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**Headline: At 34, Alvin Poh Is A Multi-Millionaire. But He Doesn't Think He's Rich.**

### **At 34, Alvin Poh Is A Multi-Millionaire. But He Doesn't Think He's Rich.**

Last month, thirty-four year-old Alvin Poh left the company his business partner and him built from the ground up.

But if you were expecting boardroom politics or corporate drama, you'd be wrong.

He was asked to stay, but knowing that his staff were well taken care of, and that the company was in good hands, the now ex-CEO of Vodien Internet Solutions decided it was time for him to take a break and pursue other interests.

Fifteen million dollars richer.

Yes, you read that right.

Far removed from crowds of plebeians, Rider's Café is sandwiched between the Bukit Timah Saddle Club and a golf course. In my mind, it's the perfect place to have lunch with a man of his stature. Having arrived slightly early, I choose a table in the corner and pass the time watching aristocrats sip tea after an exhausting morning of equestrianism. But just as I'm about to properly indulge my fantasy of being rich enough to do nothing all day, a text message from the multi-millionaire signals that it's time to open my notebook and get to work.

Dressed in a simple black tee shirt and jeans, Alvin's attire is as relaxed as his demeanour, and he says hello with the broadest of smiles. Honestly, I was expecting a fur coat and huge bling but alas, it's not meant to be. We then proceed to chat about everything ranging from the weather – outstanding conversational skills, I know – to being alumni of the same secondary school.

After his salad (more chicken, no dressing) and my beer (4%) arrive, we finally talk about the stuff that matters.

The eldest son of a clinical assistant mother and a father who works odd jobs, Alvin sheepishly shares that growing up, he was never a model student.

He hated the rigour of academic life but at his parents' behest, studied hard enough to enter junior college.

Much to his disappointment however, he discovered that junior college was exactly the same as secondary school in terms of curriculum, structure, and regimentation. He decided that it wasn't for him, and began looking into polytechnic courses related to IT and computers – an area he had developed a keen interest in while growing up.

In between bites of his salad, he tells me how the love affair started.

“One day when I was in secondary school, my dad came home with a computer. I started fiddling with it and it was the ability to create stuff that got me hooked. I experimented with the “cooler stuff” like editing photographs, graphic design, and creating web pages. The more there was to learn, the more I fell in love with it.”

At an age where I was blatantly lying to websites about being over eighteen, Alvin trawled the internet and magazines in search of anything he could learn about his newfound interest.

Eventually, he managed to convince his concerned parents to let him drop out of junior college and enrol in Temasek polytechnic, to pursue a diploma in info-communications. He also shares that persuading them was no easy feat, but their hard-earned blessings fuelled his drive for success.

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Temasek polytechnic is also where Alvin met his future business partner, John Jervis Lee.

“From day zero I set out to find like-minded people who possessed the same desire to excel and that’s how I met John. We got to know each other during orientation, hung out for a while and later became classmates,” Alvin recalls, his lips curling into another smile.

From then on, the pair stuck by each other after realising that that they worked well as a team on their many group projects. In their second year’s term break, they put that chemistry to a more significant use.

With Alvin already making enough pocket money from external freelance web design projects to stop working as a door-to-door salesman and surveyor (amongst other odd jobs), he roped John in with plans to expand. Needless to say, the plan worked.

In 2002 both eighteen-year-olds founded their company, Vodien Internet Solutions.



The co-founders of Vodien, John & Alvin. (Image: HostingAdvice)

Through word-of-mouth, Vodien’s client base started to grow until one day, the pair were unable to fully commit to their growing demand.

“The web design business requires a considerable amount of hand-holding with the client, something we were unable to do on a bigger scale because we were still full-time students. We then decided to focus on hosting.”

Upon doing so, the business became more scalable and profits were largely ploughed back into the company to ensure continued growth. But having to take time off for National Service and university, their growth plateaued.

Only towards the latter stages of their college life did they decide to pick their business up again and they haven’t looked back since.

Alvin goes on to share that in the company’s early years, they faced a whole host of problems. With the company was now able to handle a larger volume of clients with less time needed for each, Alvin and John decided to focus on 24/7 customer support.

This however, meant that they were on standby round-the-clock. Whenever assistance was needed, whatever they were doing at the time was dropped so they could help. Sleep then, came in the form of any irregular, stolen hour they could find.

But greatness demands sacrifice and the pair were only too happy to help.

As Vodien continued along its upward trajectory, Alvin and John also had to learn how to manage their expanding business. Using Human Resources as an example, he tells me about his experience.

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“We didn't even know where or how to start. We had to figure out everything from which job portals to use to how to word a contract! The whole process was all self-taught and experimental. But that's the kind of spirit my partner and I had: learn, try, fail and try again!”

That determination to succeed is what led Vodien to become the top hosting provider in the country.

In July 2017, fifteen years after Vodien was born, the company was acquired by the Australian online solutions provider Dreamscape Networks, for \$30million.

Funnily enough, Alvin tells me that though the deal was surreal, it didn't sink in until much later.

“The very next day after the acquisition, we were back in the office pushing projects and driving growth as if it never happened!” he says.

A year later, he left the company altogether.

At this point in our meeting, we get the bill and head back out into the afternoon's sunshine. But we don't part ways.

Instead, Alvin and I take a short drive to the aforementioned golf course down the road to discuss if, and how all that money has changed his life.



As we collect our mini-golf clubs, Alvin shares that the freedom which wealth brings was something he found quite disorientating at first.

“Here's the thing about money and time that I realised. If you've been working on something for such a large part of your life, and one day everything stops, it's highly likely you're going to suffer from a loss of purpose,” he says, as he takes his first putt.

In a bid to avoid that negativity, Alvin tried to keep himself busy with hobbies. But there was one small problem: he had no clue as to what they were.

“After the acquisition I actually went through a process of figuring out what my interests were. Up until then I had never had the time to commit to anything else besides my business so I looked back and thought about everything I had tried before.”

In his case, it was snowboarding. He had only ever attempted the sport once before, but remembering the utter failure of his initial attempt, Alvin decided to give it a shot again. After going for indoor classes, he gradually improved and now even has plans to become a snowboarding instructor next year.

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It's this never-say-die attitude of his that I spot as he lines up his next shot. When I informed him that we were going to play mini-golf a week ago, he forewarned me that he "sucked". But there was now a look of steely determination on his face.

His uncharacteristically serious countenance changes however, when I playfully tell him that paying attention in physics lessons would've helped.

Through his laughter, Alvin shares that he's always been fascinated with the human ability to learn and adapt.

"I mean, given enough time, the brain and body just figures out how to do it. That eureka moment is very addictive."

Thus began Alvin's quest to pick up any skill he could to improve himself – a point illustrated when he tells me that the following day, he has another lesson in plumbing at a course offered by ITE Simei.

"I never knew how to do plumbing. I always looked at the pipes in my place and wondered how it all worked. But now I know! Isn't it cool?"

Seeing the bemused expression on my face, Alvin bursts into laughter before explaining his odd choice.

"These are all skills that are great to have in the family, especially as a parent. I don't want to be a father who only knows how to run a business. I want to be able to teach my kids things."



At the mention of his future family, I then seize the chance to ask Alvin about his love-life before I take my next shot.

After politely waiting for me to miss, he tells me that he's currently meeting people and is ready for a long-term relationship. That said, he has yet to meet the right person.

I also discover that he tells his dates that he's a tech entrepreneur, not exactly lying but definitely cautious.

Walking to the next hole on the course, he pauses before answering my next question of whether money has affected his chances of true love.

"I'm planning to keep it under wraps for as long as possible although I imagine it's going to be quite difficult, since I don't have any office to go to at the moment!"

We both laugh but after a while, his smile fades and a small sigh escapes his lips.

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“I haven't figured it out yet. I mean, it depends on the girl but how do you go about telling someone you have all that money in your bank account?” he says, without realising he's asking the wrong person.

On a happier note, Alvin perks back up when I enquire how else he's spent his fifteen million.

Beaming, Alvin clues me in on the endowment fund he set up with the Singapore Management University, his alma mater.

Having been a scholarship recipient himself, he knows first-hand the importance of a quality education and remains grateful to SMU for providing him the opportunity to do his masters at Carnegie Mellon university in Pittsburgh.

He wants to pay it forward and has since donated \$250,000 towards providing financial assistance to deserving students.

As he sinks the last shot of the day, Alvin tells me he still wants to do more.

“The endowment fund is something that impacts just one person in a year. My goal is to get more people together for more social impact. I saw how my business people and ultimately I want to do something that matters to society as a whole.”

Our game of mini-golf over, we approach the 19th hole, otherwise known as “the bar” to non-golfers, and our conversation ends on a philosophical note.

“Everyone has only got one life to live and it's really up to you to determine how that time is spent. For me, it's both exciting and scary to know that my time here on earth is limited. I want to be the best version of myself I can be.”

With that, we part ways and the multi-millionaire rides off into the sunset.



Having spent an afternoon with Alvin, it's pretty clear that money hasn't changed him all that much. If anything, it's given him a new purpose in life.

He is a down-to-earth gentleman who never set out to be rich but was nevertheless rewarded for the determination and sacrifice in his quest to be the best at whatever he chose to do.

What's also obvious is that to him, wealth isn't about driving fancy cars or dining at the swankiest restaurants, but rather, having the ability and freedom to better himself.

Alvin has money but what he's really rich in, is time.

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And choosing to spend it on improving not just himself, but the people around him, is perhaps the noblest thing of all.



Dammit.