



THEORY OF *NEXT*: SEA

IGNITE YOUR NEXT BIG IDEA
— INVENT THE FUTURE.

SHAPING SOUTHEAST ASIA'S FUTURE: A CALL TO *INNOVATORS*

Southeast Asia is on the brink of unprecedented technological and economic transformation, creating a wealth of untapped startup opportunities for visionary founders.

This comprehensive intelligence report maps the exact sectors, business models, and market gaps poised for disruption in 2025 and beyond.

Inside, you'll discover:

- Actionable startup ideas across AI/LLMs, fintech, enterprise, consumer tech, and sustainability sectors
- Concrete market intelligence drawn from our investment theses and macroeconomic analysis
- Country-specific insights for Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia's unique ecosystems
- Practical founder playbooks for navigating market entry, regulatory landscapes, and scaling challenges

At Antler, we've distilled our expertise from funding 1,000+ startups to identify the highest-potential venture opportunities emerging across the region.

Whether you're brainstorming your next startup, seeking co-founder validation, or pivoting your current business, this report provides the strategic intelligence you need.

Don't just participate in Southeast Asia's tech revolution—build the solutions that will define it.

Join us as we explore the specific problems, market gaps, and technology needs that will create the next generation of billion-dollar companies.

INTRODUCTION

Today, Southeast Asia stands at the cross-roads of a new revolution. This is a region rich in cultural diversity and a strategic location priming it for rapid growth.

Through a bottoms-up analysis of recent investments and market dynamics, as well as discussions with business leaders, we built this document to highlight key investment themes and valuable sectors ripe for disruption that can take Southeast Asia into the future.

At Antler, we believe that exceptional founders are the driving force behind meaningful progress. We are a day-zero investor specializing in early-stage investments and prioritizing strong co-founder teams with the potential to adapt and scale.

This philosophy has guided us in backing transformative companies across future-forward industries. Our mission is to empower bold ideas that align with a tech-enabled future, driving innovation and long-term growth.

We hope this document inspires and equips you with insights to harness SEA's immense opportunities for regional transformation.

Let's dive in together.

JUSSI SALOVAARA
Co-founder and Managing Partner





6x HIGHER GDP PER CAPITA *Than SEA*

"With just 0.8% of Southeast Asia's population but 6x higher GDP per capita, Singapore's influence far outweighs its size. Its world-class regulatory frameworks, deep capital access, and thriving fintech ecosystem make it the ultimate launchpad for high-impact innovation.

Time and again, we've seen companies that build and scale from Singapore gain a strategic edge. The key is leveraging Singapore's advanced infrastructure not just as a local advantage, but as a blueprint for regional and global expansion. The companies that break out from here don't just lead Southeast Asia—they set the standard for the world."



RUFUS SORSA

Associate Partner at Antler Singapore



4th LARGEST CONSUMER ADOPTION *OF GENERATIVE AI*

"Indonesia isn't just adopting AI—it's shaping its future. As the world's fourth-largest user of generative AI, the country is rapidly integrating AI into commerce, finance, and industry at an unprecedented scale.

With a population of 285 million and a thriving digital economy, Indonesia offers an unparalleled proving ground for AI-driven business models. From small businesses leveraging AI-powered automation to large-scale industry transformation, Indonesia is proving that the next wave of AI breakthroughs will be built, tested, and scaled here."



AGUNG BEZHARIE HADINEGORO

Partner at Antler Indonesia



53% GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN *GROWTH*

"Vietnam's rapid evolution from a manufacturing powerhouse to a strategic global hub for technology and innovation is nothing short of extraordinary. The 53% surge in US and EU sourcing from Southeast Asia, with Vietnam at the forefront, underscores the country's pivotal role in the 'China+1' strategy.

But Vietnam's story is more than just manufacturing—The country is developing a world-class ecosystem and talent pool that fuses industrial strength with digital innovation.

This powerful combination of industrial scale, technological innovation, and a highly skilled workforce is positioning Vietnam not just as a regional leader but as an essential player in the next era of global high-tech manufacturing."



ERIK JONSSON

Partner at Antler Vietnam



\$86B COMMITTED TO *Fuel Malaysia's Transformation*

"Malaysia's commitment to AI goes beyond infrastructure—it's about uniquely positioning itself as a neutral ground bridging East and West. With a record-breaking \$86 billion in approved investments, the country is solidifying its status as a global hub for digital innovation and AI development.

The continued influx of tech investments from global giants, coupled with strong technical talent, stable infrastructure, and a pro-business environment, puts Malaysia at the forefront of AI deployment and digital transformation across the region and beyond."



FRANK KANG

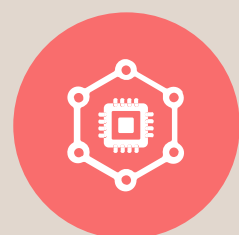
Associate Partner at Antler Malaysia

KEY MACRO THEMES



When game-changing technologies meet industries ripe for digitalisation in Southeast Asia, you get a region that is on the brink of a transformation on par with the industrial revolution.

In our exploration of key macro themes, we adopted a sector-agnostic lens, focusing on transformative technologies and solution-driven opportunities. Among these macro themes, 5 stood out with the potential to redefine economies across Southeast Asia—and beyond.



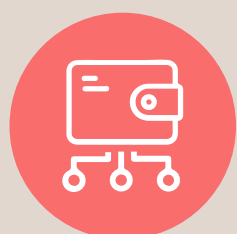
AI/LLMs



Enterprise



Consumer



Fintech



Climate

AI/LLMs

AI will drive the next wave of industry transformation, mirroring the cloud and mobile transition in the last two decades.

EMERGING SPACES



Verticalized, AI-first applications for APAC



LLM agent development & management



Multimodal AI solutions



Small language models (SLMs)/ Distillation



OPPORTUNITIES



Commodities
Industry and locale specific solutions



Manufacturing
AI-native factories



Digital Economy
Cross-cultural LLMs for media and e-commerce

ENTERPRISE

As AI reshapes business operations, enterprise software spend is projected to reach \$1 trillion by 2030. Companies that can harness AI will capture significant market share.

EMERGING SPACES



Enterprise productivity and security



Process mining & automation



Sales & marketing stack



AI-driven customer service evolution

OPPORTUNITIES

Projected 2030
global software spend

\$1 TRILLION



Specialized, vertical-AI solutions



Low/ No-code automation for SEA's >71 million MSMEs

CONSUMER

By 2025, 40% of smartphone users will regularly use AI assistants, redefining consumer experiences.

EMERGING SPACES



Next gen creative and e-commerce platforms



AI discovery and hyper-personalization engines



Public safety technology



Personalized and affordable healthcare

OPPORTUNITIES

Digital Economy
GMV (2024)

\$263 BILLION*



SEA's diverse cultures and digital savvy people make it great AI localization and personalization test bed

*e-Conomy SEA 2023 report | Bain & Company

FINTECH

AI-driven solutions will be at the forefront of SEA’s fintech growth, revolutionising matters from personal banking to global trade finance.

EMERGING SPACES

-  AI-augmented financial services
-  Cross-border payments & consumer remittances
-  AI accounting & finance workflows
-  Supply chain finance solutions

OPPORTUNITIES

\$1.5 TRILLION

Global Fintech Market
By 2030

\$11 TRILLION

in market cap is still trapped
with legacy institutions

CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Climate action urgency is growing. We expect exponential growth in ESG-tech that tackles local environmental challenges.

EMERGING SPACES

-  Clean energy tech and infrastructure
-  Industrial decarbonization tech
-  Carbon markets & climate finance
-  Climate risk & adaptational solutions

OPPORTUNITIES

-  Carbon Markets
-  Clean Energy
-  Decarbonization

THEME 1

AI AND LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS (LLMs)

Southeast Asia provides **fertile ground for scalable AI innovations**. With its diverse cultures, hundreds of languages, and a mobile-first, tech-savvy population, this region offers unmatched learning data for building localized AI models. Malaysia, for instance, is making strides to becoming a neutral AI hub that can serve Western and Eastern markets.

The rise of video and social commerce, powered by a thriving creator economy, is creating opportunities for AI tools that localize content, streamline cross-border e-commerce, and enable creators to scale globally. AI solutions tested in SEA's dynamic markets can also scale to emerging economies worldwide, unlocking massive potential.

Southeast Asia's traditional industries like agriculture, mining, and manufacturing are ripe for digital transformation. From AI-native factories to localized "Shopify" solutions tailored for SEA's B2B industries, innovation can reshape the enterprise landscape.

Meanwhile, MSMEs and businesses in tier 2 and 3 cities—many of which are smartphone-based—drive demand for mobile-first, no-code automation tools.

Southeast Asia stands at the forefront of global AI-driven transformation, with opportunities that extend far beyond the region.

"Every generation or so, we see a major technological shift. First the internet, then mobile, and now—AI is the next reset. What makes this especially exciting for SEA is that it levels the playing field, giving the region a chance to leapfrog traditional SaaS adoption and move straight to AI-driven workflows, powered by open-source models and autonomous agents."

WINNIE KHOO
Partner at Antler



Why We're Excited:

AI breakthroughs led by transformers, GPUs, retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) and open-source innovations are paving the way for advanced AI systems. These building blocks will drive transformative solutions across industries, from traditional sectors like agriculture and manufacturing to e-commerce and the creator economy.

01. NEW DEVELOPER TOOLS AND APPLICATION FRAMEWORKS DEMOCRATIZING AI SOLUTIONS DEVELOPMENT

Developer tools from leaders like LLM Ops tools like Langsmith and Weights & Biases are democratizing AI by providing reusable building blocks to create, optimize, and monitor advanced AI applications.

02. NEW EDITING EXPERIENCES: FROM COPILOT TO DIRECTOR'S MODE

Generative AI is redefining editing with tools like Director's Mode for camera-like experiences and voice manipulation through prompts.

03. INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED AGENTIC SYSTEMS

Generative AI is achieving end-to-end problem-solving autonomy, including accessing external tools.

04. SMALL LANGUAGE MODELS INCREASINGLY ENABLED BY NEW TECHNIQUES

- Emerging reasoning techniques are enabling AI to perform more complex tasks. Developers are using frameworks like Langchain for complex sequences.
- New transfer learning techniques like RLHF and fine-tuning are becoming more accessible, allowing businesses to adapt foundational AI to their specific domains and improve from user feedback.
- Retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) brings in more business or user context improving AI truthfulness and accuracy.

AI in SEA's Emerging Spaces

Next Generation AI: Building the Foundation for Intelligent Enterprise Systems



Small Language Models (SLMs) / Distillation

Details

- Distillation techniques for creating compact, task-specific models
- Compressing AI models to work better with specific hardware setups and environments
- Ensemble approaches that combine multiple small models to match the power of larger ones
- Ultra low-latency AI systems designed for real-time tasks e.g., self-driving cars or stock trading

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Local language model development
- Optimizing models for local deployment and edge computing
- Resource-efficient AI



Multimodal AI Development

Details

- AI that mimics speech patterns and emotions
- Creating coherent stories in various formats
- AI that can reason about complex scenarios across various media
- Context-aware voice assistants that use sound and visuals

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Creative ad content generation
- Video content generation and editing
- Cross-format content generation
- Integrated shopping and entertainment



LLM Agent Development & Management

Details

- Training methods to create task-specific AI agents from general models
- Orchestration platforms to coordinate multiple AI agents on complex projects
- LLM agent evaluation and benchmarking tools
- AI agents with advanced reasoning that can break down complex problems into smaller steps

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Specialized AI agents
- Culturally-aware AI agents
- LLM agent orchestration and evaluation tools



Specialized AI Development Platforms

Details

- AI model libraries and pre-trained components for specific industries
- Specialised low-code/no-code AI platforms
- Industry-specific data preparation & feature engineering
- AI tools that adapt to industry regulations for compliance

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Localised LLMs (local languages, healthcare)
- AI-powered semiconductor design optimization
- Simple business automation tools
- Mobile app development
- Accessible development tools

ENTERPRISE AND B2B

Innovation in enterprise and manufacturing is readying Southeast Asia (SEA) for transformative growth. As we were researching the region, these supporting themes emerged:

Manufacturing: As an up-and-coming manufacturing region, SEA’s factories present untapped potential for localized manufacturing software and AI-native upgrades tailored to regional realities.

Resources: Traditional commodity industries are undergoing digital reinvention, with advancements such as AI-powered drilling in Indonesia and blockchain-enabled transparency for palm oil supply chains. ESG-focused solutions also hold promise for modernizing these industries sustainably.

Emerging market enterprise software testbed: SEA’s unique constraints—mobile-first MSMEs, low discretionary spending, and diverse languages—position the region as an ideal testbed for resource-efficient enterprise software. Solutions that can succeed here have the potential to scale across other emerging markets, from South Asia to Latin America.



\$1.2 TRILLION

Manufacturing Sector
Value by 2030¹



37.6% GDP

Contribution from
Agriculture and Industry
in SEA 2022²



60% GDP

Contributed by **MSMEs**
in markets like
Indonesia³

1. [ASEAN Manufacturers Poised to Tap into \\$1.2 Trillion Opportunity through Regenerative Manufacturing: Kearney Report](#)
2. [ASEAN Statistical Yearbook 2023 Page 94](#)
3. [Gov’t to Maintain MSMEs’ Role as Economic Backbone - Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia](#)

Why We’re Excited:

The enterprise software landscape is undergoing a fundamental shift as AI capabilities move from experimental pilots to full solutions. Traditional SaaS models are being disrupted as we see the emergence of industry-specific solutions, automation solutions, and new infrastructure. Applications are becoming smarter and easier to integrate as well, changing the way businesses operate.

01. VERTICAL SAAS AS THE NEXT WAVE OF INNOVATION:

Deeply verticalized and localized SaaS platforms can transform underserved sectors like agriculture and manufacturing.

02. VERTICAL AI OUTPERFORMING GENERALIST AI:

These new AI models win by leveraging domain-specific data, automating complex processes, and utilising autonomous decision-making.

03. THE API ECONOMY ENABLING ENTERPRISE INTEGRATION:

The API economy platforms are simplifying API creation and management, driving seamless, secure integrations for digital transformation.

04. USER EXPERIENCE AS A KEY DIFFERENTIATOR:

As remote work and talent shortages redefine workplaces, enterprise software is prioritizing employee experience and well-being. Employee-focused software enhances productivity and engagement with personalized, AI-driven tools.

Enterprise and B2B's Emerging Spaces

Business Transformation: Empowering enterprises with AI-assisted, secure, and collaborative tools to accelerate innovation



Enterprise Productivity and Security

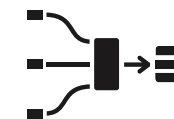
Details

AI systems that can:

- Identify and **resolve process bottlenecks**
- **Predictive maintenance** that proactively flags problems
- **AI-driven knowledge management systems** that automatically organises and surfaces enterprise data
- Advanced security **threat detection systems**

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Digital transformation tools for emerging markets
- Cross-border collaboration tools
- Light-weight, mobile first solutions for MSMEs



Process Mining & Automation

Details

- AI systems that **autonomously improves processes**
- **Cross-functional AI assistants** that coordinate and optimize processes
- Natural language interfaces **allowing anyone to create automation workflows**

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Manufacturing process optimization
- Localised business process optimization
- Resource tracking and trade process optimization



Sales & Marketing Sales Stack

Details

- **AI-driven account-based marketing (ABM)** platforms
- **Proactive sales strategies** powered by predictive analytics
- **AI-powered growth hacks** and optimization tools, built on the back of data connectors (i.e., APIs)
- **Real-time video analytics**

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Ad campaign management
- SEA super apps
- Localised and cross-border campaigns across different languages



Customer Service Innovation

Details

- **Multimodal AI support systems** that understand and respond to customers across text, voice, and visuals
- **Predictive** customer service platforms
- AI-driven customer support **personalization**
- Advanced analytics tools for **customer satisfaction and support team performance**

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- AI-powered support systems
- Mobile support solutions (for mobile-first businesses)

CONSUMER INDUSTRIES AND EXPERIENCES

With AI poised to unlock new experiences in everything from social, media, and entertainment to health and wellness, we will be seeing a plethora of AI-native and consumer products offering innovative solutions and enduring value in ways that previously seemed impossible.

SEA’s Startup Mafia and The Rising Focus on Employee Wellness: Former executives from SEA’s unicorns are building new companies based on deep regional insights and battle-tested playbooks. This is leading to an emergence of specialized talent networks unique to Southeast Asia, and a higher demand for employee wellness too.

AI Localization and Cross-border Potential: When you combine AI’s popularity in SEA with a tech-savvy population and the region’s cultural diversity, SEA is an ideal localization training hub. Companies that can master

various contexts and languages, while applying them to Southeast Asia’s unique cross-border trade potential can develop truly global solutions.

Cross-border Video Commerce and the Creator Economy: SEA is changing the face and rules of video commerce and the creator economy. Live streams can be turned into instant storefronts, AI-powered content creation and translation that works across borders and building the new backbone of truly cross-border commerce are just some examples.



STARTUP
MAFIA

Former **Grab, Gojek, and Sea** executives are building new companies



1200
LANGUAGES

In Southeast Asia, making it an ideal localization training hub



157 MILLION
USERS

On TikTok in Indonesia. Indonesia has the **most TikTok users in the world**¹

1.Campaign Indonesia - Behind the Indonesian TikTok paradox: Largest number of users, limited global penetration

Why We’re Excited:

We’re seeking founders with a bold vision of what’s missing in the world and a clear perspective about why it needs to exist. Winners will be able to develop winning products that stand out amidst their AI-native and consumer product competitors.

01. *OBSERVATION OVER PREDICTION:*
In consumer markets, success hinges on product "magic" and founder intuition. Observation and identifying momentum beats prediction here.
02. *CULTURAL AND PLATFORM SHIFTS DRIVE INNOVATION:*
These shifts create opportunities for products that redefine consumer behavior and capture the imagination through timing and market entry.
03. *EXTREME PRODUCTS WIN:*
a16z* found out that extreme products thrive due to strong word-of-mouth, starting with unconventional use cases but ultimately meeting genuine consumer needs.
04. *WELLNESS IN FOCUS:*
As mental health awareness grows, consumer products integrating wellness features are gaining traction, especially those that deliver measurable improvements while keeping users engaged.
05. *AI-POWERED PERSONALIZATION:*
Advances in AI are driving a shift toward tailored consumer experiences, with startups leveraging personalization for interfaces, pricing, and product creation while maintaining a balance between customization and privacy.

*a16z Consumer Abundance Agenda

Consumer Industries' Emerging Spaces

Experience Revolution: Personalizing experiences, fostering communities, and blending digital with physical to redefine engagement and commerce



AI Discovery and Recommendations

Details

- **AI-driven product recommendations** based on favorite creators
- **Predicting trends** from creator activity and engagement
- **Virtual shopping experiences** to explore creator-recommended products
- **Cross-platform engines** that suggest content tailored to user interests

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Ad targeting and optimization
- Personalized user experiences (e.g. shopping recommendations)
- Gaming - Player acquisition and engagement optimization
- Creator discovery and matching



Public Safety Technology

Details

- **Advanced computer vision:** develop privacy-preserving surveillance
- **Emergency response systems:** cut response times and improve coordination
- **Community safety platforms:** bridge community-police communication gap
- **Law enforcement efficiency tools:** reduce paperwork, increase patrol time

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Neighborhood and city surveillance



Next-Gen Creative Tools

Details

- AI-powered tools to **generate custom soundtracks or assist in music creation**
- **VR content creation platforms** that use natural language commands
- AI-driven **content localization and contextualization**

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Local content generation
- Content creation and editing
- Technical content creation
- Gaming - Content creation tools for game assets



Health Innovation

Details

- AI **matching teens with mental health professionals** based on their needs
- Natural language processing tools analyze text to **detect potential mental health concerns**
- **Gamified mental health interventions**
- AI-powered startups use biomarker testing for **personalized nutrition and health advice**

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Tech worker wellness platforms
- AI-powered support systems
- Mobile support solutions (for mobile-first businesses)

FINTECH

Finance has long been plagued by inefficiencies and low transparency. Open banking, crypto, and AI are driving a digital revolution, freeing up **\$11 trillion market cap** tied up in legacy systems. The reward for success is massive: fintech innovations proven in Southeast Asia also have the potential to succeed in other emerging markets globally.

SEA’s rapidly digitalizing industries offer fintech development opportunities. SEA has carved a niche by specializing in hard-to-automate manufacturing along with agriculture and commodities, all poised for digital transformation.

SEA has 650 million consumers with an average of \$200 in monthly discretionary spending. Pioneering fintech firms are finding success by efficiently processing microtransactions at scale. SEA’s many MSMEs also need remittance and payment solutions and alternative credit assessments tailored to informal economies among other unmet financial needs.

Additionally, **the creator economy and video commerce** are fueling demand for cross-border payment and logistics infrastructure.

With its unique combination of economic diversity, technological innovation, and market scale, SEA is primed for startups and investors to redefine its fintech future.

TECH-LEAPFROGGING
SEA’s Tier 2/3 cities are leapfrogging to e-wallets and digital businesses.

THE OPPORTUNITY:

Building fintech specifically for them



Why We’re Excited:

We believe the best solutions will be those built by developers with strong domain expertise who create tools with customers as the focal point. We are looking forward to businesses that reimagine financial services through AI augmented streamlining for business workflows and unlock innovation for cross-border finance.

01. *AI AGENT ECONOMY: A NEW PARADIGM IN FINANCIAL SERVICES*

The recent launch of Stripe’s Agent Toolkit signals a crucial inflection point in the development of agent-enabled commerce. This validates our thesis that traditional payment infrastructure for agent-specific use cases. We expect to see increased competition in virtual card issuance and programmable payment authorization.

02. *INFERENCE-BASED APPROACH LEADING TO FINANCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE 2.0*

AI is transforming financial services by replacing traditional rule-based systems.

We’re seeing a shift towards AI-driven, inference-based models that can handle complex, unstructured data and make nuanced decisions, particularly with financial use cases with API orchestration for more adaptable solutions.

03. *COMPLIANCE-AS-A-SERVICE IS BECOMING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE*

Rising financial regulation complexity, especially in emerging markets, is driving demand for AI-powered compliance automation. We’re excited about scalable API-first solutions for KYC/AML and transaction monitoring, with the best startups reducing false positives and adapting to evolving regulations—crucial in Southeast Asia’s diverse landscape.

04. *EMBEDDED FINANCE INFRASTRUCTURE IS EVOLVING*

Innovations abound in payment orchestration, treasury management, and cross-border payment rails designed explicitly for digital-first businesses.

Southeast Asias lack of legacy infrastructure provides an opportunity to leapfrog to API-first solutions. Success will come from flexible, scalable platforms that meet today’s complex business needs while adapting to emerging technologies.

Fintech's Emerging Spaces

Future of Finance: Building Intelligent Infrastructure for the Digital Economy



AI-Augmented Financial Services

Details

- **AI-driven risk assessment tools** that analyze financial products and market conditions
- **Automated compliance systems** for evolving regulations
- **Personalized financial coaching platforms** using AI insights with human expertise

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Next-gen credit scoring solutions coupled with optimal collection strategies
- Affordable financial products for Tier 2/3 Cities



AI Accounting & Finance Workflows

Details

- **Automated AI-powered reconciliation systems**
- **Intelligent document processing** to extract and categorize financial data
- AI for **financial modeling and scenario analysis**
- Natural language generation (NLG) for **human-readable financial narratives from raw data**

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- MSME financial management
- Trade finance infrastructure
- Fintech for SEA's commodities



Cross-border Payments and Consumer Remittances

Details

- Decentralized exchanges (DEXs) with **built-in options for fiat transactions**
- **AI-driven hedging strategies** for businesses to manage FX risk in volatile markets
- AI that **navigates international regulations**
- **Predictive analytics** for international market trends and financial risk assessment
- Analytics for **payment and currency trends**
- AI-first financial products **without old constraints**

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Trade finance infrastructure
- AI-first financial access infrastructure
- Multi-currency payments
- Payment and logistics infrastructure
- Healthcare payment solutions
- Payment rails



Supply Chain Finance Solutions

Details

- **AI-driven supply chain finance platforms** that predict funding needs and arrange financing
- **Blockchain-based trade finance solutions** that provide **real-time visibility** into goods movement and associated financial flows & **business-focused stable coin management platforms**
- Machine learning models that **assess supplier risk and creditworthiness using alternative data sources**

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- AI-powered support systems
- Mobile app development

SUSTAINABILITY/CLIMATE

There are opportunities for climate startups with scalable solutions in energy transition, resource optimization, and sustainable infrastructure. Winners in the climate space will leverage tech to balance growth and sustainability while driving decarbonization.

The Green Revolution for SEA’s Industries: Southeast Asia’s strategic position, its manufacturing strength in hard-to-automate industries, and its rapidly digitalizing commodities industries give it incredible potential in commodities markets.

But as markets are demand more sustainable solutions and transparency in its procurement, opportunities are emerging at the intersection of industrial competitiveness and sustainable solutions.

There is growing demand for sustainable and energy-efficient manufacturing solutions, alternative materials, decarbonization technology, and supply chain tracking for environmental impact.

Green Power: Malaysia’s AI data centre hub ambitions also intersect with the region’s strong renewable energy potential. SEA has abundant solar, geothermal, and hydro resources that can be a regional strategic asset - think exporting green computing power.



\$10 BILLION

Carbon capture market potential in Southeast Asia



SEA’S RENEWABLES

Include abundant solar, untapped geothermal and growing hydroelectric capabilities

Why We’re Excited:

We are looking to empower founders who are building scalable climate solutions across carbon markets, clean energy, and industrial decarbonization.

01. *CLEAN POWER TRANSITION CREATES MASSIVE TECHNOLOGY & SOFTWARE OPPORTUNITIES*

Advanced sensors, IoT devices, and data analytics are enabling a new era of precision in agriculture. We’re excited about startups that can provide farmers with actionable insights to optimize every aspect of their operations. The most successful solutions will not only **increase yields and reduce costs but also promote sustainable farming practices.**

02. *CLIMATE FINTECH AND INNOVATIVE FINANCING MECHANISMS ARE CRITICAL ENABLER*

Limited access to green financing in SEA opens opportunities for startups in blended finance, carbon trading, and transition credit. With a \$10B carbon market potential by 2030, there’s room for verification tech, trading platforms, and project aggregation tools.

03. *INDUSTRIAL DECARBONIZATION REQUIRES SEA-SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS*

Hard-to-abate sectors like steel, cement, and chemicals cause over 30% of SEA’s emissions. We’re excited about startups in carbon capture, process optimization, and alternative materials can drive decarbonization while keeping industries competitive, creating a need for efficiency-first solutions.

04. *DATA & MONITORING PLATFORMS ENABLE CLIMATE ACTION*

The lack of standard emissions data in SEA opens opportunities for startups creating MRV (monitoring, reporting, verification) solutions for nature-based and industrial projects. We’re keen on AI/ML-powered platforms improving carbon accounting and supporting net-zero goals.

Sustainability's Emerging Spaces

Green Acceleration: Enabling Southeast Asia's Net Zero Transition Through Technology Innovation



Clean Energy Tech & Infrastructure

Details

- **Grid optimization and virtual power purchase platforms** for renewable integration
- **Battery storage management and energy trading systems**
- **Smart microgrid solutions** for industrial and commercial applications
- AI-powered **demand-response and energy efficiency platforms**

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Resource optimization
- Renewable energy systems
- Smart grid development for AI workload management



Industrial Decarbonization Tech

Details

- **Process optimization software** for energy-intensive industries
- **Carbon capture utilization systems** for manufacturing
- **Green hydrogen production** and utilization platforms
- **Alternative materials** and **circular economy** enablers

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Sustainable manufacturing solutions
- Energy-efficient manufacturing processes
- Clean manufacturing
- Energy-efficient manufacturing



Carbon Markets & Climate Finance

Details

- **Carbon credit verification and trading** infrastructure
- **Project aggregation and monitoring platforms** for nature-based solutions
- **Blended finance and transition credit** enablement tools
- **ESG data analytics and reporting** automation systems

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Data & monitoring platforms: Environmental monitoring for data centers
- Green energy financing
- Carbon credit trading platforms for hard-to-abate industries



Climate Risk & Adaptation Solutions

Details

- **Adaptation infrastructure planning** platforms
- **Real-time environmental monitoring** systems
- **Supply chain emissions tracking and reduction** solutions

Opportunities in Southeast Asia

- Supply chain tracking
- Energy infrastructure resilience
- Weather monitoring



SOUTHEAST ASIA FOUNDER'S PLAYBOOK: FROM MARKET ENTRY TO SCALE

While Southeast Asia presents unprecedented opportunities, capturing them requires more than just identifying them. The region's unique characteristics demand a different playbook - one that combines bold vision with pragmatic execution and understanding of both the potential and pitfalls of building for Southeast Asia's distinctive landscape.

Understanding the Regulatory Landscape

Digital Economy Frameworks

Southeast Asia's regulatory environment is as diverse as its markets. Singapore and Malaysia lead with progressive frameworks, having issued 8 digital banking licenses, while Indonesia maintains stability with 2-3% NPLs in P2P lending despite 2x growth. This diversity creates both challenges and opportunities.

Each region is developing frameworks that reflect their unique priorities and development stage. Singapore leads with its regulatory sandbox approach, enabling controlled innovation across fintech, AI, and data initiatives while maintaining strict oversight.

Indonesia combines stringent local control requirements with progressive digital banking frameworks, reflecting its focus on data sovereignty and financial inclusion.

Malaysia is carving out a unique position with emerging AI-specific regulations for data centers, positioning itself as a neutral hub for AI infrastructure with \$15B committed in H1 2024.

Meanwhile, Vietnam is developing frameworks that focus on digital content and social commerce, adapting to its rapidly growing digital economy. These market-specific variations create a complex web of requirements that founders must navigate.

*Southeast Asia's
diversity creates*
**CHALLENGES AND
OPPORTUNITIES**



Market Entry and Expansion Strategy

Strategic Market Sequencing

When sequencing market entry in Southeast Asia, founders must carefully weigh several critical factors that can significantly impact launch timelines and success rates. Regulatory requirements vary dramatically by sector and can extend timelines anywhere from 3 to 18 months - fintech licenses typically taking the longest while e-commerce permits can be secured more quickly.

Infrastructure readiness also plays a crucial role, with founders needing to assess the maturity of payment gateways and cloud provider presence in each market.

Singapore and Malaysia typically offer robust infrastructure, while markets like Vietnam or Indonesia may require additional technical workarounds or local partnerships.

Perhaps most overlooked is the cost of market education, particularly in emerging markets where companies often find themselves allocating 30-40% of their early marketing budgets just to establish basic awareness and understanding of their solution.

Distribution Strategy

The distribution landscape in Southeast Asia demands a sophisticated, multi-channel approach, as demonstrated by the success of platforms like Shopee and Lazada.

In B2C markets, super-app partnerships have emerged as a powerful entry strategy, often driving over 40% of initial user acquisition through established platforms with built-in user bases. Social commerce has become equally crucial, particularly in Indonesia where platforms like TikTok have amassed 157.6M users, creating a direct line to consumers through shoppable video content.

The offline-to-online conversion strategy remains vital, especially in tier 2/3 cities where traditional retail still dominates; successful companies often establish physical touchpoints or agent networks to build trust and drive digital adoption.

The B2B landscape requires a distinctly different approach. Industry-specific channel partnerships have proven essential for penetrating traditional sectors like manufacturing or agriculture, where existing relationships and sector expertise carry significant weight.

Local system integrators play a crucial role as implementation partners, helping navigate the complex technical and operational requirements of enterprise customers. Direct sales teams, while resource-intensive, remain necessary for enterprise clients who expect high-touch relationships and customized solutions.



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COMMON PITFALLS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

Market Understanding: The Myth of Homogeneity

One of the most costly misconceptions about Southeast Asia is treating it as a homogeneous market. Grab's experience provides a telling example - while Singapore represents just 1% of their user base, it generates 23% of their revenue, highlighting the dramatic variations in monetization potential across markets. This disparity stems from fundamental differences in purchasing power, digital maturity, and consumer behavior across the region.

The reality of market fragmentation becomes particularly apparent in financial services. Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) startups provide a cautionary tale - many launched in Singapore, attracted by its high digital payment adoption and established credit culture, then struggled when expanding to neighboring markets.

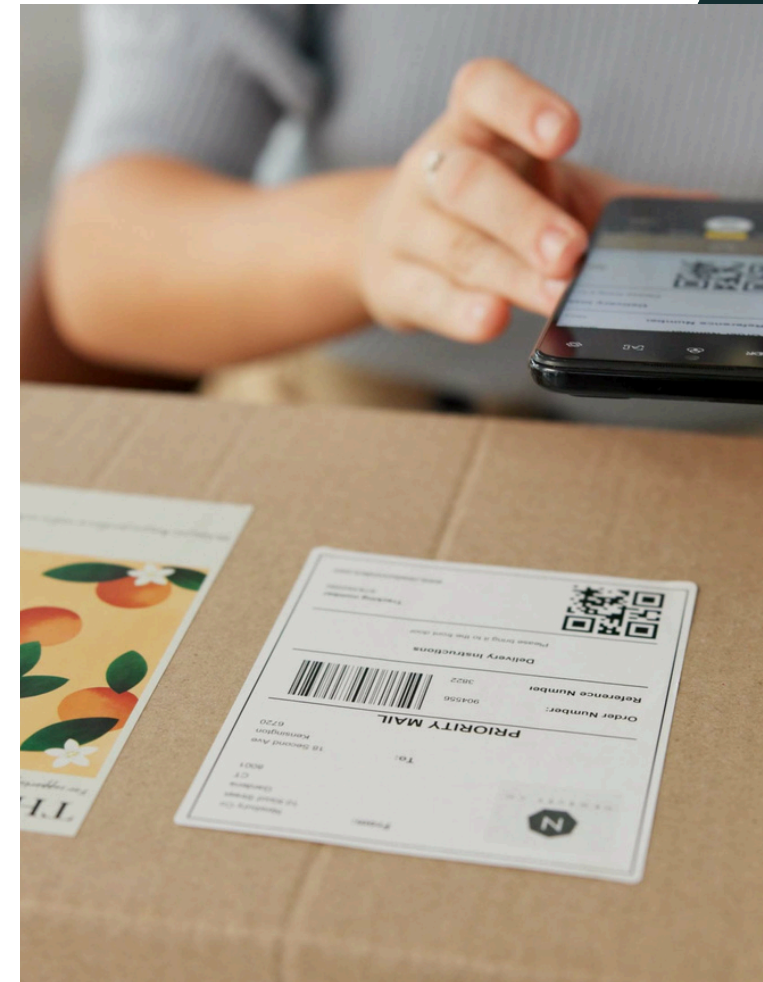
In Indonesia for instance, BNPL players found that credit assessment models built for Singapore's formal economy didn't translate to a market where much of the population lacks traditional credit history. Similarly, in Vietnam, where cash-on-delivery remains prevalent, BNPL startups had to completely rethink their payment flow and risk assessment approaches.

These market-specific strategies require:

- Detailed local market research before entry
- Adaptation of core products/services for local preferences
- Different pricing strategies by market (often varying by 3-5x)
- Market-specific partnerships and distribution channels
- Localized operations and customer service approaches

The cost of ignoring these variations can be substantial. Several prominent startups have had to retreat from markets after investing millions in expansion, learning too late that their one-size-fits-all approach wouldn't work.

*SUCCESSFUL
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Product Development: Building for Southeast Asian Realities

Infrastructure constraints must be considered from day one. Successful products work seamlessly in environments with intermittent connectivity and basic smartphones. For instance, Ninja Van's driver app functions offline and syncs when connection is restored, while their tracking system works via SMS for customers without smartphones. These weren't just features - they were fundamental design choices that enabled rapid regional expansion.

Language and cultural localization go beyond mere translation. Products must account for different communication styles, cultural preferences, and user behaviors.

Pricing strategies require market-specific calibration too. The same service might command a premium in Singapore but need significant adjustment in Indonesia or Vietnam.

Growth Strategy: The Power of Market Focus

The expansion patterns of successful fintech players in Southeast Asia reveal a crucial lesson: depth beats breadth in early growth stages. This principle has been particularly evident in digital payments and lending platforms, where understanding local nuances is critical for success.

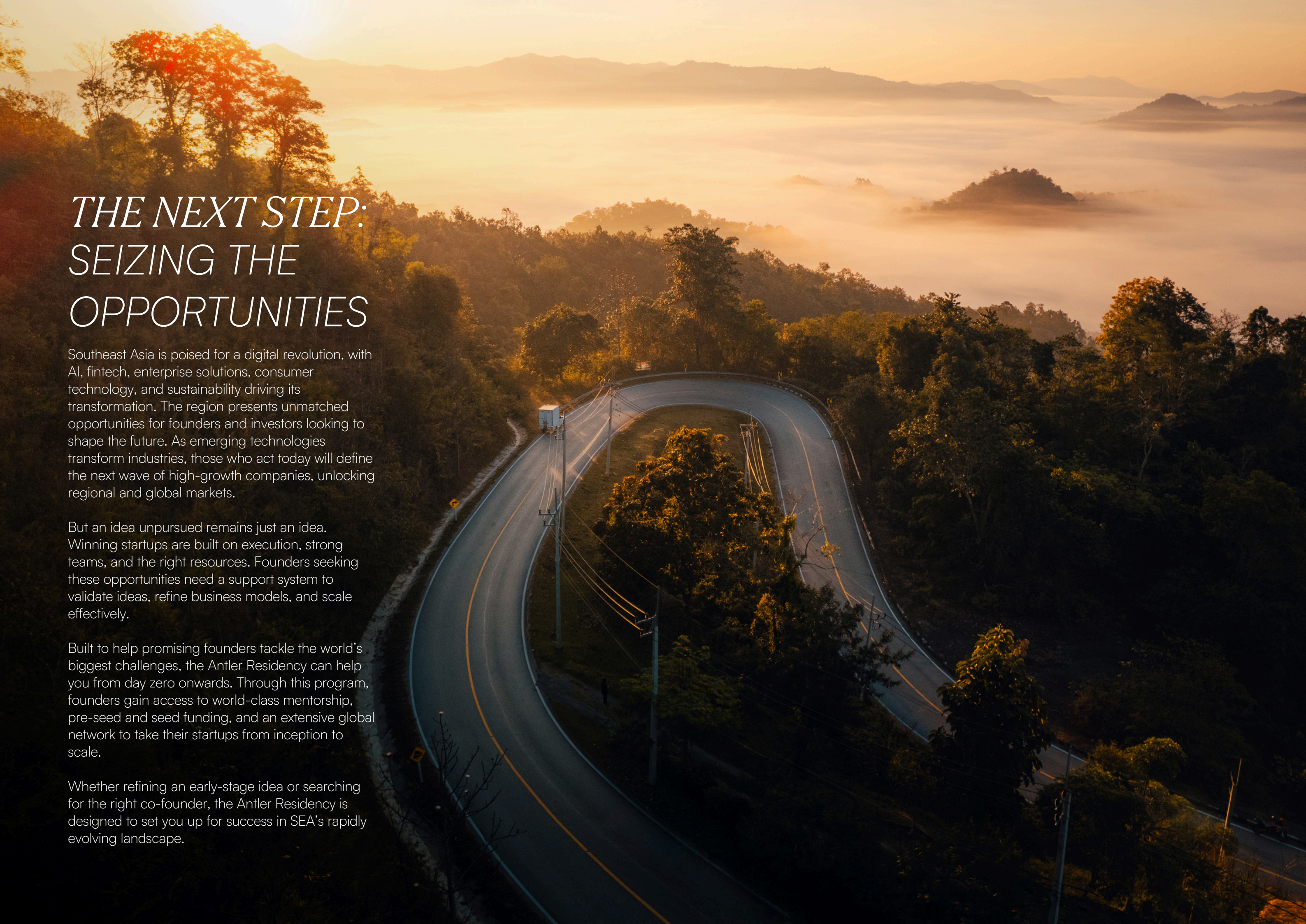
Take the example of digital banking players like GXS Bank. Rather than rushing to capture multiple markets simultaneously, they spent 18-24 months building a deep market presence in Singapore before expanding to Malaysia. This focused approach allowed them to:

- Perfect their core product offering
- Build strong regulatory relationships
- Establish operational excellence
- Develop deep understanding of customer behavior
- Create a repeatable expansion playbook

Resource requirements for this focused approach vary significantly by market. Singapore typically demands 3-5x higher investment than Indonesia across most operational areas:

- Engineering talent: S\$8,000-15,000/month in Singapore vs S\$2,000-4,000/month in Indonesia
- Office space: S\$8-12/sqft in Singapore vs S\$2-4/sqft in Jakarta
- Customer acquisition: S\$100-150 per customer in Singapore vs S\$20-40 in Indonesia

However, this cost differential often comes with advantages - Singapore's sophisticated market provides valuable learnings that can be applied to expansion markets, while its regulatory framework offers credibility that helps with regional growth.



THE NEXT STEP: SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITIES

Southeast Asia is poised for a digital revolution, with AI, fintech, enterprise solutions, consumer technology, and sustainability driving its transformation. The region presents unmatched opportunities for founders and investors looking to shape the future. As emerging technologies transform industries, those who act today will define the next wave of high-growth companies, unlocking regional and global markets.

But an idea unpursued remains just an idea. Winning startups are built on execution, strong teams, and the right resources. Founders seeking these opportunities need a support system to validate ideas, refine business models, and scale effectively.

Built to help promising founders tackle the world's biggest challenges, the Antler Residency can help you from day zero onwards. Through this program, founders gain access to world-class mentorship, pre-seed and seed funding, and an extensive global network to take their startups from inception to scale.

Whether refining an early-stage idea or searching for the right co-founder, the Antler Residency is designed to set you up for success in SEA's rapidly evolving landscape.

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Special thanks to [Eugene Teo](#) and [Ryan Thoo](#) for their valuable contributions in researching, compiling, and producing this report.