ASIA PACIFIC
ICT ALLIANCE (APICTA)

UNITING ASIA'S
SOFTWARE INDUSTRY

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Each year APICTA recognises the best in innovation from across the Asia Pacific ICT community. This year's event, hosted for the first time by Brunei, promises to break new ground

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The coveted
APICTA award

Organisations across the Asia Pacific region are expanding fast. As they increasingly rely on technology to drive their businesses, they are also looking for solutions to help them secure their IT environments, mitigate business risks, achieve compliance, enhance user experience, and improve customer satisfaction. But the software industry in South East Asia is fragmented, nations in this part of the world are linguistically and culturally very diverse, and there is no standard political model, as western-style democracies, socialist republics, Islamic states and absolute monarchies are all to be found.

The result has been that while inventiveness, technical ability and innovation are second to none, the software development sector has remained much smaller in most of the economies round the Pacific Rim than in Europe or the Americas. "Where Silicon Valley corporations might have hundreds or even thousands of people, software developers in our member states typically employ between 30 and 70 people," says Sutee Satanasathaporn, chairman of the Asia Pacific ICT Alliance (APICTA). The APICTA is an international awards programme which aims to increase ICT awareness in the community and assist in bridging the digital divide. By providing networking and product benchmarking opportunities to ICT innovators and entrepreneurs in the region, the program is designed to stimulate ICT innovation and creativity, promote economic and trade relations, facilitate technology transfer, and offer business matching opportunities via exposure to venture capitalists and investors.

Sutee has been involved in APICTA since its inception in 2001. It was born, he explains, out of the vision of Malaysia's then Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamed. "He believed we should be seeking out the most promising companies in our very different economies, creating creative and organisational networks and bringing them to the attention of international markets." National, or in some cases provincial software alliances were contacted starting with Malaysia's Multimedia Development Corporation (MDeC) and the Australia Information Industry Association (AIIA) but quickly spreading throughout the region so that today the 16 member economies of APICTA are Australia, Brunei, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Korea, Macau, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

Malaysia hosted the awards for the first two years. Since then it has moved from country to country till this year, from December 2 to 5, it will be held in the smallest economy of all – geographically at

16
Member economies
of APICTA

least. Of course Brunei Darussalam is not a poor country but with a population of less than half a million it can't be expected to have a comprehensive software industry, but what it does have is good. In some ways Brunei typifies the problems of the region. "Brunei's biggest industry is O&G," says Sutee. "They have very good universities and a few good software companies and they are looking to expand the market for their member companies. Like all of the countries they are looking for partners to augment the gaps in their knowledge and to expand the market for indigenous companies. The Brunei government is very keen to grow its ICT sector and the royal

family is a great supporter of the software industry as well."

Nominees for APICTA awards are drawn from the winners of similar awards programmes in each member economy. They present their solutions before a panel of judges from all the member states. So what are the incentives for taking part? There is no cash prize, but for the winners the value of international recognition is beyond price, he says. "I think the main advantage is probably being able to connect with other software developers. Many entrepreneurial individuals develop smart solutions but sooner or later they need expertise from outside to scale the business:

> "THE BRUNEI GOVERNMENT IS VERY KEEN TO GROW ITS ICT SECTOR AND THE ROYAL FAMILY IS A GREAT SUPPORTER OF THE SOFTWARE INDUSTRY AS WELL"

we are able to connect them and help them achieve together the critical mass they need to compete internationally."

The members cover government, private sector and academic interests, it should be remembered, and the APICTA awards are recognised in all 16 economies so award winners in each of 17 categories

can expect high profile coverage. And it's not just the winners who benefit: all nominees are already national award winners and now that APICTA is entering its 11th year they join a unique database of past participants. "If a Vietnamese company on our books is looking for a partner in Thailand," he says, "it can search for somebody with the right skills and interests in the right industry sector: our database is a great tool for expanding the software market in the region."

Green and sustainable IT is sure to come under the spotlight in Brunei. For the first time it has its own category, and with fast growing awareness of environmentally friendly practices in all industries, including construction and the oil & gas sector Sutee is convinced the new award will grab the headlines. "Everyone is talking about green and environmental IT and saving energy. I have to say I am very keen to see who will be nominated – and who will win!"

Software development is a young industry – everyone knows Facebook was thought up by undergraduates, so the categories judging secondary and undergraduate projects are particularly important and have proved fruitful in the past. "Every year we get some very good ideas put forward by university

Awards ceremony

students. They may not have qualified yet but these are much more than just student projects – they are often highly commercial. Entrepreneurship starts early! It is really difficult to judge this category, because the criteria are different; but it is fascinating to watch them progress and grow in subsequent years to meet the criteria for the Start-Ups category or industry-specific awards."

There are many examples, says Sutee, but a good illustration of award progression is Larngear Technology, the Thai pioneer of augmented reality (AR) technology that literally makes 3D images leap from the pages of a book. Larngear has developed interactive classroom materials for studying the physical environment, the earth, solar system and molecular structure. The company's educational AR products are designed to help instructors explain difficult concepts and make them more understandable, more interesting, and more attractive for young learners. "We strongly believe that AR technology can help leverage education in any part of the world."

Larngear has been a serial winner in APICTA, starting with a Merit for its founders when students at Chulalongkorn University, in the Tertiary Student Project category in 2006 for their 'real-time camera

Students gather for a workshop

positioning and orientation estimation engine' and going on to win as a company for its R&D in 2007 and 2010. Larngear has won many other awards but APICTA is unique in Asia, the only trans-national organisation that recognises developers.

This year APICTA will start looking to its future. Back in 2003 The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) announced the formation of an ASEAN Economic Community

(AEC) in 2015. ASEAN was originally conceived in 1967 as a geopolitical union, and it is hoped that when the AEC is launched it will help ASEAN boost its economic competitiveness and attractiveness to investors inside and outside the region. Discussions are under way to find ways of leveraging APICTA's knowledge and extending its influence and thus its value to the national organisations it represents, using the opportunities presented by the AEC as it focuses on its markets, introducing measures to address non-tariff barriers, liberalization and promoting the attractions of ASEAN as an integrated investment area.

2015

ASEAN Economic Community will be formed

How do you define Asia/Pacific anyway? asks Sutee. Many members are today looking towards the promising markets of the Middle East including Turkey, Iran and the southern parts of the former Soviet Union. Wider networks mean wider opportunities, he says, and the next couple of years will see APICTA actively pursuing like minded states to extend its community. **B**E

["MANY ENTREPRENEURIAL INDIVIDUALS DEVELOP SMART SOLUTIONS BUT SOONER OR LATER THEY NEED EXPERTISE FROM OUTSIDE TO SCALE THE BUSINESS"]

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