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Youngpost

One entrepreneur started a business with two others, developing a special camera system to monitor wildfires, writes **Mabel Sieh**

In the line of fire

Kevin Chan Kar-ho did not know much about business when he set out on that path at 18. He was in his first year at college in San Jose, California, when he had to return to Hong Kong due to a family financial problem. But instead of feeling sorry for himself, he made the most of the opportunity.

"It was 2003, the year of Sars. Lots of restaurants were doing very badly," says the 27-year-old. "So I thought up a plan to bring in customers by developing discount memberships for restaurants."

A decade later, Chan's early entrepreneurial spirit has paid off.

In January, he was named one of the three Make A Difference (MaD) Venture Stars, representing a new generation of "doing good and doing well" entrepreneurs who seek to change the world for the better.

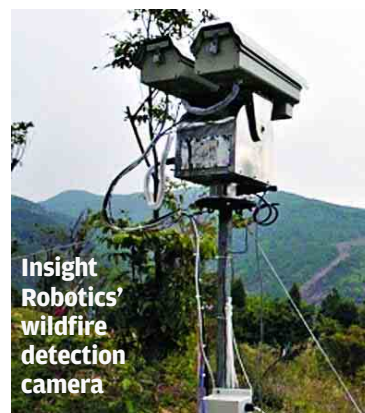
MaD is a Hong-Kong-based initiative for young people aged 16 to 35. Organised by the Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture and co-created by Innofoco, it aims to inspire a new generation of leaders.

Chan's team's winning innovation was a wireless sensor network system that can detect the early stages of a wildfire. It was developed by Insight Robotics, co-founded by Chan and two engineers, Albert Ko Wing-kin and Rex Sham Pui-sum. While Chan provides the business savvy for the company, Ko

and Sham are the brains behind the technology.

"Just like CCTV keeping an eye on a building, the Wildfire Detection System keeps an eye on a forest," says Chan. "Each camera can detect fire in an area covering a 5-kilometre radius. Every five minutes the system automatically scans a specific area. When there is any

A good business is one in which people are happy when you are doing well



Insight Robotics' wildfire detection camera

change in humidity, temperature, gas concentration or infrared level, the system sends out a signal to the fire control centre and the fire is located."

Chan says the system is important to many countries, including the mainland, where 2 per cent of forest area is damaged by wildfires every year, according to the State Forestry Administration.

Chan met Ko by chance at a social event in Beijing.

"We were the only two Cantonese speakers, so we talked for hours," Chan says. "I learned about his humanitarian work in disaster areas, including the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and the 2008 Sichuan (四川) earthquake. I was touched. It's rare to meet people who do that kind of work. I thought perhaps we could do something good together using our expertise."

In 2009, Insight Robotics was set up. It was not an easy journey, but Chan is happy with the progress. Most importantly, he finds satisfaction in his work.

"A good business is one in which people are happy when you are doing well," he says. "Maybe your competitors won't be happy; but the public will be when they see you are contributing to the community and making a difference to society."

Looking back on his entrepreneurial experience, Chan is grateful for what he has gained.

"I started my own business in special circumstances," he says. "It was hard, but it was a good learning experience. Sometimes, when we face too many options, we tend to choose the easy way out. But I've learned that, if I put my mind to it, I can earn a living in whatever I do.

"Nowadays I see young people choose jobs they aren't interested in because they think it's easier than living their dream. But you should at least try before you give up. You will never know if something works if you don't try it."

Kevin Chan (left) and Rex Sham, co-founders of Insight Robotics.

Photo: Thomas Yau and Insight Robotics