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ASIA'S BEST UNDER 25

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Asia's Young Entrepreneurs

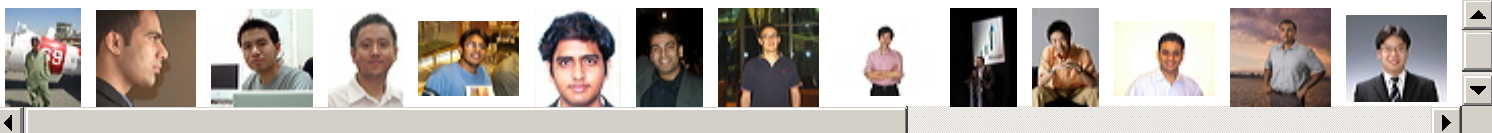
Meet Asia's next generation of up-and-coming business leaders—and then cast your vote

By Brian Bremner

Asia is home to the fastest-growing pack of economies on the planet, including China, India, and a resurgent Japan. Less appreciated is the growing and dynamic entrepreneurial class of young managers cropping up in the region who are starting to make their presence felt. This new generation is globally aware, extremely Internet savvy, and willing to pounce on a smart idea even if it means grueling hours and financial risk early on in life.

For the past month, BusinessWeek.com has set out to find the most interesting examples of this new breed. We asked readers to nominate standout young entrepreneurs. Our editors reviewed the nominations and narrowed the field to this group of 20 finalists. Take a look at them and their businesses, and at the end of the slide show, we'll ask you to vote for the biz whiz you think shows the most promise. Browse through, cast your vote, and BusinessWeek.com will report the results.

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Divyank Turakhia

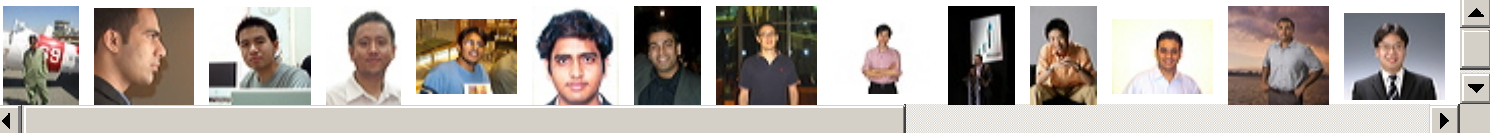
Co-Founder, President & Director:
Directi Group

www.directi.com
Bombay, India
Age: 24



Turakhia tried his hand at Internet consulting in high school at age 14 and, two years later, launched Directi Group with \$600 borrowed from his parents. In the first month of operations, the business managed to generate enough revenues to return the borrowed amount and get the company rolling. Today, the company is debt-free, has more than 1 million customers for its array of domain name registration, Web hosting, and site building services, and employs more than 250 people. It is one of the fastest-growing domain registration companies in the world. When Turakhia isn't running the show, he pursues hobbies such as sky diving, paragliding, and flying airplanes.

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They come from lands ranging from dirt poor to First World. But nothing could cool the raging work ethic and ambition of these startup stars

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Led by China and India, Asia's superfast economies have dazzled observers for the last decade. But until recently the defining feature of most of them was corporate bigness.

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In Japan and South Korea respectively, the traditional dominance of the *keiretsu*, or business alliances, and *chaebol*, or industrial conglomerates, made it difficult for entrepreneurs to find a place. China's state-owned enterprises siphoned off most of the available credit from, well, state-owned banks. In India there was more opportunity, but precious few had the financial wherewithal to attract bank financing and startup capital.

Now, however, Asia is the scene of a broad flowering of startup activity—as evidenced by our special report on Asia's young class of entrepreneurs. This new generation is globally aware, extremely Internet savvy, and willing to pounce on a smart idea even if it means grueling hours and considerable financial risk early on in life. Their stories may surprise you.

TEENAGE TITANS? For the past month or so, BusinessWeek.com has set out to find Asia's most interesting examples of this new breed. We asked readers to nominate standout young entrepreneurs 25 or under, and we narrowed down the impressive list to a group of finalists. You can flip through a [slide show](#) showcasing their companies and entrepreneurial vision, then cast your vote on the last page of the show. We'll report the results in September.

Anyone doubting the disruptive, game-changing power of the Internet, mobile software applications, and other digital technologies—which allow a go-getter with a smart idea to hit the marketplace quickly—should take a serious look at our candidates. Young folks barely out of college are running serious enterprises they started with a modicum of capital. Some of our nominees were trying out business models before graduating from high school.

Divyank Turakhia, co-founder and director of Bombay-based Directi Group, was doing Internet consulting at age 14 before launching his domain-name registration and site-building company two years later with \$600 he borrowed from his parents. At 24, he runs a profitable company with more than 250 employees and clients around the world.

OFF-LINE DREAMS. In Pakistan, Arif Ayub, 23, is the founder and CEO of Softflux, which started out as a one-man shop back in 2000. Today the Karachi IT solutions firm offers everything from Web development services to management consulting for Pakistani banks and drug companies—to help them boost their profitability and the productivity of their mobile networks. The company has roughly 70 employees and development associates in Beijing, Dublin, Romania, London, and Silicon Valley.

Even in less tech-driven economies, the Net is opening up doors to some bright young talent. Nguyen Minh Hieu, 25, wants nothing less than to create the best Internet company in Vietnam with DreamViet. The company's flagship product is an e-commerce research and technology guide Web site ([aha.com.vn](#)) for consumer electronics. DreamViet also provides Web site development advice and services for Vietnamese merchants.

Not all the startup activity is happening in cyberspace. Victor Lang, 22, a senior partner and co-founder of Global Future Educational Consulting, basically wants to change the world. His company provides educational materials for those interested in learning about international conflict resolution and diplomacy. It creates simulated U.N. confabs where students role-play as ambassadors.

MEAN STREETS. Ario Pratomo in Jakarta runs his own logistics company that sells

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cargo space for a unit of Etihad Airways, the Abu Dhabi airline. Fellow Indonesian Hendy Setiono runs a fast-growing chain of kebab sandwich shops with 65-odd outlets.

Our special report also features some remarkable tales of gritty determination in the face of adversity. Take Kentaro Iemoto, founder and CEO of Clara Online, which leases out Linux-based servers and other IT services to corporate clients in Japan. At age 14 he was diagnosed with a brain tumor, underwent surgery, spent several years in a wheelchair—and went on to become one of the hottest young talents in Japanese technology.

When David Lee was a 7-year-old growing up in the tougher streets of Hong Kong, he sold oranges to help out with the family's then-stretched finances. As chairman and co-founder of Team & Concepts, he now runs an IT service company that provides online applications for event planners. His latest product: a Beta service where users can upload and host a spreadsheet on the Web and share it with colleagues and friends.

All these young folks share an unbridled enthusiasm and a fierce desire to succeed. Will all of them make it? Maybe not. Yet this much is clear: Asia's already dynamic future has turned a little bit brighter with the arrival of this bunch.


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Bremner is Asia Regional Editor for BusinessWeek in Hong Kong

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Nickname: Susheel

Review: If we look at the unique features of the plans - most of them are already proven business models. For me, entrepreneurship is not about replicating already successful business models. This is called 'business', not entrepreneurship. 'Entrepreneurship' for me is about having the innovative thought and the pioneering spirit. It is about taking calculated risks, dreaming with dare and getting things done. That way Sasikanth, Darshan and Atul win with no doubt at all!

Date reviewed: Sep 24, 2006 6:17 AM

Nickname: Coey

Review: Where are the women????

Date reviewed: Sep 15, 2006 2:43 PM

Nickname: Jessica Thompson

Review: In response to Susan Young's query - Turakhia's company would currently be valued anywhere between \$50 and \$150 million with its million+ paying customer-base and intellectual property owned by its various business units. This estimate is arrived by taking into consideration Godaddy's recent valuation of \$600+ million as per its SEC filings, Marchex's purchase of NameDevelopment for \$160 million, and acquisitions in the market place of Register.com for \$100 million, Enom by Demand Media (DM raised \$120 million), and Bulk Register (rumoured at \$35 million). It is interesting to note that this is bigger than what facebook.com was worth when Mark Zuckerberg was named #1 on the US Top 20 List by BusinessWeek last year.

Date reviewed: Sep 12, 2006 7:49 PM

Nickname: yogesh

Review: I read about Divyank's mega-success story in the Times of India newspaper last year. Seeing this article I realize that he is continuing to grow at a phenomenal pace. Hearing about an 14 year old kid starting a company with barely any money and convering it into a multi-million dollar global corporation makes me really think about how I have wasted my life, or maybe I am just experiencing my middle-life crisis.

Date reviewed: Sep 12, 2006 12:25 AM

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All comments: Asia's Young Entrepreneurs

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Nickname: daniel

Review: I agree with Annabelle that many of them demonstrated a great potential, an article made easy for readers to compare these young Asian achievers with American Entrepreneurs will definitely be more interesting than setting a border line. While there has been many complaints on gender issue, separating them by region may bring up another unnecessary topic on race.

Date reviewed: Sep 11, 2006 11:21 PM

Nickname: digger

Review: The tendency to evaluate companies based on Google's page ranking algorithm is stupid. That's like ranking innovators based on an existing-proprietary-closed-lame-algorithm (which, as all know, is far from perfect, but better than other available crap). Only 80 year old-fat-couch potatos with a screen name hotpink92 would ever come up with such a criteria.

Date reviewed: Sep 11, 2006 11:39 AM

Nickname: Annabelle

Review: I am not sure what BusinessWeek's plan is, but I would like to suggest bringing the winners and some pick-ups of the Asia round to the report that usually focuses on those in the US only. Lots of these Asian entrepreneurs have lots of potential to compete with those in the US. Like Darshan of Hircon, I recognize his vision in investing and actualizing his thoughts in Dubai. Eric of Eriqoo.com, he in Japan is starting a new type of portal Web site that pioneers new ideas and challenges Google and Yahoo! will certainly catch attention. I would love to see these young men with global ambition being provided a global stage.

Date reviewed: Sep 10, 2006 6:48 PM

Nickname: mariam

Review: Why are there no women on this list?

Date reviewed: Sep 10, 2006 5:24 AM

Nickname: John Gibbons Ph.D

Review: This article talks only about Directi's domain registration business. It should have also spoken about its Skenzo Business Unit, which is currently among the world's top 10 largest Internet traffic monetization/parking companies. This is even more so because Divyank, the

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tech prodigy, is supposed to have personally created the core patent-pending algorithms that have made Skenzo so successful. I have been using Skenzo for over four months through Moniker's trafficclub.com, and looking at the returns it is obvious as to why Skenzo is gaining market share so fast. I feel if Skenzo relaxes its minimum traffic requirements, and allows smaller customers to sign up directly instead of forcing them to go through partners, they can grow even faster.

Date reviewed: Sep 9, 2006 11:07 PM

Nickname: julie d

Review: Ditto the first Julie. It's scary that if these young people were nominated--no one nominated any young women. Where are they? Pregnant and in the kitchen?

Date reviewed: Sep 7, 2006 10:32 AM

Nickname: Harry

Review: Hey Jeff, Noticed that in your listing of Google Ranks, www.bridleit.com (Rama Krishna Gaddipati) has been wrongly quoted as 4/10. It has a pagerank of 5/10. Pls verify with the url http://www.bridleit.com

Date reviewed: Sep 7, 2006 9:25 AM

Nickname: dave

Review: Divyank Turakhia was interviewed a few months ago on the Business News TV Channel - CNBC, in their Young Turks Program. Young Turks focuses on today's young achievers who are poised to become tomorrow's leaders, by unraveling their past experiences, the challenges they faced and their vision for the future. From what I can recollect, CNBC just gave an indication of Directi's last year's turnover but did not give out the specifics. His valuation was large enough to supposedly make his success story the best that CNBC had ever reported, on this program.

Date reviewed: Sep 7, 2006 9:20 AM

Nickname: Julie

Review: I'm bummed to see that none of the young entrepreneurs profiled are female. What does that say about the state of women's enterprise development in Asia, I wonder?

Date reviewed: Sep 6, 2006 10:46 PM

Nickname: susan young

Review: Turakhia is undeniably the best entrepreneur on this List. To achieve all of this using a measly \$600 at the age of 24 would mean that he is a man of exceptional genius, and is beyond comparison to anyone else. I would have liked to see the turn over or valuation of each of these companies along with the individual's profile. I am especially very curious to know the valuation of the Directi Group.

Date reviewed: Sep 5, 2006 2:48 PM

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Nickname: Hans Bahlow

Review: This is to correct the post made by Kyle B. The famous electronics maker, Philips (www.philips.com) has a Google PageRank of 8/10 and not 4 as posted by Kyle B. Google Page Rank gives a very accurate picture on the importance of a Web site on the Internet. Google rocks! :o) It is seldom wrong.

Date reviewed: Sep 3, 2006 2:29 PM

Nickname: vamsi

Review: Well said. All the 'businesses' listed here might not make it. But the guys listed here sure will go places. What counts is taking the plunge and being persistent with things as these young guys here are. Stating things like 'even I could do it' or 'what's great in it' is simple. Hence I have no qualms congratulating the businessweek team to glory shamelessly on this great article.

Date reviewed: Sep 2, 2006 3:41 PM

Nickname: Jeff

Review: I found Philips comment about seeing Google PageRank quite interesting. So I ranked all these entrepreneurs by the Google PageRank (out of 10) of their website. The results are as follows: (No1) 8/10---www.directi.com---Divyank Turakhia (No2) 7/10---www.clara.ad.jp--Kentaro Iemoto (No3) 6/10---www.convonix.com--Vishal Sampat (No4) 5/10---www.tnc.hk/index.eis--David Lee (No5) 5/10---www.crystalcargo.ae--Ario Pratomo (No6) 5/10---www.bridleit.com--Rama Krishna Gaddipati (No7) 4/10---www.hircon-me.com--Darshan Hiranandani (No8) 4/10---www.innovationtrip.com--Atul Khekade (No9) 2/10---www.funmobile.com--Christian Heilesen (No10) 2/10---www.dreamviet.com--Nguyen Hieu (No11) 2/10---www.majoy.cn--Mao Kankan (No12) 2/10---www.softflux.com--Arif Ayub (No13) 2/10---www.neuro-designs.com--Bellamy Budiman (No14) 1/10---www.habits.in--Sasikanth Chemalamudi. The remaining have a PageRank of zero. This model has flaws, but is interesting all the same.

Date reviewed: Sep 2, 2006 3:40 PM

Nickname: Vamsi

Review: Well said Sandy. All the 'businesses' listed here might not make it. But the spirit in them young guys will

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bad (as in good)

bad (as in bad)



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“...I'm betting instead of clicking on things to buy, it'll catch on in the context of games and contests.”

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remain and they will surely go places. This is what counts and that is why I have no qualms shamelessly congratulating Businessweek to glory for this tremendous article. Saying 'even I could do it' or 'what is great in this' is pretty easy. but taking the plunge and being persistent as these young guys are being is real tough.

Date reviewed: Sep 1, 2006 4:13 PM

Nickname: Kyle B.

Review: I am not leaving this message to favor any particular candidate but I do wish them can be judged fairly. Personally I would not attack a 10 days old website with zero Google PageRank while there is no proof if I can do anything better. I am also not disregarding the quality of Google PageRank, but did you know it gave that famous electronic maker, Philips, a score of 4 only? I believe each candidates are being mentioned for some good reasons. Why don't we instead try to recognize the passion that they have shown and the eager of success that they are devoting for? To make one final judgment, I was surprised by the high quality of output that eriqoo.com have accomplished with a resource of only 12 employees, it was considered impressive to me. I give my wish and admire to all candidates.

Date reviewed: Sep 1, 2006 3:17 PM

Nickname: Sandy

Review: How do you know what dreams the young guys listed here have and how do you know if they have the capability of making money or not? Let us take the example of Sasikanth Chemalamudi - Miller has commented that Infosys takes in "thousands and thousands" every year. But, read the situation in India where out of these "thousands and thousands" none rejects the offer (except those who got admissions into universities abroad). And to comment on the money he is making, do you know his business model? You made the decision based on his website? I have taken time to interact with him and I know that his model is based more on an offline system and the web-site is just an interface. He sure is an inspiration for me (I concluded ONLY after interacting with him) and many others like me. Similar things might apply to all the others you have commented on in a hasty and irresponsible way. I tried interacting with them too. But couldn't get their e-mail ids.

Date reviewed: Sep 1, 2006 2:23 PM

Nickname: Sandy

Review: I think these people are here for various things, passion and risk-taking ability included (and not just money making). It takes time and lots of learning to earn money - and at the age of (<)25, it is that learning and potential of the candidate that has to be looked at. Some of the below comments look senseless - be it downsizing Protomo, eriqoo and Hieu or Sasikanth, Surya Budiman and Vikas. Miller, Neuman, Anonym and Philip need to understand that there are two sides of an issue and our analyses/comments should be based on that. Your impulsive comments (based on no facts and just imagination) can spoil the spirit of the whole competition.

Date reviewed: Sep 1, 2006 2:15 PM

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