## "GUESS WHERE I PUT THE DAFFODIL?"

Solomon's parents have participated in child-parent activities held by PaterMater, such as Thai boxing, eco-tours and tea tasting sessions. His father made new friends during the tea tasting activity and even inscribed the flowerpots for the daffodil class. His mother has become the coach of the massage class. PaterMater became a bridge between Solomon and his parents, bringing their lives in sync. "I used to get so annoyed when they asked me about work, but now when I get home, my dad would ask me, 'Guess where I put the Daffodil?' It's cute and fun," he laughed.

In the three years since Solomon started PaterMater, the bonus for him was getting closer to his parents and spending more time with them.
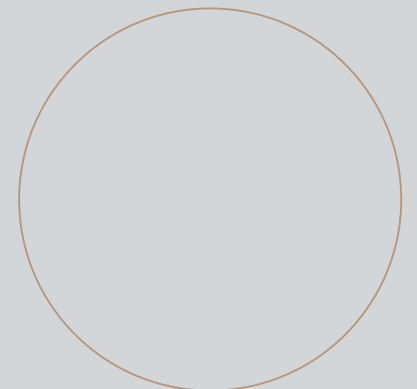
"I have no regrets about this experience. I've always been rather rational when communicating with my family, and I seldom share my feelings. But I've done so many activities with them now and interacted with them so much more — that is already worth it."

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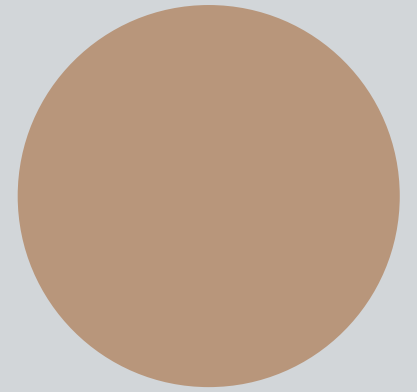
SEARCHING FOR AN EXIT FOR URBAN DWELLERS

POKEGUIDE – HUI PUI YIN BRIAN

> **Many Hongkongers may have already heard of this mobile app with the playful name "Pokeguide". This app is designed to assist busy urban dwellers to locate the carriage and door nearest to the escalator to a designated exit, suggesting the shortest route to save their time.**

Pokeguide was founded by a pair of post-80s brothers, Brian Hui and Andre Hui, as well as a friend of Andre's. From its launch in 2015 to the end of 2017, not only has Pokeguide reached an accumulated download count of 180,000, but also added a range of features. For instance, it has launched features designed for users with visual impairment and wheelchair users. Recently, it also launched a new "AR Navigation" feature, which provides an intuitive way of navigation for people who are bad at reading maps. Pokeguide has also expanded its business from Hong Kong to Taiwan and San Francisco, with more international expansion plans to come.


IDENTIFYING SOCIAL NEEDS FROM EXPERIENCE

On day of the interview, Brian, the elder brother, brought me to their office in Causeway Bay and shared the story of Pokeguide and the mental journey of the founders. The story began at the end of 2012, when Andre, his younger brother, was drafting the topic for his final-year project for his degree in Product Engineering with Marketing at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. During brainstorming, Andre recalled a habit that he and his brother had when taking the MTR when they were kids: they used to make a mental note of which carriage and door were closest to the escalator to certain exits in their most visited MTR stations. "We lived in Causeway Bay. Going through the wrong exit would result in a long walk of more than ten minutes on the street. For example, our home was near Sogo, so if we went out through the Causeway Bay Plaza I exit, it would take a long time for us to get home." It is common

for social entrepreneurs to discover social needs from their own experience. Due to the growing popularity of smartphones, Andre decided to design the mobile app Pokeguide.

After that, Andre began to discuss the feasibility of the app with Brian. Brian, five years older than Andre with commercial and IT background, had been working full time for almost ten years at that time. "When I heard about his idea, I thought it would benefit a vast number of commuters. Not only would the app improve the MTR-taking experience, but also save time and improve crowd control at MTR stations. This was the vision we had from the very beginning." Brian believes that if a product is useful, business opportunities will come. "Even if the performance indices are not satisfactory at the moment, once it grows to a certain economy of scale, it will shine."

ANDRE'S SUDDEN ILLNESS BROUGHT BRIAN TO THE START-UP
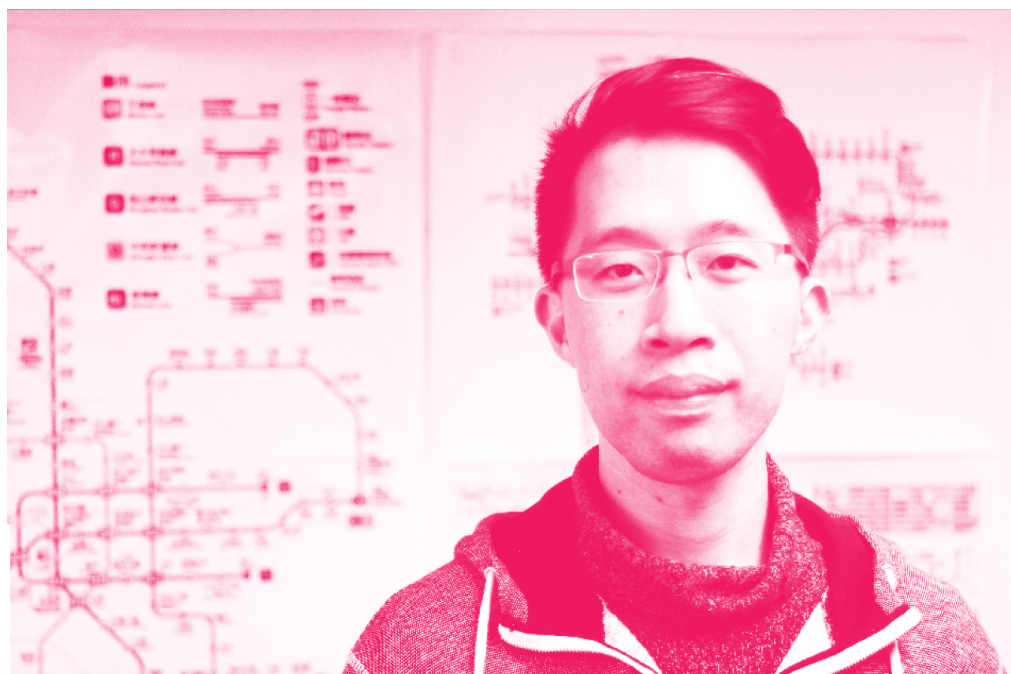
As a result, Andre completed the prototype of Pokeguide in a year, and he got an A in his final-year project.

After finalising the prototype, the mobile app would be ready for launch after a short period of programming and data optimisation. However, at that timing, the Hui brothers made a wise key decision —

"We decided to collect subway transit data for ten or more major cities around the globe, and to launch the support for each city one after another. By doing so, even if someone steals our idea, they can never catch up with our pace. And reality has proven our decision to be right."

The reality that Brian referred to was clearly the well-known incident of the MTR allegedly "stealing" the start-up's idea. Andre then spent another year visiting subway stations around the globe to record all relevant information of carriages and doors.

In November 2014, when Andre finally thought that everything was ready for launch, he was suddenly diagnosed with cancer, which put the whole project on hold. "His top priority had to be cancer treatment and rehabilitation. Therefore, I decided to resign from my job and fully engage in Pokeguide's work because it would be a shame to forgo this project," Brian said. Luckily, the cancer was discovered at the initial stage, and Andre recovered fully within a year. The Hui brothers then rented a co-working space in June 2015 to complete the programming, and successfully launched the trial version of Pokeguide after two months.

Afterwards, the Hui brothers kept improving the technical aspect of Pokeguide; at the same time, they actively engaged in various entrepreneur competitions to gain entrepreneurial knowledge and promote Pokeguide. Brian thinks that joining Good Seed was a key turning point: "Good Seed allowed us to reach the visually impaired and wheelchair users. We followed up the discussion with a few meetings and interviews." Despite wanting to help people with disabilities in the initial phase of designing Pokeguide, the idea had seemed hard to realise. Good Seed gave them a golden opportunity to analyse the needs of the visually impaired and wheelchair users, which helped them design related features. For example, users with visual impairment can enter their destination into Pokeguide through voice input, and the app will immediately reply with the closest subway exit and the train door; wheelchair users can press the phone button in Pokeguide to call the designated service centre of the MTR station for direct assistance from the MTR staff.

PRAGMATIC DESIGN BORN FROM TRUE COMMUNICATION

"**Good Seed inspired us to think differently. In the past, we used to see people with disabilities as the minority, and we would prioritise the majority, or the general market. After joining Good Seed, we learnt that if we take the need of a group to heart, it can benefit the group hugely, and they will become the foundation of our business.**"

Brian admitted that due to the small numbers of minority groups, they had brought little economic benefit. However, they were active in giving feedback on room for improvement, which significantly fostered Pokeguide's improvement. They also sent encouraging and supportive messages to the team from time to time, which was a shot in the arm for Brian in times of trouble, such as during the incident of the MTR allegedly "stealing" their idea.

As the MTR incident, which happened in September 2017, has been widely reported by the media, the details will not be covered here. Facing this situation,

Brian was unsure whether to laugh or cry. "I remember at that time, we were about to launch the San Francisco version. How did I feel? It felt like I was trying my best to complete a task — I can't say to win glory for Hong Kong, but at least we were showing the world that start-ups in Hong Kong were a thing… Who knew we would get stabbed in the back? What was our own team doing to us?" After this, Brian learnt that a start-up company should never expect anything from collaborating with a sizeable company, but it should instead prepare for the worst. It also highlighted the importance to "think global" — without their advance planning on covering cities outside of Hong Kong, the MTR incident would have struck them even harder.

Now, Pokeguide has expanded its team from the three initial members to more than ten. It is expected that its service will soon expand around the globe.
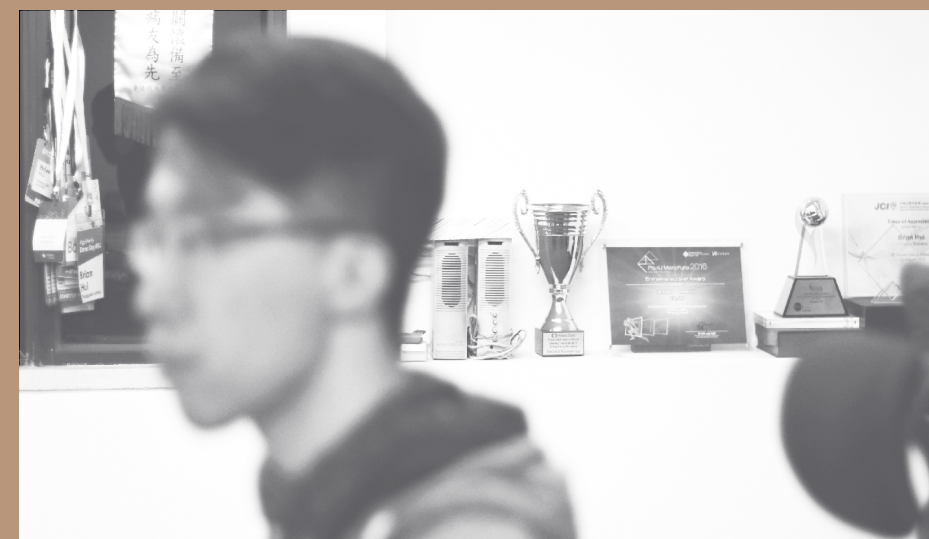
"Social innovation does not only emphasise on creativity, but also on providing solutions to social needs. The successful story of Pokeguide is the best demonstration that instead of working behind closed doors, communicating with real people is the best way to understand social needs."