

# Interview with Sheelpa Patel, the Head of Infiniti Lab

Interviewed by Kaden Ng



**W**herever you look, innovation is increasingly driven by entrepreneurs. To stay ahead of the curve and spot innovation as it happens, corporates around the world have a growing interest in investing in startups. Spearheaded by Infiniti Motor—Hong Kong-based luxury vehicle makers—launched the Infiniti Lab back in 2015. Infiniti Lab is a platform designed to connect Smart Cities and Internet of Things (IoT) startups with Infiniti Motor. In this issue, we have the pleasure to talk to Sheelpa Patel, the global head of Infiniti Lab. We are excited to learn about Infiniti Lab's effort in driving innovation and empowering female entrepreneurs.

## How Infiniti Lab was Started

Infiniti has always been a brand driven by a deep belief in the power of entrepreneurial spirit. When Sheelpa joined Infiniti, the team realized that there was an opportunity to do something disruptive with the startup ecosystem, shaping the future of intelligent urban mobility. Things moved quickly. Partnering with Nest VC, Infiniti created the Infiniti Lab—a unique platform for engaging entrepreneurs.

## Reimagining Smart Cities

The core of Infiniti Lab is its three-month accelerator program, targeted at passionate entrepreneurs who share Infiniti's vision to improve future urban living through technology. In the past two years, Infiniti Lab ran very successful programs to prepare early stage startups for commercial integration. For instance, the Hong Kong-based E-Cycle worked with Infiniti Motor to develop the prototype for their premium electric bikes that are foldable and easily rechargeable. E-Cycle is now preparing for their pilot phase with support from Nissan Motor, Infiniti's parent company. Infiniti Lab has also helped Germany-based Green City Solutions to bring CityTree—a freestanding smart air purifying system—to Hong Kong. CityTree is able to utilize a special moss that effectively eats pollutants from the air without creating hazardous by-products. Thanks to Infiniti Lab, Asia's first CityTree is now located outside Hopewell Centre in the busy area of Wan Chai, helping Hong Kong alleviate air pollution.



"We wanted to build that bridge between the startup environment and the corporate grid", said Sheelpa. "We believe that the innovations and technologies developed by these startups—right here in the Infiniti Lab—contribute to Smart Cities of the future and to Infiniti's overarching mission of developing world-first technologies that enhance the driving experience of our customers."

## The Future of Infiniti Lab

What started as a localized pilot project is now a global program. Infiniti's goal is to offer programs globally for every type of startup at every stage of their journey. Infiniti is currently running another accelerator in Singapore for mature-stage startups, with the theme Smart Mobility. Infiniti has also recently launched a pre-accelerator program, qualifying Canadian entrepreneurs to secure a place with global accelerators. Targeted at idea-stage startups, Infiniti plans to launch Startup Weekend events globally—next stops for Infiniti Lab include Taiwan and Dubai.

## Empowering Female Entrepreneurs

Beyond Infiniti's vision to shape the future of smart cities, it is exciting to see Infiniti's recent initiatives in empowering female entrepreneurs. Last April, Infiniti hosted Hong Kong's First Startup Weekend Women in Tech Initiative, with 35 female participants. "The initiative served as a fantastic opportunity to encourage the growing number of female leaders in Hong Kong to start a business, and to connect more women to the number of resources and mentors available in the local community", said Sheelpa.

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Infiniti has also worked with 'Young Makers, Change Makers' to produce the 'Technovation' event at Infiniti Lab Hong Kong in April. This is a global annual program that offers girls around the world the opportunity to learn skills needed to become tech entrepreneurs and leaders in areas of social and community issues. Infiniti Lab hosted the event and provided mentorship for their GirlsMakeTech workshop on Branding, Digital Marketing and Pitching. The youngest participant is just 10 years old!

In Singapore, Infiniti is now working closely with the Female Founders, a Singapore-based non-profit, to host a 'Smart Women, Smart Cities' panel discussion. This event will mark the culmination of Infiniti's Singapore Smart Mobility program.

"There aren't enough female founders in any industry, let alone the tech industry in Asia, so it is very important for us to empower female entrepreneurship on a much broader basis." Sheelpa hopes to pave the way for empowering enterprising female individuals to push the boundaries of the tech industry.