



Myanmar's first social network plans to float in London

MySquar is chaired by Bell Pottinger co-founder Piers Pottinger.

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Published: 23 Mar 2015

Last Updated: 06 May 2015

Myanmar's first and only local language social network is floating in London. Yep, you heard that right – Burmese startup MySquar is planning to IPO on the small companies Aim market, as it expands rapidly in a country that is fast coming online after decades in the dark of political and economic isolation.

The company, which is less than two years old, is planning to raise \$2.5m (£1.7m) at a valuation of \$25m, according to a spokesperson, although nothing official has been filed

yet. It expects to have 460,000 users on MyChat, its Whatsapp-esque messaging service, and its various app games (including the awesome-sounding 'flip the tofu' game MyFlip) by the end of this month and more than triple that to 1.48 million by the end of the year.

That's not surprising given Myanmar's potential. The country, also known as Burma, started reforming its fifty-year-old military dictatorship in 2011, leading western countries to drop many of the sanctions that had shut it off from international investors.

That meant an almost-untouched market of more than 53 million people was suddenly opened up to foreign investment., spurring spurred pretty rapid growth. GDP leapt an estimated 8.5% last year and should grow the same again in 2015, according to the World Bank.

Anything related to mobile phones, in particular, has huge scope for growth. Only 11-13% of the population had access to one in 2013, according to London-based research firm Analysys Mason. The government has targeted a level of 45% by the end of this year, after awarding the right to build modern mobile networks to Norwegian and Qatari telecoms companies Telenor and Ooredoo.

MySquar was founded in May 2013 by Canadian-Vietnamese entrepreneur Rita Nguyen. She was reportedly literally locked out of the company by its investors, Singaporean private investment firm Rising Dragon and PR giant Bell Pottinger a year later, but a spokesperson said the buyout had been 'amicable'. The company was then led by former Visa exec Linda Lim until December 2014.

Rising Dragon chairman and CEO Eric Schaer is now chief executive 'for the long-term,' while Bell Pottinger co-founder and Asia chairman Piers Pottinger is the startup's chairman.

'It is tremendously exciting to be involved in a business which is very much central to the development and transformation of Myanmar. MySQUAR is a genuinely pioneering venture,' Pottinger said.

He'll be hoping the great and good of the City will be just as enthusiastic about the brave new world of Burmese tech. For the more financially challenged investor, this positively bargain IPO - compared to most of today's frothy tech valuations anyway - could be just what they're looking for.

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