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Buck\$ for Blog\$

Thanks to Singapore firm Nuffnang, bloggers can turn their popularity into ad dollars

By Jamie Ee Wen Wei

BLOGS were once the domain of daily musings, inconsequential chatter and random rantings.

But now, a local company wants to change that by bringing in advertising money for local bloggers.

Founded by Singaporean Cheo Ming Shen and his Malaysian counterpart, Timothy Tiah, Nuffnang provides an online platform to match bloggers with advertisers.

All bloggers need to do is to join its blog advertising community and fill up an online form, which provides details of their blogs and readerships that are used to match them with advertisers.

Launched in Malaysia in February, the blog advertising community - the first of its kind in Asia - was an instant hit, attracting 300 bloggers in just three days.

'We were only expecting 300 blogs in three months,' said Mr Cheo, 24, a graduate of the London School of Economics.

Two months later, the company started its Singapore community, and 1,800 bloggers have already joined.

Despite competition from similar online ad services such as Google AdSense, local bloggers are attracted to Nuffnang because it focuses on promoting local products and businesses, which means bloggers have a greater chance of clinching ads on their web space.

'There is no point showing somebody in Singapore an ad from the US, right? So if you sign up with Google AdSense, the ads appearing will be public service announcements, which pay zero dollars,' said local blogger Cowboy Caleb, who earned \$200 in two weeks from Nike Singapore ads on his blog.

Depending on the number of unique visitors to their blogs, bloggers can earn from \$2 to as much as \$2,000 a week for ads placed on their blogs.

Big-time bloggers such as Wendy Cheng, also known as Xixue, can easily earn about \$1,000 a week, said Mr Cheo.

But personal blogs with a smaller readership are benefiting from this service too.

Final-year psychology student Estee Teo, who keeps a personal blog that has up to 150 hits a day, said she earned about \$7 a week from ads for Hitchoo.com, a dating website. The money, though meagre, stokes the ego.

'It feels good that someone actually wants to put their ad on my blog,' said Ms Teo.

For advertisers, the playing field seems huge.

A study by media agency Universal McCann said that Singapore's community of bloggers and blog-readers has increased dramatically in the last six months. About 75 per cent of Singapore's netizens - about 2.5 million people - have read at least one blog in the past six months. By March, 36 per cent of them had blogs of their own.

So far, at least five companies, including Nike Singapore and Hitchoo.com, have run ads on blogs under Nuffnang.

But local advertisers remain conservative. According to a report by Nielsen Media Research, Singapore's online advertising expenditure accounted for only 2 per cent of the market's total advertising spending in March this year. The total advertising expenditure was almost \$2 billion last year.

Still, Mr Cheo is confident that blog advertising will pick up among advertisers.

'They have waited a long time for this, and they are very happy to explore this new medium,' he said.

And there is always the dream of becoming the next big thing on the Internet.

'Who doesn't want to be the next Google?' Mr Cheo said.



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