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**LONGEVITY  
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**Connecting the  
Global Syndicated Loan Market  
the Debtdomain Story**

**Sean Tai**  
**Founder and CEO**  
*Debtdomain*

[Sean Tai](#) been a tech entrepreneur since 2000. Founder and CEO of Debtdomain ([www.debtdomain.com](http://www.debtdomain.com)), the largest platform globally for syndicated loans. Exited Debtdomain to KKR, Blackstone, Goldman Sachs MBD and IHS Markit. My investment portfolio comprises 25+ tech companies including Lendable, OnBuy, Tabeo, OutFund, Koyo Loans, Shift Group, Alterest, Impak Finance, Distributed, Chaser Technologies and Simba Sleep. Investments include equity, warrants, senior and mezz debt. I'm an LP and Advisor to Fuel Ventures. Sean Tai previously arranged syndicated loans and structured deals in Asia for Standard Chartered and Macquarie and was a Tax specialist Chartered Accountant (KPMG and National Australia Bank). During his career, Sean has been based in Australia, Asia, North America and Europe.

Sean Tai holds 7 board and advisor roles including Board Member and Investor at Outfund, Board Member and Investor at Chaser, and Board Member and Investor at TeachKloud. Sean Tai has 2 current jobs as Investor at Frontline Ventures and Founder and CEO at Debtdomain. Additionally, Sean Tai has had 4 past jobs including EVP/Managing Director at Ipreo.

[Frontline](#) is the venture firm for globally ambitious B2B companies on both sides of the Atlantic [Ipreo](#) provides financial services technology, data and analytics.

Over the past 20 years, there have been significant changes in the syndicated loan market. Many of these changes have been driven through, or facilitated by, innovation and adoption of technology. Throughout this period, regulation, cost pressures and competition have been key drivers for banks to adopt new technology. In addition to this, banks are searching for ways to be more flexible and efficient, with reduced operational risk. As a result, many larger organisations have looked to leverage offshore back office centres to further reduce processing costs, but without compromising on service quality and risk management.

While the syndicated loan market enjoys steady growth, improvements in technology and the way firms manage their lending operations have the potential to enhance liquidity and attract even more participants to the market. There is already an abundance of technology available in the market, and the pace of automation is increasing.

Drivers of change in the loan market include:

- settlement liquidity: a growing concern among regulators;
- margin pressure and efforts by asset managers to operate as efficiently as possible;
- volatility: making risk management more complex in loans;
- better data integration between participants and servicers; and
- new and innovative technologies such as Blockchain, which focus more attention on loan market operations.

Although Debtdomain is a global platform, it is best known for its role in the EMEA syndicated loan market, both for historical reasons, and its current prominent position in that market. This part of the chapter traces the growth and development of Debtdomain, as it added features and functions in

Debtdomain was introduced to the EMEA syndicated loan market in 2001, initially as an online marketplace for secondary trading. The platform was a hybrid electronic/voice order matching service, which sought to connect buyers and sellers of loans in the secondary market. Whilst there was some traction in the secondary platform, particularly for developing market assets, liquidity was insufficient for a standalone business. Consequently, Debtdomain added a primary syndication platform in 2002, both as a distinct business and to complement secondary liquidity.

1. Who is Sean Tai
  - a. Grew up on a Sydney beach
  - b. Much more experienced than I look – 1968
  - c. Immigrant parents
  - d. ENTJ
  - e. Great education
2. Career – First decade
  - a. Chartered Accountant - Tax KPMG
  - b. National Australia Bank
  - c. Move to Singapore 1996
  - d. Standard Chartered, Macquarie – Syndicated Loans and Structured Finance
3. Genesis of DebtDomain (DD)
  - a. Very early access to broadband in 1998
  - b. Experienced the inefficiency of excel, fax and courier for loan syndication process. Opportunity to move the paper process onto the web.
4. 2000-1 Hopes, dreams and mistakes
  - a. Finding greenspace, avoid big competition in primary markets – Intralinks backed by JP Morgan
  - b. Secondary loan web exchange in Asia and Europe - Ultimately too small
  - c. Mistakes! Hiring, small TAM, tech, cash
  - d. Pivot to primary market and go deep in workflow
  - e. Challenges and cost of tech where the ecosystem is undeveloped

5. 2001-2004 Hard slog
  - a. IFC World Bank development contract
  - b. Niche primary platform for emerging market deals for EMEA/APAC
  - c. Bootstrapped, cash poor
  - d. Broadband not yet widely available
  - e. Iterate product quickly
6. DD Judicial Management in Singapore in 2005
  - a. Cash crisis with aggressive creditor
  - b. Court win – clean up balance sheet and cap table
  - c. Lesson – good relationships and honesty
  - d. Revenue \$500K
7. 2005 to 2008 Growth
  - a. Move to Toronto to pursue North America and LATAM
  - b. EMEA develops – over 80 clients
  - c. Citi, Commerzbank, EBRD, ANZ, Unicredit, Fifth Third
  - d. \$2MM Revenue
8. 2008 GFC Opportunities
  - a. Acquire investment and team from team that built US competitor
  - b. Win big clients – BNP, HSBC, ING, CACIB, Credit Suisse
  - c. 2008 financial crisis – primary volumes / revenue fall 75%
  - d. Expand vertically to stable agency business to service loan portfolios

9. 2009 to 2012 Growth, litigation, explore exit
  - a. Revenue \$10MM in 2012 – 120 bank clients
  - b. Failed DD exit Carlyle 2012- Grexit
  - c. Fidelity Info System Litigation 2009-12 that slowed USA expansion
  - d. Hire 14 grads in London, HK and NY.
  - e. 7 related products in one platform
10. 2013 KKR Exit
  - a. 11x EBITDA – very cheap!
  - b. Merge DD with Ipreo, a KKR portfolio company
  - c. 14 year journey to first exit. Management rollover
  - d. New PE owners help with NA expansion
11. 2013-2015 PE Growth
  - a. Private Equity ownership – left alone to be entrepreneurial
  - b. Secondary exit to Blackstone and Goldman Sachs– Ipreo/DD EV \$975MM
  - c. Revenue \$20 million
  - d. Hosting Global Loan Agency conferences
12. 2015-2019 Strangulation
  - a. Integration across business lines – death of unique culture
  - b. IHS Markit acquisition of Ipreo/DebtDomain – going public at \$1855MM EV
  - c. Publicly listed bureaucracy, SOX and politics 2019
  - d. DebtDomain EBITDA over \$30MM and 300+ bank clients

13. DD reflections on success

- a. Loan market domain expertise
- b. Resilience and execution
- c. Lead from front – > 4000 client meetings
- d. Product iteration and going vertical, not horizontal
- e. Network effects

14. DD reflections on success

- a. Global client base in 70 countries
- b. Family staff culture and high trust/engagement
- c. Empowering millennials
- d. Client retention 99.5%
- e. High value product – Over \$1 trillion raised a year on DebtDomain
- f. Small cost base – 40 staff globally

15. DD Challenges

- a. Lack of cash
- b. Board members clash
- c. Court room battles
- d. Inertia and long sales cycle (years)
- e. Niche market



## 16. 2019 – 22

- a. Invested in 25+ startups – Seed and Series A, one unicorn.
- b. Sectors, Lending Fintech/ B2B SaaS, Ecommerce and Edutech
- c. 6 x Board member and VC fund advisor
- d. Operationally involved
- e. Contrast in startup environment to 2000-2004!

## 17. Biohacking – 2013-2022

- a. Environment – nature and cold shower
- b. Unprocessed food and IF
- c. Healthy relationships
- d. Meaningful work