeper is a trademark already protected in HK and France and under final approval in China, EU, US and other major countries. It claims to be the first exclusive Chinese watch brand. According to founder Adrien Choux, all its time pieces are 'crafted in China' where designs embrace the unique and rich Chinese history and culture to offer watch amateurs around the world a new take in a Swiss dominated market.

CTK was officially launched in HK in December 2010 with a distribution network comprised of 4 points

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of sales in 3 countries: HK, China and Holland. Mr. Choux boasts that the most striking achievement the company has so far is that the brand was successfully launched with only HKD 500,000 when any other new Swiss watch brand would have at least spent 10 to 20 times this amount to end up having a lesser attractive product and brand altogether. According to him, 2012 will be a 'fascinating' year for CTK as it will unveil during Baselworld, the world's biggest luxury watch fair on March 2012, its second collection. Also, Mr. Choux shared that CTK will open its very first boutique in Hong Kong at the end of February. The website is www.thechinesetimekeeper.com and will have its Mandarin & French version added within one month.

➤ 7. Alternative Turbine Technologies Limited

FOUNDERS: Louis Lam, Ronald Lam
FUNDING: Self-funded. The company is raising USD 3 million of capital.

Alternative Turbine Technologies or Alturtech was established in 2009 but marketing operation for selling of products will only start in the second quarter of 2012. The company specializes in novel turbine technology to harness fluid flow energy. According to co-founder Louis Lam, the company is currently developing Alturtech Transverse Axis Turbine (ATAT) which is a revolutionary turbine design to overcome limitations and issues of existing turbines. "A-TAT is ideally suited for urban environments and can harness energy in turbulent wind and flowing water," he said noting that the project has the full support of the Mechanical Department of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)," Mr Lam said. Alturtech is assisting HKUST to build a full scale prototype which will be erected in their Ecology Park in Hong Kong. The Company will also collaborate with the Technical University of Munich this year. According to Mr Lam, the Chair of non-destructing testing laboratory of the TUM has shown great interest in the development and utilization of Alturtech's turbine in the German market. The company, he said, has now completed the wind tunnel tests on the half-scale model of the prototype. "Alturtech is



" We give you the freedom to build your business while we take care of the tedious, administrative tasks - Startupr Hong Kong"

ready and poised for production and delivery of the revolutionary turbine in 2012," said Mr Lam. Website: www.alturtech.com

➤ 8. Golden Fern Holdings (HK) Ltd

FOUNDERS: Chris Berryman and Yanyan Zhang
TOTAL FUNDS: Approximately HKD 20 million as of March 2011. The main investors are BVI companies which are held by local Hong Kong and Macau investors.

GFH through its wholly owned subsidiary in New Zealand, Golden Fern Group, is an exporter and brand management company for NZ- made dairy and health products. The focus is on value added products that are packed for retail. Business commenced in August 2010 but co-founder Chris Berryman boasts that its dairy formulas, especially infant formulas, are experiencing unprecedented demand in China. Mr Berryman expects its growth revenues to exceed 300% in 2012. "Golden Fern brand of formulas is fast gaining recognition in China through TV advertising and retail presence. The Company will also enter new markets in 2012 including Vietnam and Japan. Growth in 2012," he said. Website: www.goldenfern.co.nz

➤ 9. Track the Buzz

FOUNDERS: Gideon Vos, Bruce Altmann and Joyce Paulo
FUNDING: Self-funded. USD5,000

Track the Buzz is a social media monitoring and analytics tool which tracks social networking conversations as they move around the globe, allowing companies to determine customer satisfaction and sentiment, plus the latest trends. It supports 34 languages and offers online transla-



tion of social conversations - Twitter, Facebook, Sina Weibo, LinkedIn, and more - as they happen. According to co-founder Gideon Vos, the company is in BETA mode for the last seven months and is looking to start proper operations in the second quarter of 2012. Mr Vos said that with very little cash, the company managed to build a highly competitive online platform from scratch to 280 subscribers in 7 months. Its operational costs per month are less than USD 300, yet it nearly doubled its subscriber base every month. The company, which has global operations intends to focus on Asia and the social networks available in the region. Website: www.trackthebuzz.com

➤ 10. Startupr Hong Kong

FOUNDERS: Tomas Milar, John Vanhara
FUNDING: Self-funded. USD50,000.

Startupr is a Hong Kong-based company with global operations since July 2011. According to founder Tomas Milar, the firm's main focus are startups with global ambitions. "We give you the freedom to build your business while we take care of the tedious, administrative tasks, leaving you to concentrate on your dream for your company. As part of our brilliant service, our back end software will automatically send you reminders of important annual filings, and upload your important document to your online account," he said. For 2012, Mr Milar said that Startupr will implement the company auction platform - ready made companies for over 20 jurisdictions plus whole of USA. "The auction system will provide the list of ready made companies for particular jurisdiction. The auction should support the fast match between vendors and customers," he told *Hong Kong Business*. Website: startupr.com