





# In[ter]view: Jindou Lee



Interview conducted by Jesse Neill  
Images supplied by Jindou Lee

In Verse's last In[ter]view of the year Jesse Neill speaks with Jindou Lee, CEO and founder of *HappyCo*, a software development company that helps automate property operations.

Beginning in 2011, Jindou developed *Happy Inspector*, an iOS app aimed at addressing the lack of standardised documentation in property inspections. After moving to Silicon Valley in 2012 following the success of *Happy Inspector*, Jindou and his team developed *Happy Manage* and *Happy Insights*, forming the umbrella company *HappyCo* in 2015. Jindou discusses the unexpected success of *Happy Investor* and his move to Silicon Valley, as well as ways of encouraging young entrepreneurs to stay in Adelaide to boost innovation in this exciting but overlooked city.





**How did the idea for your app first come about and did you expect it to grow as fast as it did?**

It was a problem I experienced myself first hand as a real estate investor. Many processes in real estate are still solved with pen and paper; one of those processes is the inspection of real estate. For the most part, that is largely a manual process. When my co-founder, Andrew Mackenzie-Ross and I built the first version of our app, we were just trying to solve my problem. Turns out, there are over 100 million properties in the world that want the same solution.

I never had any grand plans to be a great success or create a company. So, I guess our success has been surprising to say the least.

**What did you do prior to developing Happy Inspector and is this what you were originally intending on pursuing when studying your Bachelor of Design?**

I've done a bunch of things. After design school I worked for a number of web design agencies, then worked in video games for a number of years. I've also tried a bunch of different small businesses on

the side before finally starting my own digital agency, which I sold prior to investing in real estate.

**What's been your greatest challenge since graduating?**

Having to understand that it takes time to get good at your craft and that any type of success takes time. So, learning to be patient and persevere.

***“However, in hindsight, we had to make some very big sacrifices; leaving family, friends and a comfortable life in Adelaide behind”***

**You moved to Silicon Valley not long after launching Happy Inspector. I can imagine that would've been a little bit daunting, how did you find the move and is it what you expected?**

I had no real expectations except that I felt it was the right thing to do as our biggest market was in the US and I wanted to be closer to our customers. I was so focused on trying to make it work that I did not really think about anything



else. So, it was a very straightforward decision. However, in hindsight, we had to make some very big sacrifices; leaving family, friends and a comfortable life in Adelaide behind.

The main criticism of Silicon Valley is its lack of diversity and favouritism towards Ivy League graduates, how did you personally find this as an outsider coming from Australia?

I do think that biases exist. It's not exclusive to Silicon Valley though. I'm not too phased by it and I did not pay too much attention to that side of things. I decided early on that I did not want to make excuses for my failures. So, I just kept my head down and worked on the business.

After seeing success with HappyCo internationally, why did you want to keep an office in Adelaide?

Lots of reason. There are a number of great universities in Adelaide, a lot of amazing talent, and many expats that want to move back for family and lifestyle reasons. And we hope to give back to Adelaide by creating a world class company, hiring world class talent to service a global audience. So, we decided to keep our Research and Development team in Adelaide.

***“There are a number of great universities in Adelaide, a lot of amazing talent and many expats that want to move back for family and lifestyle reasons”***

Over the past decade, we've seen more and more of our graduates moving away from Adelaide towards Melbourne, Sydney, and even overseas. How do you think we can keep more young and talented entrepreneurs like yourself in Adelaide?

It's going to be very difficult. There are just not enough jobs or great companies to join. One way to fix this would be to share more success stories of companies that are growing in Adelaide. We need to celebrate all types of these amazing stories, no matter how big or small. That way, success breeds success.







Do you think Adelaide is keeping up with the rest of Australia and the global community in terms of tech development, and if not why?

Nope. Even though I do think there is growth in the ecosystem, I don't think that the speed of growth is comparable to other cities in Australia and overseas. I rarely see Adelaide entrepreneurs that have the drive and global perspective that their peers in other cities may have. As a city, we are also pretty negative in terms of attitude and that culture really hurts our economy.

I imagine your line of work can be very demanding. As students' mental and physical wellbeing is becoming more and more of a focus on campus, what sorts of things do you like to do to relax and what motivates you to keep going?

It's very important to listen to your body. Slow down to understand yourself. Some people meditate to do this or spend time with nature. For myself, I'm good at listening to my body and emotional state and I play soccer to relax.

What's been the most rewarding part of your time growing HappyCo to what it is today?

I feel very fortunate to be in the position I am in today. Besides a lot of hard work, I know that it's also been a combination of good fortune and people that have supported me along the way from my wife, investors, employees, my co-founder Andrew, advisors, and my peers. So, every day I am grateful and excited to do more.

What is your future vision for HappyCo?

We have such a big problem to solve and a lot of room to grow the company. The future is really just more of the same. I would love to build one of the best companies for people to come work for and solve big problems in the real estate industry.

***“Aim high. Then aim higher. Then triple that vision you have for yourself. And when you get there, stay humble and hungry for more”***

Finally, what message do you have for students with aspirations such as yours?

Aim high. Then aim higher. Then triple that vision you have for yourself. And when you get there, stay humble and hungry for more. ◊