

Riding the Wave of Private Wealth Creation in Thailand with iWS and 159 Capitals

Fortune favours the brave. This is certainly the case for Siriporn Lekhakula and Ittapat Akaraveepakin, who are both partners in iWS, a Thai company they formed in 2010 and that is now, they report, home to the largest network of independent personal financial planners in Thailand, focusing on high-net-worth individuals. Not content with iWS alone, they have since 2010 also created Wealth Platforms Advisory, which provides training and other services to the independent planners, and partnering with an innovative family, renown bankers and experts from various fields to found 159 Capitals, a family office advisor dedicated to independently and holistically help Chief Family Officers manage their ultra-wealthy families and the total financial and wealth planning needs. Hubbis met up with the dedicated duo and found them to have a clear vision of their mission and of the opportunities ahead.

Although formed in 2010,

the origins of iWS in fact date back to 1995, when Siriporn set out as an independent financial planner, not long after returning from completing her MBA in the US. She had started work as an investment banker but took the brave step to go it alone as an independent wealth advisor, seeing the potential opening up in Thailand. She started out only with her brother, Akarawut Lekhakula, at the time, who remains a partner, and later met Ittapat and in him, they found a like-minded entrepreneur who shared many of the same values and ambitions.

The clear vision back in 1995 was the same as the concept is today for iWS, namely to help HNW individuals with financial planning using a systematic financial model that focuses on bespoke financial goals in all real-life dimensions.

“Back in the early to mid-1990s,” Siriporn explains, “I had completed my MBA in the US, and I had seen for myself while over there how the world of financial planning for individuals and families in the US was advancing apace. So, I thought maybe I can start the same sort of business in Thailand, and I soon jumped out of investment banking, taking the leap to personal financial planning. We became essentially the pioneers for the independent financial planning sector here all those years ago.”

Siriporn and her brother later met Ittapat, who then joined them in 2007, realising that his own inclination was similarly towards the world of finance and wealth management more than the engineering career he had embarked upon.

The Key Priorities

“As we see things, looking ahead,” Siriporn comments, “we think Thai HNWIs and UHNWIs face three key challenges, which are our three priorities - wealth planning, succession planning, and inheritance tax, especially for the latter as wealthy Thais tend to own a lot of property, and clearly that is relatively illiquid, so they must carefully manage their obligations and their liquidity. We help the individuals and the families plan, we help them with investments, governance, with constitutions, with cashflow projections, with insurance, with planning for education for their children, with dividend planning and execution for family members, so on and so forth. It is absolutely essential for these families and individuals to focus on these matters, and to enjoy impartial advice from advisers who understand them fully.”

A SIMILAR VISION

He therefore left his job at Toyota Motor Asia Pacific in Thailand and joined forces with them, also as an individual consultant, first of course learning his trade, and then becoming a co-founder partner when in 2010 iWS Wealth Advisory began its formal life as a corporate entity. The entity was created essentially to formalise the relationship with the growing community of Independent Financial Planners they had established to provide comprehensive financial solutions direct to wealthy individuals and family clients. Today, the firm acts as an umbrella brand for some 30 financial planners.

ANALYSIS AND DIRECTION

The company iWS today promotes itself as offering individual financial planning to clients with sophisticated and systematic analysis in order to achieve the client’s financial goals.

“The advice and direction that we give to clients are based on the

relations between their goals and their limitations, using all types of available financial products and service, in order to create solutions conforming to the best international financial standards,” Siriporn reports.

“We aim to build up personal financial plans to match the customer’s financial goals, from a very simple plan to a very complex plan, depending on their situation and needs.

The financial plans that we design are specific only to each individual client, and we then work with many domestic and international business and corporate partners to fulfil the products and services for those clients.”

AN EXCITING JOURNEY

“It has been a great journey thus far,” explains Siriporn, “and we are in the right business at the right time. We deal with clients, their families and their wealth. Our planners identify underlying problems and provide suitable financial solutions on many aspects



SIRIPORN LEKHAKULA
iWS & 159 Capitals

such as tax, legal, investment, insurance etc. We span the entire wealth management spectrum through iWS Wealth Advisory and 159 Capitals, from corporate structures, tax planning, personal and family wealth planning, insurance solutions, estate and succession planning and so forth.”

Siriporn explains that their initial rationale was to relieve the pain points felt by wealthy Thai clients.

PIECING IT ALL TOGETHER

“Many wealthy Thais often really did not, and still do not, quite understand how it all worked, and needed someone they trusted locally to sort of clarify how it all fit in with their goals, and whether they were actually suitable for what was being promoted. In short, providers were really selling products, whereas there was a real need for good, objective advice. That is exactly where we fit in.”

Accordingly, iWS’s planners focus on personal wealth planning, investment planning, insurance planning, family wealth planning, family welfare planning, inheritance planning, estate and asset succession, family governance and constitutions, and so forth.

TAILORED TO YOUR NEEDS

“Once we understand the clients well, we can devise a bespoke plan with them, we can then advise those clients to select the products, solutions and providers according to the plan,” Ittapat explains.

In terms of licenses, they explain that iWS is an umbrella organisation for independent consultants who hold their own, personal licenses. “We the company are not doing the advising, the consultants and advisors we work with are not employees,” Ittapat explains.

“We are operating a network of individually licensed advisers who themselves hold the requisite licenses. It is similar to the models they adopt in the US. We do not pay them, we do not employ them, we only house them under our brand, and train them to follow the best procedures.”

“Clients usually ended up with too many financial products because they are approached by many product providers. However, not all of these products fit in with the clients’ goal. Therefore, we communicate and build our relationship and trust with the clients to really understand their goals. Then we provide goals-based ideas and solutions, curating the best products and providers from the market,” Ittapat elaborates.

SHARING IN THE SOLUTIONS

Siriporn reports that to handle the HNW private client business through iWS, the firm has around 30 independent consultants today. The company’s planners earn their income through advisory fee and a share in the sale of the products and solutions the clients ultimately select. “But we consider ourselves

independent, as we select the best products and solutions for the clients from a wide range of firms and providers in the market, from lawyers to accountants, private bankers and insurers,” she reports.

They note that there are more and more private banks offering products and services in Thailand, from onshore or offshore, or often in partnerships between the two, so it is vital for these families, these individuals to have friends on their side that they can trust and who truly understand the market. “They then need us to work with the institutions they select,” Siriporn comments, “in order to help ensure the right procedures take place and the right outcomes are achieved.”

CURATING TRUST

Siriporn adds further insight. “We essentially work only with the brands we trust, and our clients trust our advice to curate the best options for them, not just the right products and providers, but the right solutions for their needs. After the clients make decisions, we then help them through the execution of their strategies and choices, so they can move through the whole process secure in the knowledge they are being guided in the appropriate direction.”

The firm does not get involved in any shape or form with custody, which is vested with the providers the iWS clients select, with help from the independent advisers iWS houses.

They co-founded 159 Capitals in 2018 to address the needs of the very wealthy families via a family office operation. “We have good personal and family connections to the UHNW Thai families and our target market through 159 is



ITTAPAT AKARAVEEPAKIN
iWS & 159 Capitals

different from the clientele for iWS, as we focus through 159 only on UHNWs, whereas through iWS our targets are largely professional, working HNWIs," Siriporn explains.

159 – A PRIME NUMBER

Ittapat elucidates, offering more insight into the 159 Capitals model. "Through this entity, we focus far more broadly and holistically on the UHNW family's needs than on investments and products," he reports. "Accordingly, we look at the clients and their families from a wide-angle perspective as to their wealth, family governance, the family constitution, family investments, estate succession and so forth. In short, all the key facets that a family office traditionally offers that uniquely empowers Chief Family Officers to effectively and conveniently manage their families. Through the networking effect of family entrepreneurs, more can also be achieved via the 159 community as families look to diversify their businesses and open up their resources for potential collaboration. This is a fun part where it could spring out new businesses and investments with unique competitive advantages."

"159 Capitals was born out of a passion to help families manage the challenges of their wealth and their family cohesion," Siriporn comments. "There are so many complexities in efficiently organising family businesses and investments for long term sustainability while striking a balance between family members' aspirations and responsibilities. Such tasks require a holistic view and the family office is the ideal vehicle to achieve those goals. In addition, if families who are blessed with wealth and resources, they can help contribute to the society at large for higher purposes. To foster such realisation of the power families have in their hands that can eventually lead to societal contribution requires significant education and communication, which 159 Capitals is dedicated to provide."

They both express considerable optimism about the opportunities that lie ahead. "The Thai regulator is increasingly receptive to Thais investing offshore," Siriporn remarks, "so we are actually in the process of acquiring whatever licences that we will need to better serve the clients in the future."

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

She closes the discussion with a comment that material wealth is not the only goal in our lives, as mental and spiritual wealth are as important for a worry-free life amongst family members. "Both iWS and 159 Capitals were therefore established as independent, solution and execution driven platforms," she says. "In all that we do, we work with the words of Warren Buffet in mind; he remarked that someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago." ■



Getting Personal with Khun Siriporn and Khun Ittapat

Siriporn was born in Chumporn and raised in Bangkok, and later studied medical technology at Mahidol University in Bangkok, before working in the same field at Paolo Memorial Hospital in Bangkok, and then leaving to do her MBA at Colorado State University in the US. "On my return," she recalls, "I made my mind up that I did not want to be hidden away in a laboratory for many years ahead, so went straight to investment banking with Kasikorn, and then I saw the light and soon left to start my life in independent financial planning, and that is the journey I am still on today."

Still single, her holiday time is spent travelling the world, especially to Switzerland, which she loves for its beauty and peacefulness. Interlaken and Zermatt are two favourite destinations there. Unsurprisingly, given her love of scenery and quiet, she also enjoys visits to the South Island of New Zealand, especially Queenstown. "The mountains, the clean air, and the local Kiwis are all attractions that draw me there," she reports.

Rather more populous but offering plenty of spirituality is India. "I love visiting and go there to be close to Buddha, to find peace through meditation," she explains.

Ittapat hails from Thailand's Nakhon Ratchasima province and graduated in mechanical engineering from Suranaree University there. Early career highlights include helping Toyota Motor Asia Pacific in Thailand establish its warranty procedure.

"But I wished to be more than an engineer," he recalls, "and saw this movie 'The Pursuit of Happiness' and that changed my life. I then met Siriporn and her brother and soon embarked into the financial world: financial planning, insurance, investment, tax, corporate structuring, onshore and offshore assets and so forth, and here I am today."

Like Siriporn, he is not married and loves travel in his spare time. "We are both not married, and we both love to travel, we both have similar friends, and we are lucky enough to enjoy a good relationship socially and as partners in the companies. In short, we enjoy a very really close relationship. And we have a similar outlook, as we both want to help Thai people; we believe the more they know and understand, the better it is for them."

Ittapat also enjoys travel to similar places as Siriporn, and also has a fondness for meditation. And he also loves his visits to Japan, especially Hokkaido, for the scenery, the food, and the people.

