

CHENGDU FORTUNE

Software park a magnet for IT firms

Youngsters realize entrepreneurial dreams in the southwestern city

By ZHENG YANGPENG in Beijing and LI YU in Chengdu

More than 80 millions users! This is what Gu Rui and his "camera360" achieved in just two years.

Over the past few years, Camera360, a camera application for the Android system that enable users to adjust and improve photos taken with their mobile phones, has grown to be China's most popular camera application.

More than 60 percent of camera360's users are in China, according to Gu, chief marketing officer of Pinguo Digital Entertainment, the company that originated the product. Based on the number of smartphone users in China — 330 million by the third quarter of 2012 — around 15 percent of China's smartphone users have installed the application on their phones.

What is much less known is the birthplace of the camera360 and Pinguo — Chengdu. But to Gu and many other young people who aspired to launch ventures in the digital age, the southwestern metropolis has increasingly become a magnet for them.

Like Gu, Li Cheng, a technology enthusiast who has years of experience in the IT business, also realized his entrepreneurial dream in Chengdu.

After the failure of his first venture, Li left Shanghai for Chengdu. His first venture in

Chengdu is a cloud computing system that provides data storage services to enterprises. Combining the hardware of a Taiwan company with the software developed by his own team, they managed to offer enterprises a service that was cheaper than that provided by cloud storage service giants such as IBM and HP.

The service turned out to be a big success and laid the foundations for Li's second adventure. The first adventure convinced Li that cloud computing storage has great potential, but to convince ordinary users to turn to the service, service providers have to overcome security and privacy issues.

This idea is the basis for the birth of xcloud, an application that converts personal computers into personal data storage devices.

But Li was not the only person to come up with this idea. When the beta version of the xcloud went online in June 2012, Li found eight similar pieces of software in existence.

Under great pressure, he and his colleagues improved the software to make it more user-friendly. When the second version came out in August, the global number of users jumped from a few thousand to 100,000. By last October, xcloud had a million users.

Besides collecting fees from iOS users, mostly in Europe and the United States, Li's software could also generate a profit from allowing a network-attached storage



The third phase of Tianfu Software Park in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province.

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Gu Rui, chief marketing officer of Pinguo Digital Entertainment

Left: Gu's firm has developed Camera360, a very popular Android system application.

(NAS) hardware producer to pre-install his software in their NAS.

"When household users use our product for a while, they realize it is much more economical to use NAS instead of PC. Then they turn to NAS. This is why NAS producers

would pay us," Li said. Li noted that one of the convenience aspects of being in Tianfu Software Park is that he can exchange ideas with other start-ups gathered there.

The park routinely holds seminars and offers a low-cost coffee bar for their gatherings.

For example, by exchanging ideas with people from camera application companies, Li said he would develop xcloud in a way that enables users to store pictures taken with their smartphones in their PCs.

Gu said though the entrepreneurial atmosphere in

Chengdu is not as strong as in China's first-tier cities, and financing firms are not as accessible as in Beijing or Shanghai, an enabling environment for technology start-ups, especially in the mobile Internet sector, has rapidly taken shape over the past two

to three years in Chengdu. Another attractive feature for Gu and Li's companies is Chengdu's relatively lower labor costs, which Gu estimated to be only half of that of Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen.

"Those first-tier cities do have greater access to high-end talents but because of the intense competition there, highly skilled employees are more likely to switch jobs frequently. Here we have a much lower turnover rate," Gu said.

Both Gu and Li said they are grateful for the park's effort to organize a collective hiring program. Their companies could join the campus recruiting as well as flying to Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen to hire employees. Organizing their own campus hiring campaign separately could cost them much more money.

Gu said the biggest challenge for his company is to transfer the Camera360 from a "tool" to a "platform" that helps its users manage their photo albums and share the photos with others, much like the function of Instagram from the US.

"By shifting from a tool to a platform, we can add a social networking dimension to the application and increase users' loyalty," Gu said.

With these talented and devoted people and an enabling environment, who could deny Gu would not create another Instagram and the possibility of Chengdu becoming the next Silicon Valley?

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Gemini Grove - 嘉里星源汇 ID: 38829 332sqm, 4bedrooms ¥50,000 penthouse, south facing, nice balcony	Seasons Park - 海晟名苑 ID: 12518 210sqm, 3bedrooms ¥96,000 high floor, garden view, modern furniture	Beijing SOHO Residences - SOHO北京公馆 ID: 12521 196sqm, 2bedrooms ¥93,000 high floor, value for money, good view	Park Apartment - 天安豪园 ID: 5185 245sqm, 3+1bedrooms ¥34,000 high floor, south facing, modern furniture

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