

Thanh Nien News | Special report | Innovation nation:  
expert sees openings for entrepreneurs

## THANHNIE NEWS

### Innovation nation: expert sees openings for entrepreneurs



**Vietnam's economic growth and developing nation status provide an ideal breeding ground for entrepreneurs though many pitfalls do exist, according to a visiting Australian expert on entrepreneurship.**

Southeast Asia's fastest-growing economy presents many opportunities for entrepreneurialism

Vietnam's rapidly expanding economy and its developing nation status provide an ideal breeding ground for entrepreneurs but many pitfalls exist for foreign and local business people alike, according to a visiting Australian expert on entrepreneurship.

Many entrepreneurs had already found success in Vietnam in the business, government and charity sectors, said Marcus Powe, the entrepreneur-in-residence at Australia's RMIT University, which has two campuses in Vietnam.

"Even in rural communities, the ability to be successful, the ability to move past subsistence to generate surpluses – that's being entrepreneurial; to me it seems a fairly natural thing," Powe told *Thanh Nien Daily* during his visit to Ho Chi Minh City last week.

Powe was in Vietnam - his second visit since taking up his unusual post at Melbourne-based RMIT – to encourage local students of the university to enter the seventh annual business plan competition.

Foreign interest in Vietnam has been growing since the country became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in January 2007.

WTO membership helped the country last year attract a record US\$20 billion in foreign direct investment and post economic growth of 8.5 percent.

"It will be interesting to see how the demands of the market will put pressure on what's required (of the Vietnamese government)," said Powe, who also runs consultancy and training company EIC Growth.

"I think as this place grows, as it is, there's wonderful opportunities for government departments to add some really positive spin into what's going on, if they choose to."

From his "limited" experience in Vietnam, Powe said he could see signs the Vietnamese government was already being entrepreneurial.

“In education, the government has already encouraged both local and foreign institutions to invest and provide services,” he said.

“It seems to be a focus to invest in education.”

Powe said small players as well as big businesses could be entrepreneurs.

“In Hanoi I met a young man who came up to me and asked if I wanted a shoeshine,” he said.

“I said no and he proceeded to offer me a range of other services.

“I would consider him an entrepreneur - quite often you find entrepreneurs have multiple offerings. He was confident, he was self-assured, and he spoke good English and was obviously targeting westerners and probably charging a premium price – as he should.”

Powe said there were plenty of traps for companies entering foreign markets.

“In Australia we’ve had many business models from Europe and America that haven’t worked because of cultural differences,” he said.

Researching the market and market demand was important for any entrepreneurial exercise, he said.

Another trap for aspiring entrepreneurs – in any culture – was relentlessness, one of the very characteristics that create an entrepreneur.

“You must allocate time to think and reflect,” Powe said.

“There are many types of energy.

To me the most important energy is creative energy and we all need time – and I know it sounds corny – to recharge the batteries.”

At an event in Ho Chi Minh City last week, Powe delivered a presentation on entrepreneurship to Western business people.

At the end of the presentation, Powe asked if those present had the “courage” to get out of the way and let their Vietnamese staff exercise their entrepreneurial talents.

“The question is: how do you encourage staff to flourish, appreciating the cultural differences, the styles and the skill levels? There are ways to do it.

There’s the traditional way, the ‘do it my way.’ That’s the best way to kill creativity and innovation.

“Instead, a manager might say ‘bring me some ideas about how we can grow the organization, tell me why it will be successful, and tell me how we can do it.’ That’s the first step

towards changing into an innovative institution.

It works for private enterprises and government as well.”

**EXAMPLES OF ENTREPRENEURIALISM**

A community from the Pacific island of Nuie, living in South Auckland in New Zealand, approached Marcus Powe for help in obtaining economic independence.

Powe tells the story of the community entrepreneurship he encountered there: "Most Polynesian communities have three leaders: traditional, government and religious.

In this place the most powerful leader was the minister.

"He said `Marcus, I'm stuck. I don't know what to do. The only thing I've got is this land around the church and it just sits there.' Then he said, `Why not turn it into incoming-producing property? Why didn't I think of this before?'  
"So he began raising lambs.

He got some members of his congregation to run it and it made a profit.

"I think he ended up with five small businesses on that land within a year, that's people off unemployment benefits and running profitable little businesses." Another example comes from a Maori community in New Zealand:

"An ex-student of mine was asked by his community to build a high school. He deliberately chose the poorest members of the community to come to his high school, so it was pretty tough.

"It's a Western curriculum but taught in the Maori language the Maori way and he's had such success in five years that the New Zealand government wants to use it as the model for indigenous education.

"Now he's building a center for innovation and entrepreneurship at the school.

I've already finished working with the staff and we've developed a curriculum and, if it goes as we hope, the Maori school and the innovation center will, hopefully, be a national and South Pacific model for growth."

*Reported by Barbara Adam*

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