

YOUR CAREER



A part-time driver drops off juice he picked up at a nearby supermarket for a CarPal customer in Singapore. Photo: Kyodo

# Smart driving force

Courier start-ups are taking off in Singapore and setting their sights on expansion, writes Siti Rahil

## GAME CHANGERS

Thousands of people in Singapore have signed up to become freelance or part-time couriers, collecting and delivering parcels for on-demand delivery companies that have sprouted up in the wealthy city-state over the past year.

The new courier companies employ high-tech platforms they have developed that can be accessed on smartphones, linking up clients' orders for delivery services with the couriers, who can accept assignments using their phones.

They have attracted a huge pool of freelance or part-time couriers, usually those who own cars, vans or motorbikes and are keen to earn some extra income as couriers while holding full-time jobs elsewhere.

Although the concept is new in Singapore and elsewhere in Asia, it has already become so popular that these companies are planning to expand their business to other cities in the region within months of launching the businesses.

The demand is fed by decades of strong economic growth in Southeast Asia which has created a faster pace of life in the region's bustling cities, made consumers more sophisticated and led to the success of e-commerce. Yet logistics services in most cities in the region can still be improved.

"If you look at Southeast Asia, there are no strong logistics networks that are equivalent to the logistics network in the US, for example, [with regard to] technology, quality of service and so on, and the logistics structure is very highly fragmented," said Noam Berda, the founder of RocketUncle.

His colleague Sumit Mathai added, "What we find [is that] Southeast Asia is behind. Even in the big cities, there is still no same day delivery service that is available."

RocketUncle, which describes itself on its website as "Singapore's guaranteed same-day delivery" service, has about 5,000 people who have recently signed up as freelance or part-time couriers.

Another on-demand delivery company, CarPal, which touts itself on its website as "your personal same-day delivery courier", has about 3,000 couriers on its books.

One of them is Tino Leong, 36, who runs a valet business at night. Leong registered to work as a part-time courier with CarPal six months ago and has since been zipping about in his Mitsubishi Colt, delivering a variety of items such as flowers, cakes and fruit juices for CarPal's clients.

One Sunday night last month, he got a beep on his mobile phone and responded to a job order to collect and deliver about half a dozen bottles of fresh fruit juices from the

This also means we can dispatch a driver [at the] very last minute, so we can have more volume."

The Dutchman, who was formerly a lawyer in Amsterdam, says he got the idea to start the company after seeing an on-demand delivery service in action in San Francisco. However, as this kind of service seemed to be already "mature" in the US, he started exploring opportunities in Asia.

"In Asia there are many countries where I believe I can apply this model, but Singapore is by far the most business-friendly country and Singaporeans are very open to try new things," he said.

Hemmes arrived in Singapore in May last year and launched CarPal soon after. Over the past year, the company has been growing by leaps and bounds - about 20 per cent a month. Now he is looking at applying the business model to other busy Asian cities like Taipei, Manila and Kuala Lumpur.

The part-time or freelance couriers - most of whom already have other jobs such as sales or insurance, real estate agents or cab drivers - tend to be aged between 30 and 60. There are also a lot of retirees. Most are local men, Hemmes said.

RocketUncle is focusing on expanding in Southeast Asia this year, in particular the Philippines.

"We will start to offer services in Metro Manila soon, and then obviously go to other cities in Southeast Asia," Berda said.

Muhammad Syahid Sariff, 23, who delivers parcels five days a week for RocketUncle with his motorbike, says he can earn up to S\$1,700 (HK\$9,800) per week.

Syahid, who has just finished his national service and has not yet found a full-time job, says the courier job with RocketUncle appeals to him at the moment as "it's very, very flexible - I can choose my own working hours. I don't have to take instruction from anyone and I can be my own boss". Kyodo

**If you're going from A to B, why not take a package along?**

MAARTEN HEMMES, CARPAL CEO

eastern part of Singapore before 9am the next day. That job took just 30 minutes and earned him S\$16 (HK\$92).

"The resource which is used for that is basically sharing. You have a lot of cars and bikes already out there, so if you're going from A to B, why not take a package along?" says Maarten Hemmes, CarPal's 29-year-old founder and CEO.

"We use people like you and me who have their own car, and take something along while they drive, so we have more resources.

## CAREER GUIDE

# No pain, no gain

If your boss asks you to take on an extra task that isn't part of your job description, you can view it in one of two ways: as an opportunity to learn a new skill and gain valuable practical experience, or with exasperation that you are now taking on extra work.

Unfortunately there are many people who take the later approach - they may not express it openly but it is evident in the way they complete tasks or their attitude at work.

Instead why not embrace the opportunity and see it as your chance to add not only extra skills but valuable experience to your CV?

Usually when people want to learn a new skill to advance their career they take a formal course. Certainly courses are important, but many additional skills can be gained on-the-job. This has the added benefit of complementing your learning with practical experience, which after all is what employers look for when they recruit - a proven performer.

So if your boss asks you to do more, it can be a great opportunity to learn a new skill and gain valuable practical experience to aid your future career growth.

But if the additional tasks you are being asked to perform are not related to your current role or future career progression, you could ask your boss for a meeting to openly and honestly discuss the expectations of your role. Make it clear during this meeting that you are



**See it as a chance to add extra skills and experience to your CV**

willing to take on extra duties relevant to your profession, but that you do not want to develop your career in the direction of the tasks being assigned to you.

You could also consider having a fallback position. If your employer keeps throwing unrelated tasks your way, is it time you looked for your next role?

**Christine Wright, Managing Director of Hays in Asia.**

## CAREER TRACKER

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**Calvin Chiu**  
Manulife Asia

Manulife has appointed Calvin Chiu as vice-president for pensions for Greater China. He is responsible for developing the company's pension market entry and expansion strategy for mainland China and Taiwan. Chiu joined Manulife in 2010 and previously worked in a bank and a consultancy firm. He holds a bachelor of mathematics degree in actuarial sciences from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada.



**Chris Wei**

Friends Provident International  
Chris Wei is the new chairman at FPI. He joined parent company Aviva in 2014 and has extensive experience in the Asian market, holding senior roles in the savings, pensions and insurance industry. Wei said, "I am excited about FPI's potential...our intention [is] to bring both businesses closer together, maximising their combined potential and accelerating our growth."



**Giovanni Di Russo**  
Harbour Grand Kowloon

The hotel in Kowloon has appointed Giovanni Di Russo as director of food and beverage. The Italian has over 30 years' experience in the industry, working in several countries including Qatar, Switzerland and Russia. General manager Yngvar Stray said, "With his international experiences and insights, we are now ready to bring our food and beverage offerings and experiences to a new height."



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## CAREER DOCTOR

# The risks of freelancing

**am considering quitting my school job and starting up a freelance teaching business. However, while I am sure I will have no problems getting work, I've heard horror stories about freelancers chasing up clients for fees. Some wait months to get paid. Is it worth jeopardising my job stability to go freelance? Is there**

**any way of getting clients to pay promptly without sounding threatening? And if they don't, what options do I have?** David138

It is a brave move going into freelancing. In more recent times, it has become quite popular and more common in certain industries, such as education, media and creative industries. Freelancing is definitely a lifestyle choice for many people and whether you choose to do a freelance role or a more stable, permanent role, you are the best person to know whether this is what you are looking for. With freelancing, it does come with the risk of uncertainty around pay, however you usually do get a higher income for the risk you take.

With regards to payment for your services, you will come across all sorts of clients. Some will be great to work with and will pay promptly, and of course, you will come across some of the more difficult clients, who will not be prompt in paying their dues. Here are a few suggestions in dealing with payments:

- make sure you have solid contracts in place between yourself and your clients, which clearly state the payment terms
- ensure each contract is signed by both parties and you have it documented
- once you have completed your services, make sure your invoices go out on time - the earlier you send out invoices, the earlier they will be processed and paid
- follow up invoices as promptly as possible - communication is key and if done correctly, you won't sound threatening.

If your client delays payment, where you have signed a legal contract, you can proceed further with lawyers or debt

**Freelancing is popular with teachers because it involves less marking and administration**



collectors to help chase them. This can be a costly activity, so whether it is worth doing or not will depend on the project. It is vital to make sure you have the

relevant legal contracts in place and continue to develop your relationships with clients and communicate effectively with them for the best results.

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**Natalie Sun, Regional Director of Page Personnel, Hong Kong.**