

**WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO START PEOPLEWAVE?**

I was a corporate high flyer, having spent over 20 years in marketing and digital transformation leadership roles at big brands. My last role was global head of digital for an international bank, working in Singapore. But it all came crashing down.

I can't forget how it happened – the previous month my boss suddenly retired, and a new department head was quickly and unexpectedly ushered in. I remember I was supposed to have my first official one-on-one meeting with her. I walked into the meeting room to see an HR (human resource) person in the room too. I was told my job was made redundant, and I was asked to leave.

It was shocking and soul destroying. But in that moment, something became very clear: Work isn't fair. HR was not transparent, and I wanted to change this – to disrupt and reinvent how HR and people management is done, making it more transparent, data-driven and fairer to both the company and employee. This was the catalyst that gave birth to Peoplewave.

Peoplewave was started in Singapore by me in January 2017, and I was later joined by Phil Aldridge as CTO and co-founder. Peoplewave is an HR tech company. It's a cloud-based software provider that is focused on performance and people analytics.

It was born out of a deep frustration. Many smart and good people have become victims of corporate restructures, biased decision-making or been unfairly treated. The sad truth is that most managers are poorly trained in people management or have simply been thrust into these roles without guidance, mentoring or adequate support.

At the same time, HR teams often don't play an active role in managing employees. The HR function has become overworked, compliance-driven and too focused on talent acquisition – not employee development and people management. Peoplewave was created to fix this.

**WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND?**

I have over 20 years' experience in digital transformation and marketing, while Phil has over 20 years' experience in technology. Both of us have been people managers in both SMEs and large enterprises over that time, so we come with real-world experience on the challenges facing managers and employees.

There are many HR tech companies that try to make processes a little better. Peoplewave is taking an "outside-in" approach, going in with a fresh pair of eyes and a simple goal: How can this be better?

This approach has been successful, leading to a radical redesign of how a structured new hire onboarding should be done (the First 100 Days tool) and reinventing the traditional annual performance review into a simple monthly data-driven feedback tool (the Performance Wave tool).

**HOW HAS YOUR ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY BEEN?**

The first four months of operation was talking to people – validating the business ideas, seeking to understand how CEOs, business owners and HR leaders view employee performance and onboarding. It was an eye-opening experience, as the overwhelming feedback is that HR needs help in these areas, and there aren't many great tools that genuinely create value.

# MANAGING PEOPLE PROBLEMS WITH TECHNOLOGY

AS TOLD TO VIVIEN SHIAO

Damien Cummings, founder and CEO of HR tech startup Peoplewave (right, with CTO Phil Aldridge), says that the company was started out of a deep frustration that good employees sometimes become victims of corporate restructures, biased decision-making or have been unfairly treated.



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After the validation phase, Peoplewave grew quickly. The company is now 17 people across Singapore, Hong Kong and the Philippines, with plans to open an Australian office in the next few months.

Personally, it's been an adjustment. Going from working in a senior job at a bank to getting my hands dirty running a new startup was a humbling experience. I am genuinely grateful to the founders in the Singapore startup scene – they all want to help.

At the beginning, I met quite a few people who were curious about what I was doing, and even more who wanted to be part of the journey. It is a shame that you lose contact with some people when you're no longer working at a big brand though it's a good exercise to find out who your friends really are.

It can be tough running a startup but working with amazing people, the feeling of building something yourself from scratch, and having a clear purpose is really motivating.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF PEOPLEWAVE'S BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENTS?

Peoplewave has had impressive growth – going from one to 17 employees in its first year. Opening the tech lab in Davao, the Philippines, has been rewarding as we're building a great community of developers in a region that's got strong tech talent but is less well known.

In terms of customer acquisition, the company has ramped up its sales and marketing efforts with over 100 online customer sign-ups and 45 companies using the platform. Since December 2017, the company is signing on up to six customers every day.

Peoplewave's growth has been made possible through raising of a seed round of capital (US\$500,000) in November 2017, which is the company's biggest financial milestone to-date.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES?

For any growing startup, attracting and retaining people is always the biggest challenge. In Singapore, there's a small pool of very talented people who have their pick of companies to work at.

We're currently looking for sales, marketing, customer

success and product management talent in Singapore but we're up against the likes of Google, Facebook, Salesforce and SAP. That's just the big brands!

There's also a great depth of startups too. This makes it more difficult to find local talent. We're looking to overcome this by offering "Google-like" benefits including unlimited annual leave, work-from-home and remote working options and paying above market rates for each new job but this still remains a challenge.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN YOUR COMPANY?

The two big focus areas are international expansion and the software product development roadmap. Peoplewave already has staff in Singapore, Hong Kong and the Philippines. The plan is to open a new sales office in Sydney, Australia by the end of March. Singapore and South-east Asia remain central to Peoplewave's growth, so there's a strong push for signing deals with partners in markets such as the Philippines and Indonesia.

On the product development side, Peoplewave's first two products (First 100 Days and Performance Wave) are going into their second generation and there's an increased focus on people analytics. People analytics, in particular, is a hot area, which can be assisted by machine learning and artificial intelligence to revolutionise employee analytics.

### WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR PEOPLEWAVE?

The plan is simple: to change the world of work by putting people first. The Peoplewave team are motivated by making work fair. Outside of this, Peoplewave is aiming to be the biggest HR tech company in Asia and one of the biggest software companies to ever be produced in Singapore.

Peoplewave is growing fast and changing the game for HR leaders. We're looking to shake up how HR is managed, and focus on putting people first. At the same time, we've got massive growth ambitions. We plan to be a US\$100 million business within five years, and there's no reason why we can't become one of the biggest Singaporean software companies to ever come from the little red dot. ■