



SUCCESS STORY

Cambodian Start Up That Centralizes Bus Booking Makes Traveling Easier



Chea Langda, Founder and CEO of Bookmebus.com, gives a talk at BarCamp Battambang.

[Photo Credit: Development Innovations]

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In June 2016, a new platform for booking bus tickets in Cambodia, just nine months old, won the gold medal for startups at [the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications' Cambodia ICT Awards](#). Among nine startups shortlisted for the award, [BookMeBus](#) took home not only the award but also a \$5,000 cash prize.

Travel booking platforms are not new, but are considered an innovation in Cambodia. Many, especially from the country side, depend on bus companies, with approximately 70 pick up points and 60 bus companies operating in Phnom Penh alone. Bus travel also remains a popular way for foreign tourists to see the country.

As a frequent bus traveler himself, Chea Langda, the 27 year old founder and CEO of BookMeBus, makes approximately three trips per year back to his parents' hometown in Battambang. Recognizing the inefficiencies of both the shared taxi and bus system and frequent booking errors of the current paper-based booking system, "I felt the pain, and knew as a tech guy, there was something I could do." Starting with chats with bus drivers on the feasibility and desire for a centralized booking platform, Langda decided to quit his job as an IT manager for an international company and join the burgeoning world of startups in Cambodia.

Langda first joined the startup hub at the [SmallWorld](#) co-working space, where he gained a business acumen by connecting with established and successful enterprises. From there he was referred to both [Impact Hub](#) and [Development Innovations](#), where he has received [consultative services](#) as he developed his business.

Eight months after it started, BookMeBus launched at the [Inno-Tech Festival](#) in April 2016 and was showcased at [BarCamp Battambang](#) as an online ticketing portal for bus travel for both local and international travelers. Participation at both events provided the publicity and networking opportunities that BookMeBus needed to take it to the next level while also gaining inputs to help refine his product.

These opportunities to promote BookMeBus also helped Langda gain mentorship and investment from an Australian startup incubator (and a matching investment from a local individual). This incubator, which he will be joining for three months, will also provide him with the soft skills of pitching and management.

BookMeBus (available on [Android](#) and [iOS app stores](#)) has now formalized itself as a platform to book and pay for their travel online; prices for tickets are the same as they are retailed by the bus companies themselves. Payments can also be made through their partner banks, and in the near future through cash with [Pay&Go's Kiosk](#) at minimarts across the city for those without bank accounts. Of the 60 bus companies that exist in Cambodia, BookMeBus partners with 27 well known bus companies that caters to travelers who use smart phones, rather than with farmers who seek to transport agricultural goods. Partnerships have also been made with guesthouses and hotels that are able to assist travelers with bus ticket booking. In February 2016, the new company broke even.

While trust in online platforms and e-commerce remains a challenge among start-ups in Cambodia, and many older bus company partners are slow to acknowledge the long term rewards of BookMeBus, Langda is confident that BookMeBus will be the "recognized brand for travel in Cambodia, just like [TripAdvisor](#) and [Lonely Planet](#)." According to Langda, it now sells more than 2300 tickets per month, which continues to increase, and now receives solicitations from interested partners.

The winnings from the ICT Awards will help Langda to grow the business, and the publicity has helped to bring more opportunities as people take notice. Langda hopes that online booking will be possible for every means of transportation in Cambodia in the long term.