

INNOVATION ASIA

創新亞洲

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Our series exploring fresh ideas, technology and entrepreneurship across our region, one city at a time. This month...

OSAKA, JAPAN

這個專欄探索亞洲區內的蕪新意念、科技及創業精神，
每期聚焦一個城市。本月焦點城市是：

日本大阪

CONSIDERING JAPAN'S reputation for technological advancement, it is somewhat surprising that its major cities have been outpaced by the likes of Beijing, Singapore, Hong Kong and even Bengaluru when it comes to attracting and nurturing startups. High costs, language difficulties, cultural differences and an abundance of red tape have no doubt deterred many budding tech entrepreneurs from choosing Japan in the past, but, as the country attempts to bolster its tech industry to boost its stagnant economy, signs of change are discernible.

And while the lion's share of Japan's startups can be found in Tokyo, the Kansai region – and Osaka in particular – is starting to emerge as a viable alternative. Evidence can be seen at the Grand Front Osaka

mall, the centrepiece of the seven-hectare Umekita Phase 1 Development, home to organisations aimed at nurturing startups.

These include Knowledge Capital, an initiative that aims to help startups get off the ground. Its facilities include members-only co-working space/incubator Knowledge Salon and The Lab, a three-storey space that showcases experimental prototypes that shoppers can try.

Also located at Grand Front is the Osaka Innovation Hub (OIH), a government-driven innovation business centre that hosts around 200 events, workshops and programmes each year, and offers services such as legal and investment advice. OIH also operates a seed acceleration programme that coordinates partnerships

between startups and major corporations and connects entrepreneurs to VCs.

Tugi Günes of Global Venture Habitat (GVH) Osaka, a co-working space and incubator, says that while the startup scene in Osaka is still relatively embryonic, the city has many significant advantages. 'First of all you have the manufacturing history – Panasonic, Sharp and all the big electronics companies are based here – and beyond that, Osaka has a very open culture, the people have a "just do it" mentality.'

The city also has lower cost of living than Tokyo and enjoys a steady stream of talent from the Kansai region's many highly rated universities – although Günes says most graduates opt for the security of major corporations rather than startups.

Nevertheless, with the 17-hectare second phase of Umekita – which will combine green space with innovation-led facilities and cutting-edge IoT technology – slated for completion by 2024, a year before Osaka hopes to host the World Expo, it seems the city is laying the foundations for a bright future. ☺

日本素來以先進科技享譽國際，因此當其主要城市在吸引和培育初創企業方面，被北京、新加坡、香港、甚至印度班加羅爾比下去時，實在令人感到意外。過去，營運成本高、語言障礙、文化差異及大量繁文縟節，無疑令新晉的科技企業家對進駐日本卻步，但隨著日本積極扶持科技業以推動停滯的經濟，當地明顯出現了改變的跡象。

雖然日本大部分初創企業均坐落東京，但以大阪為首的關西地區現正崛起，有望成為另一個初創企業集中地。在佔地七公頃的Umekita一期開發項目，商場兼辦公大樓Grand Front Osaka位於正中，現已獲不少初創企業培育機構進駐。

Knowledge Capital是其中一間位於Grand Front Osaka的初創培育機構，旨在協助初創企業起步。設施包括會員專屬的共享工作空間/創業培育中心Knowledge Salon，以及佔地三層的The Lab，專門展示可供顧客試用的實驗性產品原型。

由當地政府推動的Osaka Innovation Hub (OIH)同樣落戶大樓內。這間創新業務中心每年舉辦約200個活動、工作坊及項目，並提供法律及投資諮詢等服務。OIH亦推行種子加速計劃，促成初創企業與大型公司合作，為企業家與創投公司牽線。

Global Venture Habitat (GVH) Osaka是一家共享工作空間兼初創培育中心，發言人Tugi Günes表示：「雖然大阪的初創企業界相對仍未成熟，但這座城市具備不少明顯優勢。首先，大阪的生產業發展悠久，Panasonic、Sharp及所有大型電子企業均以大阪為基地，加上這裡文化十分開明，當地人更擁有一種『勇往直前』的精神。」

此外，大阪的租金和生活費比東京較低，而關西地區多間著名學府亦持續培育人才，不過Günes反映畢業生較少考慮加入初創大軍，而傾向選擇有較高保障的大型公司。儘管如此，隨著佔地17公頃、將綠化空間結合創新設施及先進物聯網技術的Umekita二期項目將於2024年完工，而大阪更有望在2025年主辦世界博覽會，這座城市已為美好將來打好基礎。☺

THE PERSON 人物

AKINORI TAKAHAGI 高萩昭範

The noise-maker
先聲奪人

THE CEO of wearable smart-toy-maker Moff, Osaka-born Akinori Takahagi is at the forefront of changing the way kids play around the world. Formerly a product manager at Mercedes-Benz and Kraft Foods, Kyoto University graduate Takahagi co-founded Moff in October 2013, developing what would become the Moff Band at an OIH hackathon and then obtaining funding through Kickstarter. The big idea: a Bluetooth-enabled smart bracelet that makes a variety of realistic sounds – from musical instruments and sporting noises to clashing swords and magic wands – in response to the wearer's movements.

'Parents don't like kids using screens and tablets primarily because it is so passive,' Takahagi told *Mashable* following Moff's launch in early 2015. 'Moff solves this issue because it blends the technology with physical activity – it

makes kids jump up and move around, exercise their imagination and play with friends.' The company was subsequently named one of the '12 Startups that Will Change the Way We Play' by the *San Francisco Business Times*.

Takahagi has gone on to sign partnerships with Japanese gaming company Bandai Namco Entertainment (makers of *Pac-Man*) and American public broadcaster PBS Kids (of *Sesame Street* fame) to create educational games that can be played using the smart band.

But Moff isn't just for kids. Takahagi has also steered the company into the health sphere, raising US\$2.7 million in March 2017 to develop a platform that uses the band's motion, position-recognition and data-analysis technologies for uses as diverse as fitness tracking and enhancing care of the elderly – a smart move given Japan's ageing population. *moff.mobi*

大阪出生的高萩昭範是可穿戴智能玩具製作商Moff的行政總裁，他正牽頭改變世界各地兒童的玩樂方式。高萩畢業於京都大學，曾於德國知名汽車品牌平治及美國卡夫食品公司擔任產品經理。他於2013年10月與他人合作創辦了Moff，並在OIH舉辦的編程馬拉松中，研發出後來被稱為「Moff Band」的產品，然後成功透過Kickstarter集資。其意念是可發出多種真實聲效的藍牙連線智能手帶，配合穿戴者的動作而發出樂器、體育盛事喧鬧聲以至鏗鏘劍聲和魔杖等聲響。

2015年初，高萩推出Moff Band後接受科技網站Mashable訪問時表示：「家長不喜歡孩子使用電腦和平板電腦，主要因為這會使他們老是坐著不動。Moff可以解決這個問題，將科技與體能活動合而為一，令孩子蹦蹦跳跳，到處走動，發揮想像力，與朋友一起玩耍。」公司其後獲《三藩市商業時報》評為「12間改

變人類遊戲方式的初創企業」之一。

高萩繼而與日本遊戲萬代南夢宮娛樂（遊戲「食鬼」的製作商）以及美國公共電視台兒童頻道PBS Kids（著名節目有《芝麻街》）簽訂合作協議，製作可配合智能手帶使用的教育遊戲。

不過Moff並非只製作兒童玩具而已。高萩亦帶領公司涉獵健康領域，於2017年3月籌得270萬美元，研發應用手帶的動態、位置識別功能及數據分析技術的平台，可廣泛應用於監察健身活動以至協助照顧長者等用途。鑑於日本正面對人口老化的問題，這項研發實屬明智之舉。*moff.mobi*

DATA DROP 數據掠影

19 million (1,900萬)

The population of the Keihanshin metropolitan region that includes Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto

由大阪、神戶及京都組成的京阪神大都會區人口。

5

The ranking of the Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto area among innovation clusters globally, according to the Global Innovation Index 2017

2017年全球創新指數報告中，京阪神地區在全球創新區域當中的排名。

100%

Amount of tax rebate available for the first five years for new businesses established in designated areas of Osaka
在大阪指定地區建立的新企業前五年的退稅率。



THE PRODUCT 產品

AKIPPA

Easier path to parking 泊得其所

FINDING A PARKING SPACE can be a pain at the best of times, but in Japan even more so, as motorists are legally obliged to prove that they have a parking space before they can buy a car. This usually means renting a parking space, which must be within two kilometres of your home address and often means forking out up to three months' rent as a deposit.

Tackling this problem is Akippa, a platform that facilitates peer-to-peer parking-space sharing as well as allowing motorists to reserve spaces in advance at a variety of car parks. Founded in Osaka in 2014, the company does for parking spaces what Airbnb does for apartments, allowing people with spaces that are wholly or partially unused to rent them out with ease, while giving drivers the ability to search for and reserve parking spaces across Japan.

Previously limited to un-gated or manned parking lots, Akippa recently unveiled a system that allows users to open gates at unmanned lots by inputting an access code generated by the app, thus massively increasing the number of sites at which the service can potentially be used.

On the back of its success (it currently has about 700,000 users and covers 20,000 parking spaces), Akippa raised US\$7.4 million

in funding in May, and announced that it hopes to grow to 100,000 spaces by 2020. Plans to expand into peer-to-peer car sharing are also in the pipeline. *akippa.com* ■

在繁忙時間找車位可能令人煩惱不已，而日本情況更嚴重，皆因駕駛者在買車前，在法律上有義務證明他們擁有車位。日本人普遍除了要租用車位外，車位更必須在其住址兩公里內，這意味著他們需要掏出最多三個月的租金作泊車位訂金。

Akippa應運而生，這個應用程式促成點對點車位共享，並讓駕駛者從不同停車場中提早預約車位。公司於2014年在大阪成立，程式宛如停車場版的Airbnb，讓人輕鬆出租完全或部分時間空置的車位，駕駛者亦可利用平台搜尋並預約日本各地提供的泊車位。

Akippa原先只限於不設閘口或人手管理的停車場，最近推出的系統則容許用家透過輸入應用程式產生的存取碼，開啟非人手管理停車場的閘門，因此大幅增加可共享的泊車位數目。

隨著應用程式大受歡迎（目前共有約70萬名用家，覆蓋2萬個車位），Akippa於5月募資740萬美元，並宣佈計劃在2020年或之前將覆蓋車位增加至10萬個，此外公司亦積極籌備點對點共享汽車服務。*akippa.com* ■

WHAT TO WATCH

蓄勢待發

PERSONAL PAPARAZZI

Created by Osaka-based Plen Robotics, **PLEN Cube** is a palm-sized, box-shaped robot that acts as your personal assistant and photographer. This voice-activated device can automatically shoot and share photos and videos, as well as control internet-connected home appliances. *plenrobotics.com*

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Named after the Japanese phrase *gochisousama*, which is said after a meal to express gratitude, **Gochiso** is a restaurant-booking platform that lets users earn points to either redeem meals or donate money to non-profit groups. *gochiso.jp*

VIRTUAL DESIGN

Selected to represent Japan at the Get in the Ring pitch contest finals in Portugal earlier this year, **MARUI** is a plugin for 3D/CAD software Autodesk Maya that allows designers to carry out product modelling and animation work in VR using a headset. *marui-plugin.com*

私人狗仔隊

大阪企業Plen Robotics研發的PLEN Cube是手掌大的盒型機械人，可充當用家的私人助理及攝影師。這件利用語音操作的裝置可自動拍攝及分享照片和短片，亦可操控連接互聯網的家電。*plenrobotics.com*

精神食糧

餐廳預約應用程式Gochiso以日本人飯後會說的「多謝款待」（*gochisousama*）命名，讓用家累積積分，可兌換餐點或捐款支持非牟利團體。*gochiso.jp*

虛擬設計

MARUI在本年初獲委以重任，代表日本出戰葡萄牙舉行的Get in the Ring初創企業擂台大比拼決賽。這個外掛程式為3D/CAD軟件Autodesk Maya而設，讓設計師使用頭戴裝置，在虛擬實境中製作產品模型及進行動畫工作。*marui-plugin.com*



DISCOVER OSAKA

Cathay Pacific flies to Osaka from Hong Kong 42 times a week

探索大阪

國泰航空設有由香港飛往大阪的航班，每周有42班

