

BRANDED CONTENT

# These local start-ups are making waves globally with their innovative AI solutions - and securing millions in funding along the way

From cutting down candidate screening time from 37 to eight minutes, to mapping routes in far-flung locations, these Techblazer Award winners are transforming how businesses work and attracting investors

🕒 FRI, JUL 23, 2021 - 5:50 AM | UPDATED MON, AUG 02, 2021 - 10:33 PM



impress.ai co-founders Vaisagh Viswanathan (standing, left), Sudhanshu Ahuja (standing, right), and Amrith Dhananjayan (seated, second from left), with their leadership team in Singapore (photo was taken before Covid-19). PHOTO: IMPRESS.AI

The Covid-19 pandemic has reshaped the global economy and accelerated the demand for new tech services in areas such as hiring and e-commerce. Despite the challenges and tough global outlook, Singapore ranked at the top again in the Asia-Pacific region

on the Global Innovation Index (GII) 2020 for the seventh consecutive year. Adding on to the accolades, Singapore also made it to the Bloomberg Innovation Index this year as the second-most innovative country after South Korea.

Recognising the importance that innovation and technology play in ensuring Singapore continues to thrive, the Techblazer Awards, organised by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) together with SGTech, seeks to put a spotlight on excellence in the development or adoption of tech solutions. Last year, artificial intelligence (AI) emerged as a common theme, with winners demonstrating novel applications across a wide range of fields.

Firing up enthusiasm in the tech start-up space for their creative application of AI are NextBillion.ai and impress.ai, both Silver winners in the Most Promising Innovation category at the Techblazer Awards 2020.

NextBillion.ai's location-based mapping solution has seen an uptake in sectors such as e-commerce and on-demand deliveries, while impress.ai's recruitment chatbot has seen a surge in demand since the pandemic, with the rising need to replace traditional human resource (HR) processes that rely on human interaction. Since their Techblazer Award win, both companies have been winning over enterprise clients, while helping to solve business challenges brought about by the ongoing pandemic.

### **An intelligent chatbot that enhances candidate experience and reduces hiring time for recruiters**

According to Glassdoor for Recruiters, each corporate job opening receives an average of 250 resumes. Of these, four to six are shortlisted, and only one person is hired. Faced with a flood of applications, some of the world's largest organisations are using AI to reduce the time that talent acquisition takes and guide potential candidates quickly through application functions.

**Stay updated with BT newsletters**

Your email address

**SIGN UP**

By signing up, you agree to our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms and Conditions](#).



**Your feedback is important to us**

Tell us what you think. Email us at [btuserfeedback@sph.com.sg](mailto:btuserfeedback@sph.com.sg)

---

Headquartered in Singapore and with offices in India and Australia, impress.ai has garnered more than 50 large enterprises as clients since its launch in 2017.

The firm's intelligent – and empathetic – recruitment chatbot has been making waves on the local HR scene since it was deployed to impress.ai's clients. The chatbot conducts personalised interviews with candidates and assesses their responses, which contribute towards the client's decision to hire.

DBS Bank, one of impress.ai's first clients, says "Jim", impress.ai's virtual recruiter for the bank, has helped reduce the time its recruitment specialists take to screen candidates, from 37 to just eight minutes. Needless to say, Jim's popularity has grown tremendously, and he now assists the bank's HR department in six of the markets that DBS currently operates in.

"Kate", Singtel's virtual recruiter, continues to work alongside the company's HR team to manage its Management Associate Programme, attending to candidate inquiries with an accuracy level of nearly 96 per cent.

Over at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, impress.ai's chatbot "Eva" has been regularly engaging in two-way conversations with applicants on their passions and aptitudes as part of the institution's admission process, and her services are being rolled out to more schools after a successful pilot run.

impress.ai co-founder and chief executive officer Sudhanshu Ahuja says: "We've raised \$4 million since winning the award and are using these funds to drive expansion into new markets such as Australia, Hong Kong and Taiwan, accelerate product development, increase outreach marketing, and attract more expert talent to our global team.

"Language is integral when rolling out into different markets in the Asia-Pacific. Our platform now supports over 10 languages — with the most recent addition being Japanese — and we're looking to add more as we expand. As a no-code, self-service

enterprise platform, it's easy for recruitment teams with no coding background to use and it integrates well with HR tools already in use like Taleo, SuccessFactors and Workday."

## **AI-powered location technology that maps the roads less travelled, enhancing mobility for businesses in global markets**

Also focused on the region, NextBillion.ai is targeting the next billion users in emerging markets with its mapping technology.

For those living in places where driving directions are available at our fingertips, it might be surprising to learn that there are millions of roads around the world that have not yet been mapped. With the help of AI, roads in rural areas can now be mapped in a significantly shorter time.

"Our capabilities include AI-powered analyses of satellite imagery. This enables us to efficiently map and track roads, traffic patterns, and regional developments in different weather conditions," explains co-founder Gaurav Bubna.

NextBillion.ai's technology helps to optimise routes as well as enable real-time updates and scheduling in some of the most far-flung locations in the region, providing a critical link between businesses and their customers in hard-to-reach markets.

"Investing in customised maps can be too costly for some companies. Our decentralised mapping solution can be tailored to each enterprise and the markets they operate in. In some cases, even different cities within the same country. This differentiates it from more universal options like Google Maps," adds Mr Bubna.

Founded just last year by Mr Bubna, Mr Ajay Bulusu, and Mr Shaolin Zheng, who are all former Grab employees, NextBillion.ai already has 15 customers in 20 countries across the logistics, e-commerce, on-demand delivery and transport aggregators sectors.

The decentralised, highly customisable solution is also offered in more than 15 languages. Instead of offering a homogeneous tool to all their customers, NextBillion.ai's solution provides a location-based experience that adapts to local needs, from last-mile delivery to native language support.

Mr Bubna reveals that one client, a popular ride-hailing company in the United Kingdom, has harnessed NextBillion.ai's technology to manage compliance requirements regarding serviceability and pricing. Another client in India uses the technology to incorporate driving performance for inter-city trucking, including pit stops, for more accurate predictions of estimated arrival timings.

"We're so honoured to be recognised as a promising Singapore technology start-up. Singapore was our first choice as a base for NextBillion.ai because the environment is so conducive for growth. As a hub, it offers seamless access to all of Asia and ease of travel globally. As a technology start-up, we find it beneficial to operate under strong corporate and IP (intellectual property) protection laws. Having access to investors and capital has been particularly critical to our survival and growth as a start-up," he says.

### **More doors opened since clinching Techblazer Award**

"Since our Techblazer Award win, we have seen an increase in the number of leads and potential clients. This award has raised our profile greatly and led to our most recent fund-raising round, where we received \$4 million."

– Mr Sudhanshu Ahuja, co-founder and chief executive officer, impress.ai.

"Since winning the Techblazer Award, M12 — a Microsoft venture fund — has invested \$6.25 million in our firm. This will help us scale up and grow into new markets like North America, and add new talents to our growing team of 60."

– Mr Gaurav Bubna, co-founder, NextBillion.ai.

### **NOMINATE YOUR COMPANY FOR THE TECHBLAZER AWARDS 2021**

Calling all who are making a mark in the realm of tech innovation – it's your time to shine with the Techblazer Awards, Singapore's top award that recognises excellence in the development or adoption of tech solutions. for the Most Promising Innovation, Best Adoption or Student Techblazer categories by Aug 13.

*The Techblazer Awards is organised by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) together with SGTech, in support of SG Digital.*

*Brought to you by*



THE BUSINESS TIMES

Leave nothing to chance with BT.

The BT Personal Edition

Only

**S\$9.90** /month

No lock-in contract

SUBSCRIBE NOW



**BT is now on Telegram!**

For daily updates on weekdays and specially selected content for the weekend.  
Subscribe to [t.me/BizTimes](https://t.me/BizTimes)

## TECHNOLOGY

**NTU scientists transform fruit leftovers into antibacterial bandages**

---

UK PM Johnson to challenge Amazon founder Bezos over company's tax record: FT

---

Tencent bows to regulator, allows WeChat users access to rivals' links

---

A pertinent need for firms to keep focus on cyber risk management

---

Google, Apple 'censor' Navalny app as Russian polls open

---

US Department of Justice resumes talks on plea deal with Huawei's Meng Wanzhou

---

|

## Lifestyle



[PRINT ARCHIVE](#)

[MON](#)

[TUE](#)

[WED](#)

[THU](#)

[FRI](#)

[SAT](#)

---

**SUBSCRIBE TO THE BUSINESS TIMES NOW : CALL +65 388 3838 | [BTSubscribe.sg](#)**

---

[ABOUT US](#) [CONTACT US](#) [HELP](#) [TERMS & CONDITIONS](#) [SPH WEBSITES](#) [DATA PROTECTION POLICY](#)

SPH DIGITAL NEWS

© 2021 SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDINGS LTD. REGN NO. 198402668E