Entrepreneur Realizes Kids' Dream

[PC Market - Hong Kong, 14 May 2013] 2010 was an important year for Eric. He had previously predicted that e-learning would be happening in 2010 when he was in secondary school. From this idea, he won a computer competition. In 2010, he founded the company, Playnote, which focuses on music education software. He received many good reviews when the product was launched. He has also won two important awards in the Asia Pacific ICT Award (APICTA).

Eric likes computers and music. He combined his two passions to create the idea of teaching through technology. "In 1993, when I was a secondary school student, I participated in a joint school competition to think about the future e-learning in 2010. I built a question database with a computer, based on this idea. It helped teachers and students interact. Of course, it was just a model of e-learning." No one expected that this product in the student stage would plant the seeds to start the company.

In 2010, the launched of the iPad gave this chance to Eric. With a mobile device, his student project could become a reality. So, Eric founded the company, Playnote. The product focuses on music education. The flagship product is AURALBOOK, which helps students prepare for the Aural Test in professional music examinations.

iPad breaks the barrier of technology

Eric is a businessman. The product is an examination practice training aid. It is compatible with the syllabuses of Associated Board of Royal Music Schools (ABRSM) of UK, Australia Music Examination Board (AMEB), Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) of Canada, etc. All of these tests are major examinations in the world and the product fits the market's need. "In Hong Kong, everyone learns music. No matter whether they are forced to learn or like learning, a market is created there. Many people take the examination and the demand is very stable. I use AURALBOOK as a market entry point. When more people know about Playnote, we can promote more music education related Apps."

The objective is at a much higher level than the marketing strategy. "Our objective is to help more people learn music. In the past, people have had to hire a music teacher to learn a musical instrument or to learn to sing. The fee, including the examination fee, is very high. Mobile devices like the iPad break the barrier of technology. Teachers can concentrate on skill training during the lesson."

Eric emphasizes that he is not a businessman or an IT professional. He is a musician. Eric is a piano teacher, opera tenor and has been an orchestra conductor. He understands that music includes feeling that cannot be quantified. "Using singing as an example, other than the singing skill, the performer needs to include feelings in order to motivate the audience. Teaching expression through technology is difficult to realize in a short time. However, the Aural test provides an objective guideline in pitches and rhythms. As a result, we can use technology to analyze it."

Giving up a senior management post to become an entrepreneur

The road to success is not always smooth. Eric graduated from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) with a master's degree in electronic

engineering. He has had a lot of time to complete research for the core technology of AURALBOOK, which allowed the system to understand how to analyze pitches and beats. Before founding Playnote, he founded another company, Perception Digital, and had been part of the senior management of some enterprises.

When asked why he gave up his senior management position to start a new company, he said, "I like to break the rules. Working with a giant entrerprise does not fit with my character." Eric walked the road step by step. When he didn't know how to manage, he studied for his MBA. Research often relates to patents and involves a lot of legal knowledge. A lawyer does not know much about IT. He also did not want to be paid a high salary to recruit people to understand. As a result, he studied for his law degree. By this time, Eric received a number of patents.

In the beginning stages of Playnote, Eric faced a lot of problems. First, Eric needed others to believe in his dream. Then, there was a technical problem as it is difficult to define the standard in pitches and beats. For example, is there any difference in judging the accuracy for the voice from a man and woman? Lastly, when the app was done, it was difficult to enter into the market. "It is very difficult in the first step for people to accept a new thing."

<u>Surprised to get an award</u>

Eric believes there is market potential and that there was no similar product in the market. Playnote received the Best Startup Grand Award and e-Learning Merit Award in the Asia Pacific ICT Awards (APICTA) 2012. Eric said, "We are lucky and surprised. I believe that the reason we won is because our product is very unique. Music is a universal language and there is no boundary. Judges can easily understand the target behind our product. Of course, the presentation skill is also important. I believe I acquired that skill from my MBA and I applied it here."

2010年是容志偉的重要一年。他在中學時參加比賽，構想2010年的電子教學模式，結果贏得獎項。至2010年，他創立Playnote公司，埋首研發音樂教育程式，其後推出產品獲得一致好評，並為他贏取亞太資訊及通訊科技獎（APICTA）兩個重要獎項。

**追求突破
推動創新。**

創業實踐兒時夢想

容志偉：由大眾市場入手

對電腦深感興趣，又醉心音樂的容志偉，將兩者結合，實現以科技教學的目標。「1993年，還在求學的我參加聯校比賽，構思未來2010年的電子教學情況。我當時的概念是利用電腦作智能題目庫，方便老師和學生進行互動練習。當然，那只是電子教學的雛型。」誰也未曾料到，學生時候的比賽項目，播下日後創業的種子。

2010年可謂容志偉事業上重要的里程碑。iPad的出現，成為他的創業契機。有了流動裝置，當年的電子教學概念便透過流動應用去實現，於是成立Playnote公司。產品以音樂教學為主，其中主打產品AURALBOOK為針對音樂聆聽考試部分而設的練習應用。

iPad突破技術局限

容志偉可稱得上是個生意人，產品以應付考試為主，適用於英國皇家音樂學院、澳洲音樂考試委員會及加拿大音樂學院等考試，都是考生人數較多，正正是市場需要的應用。「香港新一代人人都學習音樂，暫且不論被迫或發自興趣，這自然地產生一個市場。參加音樂考試的大有人在，因此市場需求可謂相當穩定。我的產品以此切入市場，多人認識Playnote後，將可開拓更多學習音樂相關的流動程式。」

市場策略背後有更崇高的理念。「目標當然是希望可以世界普及，讓更多人可以學習音樂。以往要學習樂器或聲樂，便要聘請老師授課，加上考試費用，所費不菲。iPad等智能設備的出現突破技術局限，學生可以透過科技自行鍛煉基本功，上課時老師便可以集中指導技巧。」

不過他強調自己並非生意人，也非IT人，而是百分之百的音樂人。容志偉既是鋼琴老師，也是男高音，亦有擔當管弦樂團指揮，因此相當明白，音樂包含情感，難以客觀量化。「以聲樂為例，演繹歌曲時除了技巧，往往需要加入情感，打動觀眾，要完全以科技代替真人，去教授如何演繹音

樂中的情感，恐怕不是短時間內可以實現的事。然而音樂聆聽試相對較客觀，節拍、音準皆有客觀標準，可以利用科技去分析。」

不做上市高管去創業

邁向目標的路從來不是康莊大道。容志偉畢業於香港科技大學電子工程學碩士，埋頭鑽研多時，才成功研發AURALBOOK的核心技術，讓系統懂得分析音準和節拍。創立Playnote前，他也曾創辦另一間公司，上市公司幻音數碼的前身，也曾擔任過企業管理層。

問他何以毅然放棄高薪厚職去創業？他淡然回答：「我的性格喜歡打破規矩，突破框框。而且大企業的作風不合我追求突破的性格。」一步步，容志偉朝目標前進。不懂得管理，便修讀工商管理碩士；研發新智能牽涉專利，當中有大量法律知識，律師不懂IT，也不甘花錢聘人解讀，便自己修讀法律學士學位。因此，容志偉手持多個專利。

創立Playnote初期，遇到的挑戰也不少。容志偉稱首先要説服別人概念可行；然後又遇到技術瓶頸，難以訂立衡量的標準，例如男女聲的音準應如何分別衡量；最後，應用程式已開發了，要打入市場就更是困難。「要大眾接受新的事物實在艱難，第一步往往事倍功半。」

獲獎感意外

但容志偉相信，目前市場上並無同類型產品，市場潛力龐大。Playnote於2012年亞太資訊及通訊科技獎中，獲頒最佳創新公司大獎及電子學習優異獎。容志偉坦言：「真的很幸運、很意外。致勝的關鍵是產品獨特，畢竟音樂乃世界語言，沒有地域界限，評判容易理解背後的概念。當然，表達的技巧也相當重要，相信工商管理的經驗在此大派用場。」説畢哈哈大笑。▣
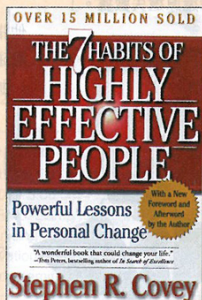

● iPad的出現，成為容志偉的創業機會，在平板電腦上分析音準和節拍，讓學生練習考試。

資源分享

七個習慣

容志偉推薦1989年出版的經典管理書籍《The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People》。作者Stephen Covey在書中講述七個改變生活的習慣，包括主動積極、以終為始等，建立一套有效達到目標的方法。

容志偉稱，書中所提出的理論其實非常簡單，要落實不難，但經常為人所忽略。「例如以終為始，提醒我們做事要記得目標，不要偏離軌道。每當開始一個項目，起初總會面向目標進發，但往往中途出現岔子，離開原本的目標愈走愈遠。因此我經常提醒自己做每一決定要以終為始。」他認為書中的理論實用性高，不受地域或時代所限，即使多年前讀過，至今仍然牢牢記得，令人終生受用。

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