

## Rising sun

Victoria's Terapeak is poised for growth thanks to a Japanese e-commerce alliance, while a slew of new tech ventures hit the market

BY BRIAN HARTZ

It's been a year of extremes for Japan. Laid low in March by an earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster, the nation's sunken spirits soared in July when its women's soccer team pulled off a dramatic upset of the United States in the World Cup.

Less than 260 kilometres from the stricken power plant in Fukushima, site of the world's worst nuclear crisis since Chernobyl, is Morioka, Japan, one of Victoria's four sister cities. Thousands of evacuees were housed there in the aftermath of the crisis, a link Mayor Dean Fortin acknowledged at the mid-summer signing of a partnership agreement between Victoria-based tech firm Terapeak and Yahoo Japan — a dominant e-commerce platform in the Asia-Pacific region with 2010 revenues of nearly US\$3.5 billion.

Terapeak was founded in 2004 by brothers Anthony and Andrew Sukow. Today, it employs nearly 50 staff, creating software that provides detailed transaction information to sellers using online auction sites like eBay — another client — helping them “sell faster, sell smarter, and sell better,” says president Colin How. Thanks to its lucrative partnership with eBay, Terapeak currently aggregates 20 per cent of the world's online commerce sales data. Yes, you read that correctly.



Terapeak president Colin How. The tech company's new HQ boasts a litany of features designed to make work more fun, including a meeting room wallpapered with comic book covers.

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“We do one thing very well,” says How. “We ingest e-commerce data and we develop insights out of it for merchants. In focusing on the one thing that we're best at, we hope we can maintain an unassailable position.”

Terapeak's services cost sellers anywhere from \$10 to hundreds of dollars depending on the amount of data they require.

“You have people selling \$100 per month worth of inventory, and you have others selling \$1 million,” says How, “so the challenge for us is to build the right tool for each segment, and understand their needs.”

Terapeak's new partner, with more than 21 million monthly auction listings attracting 230 million unique browsers, is bigger than eBay and Amazon.com in Japan. Its vice-president of e-commerce, Koichi Imamura, and four other executives travelled from Tokyo for the signing ceremony.

“This is just the beginning,” Imamura tells Douglas through an interpreter. “There are so many things we have ahead of us. Terapeak and Yahoo Japan will be able to work effectively as partners and grow together.”

The alliance with Yahoo Japan represents Terapeak's first international partnership outside of its relationship with eBay.

“For the first seven years of the company,” says How, “we were predominantly focused on one marketplace, a very large domestic marketplace: eBay. This partnership ... it's taking us to a global opportunity. We've

picked the ideal partner in Yahoo Japan.”

It may be Terapeak's first international partnership, but it likely won't be the last, says How. “We have a pipeline of international partners that we're currently in discussions with, and our goal is to launch several new partnerships over the next 24 months.”

How says despite the geographic distance and language barrier, the deal with Yahoo Japan came together smoothly. “Particularly in the Internet and web-based market space, a lot of cultural barriers dissipate because we're all kind of on ‘Internet time.’ A lot of the engagement is very natural and comfortable, and I've been impressed and surprised by that. There's a very strong, positive connection between the two companies.”

At the time of the deal, Terapeak planned to add up to eight new staff. More new hires coincided with its move, in late August, from its 5,400-square-foot headquarters at the Victoria Technology Park to a 9,600-square-foot premises near Borden Mercantile in the Quadra and McKenzie area.

“We're ramping up pretty good,” How tells Douglas. “We had decided to move outside of this deal, but we had a lot of confidence this deal was going to happen. But until the papers are signed, the contracts are signed, you never know. If they go off the rails, it's usually at the 11th hour. But we had a lot of confidence it was going to materialize and so we started scaling up.”

## THE GEEK SQUAD MARCHES ON

A bevy of tech firms in various stages of development took big strides this fall. ParetoLogic's PC Health Advisor program was named VIATeC's 2011 product of the year. Meanwhile, the company's co-founders — Elton, Myron, and Adrian Pereira, and Don Wharton — were busy launching or providing seed funding for three new ventures: SparkTrust, Wonton, and Travergence.

**SparkTrust** offers security services for website owners and online shoppers — “we're on a mission to make the Internet safer,” says general manager Greg Amlin — while **Wonton** is a daily-deal site focused on options unique to Vancouver and Victoria (see our web feature on Wonton at [www.douglasmagazine.com](http://www.douglasmagazine.com)).

Co-founded by Brad Williams and Nick Holland, **Travergence** is an online hub for travellers looking to find, book, and review tours and other travel activities. It's working with operators in 12 cities, including Victoria, and plans to expand to 60 across Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

Big money was on the table for three other Victoria tech startups as they advanced to the late stages of the 11th annual British Columbia Innovation Council (BCIC) New Ventures Competition.

**Chatterblock**, founded by UVic grad James Degreef, is a social networking site that provides information on sports, music, recreation, community events, and other programs and activities for children. It went live this past summer for families in Victoria, after closing an “oversubscribed” round of angel investment, Degreef tells *Douglas*. He's aiming to raise \$6 million as Chatterblock launches in the Silicon Valley by the end of the year, and in 20 other cities in 2012.

If you get lost in airports, there's an app for that. **Wifarer** provides personal navigation at buildings equipped with Wi-Fi networks. Mayfair Mall is already using it, and the Royal BC Museum tested it over the summer. The software updates the user's position in real-time and signals when location-specific content is available. Philip Stanger is the founder and CEO.

Finally, there's **AdviceScene**. Hotelier Nancy Kinney founded this legal-advice website in 2009 as a way to “democratize” the law. At first glance, AdviceScene appears to be simply a Q&A site for free legal advice and general questions about the law, but it's also a clever marketing tool for lawyers, who can develop a profile, burnish their credentials, and generate business. The site maintains a searchable directory of verified lawyers, with listings that can be changed and updated as the lawyer sees fit. ■



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