

April-June 2016

BizQ

A PUBLICATION OF SINGAPORE BUSINESS FEDERATION

INSIGHT

BLUEPRINT FOR GROWTH

UNDERSTANDING SBF'S POSITION PAPER FOR A VIBRANT SINGAPORE

READY FOR ROBOTS

MORE COMPANIES ADOPT HI-TECH WORKERS

IN FOCUS

TALENT RESPITE

WILL HIRING GET EASIER?

ONE ON ONE

MARK LEE

STITCHING TOGETHER A GLOBAL BUSINESS

THE AEC BECKONS
DAWN OF A NEW ASEAN

SME COMMITTEE

The SME Committee (SMEC) was established in December 2011 under the auspices of the Singapore Business Federation.

Representing SMEs across key industry sectors, the SMEC leverages SBF's position as the apex business chamber, providing a platform for effective engagement between the SME community and policymakers.

About SMEC

- ▶ Set up to meet the need for a single, consolidated and strong representative voice for SMEs
- ▶ Addresses key issues and challenges faced by SMEs

Stakeholders

- ▶ SBF members
- ▶ Government
- ▶ Trade associations and chambers (TACs) and their members

Activities

- ▶ Advocacy
- ▶ Outreach
- ▶ Research
- ▶ SME development
- ▶ Budget recommendations



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Contents

April - June 2016



FEATURES

10

INSIGHT POSITIONING THE ECONOMY FOR GROWTH

SBF's position paper tackles Singapore's short and long-term economic challenges

18

IN FOCUS PEERING INTO THE LABOUR LANDSCAPE

Despite slowing economic growth, some sectors will still face tight manpower supply

22

ONE ON ONE BECOMING BIGGER & BETTER

Sing Lun CEO Mark Lee wants to grow his business into a serious player on the world stage

Welcome

April – June 2016

Riding out the uncertainty

As we head towards mid-2016, much anxiety persists in the local business community as uncertainty in the global economic environment continues to weigh on sentiment.

Low oil and commodity prices continue to burden businesses, particularly those in the offshore and marine sector. Concerns over a slowdown looming in China are also growing. In Singapore, the economy grew by just two per cent in 2015, its slowest rate since 2009. The government has forecasted GDP to grow by one to three per cent this year.

In light of these events, it is encouraging to note that efforts to restructure Singapore's economy to meet future challenges are well and truly underway. The Committee on the Future Economy (CFE), led by Minister for Finance Heng Swee Keat, has established five sub-committees to set the direction for Singapore's future economic development.

I am honoured to be serving alongside Minister Heng and other business leaders in the Future Corporate Capabilities and Innovation sub-committee. Ultimately, we aim to position Singapore well for the future, so that it grows as a vibrant and resilient economy with sustainable growth.

The CFE will consult trade associations, business chambers, thought leaders and businesses from all sectors for their views on the challenges and opportunities ahead, as well as ideas on how our people and enterprises can play an active role in developing our nation's economic future.

As such, I urge members of the local business community to share their concerns and ideas, so that Singapore can continue to thrive for decades to come.

On its part, SBF released in January a position paper containing wide-ranging recommendations that aim to help Singapore remain relevant. The position paper was put together following extensive consultations and meetings with local businesses. The recommendations address our key immediate concerns as well as medium- and longer-term issues, and we urge the Government to consider our proposals seriously.

At SBF, we continue to press ahead with initiatives that will help local enterprises weather the difficult conditions and find new avenues of growth. To help Singapore companies take advantage of opportunities arising from the China-led "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) initiative, we have launched, in partnership with Chinese language newspaper *Lianhe Zaobao*, a portal that will offer news and insights about OBOR. I urge businesses to tap this resource to expand their network, leverage business opportunities, and establish partnerships with Chinese enterprises.

SBF and International Enterprise Singapore also led a business mission to Iran in February to help Singapore firms capitalise on opportunities, following the nation's reintegration into the global economy.

The year so far has proven to be a challenging one, but if businesses continue to streamline their operations, seek new avenues of growth and leverage innovation to stay ahead of the curve, they will emerge in a stronger position to take advantage of the eventual upturn.



S.S. TEO

Chairman, Singapore Business Federation



Contents

April - June 2016



06 TRENDSPOTTING
We take a closer look at the Committee on the Future Economy

14 BIZ TALK
A grand plan for R&D is unveiled; SMEs eye overseas growth

26 INNOVATE
Robots are coming to a business near you

30 HAPPENINGS
Singapore's productivity champions are crowned

36 BEYOND THE RED DOT
The ASEAN Economic Community arrives

38 RESOURCES
Programmes and tools to give SMEs a leg up

40 BIZ FLAIR
How to put your best virtual foot forward for employers



26



38

On page 33 of the January-March 2016 issue of *BiZQ*, we identified Mr Kevin Kwok as one of the winners of the Total Defence Awards. This is incorrect. It was his employer, City Developments Limited, that won. We apologise for the error.



Business Quotient (BiZQ) is the official publication of the Singapore Business Federation, reaching out to over 22,500 of Singapore's business elite, chief executives and entrepreneurs. This is your eye on Asian and global business trends, bringing you up to date on industry developments, the economy, country profiles, stories about successful companies and the people who lead them.

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BiZQ is published exclusively for the Singapore Business Federation by Publicitas Publishing

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SEEKING NEW PATHS TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

With a highly uncertain macroeconomic environment, the Singapore government has convened a high-powered committee to craft new growth strategies

WORDS FRANCIS KAN

Singapore's economy is at a crossroads. After decades of pursuing a successful growth model that depended heavily on exports and investments from multinational corporations, a fast-changing global economy is compelling the Republic's planners and policymakers to change tack.

Leading this transformation is a

30-member committee headed by Minister for Finance Heng Swee Keat that was unveiled late last year. Made up of ministers, captains of industry and top professionals, the Committee on the Future Economy (CFE) will study five key areas that are crucial to sustaining economic growth vital to Singapore's future.

Mr Heng said the formation

of the committee comes at an important juncture for Singapore, as businesses and workers are facing difficult adjustments in the face of slowing global growth and rising costs. "We hope to go beyond seeking their views, to working with and supporting them to lead and champion some of the transformation processes," he said.



Minister for Finance Heng Swee Keat will co-chair the CFE sub-committee on corporate capabilities and innovation with SBF Chairman S.S. Teo

“We must build on our strengths, to overcome immediate challenges and seize the many exciting opportunities to move towards a value creation economy”

- MINISTER FOR FINANCE, HENG SWEE KEAT

the Prime Minister's Office Chan Chun Sing, and Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung are also on the committee.

The majority of the members, however, come from the private sector. These include heads of business associations and multinational companies such as Shell and the Boston Consulting Group, as well as local enterprises such as the Timbre Group, ST Engineering and apparel maker Sing Lun Holdings.

What will they focus on?

Five sub-committees have been formed, each looking at one key area of transforming the economy. Each sub-committee will be co-chaired by a minister and a private sector representative who sits on the committee.

For instance, Mr Heng together with SBF chairman Mr S.S. Teo will co-chair the sub-committee on corporate capabilities and innovation.

The five areas of focus are:

Future growth industries and markets. Identify and design growth strategies for priority clusters in Singapore, and enable companies to seize opportunities in the global marketplace.

Corporate capabilities and innovation. Recommend strategies to enable companies and industry clusters to develop innovative capacities, and use technology as well as new business models and partnerships to create value.

Jobs and skills. Assess the impact of demographics and technology on the labour force, and recommend strategies to create and redesign jobs, and to equip Singaporeans with the skill sets needed for the future.

Urban development and infrastructure. Recommend strategies to enhance our infrastructure and develop sustainable urban spaces, so as to create an outstanding living environment for our people and reinforce economic advantage.

Connectivity. Study modern connectivity and flows in the future global economy and recommend how Singapore can continue to be a hub that brings value to the world.

How will the CFE do its work?

The CFE will consult with trade associations and chambers, as well as the trade unions, to forge new strategies together to develop Singapore's competitive strengths. The committee will also engage with thought leaders from the corporate world and in academia, from both Singapore and abroad.

The group will engage widely to get a good representation of views from all sectors of the economy on the country's challenges and opportunities.

Members of the public will be invited to share their views through various platforms and channels.

The CFE aims to complete its work by the end of 2016.

The Singapore Business Federation's (SBF) National Business Survey 2015/2016 reflects the difficult environment local enterprises find themselves in. According to the survey, some 54 per cent of the over 1,000 companies polled have been adversely affected by the current economic climate.

BizQ breaks down what the local business community needs to know about the CFE.

Who's in it?

The committee is chaired by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat, with Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) S Iswaran as deputy chairman. National Development Minister Lawrence Wong, NTUC secretary-general and Minister in

Sentiment among Singapore enterprises hits all-time low

After six straight years of optimism, Singapore SMEs now do not expect to achieve any growth in the second and third quarters of 2016, according to the latest SBF-DP SME Index.

The index, which measures the business sentiment of SMEs for the next six months, fell 1.1 points to a neutral rating of 50.0 – its lowest score since it was first published in the first quarter of 2010. Some 3,600 SMEs were surveyed over January and February 2016 on their outlook and sentiment.

The poor sentiment was felt across all six industry sectors, with the Transport/Storage sector recording the largest fall in its index score, from 53.1 to 50.8. The second largest fall was recorded by the Business Services sector, dipping from 53.5 to 51.4.

In contrast, these two sectors were among the most optimistic in previous quarters' index, and their steep decline in optimism has brought the overall index score into neutral territory for the first time since 2010.

Meanwhile, the Manufacturing sector was the most pessimistic in the



current survey, recording an index score of 49.6. Any score below 50.0 means the sector believes it will see a contraction during the next six months.

“The convergence of domestic factors such as low economic growth and rising business costs, as well as global headwinds such as heightened volatility in the financial markets and a slowdown in the Chinese markets have impacted SMEs in Singapore,” said Mr Ho Meng Kit, CEO of SBF.

He added: “Both the Turnover

Expectations and Profitability Expectations indices from the SBF DP Information SME Index for Q2-Q3 2016 registered weaker quarter-on-quarter readings, reflecting the current state of business health in Singapore.”

At the same time, Mr Ho noted that SMEs are showing resilience amid the challenging environment. “SMEs should consider focusing on improving productivity and sourcing for new opportunities.”

BUDGET 2016 RECOMMENDATIONS

The SBF-led SME Committee submitted its recommendations for Singapore Budget 2016 to the government on 15 January 2016. Here are some highlights:

Overcoming growth challenges

- Expand the Job Flexibility Scheme eligibility to other sectors beyond services

- Hold back planned increases in foreign worker levies
- Conduct a review to reduce foreign worker levies
- Remove the foreign worker levy for S Pass holders
- Strengthen support for companies venturing into overseas markets
- Encourage partnerships between large local enterprises and SMEs for overseas projects

New paradigm for enterprise development

- More effective help and resources will have to be channelled to nurture innovative and entrepreneurial local companies to their full potential
- Establish a single SME authority that is headed by a minister and empowered to drive SME development

- Study and consider the adoption of the Korean Technology Finance Corporation (KOTEC) model for intellectual property valuation and loan guarantee to support SMEs
- Review R&D programmes for SMEs to close gap in understanding SMEs' innovation needs

A Place-and-Train Programme for Professionals, Managers, and Executives (PMEs)

P-MAX

Maximise Your Potential

With PME's set to form the majority of our local workforce in the years ahead, it is therefore imperative to have more attention and resources dedicated to assist local PME's to remain employable.

SME's can offer many interesting and challenging career opportunities for PME's, a fact that is often not known to some job seekers.

P-Max is a place-and-train programme which will assist Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) to recruit, train, manage and retain their newly-hired PME's, encourage the adoption of progressive HR practices within SME's, and to help place job-seeking PME's into suitable SME's job roles.

PROGRAMME CONCEPT



Hiring SMEs



Job-seeking PMEs

SMEs and newly-hired PME's

Complete respective
workshops for

SME
(1-Day)

PME
(2-Day)

90% course fee funding from WDA

SMEs to retain PME(s) and
complete six months follow up
with SNEF

Receive a one-off
Assistance Grant of \$5,000
upon completion of programme

UPCOMING EVENTS



SME Engagement Sessions on WDA
P-Max Place-and-Train Programme

Upcoming Dates:

Thu, 28 April 2016 (2pm - 5pm)
Fri, 13 & 27 May 2016 (3pm - 5pm)
Wed, 29 June 2016 (3pm - 5pm)

Scan the QR Code to find out more
about the programme, available
resources and upcoming events!



<http://www.p-max.sg>

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Positioning the economy for growth

An SBF-led private sector initiative seeks to find solutions to challenges

WORDS FRANCIS KAN

Recognising the hurdles facing the local economy on multiple fronts, the Singapore Business Federation (SBF), as the apex business chamber, has conceived a position paper that presents a list of wide-ranging recommendations to address the nation's key immediate concerns as well as longer term issues.

"We are facing an increasingly volatile and uncertain world. Sustained economic growth is needed to fund Singapore's future increase in social spending, so that we can build an inclusive society," said SBF Chairman S.S. Teo in his foreword to the document titled SBF Position Paper for a Vibrant Singapore.

"We urge our government to consider our proposals, especially those that concern our rising costs and the need to expand our economy and grow an external wing."

Recent surveys by SBF point to the tough times ahead. The SBF-DP SME Index, for instance, showed that sentiment among local businesses for the next six months have fallen to an all-time low (See Trendspotting, page 8).

Released in January this year, the position paper was drafted following extensive consultations and meetings, and is supported by major trade associations and chambers and prominent members of the business community.

Upon receiving the report, Finance

Minister Heng Swee Keat, who heads the government-led Committee on the Future Economy (CFE) said: "It's quite remarkable that the recommendations touch a lot on the medium and long term, and what we need to do. This is exactly what the CFE seeks to do." (See Trendspotting, page 6)



Minister for Finance Heng Swee Keat (left) and SBF Chairman S.S. Teo

A snapshot of the recommendations

SBF's position paper calls for a comprehensive review of Singapore's existing economic strategies and urges the government to formulate new responses to the challenges and opportunities in an increasingly uncertain operating environment. Here are some of its broad recommendations aimed at tackling short-term as well as longer-term issues that have an impact on Singapore's future.

IMMEDIATE-TERM

- Assist businesses to transit through this difficult period into a

restructured economy for sustainable growth. In particular, the government should take a deep dive to analyse and address cost and manpower issues.

- Specific recommendations include identifying key reasons for the sharp increase in costs faced by businesses in recent years and study how to manage them. The paper calls for the government to work with SBF and trade associations and chambers to review manpower-lean policies, as businesses

need time to adjust and refine the foreign manpower policies across different sectors so that Singapore can continue to be attractive to foreign talent.

MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM

For the longer term, the paper proposes two overarching strategies to promote growth.

- Create an economy that is not constrained by our geographical boundaries. The government needs to do more to encourage Singapore-based companies to expand overseas both in terms of operations and markets, but with their home base firmly anchored here. More also needs to be done to encourage our companies to leverage the digital economy to expand their markets and opportunities.
- Develop Singapore as a strong home base for thought leadership and innovation activities. Singapore should capitalise on its competitive strengths to anchor and grow key activities here to continue to provide good jobs for its people.

▶ To read the SBF Position Paper for a Vibrant Singapore and share your ideas, visit sbfpositionpaper2016.org.sg





Derek Goh

Lawrence Yong

An optimistic outlook

BizQ spoke to two local businessmen to get their views on SBF's position paper

Derek Goh, executive chairman of electronics distributor Serial System, and Lawrence Yong, CEO of crowdfunding platform MoolahSense, represent both the established and the emerging Singapore-based enterprises. The two entrepreneurs are hopeful the position paper will help boost prospects for local businesses and the broader economy.

What is your overall reaction to the SBF position paper?

Derek Goh: The SBF position paper is a good initiative to address headwinds and challenges for domestic and international businesses. It is insightful and the comprehensive points reflect most of the challenges faced by businesses today. If well-executed, this could play an integral role in building a strong foundation for Singapore to progress and thrive

in the next 10 years and beyond. **Lawrence Yong:** It is a forward-looking paper that accurately describes the challenges facing Singapore businesses, with near term proposals that address the immediate pain points. It also has long-term orientation in recognising trends of a collaborative economy that will characterise its future competitive advantage.

What do you see as the most critical challenges to Singapore's economic future?

Goh: Manpower challenges such as matching the right tasks to the right skills and talent retention. Also, a lack of regional and international exposure in today's workforce. There is a need for a more diverse workforce that includes foreign talent, which can bring international experience and expertise to Singapore.

Calendar of follow-up activities for SBF position paper

APR - JUN

- Collaborating with Large Companies seminar/workshop
- Budget 2016 seminar
- ASEAN Conference
- Fair Tenancy Framework Workshop

JUL - SEP

- Moving from Value-Adding to Value-Creation seminar
- Internationalisation: Beyond Geographical Boundaries conference
- Singapore-Japan Business Forum
- 7th Asian Business Summit
- Singapore Regional Business Forum

OCT - DEC

- How Family Businesses Can Be Successful seminar
- Singapore India Business Symposium
- Fair Tenancy Framework Workshop

Yong: Technological innovation is disrupting the way business is done in many industry verticals. If businesses are not nimble and adaptive enough, they risk losing their competitiveness and relevance to more innovative upstart challengers.

What other recommendations not covered by the paper will help grow Singapore's economy?

Goh: To encourage and attract Singaporeans who have worked overseas for many years to return and contribute to the local economy and society. Another recommendation would be to build a strong financial support infrastructure for local companies to conduct businesses in targeted foreign countries.

Yong: Having initiatives to encourage mid-career Singaporeans to shift their mindset towards risk-taking and better embrace entrepreneurship.



Office Unit At Choice CBD Location Available For Lease

Information on Office Unit for Lease

Building :

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(an upcoming 31-storey commercial development with Platinum Green Mark)

Unit location :

160 Robinson Road level 8 Tower section

Strata area for lease :

887.81 sqm (Tower)

TOP :

May 2016

Special Feature :

High ceiling

Facilities and amenities :

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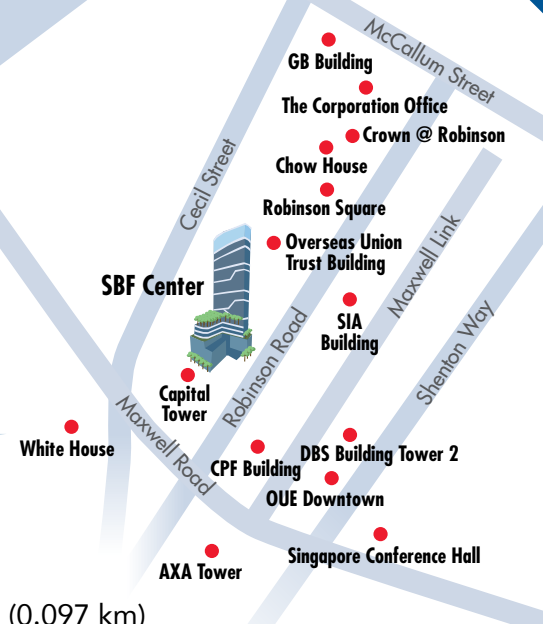
- Tanjong Pagar MRT station (one minute from exit G)
- Shenton Way MRT station (under construction)

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- Capital Tower (0.005 km)
- CPF Building (0.049 km)
- SIA Building (0.088 km)
- OUE Downtown 1 (0.096 km)
- Overseas Union Trust Building (0.097 km)





PHOTO GETTY IMAGES

A GRAND PLAN FOR R&D

A \$S19 billion plan to support Singapore's R&D efforts over the next five years was unveiled by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in January. The Research Innovation Enterprise 2020 Plan (RIE2020) aims to help translate research into solutions that address national challenges, build up innovation and technology adoption in companies, and drive economic growth through value creation.

"It will contribute significantly to the economy, create opportunities and jobs, support national initiatives like Smart Nation, SkillsFuture, studies that we are doing under the

Committee for the Future Economy, and help our workers thrive amidst technological changes and globalisation," said PM Lee at the launch of the RIE2020.

Under the sixth five-year roadmap for research, innovation and enterprise, the National Research Foundation (NRF) will also be more targeted in how it funds R&D initiatives going forward, as the agency seeks to capitalise on technologies that Singapore has a competitive advantage in, as well as build up capabilities in areas that have a greater national need.

▶ To find out more, visit nrf.gov.sg/research/rie2020



MANPOWER

TWO NEW STAT BOARDS TO BOOST SKILLS

Two new statutory boards were unveiled in January to enhance Singapore's focus on skills and employment. The SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) will take over some functions of the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) – such as the training of adult workers – and incorporate the Council for Private Education, which oversees private schools. SSG aims to improve the links between vocational, academic and adult training qualification systems, so that credentials can be recognised consistently.

WDA will be reconstituted into Workforce Singapore, which remains under the Ministry of Manpower, and will focus on jobs and helping companies become manpower-lean while staying competitive. The two new agencies are expected to be established by year-end as changes to existing laws are required, which must be approved in Parliament.

FINANCE

SMES SEEK REGIONAL FINANCING

Almost half of Singapore's SMEs expect revenue growth to be driven by overseas markets, but many face difficulties in obtaining financing in their target markets to fund their expansion.

According to the inaugural SME Growth and Financing Survey 2016 by the Singapore Business Federation and Standard Chartered Bank, more than half believe that their existing banking partners do not have the capabilities to establish relationships with



banks in the host country (56 per cent), find the right overseas partners (55 per cent) or understand foreign markets (58 per cent).

“When venturing overseas, SMEs’ lack of proven track record in a foreign country often makes access to banking

facilities and funding difficult. It is therefore critical for SMEs to find the right banking partner that can support their growth strategy,” said Ms Vanessa Leung, Head of Commercial Banking, Standard Chartered Bank Singapore.

TRADE

LOCAL SMES EYE GROWTH ABROAD

Singapore SMEs see international markets as key to their growth plans, according to a study commissioned by FedEx Express. Some 71 per cent of respondents said

that they are more likely to forecast growth revenue from international exports than from domestic business in the next five years.

The independent study, “Global Opportunities: Examining Import and Export Trends Among Small Businesses,” also revealed that only 41 per cent of Singapore

SMEs export to other markets. However, 67 per cent of the respondents also believe that they will generate international revenue in five years’ time. The businesses polled saw Central and South Asia as the regions with the greatest export potential, followed by Europe and the Middle East.



SURVEY

SMES NEED MORE INSURANCE

SMEs in Singapore remain underprepared for dealing with significant business risks and threats, according to a survey of local enterprises by global insurer QBE. The research revealed that as many as one in seven smaller companies do not have any business insurance at all. According to QBE, this is “driven by a prevailing

perception among the majority of SMEs that insurance is a ‘commodity’ product, where a basic level of cover is perceived to be sufficient”.

Despite recognising the value of insurance in helping their businesses operate better, over half of SMEs surveyed (53 per cent) admitted it was low on their priorities, while 56 per cent agreed that minimum coverage was adequate rather than seeking greater protection of their business and assets.

PROCUREMENT

GOVERNMENT PROJECTS CAN BOOST SMES' COMPETITIVENESS

Participating in government projects will help SMEs gain the experience and expertise that will help them compete overseas, said the SBF-led SME Committee (SMEC).

Government procurement took centre stage at the SME Convention 2016 incorporating the inaugural Government Procurement Fair, organised by SMEC. The government procures over S\$10 billion in goods and services each year, making government procurement an important

source of opportunities for SMEs.

The Government Procurement Fair is part of an 18-month project funded under the Local Enterprise and Association Development (LEAD) programme to enable more SMEs to participate in government procurement. The first collaboration between SMEC and government agencies, the inaugural Government Procurement Fair aims to encourage and enable more SMEs to tap on government procurement for growth.

The fair attracted a number of government agencies, including the Agency for Science, Technology and Research, Building and Construction Authority, Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, and JTC Corporation.



MANPOWER

HELP FOR BUSINESSES TO ADOPT MANPOWER SOLUTIONS

Nine associations will encourage SMEs to adopt manpower-lean solutions, and build a workforce with a strong Singaporean core under the Lean Enterprise Development (LED) Scheme.

The LED Scheme, unveiled in October 2015, is intended to help progressive SMEs transform and grow in the

new manpower-lean landscape.

Known as the "LED Multipliers", the nine associations are: Singapore Manufacturing Federation, Workforce Advancement Federation, Restaurant Association of Singapore, Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, Singapore Precision Engineering and Technology Association, U-SME (an NTUC initiative), Singapore Business Federation, Singapore National



Employers Federation, and the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The LED Multipliers aim to help 400 SMEs come on board the LED Scheme over the next two years.

Peering into the labour landscape

Local businesses need to relook their talent management strategies to meet their manpower needs

WORDS FRANCIS KAN

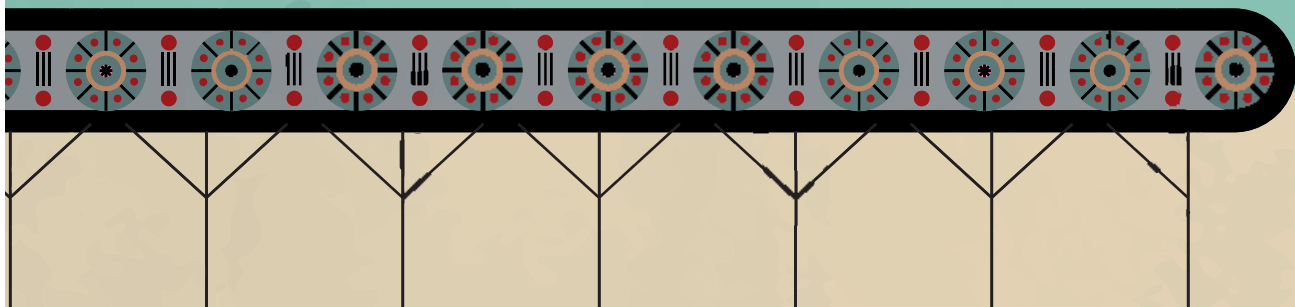
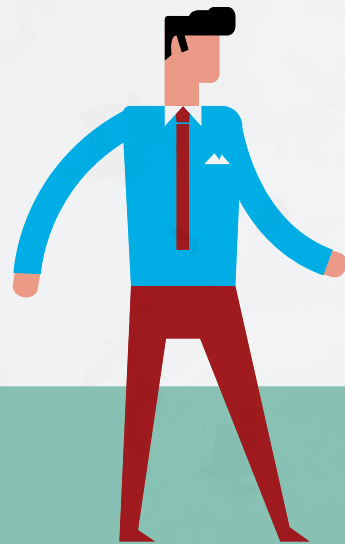




PHOTO SHUTTERSTOCK

Ask businesses in Singapore what their top challenge is and chances are, many will cite the ability to attract talent. Revised labour policies introduced a few years ago to tighten the flow of foreigners continue to be a bugbear for many in the local business community.

The situation is more dire for SMEs, who, because of their relatively small size and lack of employer branding, lose out to large companies and multinational corporations when it comes to hiring the best talent in the market.

However, with the slowing economy, the situation may ease somewhat as businesses hold back on hiring amid the uncertainty, resulting in some slack in the labour market. Industry watchers are seeing an increase in companies giving up their leases, abandoning projects or selling off assets – moves that will dampen demand for labour.

Pointing to a possible easing of the manpower situation here, international companies including Standard Chartered, Barclays and Yahoo have all announced layoffs in recent months, while Comics Connection and homegrown fashion brand M)phosis have shut their operations in Singapore. Meanwhile, recent surveys by the Singapore Business Federation (SBF) have also shown that hiring expectations for 2016 continue to be weak.

“The competition for talent in Singapore is projected to continue in 2016, albeit with a milder impact on organisations. There has been a slight moderation in the demand

“The competition for talent in Singapore is projected to continue in 2016, albeit with a milder impact on organisations. There has been a slight moderation in the demand for talent due to softer economic conditions in the region”

- MR SERGE SHINE, MANAGING DIRECTOR, ASIA (EX-JAPAN), SPRING PROFESSIONAL

for talent due to softer economic conditions in the region,” said Serge Shine, managing director, Asia (ex-Japan), at recruitment firm Spring Professional.

He noted that the Singapore Government’s push for productivity will also affect how tight and fluid the job market will be in 2016, although the long-term effects of these moves still remain uncertain.

According to the Job Vacancies 2015 Report by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the ratio between job vacancies and unemployed persons has declined from 143 openings per 100 job seekers in March 2015 to 116 in September 2015, marking a brief respite from the tight labour situation in the early half of 2015.

And just 31,800 more people here were employed at the end of last year, the lowest annual growth since 2003.



The slower employment growth took place “amidst sluggish global economic conditions and slower growth of the Singapore economy, and tightened supply of foreign manpower,” MOM said in a statement released in January.

“We are witnessing layoffs or no replacement when staff leave. All this will mean that companies will hold back major hiring, introduce selective firing and seek voluntary workforce reduction,” said David Leong, managing director of recruitment firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting.

On the supply front, SMEs have urged the government to ease some of its labour policies as economic growth stagnates. SBF, for instance, has called for the authorities to hold back any further planned increases in foreign worker levies. It further recommends that the government recalibrates the levy quantum to take

into consideration the latest net inflow of foreign workers.

Help wanted

So will the labour situation get better for businesses in light of recent events? It depends on the kind of staff firms are looking to hire. Experts said that there could be some slack created in the PME (professionals, managers and executives) segment of the market. This group is usually hardest hit when a firm tries to cut costs by trimming their payrolls as they yield the biggest savings in terms of wages.

However, for those looking to hire rank-and-file staff in the labour intensive services sector, there will be little relief. Workers are needed to run restaurants, retail shops, hotels and to provide maintenance to properties and estates. Skilled technicians, housekeepers, service staff, delivery staff, riders and

drivers will also be in demand.

“Generally the service sector is seeing a strong talent crunch to the point that some restaurants and shops choose to close down because there is no one to help man operations. This is a bad problem,” said Mr Leong.

The IT sector is also expected to face a talent shortfall as Singapore embarks on its drive to become a Smart Nation. The Infocomm Development Authority told *The Straits Times* in February that the sector might find itself short of nearly 30,000 information technology professionals in 2017.

Already, SMEs in the sector are finding it difficult to fill positions. For instance, mobile technology firm BST Consulting has hired over 100 people from around Asia working remotely to meet their manpower requirements. In contrast, it has only seven developers in Singapore. “We are fighting for the same pool. Even

31,800 Additional number of people employed in 2015

30,000 Expected shortfall of IT professionals in 2017

fresh graduates can pick and choose because there is a shortage of such people,” said BST CEO Paddy Tan.

A flexible workforce

In view of the slowing economy, SMEs should look out for opportunities to hire workers that may become available as a result of retrenchment. They should also consider utilising government grants for the Singapore Workforce Development Agency’s (WDA) “Place-and-Train” (PnT) schemes under the nation-wide SkillsFuture initiative.

This involves an employer hiring a trainee before he or she commences training to acquire the necessary skills for the job that they are recruited for. Under PnT programmes, trainees do not pay any fees as their training will be supported and co-funded by their employers and WDA.

“SMEs should not exclude this potential pool of workers because of their lack of experience but should embrace them because they can form our Singapore core. SMEs should be SkillsFuture-attuned and use this government scheme to absorb local workers into their companies,” said Mr Leong.

Companies also need to implement more flexible working arrangements so that they can attract more contract, casual or temporary workers. These can include women

re-entering the workforce, elderly workers and even students.

“Aside from remuneration, smaller companies can consider offering alternative benefits such as well-structured training or career development plans, work time flexibility as well as the option to work from home, all of which are highly appreciated by younger talents as well as those with children,” said Mr Shine.

Finally, businesses facing labour shortages must leverage technology to ramp up their productivity and reduce their reliance on human workers. Hotels and restaurants in Singapore are already using robots to fill some roles (see Innovate, page 26).

“Companies also need to implement more flexible working arrangements so that they can attract more contract, casual or temporary workers”



Employment checklist

Here are some strategies to adopt to ensure you attract the best talent available.

- Look to hire talent displaced from their jobs as a result of the economic slowdown
- An excellent digital presence will attract young talent, as social media and mobile career platforms continue to be the top hiring channels for new entrants to the workplace
- A well-structured internship programme will also help attract promising new graduates
- Implement flexible work arrangements to attract contract or temporary workers such as the elderly and women re-entering the workforce



BECOMING BIGGER & BETTER

Sing Lun Holdings CEO Mark Lee shares his thoughts on becoming a major player in the global apparel business

WORDS FRANCIS KAN PHOTOGRAPHY WILSON PANG

In 2006, Mark Lee, then a senior executive at his family's apparel manufacturing business at Sing Lun Holdings, cast a critical eye over the global market and spotted a growing trend in health and wellness.

"I felt that Sing Lun could fill a gap in the market and made the move to expand into the performance sportswear segment," said Mr Lee, who took over the reins of the business from his father in 2009, and is currently its chief executive officer.

It was a bold move for the 65-year-old company founded by his

grandfather, which had begun life as a textile trading company. It was also a controversial decision as the firm's existing production facilities had to be re-engineered to meet the sportswear industry's standards, and employees had to undergo re-training.

The move paid off. Today, the sports performance segment makes up 80 per cent of Sing Lun's business. It has also allowed the company to scale dramatically. Today, the firm generates around US\$250 million in revenue, but Mr Lee is far from done.

His ambition is to grow the





company into a half-a-billion-dollar enterprise in five years. The urgent need to scale up is not a vanity move, but a necessary condition of becoming a major player in the industry.

“You need that size before you are considered a serious player. With size, you enjoy economies of scale and it allows you to develop a deep relationship with your customers,” the 41-year-old explained.

Painful decisions

It has not been all smooth sailing for the young CEO. During the 2008 financial crisis, Sing Lun lost a major customer that made up a big chunk of its business at the time.

This exit meant the loss of 30 per cent of the company’s capacity overnight as orders retreated, forcing the closure of two of its oldest plants and the retrenchment of 600 staff.

“Most of the employees had literally seen me grow up, from a young child to now CEO of the company. They were more like family than employees and breaking such difficult news was not easy. It is a moment I will never forget,” Mr Lee recalled.

Determined to ensure that the company would never again be over-reliant on a single customer, Sing Lun now represents more than two dozen apparel brands, ranging from performance sportswear and fashion wear to children’s brands. The company’s biggest market is the US, which contributes some 60 per cent to its total revenue.

The customer that they lost in 2008 has also since returned to Sing Lun, and now contributes 2.5 times more in business than before.

“When they left abruptly, many people were upset, but I said we had to execute our outstanding orders with them, even if it meant making a loss. The managers at the company that left us remembered that, and

when new management took over they came back,” he said.

Calculated risks

Though the macroeconomy is fragile and subdued again, Sing Lun, under Mr Lee’s stewardship, is in far better shape than in 2008 to ride out the volatility. Despite the uncertainty, he is determined to continue growing the company, albeit in the cautious, calculated manner that has been a hallmark of his leadership.

“I make conservative decisions appropriate for the times. Before deciding, I ask myself, will this sink the ship? I look at where the exit signs are in a worst-case scenario,” he explained.

“I learnt this from my father: When you’re punched, will it floor you or are you able to get up? This helps me make decisions.”



US\$500m Target revenue for Sing Lun in five years

“ I make conservative decisions appropriate for the times. Before deciding, I ask myself, will this sink the ship? I look at where the exit signs are in a worst-case scenario ”

A track record of success

Sing Lun Holdings CEO Mark Lee joined his family business in 1999, and became its CEO in 2009. Under his helm, Sing Lun's revenue has grown from under US\$50 million to almost US\$250 million today through a series of organic growth strategies, mergers and acquisitions, and buyouts.

He was instrumental in transforming Sing Lun from a maker of original equipment manufacturing apparel into a full-service provider of apparels, incorporating design and developmental services, to manufacturing and supply chain management of a full range of apparel, including knits and sweaters.

Its manufacturing and sourcing offices are located in Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and China. Some of its customers include The North Face, PUMA, Timberland, Oakley, Under Armour, Lucy Activewear, Banana Republic, Macy's, and OshKosh B'gosh.

Mr Lee is also a prominent member of the local business community. He was a winner of the prestigious EY Entrepreneur of the Year Award in the manufacturing category in 2015, and one of 30 members in the high-powered Committee on the Future Economy that has been tasked to forge a new growth path for the Singapore economy.

He is also an active member of the Singapore Business Federation-led SME committee's sub-committee on innovation.

ROBOTS TO THE RESCUE

More services sector firms here are turning to robotics to overcome the persistent labour crunch

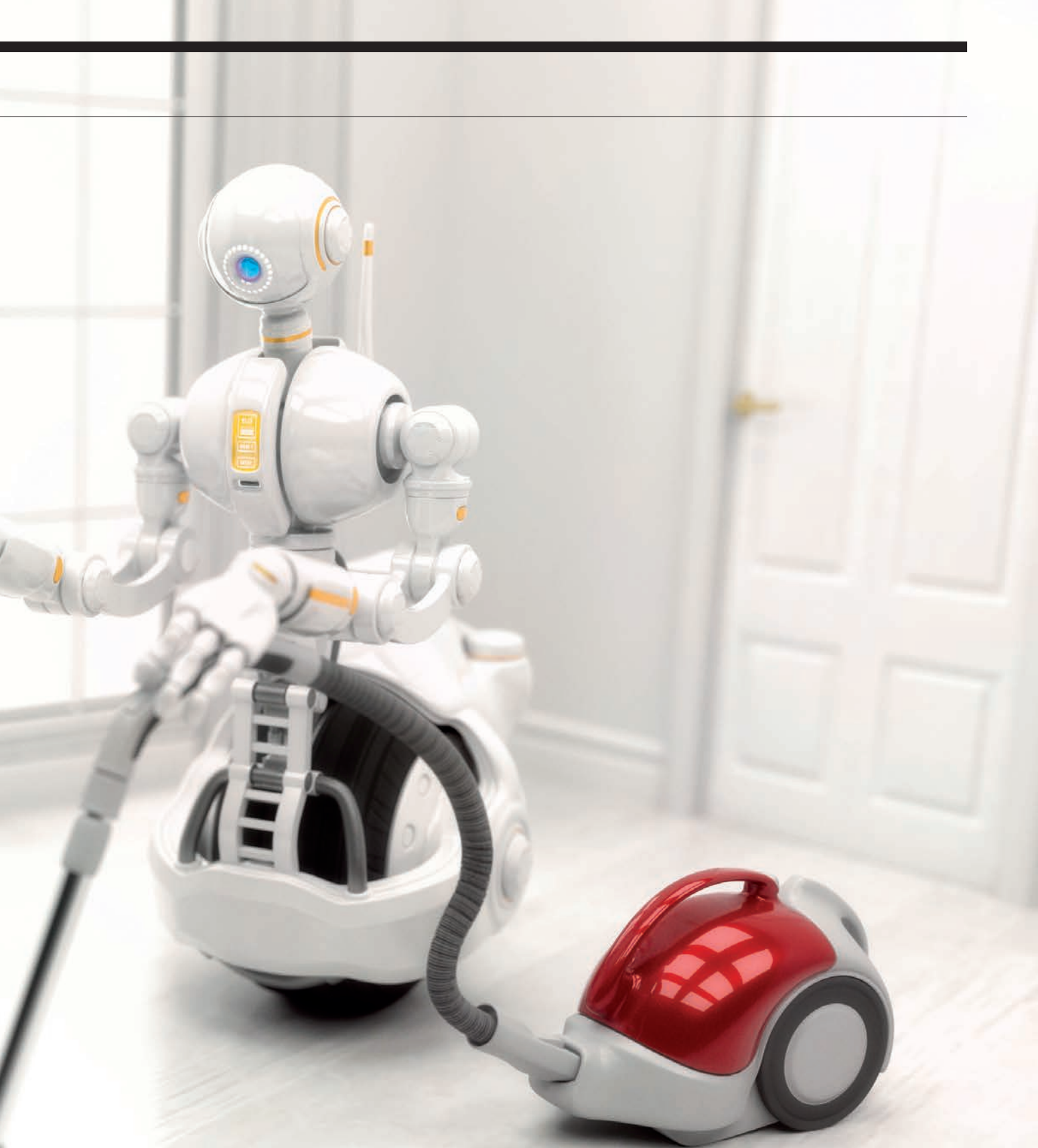
WORDS FRANCIS KAN

They are a familiar sight at manufacturing plants but robots are breaking out of the factory and making their way into restaurants, hotel lobbies and retail outlets. Fuelled by more advanced technology and falling costs, robotics

systems are now a feasible solution for local SMEs in the services sector looking to ramp up their productivity and lessen their dependence on human labour.

Some 8.7 million service robots were sold globally in 2009, up from





7 million in the previous year. The global market for this technology could be worth up to US\$190 billion in 2020 as the workforce ages and labour markets tighten.

In Singapore, robotics will make their debut in the hospitality industry

in June, when two of these high-tech workers take on the role of bellboy and housekeeper at Park Avenue Rochester Hotel. Among other tasks, the robots will deliver bottled water, linen and toiletries to guests' rooms.

This will be expanded later to items such as food, luggage and mail.

Likewise, in the equally labour-challenged F&B space, eateries have been experimenting with robot waiters to deliver food to customers.



The Techi robot will debut at Park Avenue Rochester Hotel in June

“Our aim is to replace the repetitive, tiring jobs for human beings, so that they can concentrate on more productive work”

- MR MATHAN MUTHUPILLAI,
CHAIRMAN AND TECHNICAL
DIRECTOR, TECHMETICS

Rong Heng Seafood Restaurant at East Coast Park is believed to be the first here to use robots to serve food. The recently opened eatery has three such waiters in use, helping cut its manpower needs from 15 human waiters to just 10.

According to Chinese newspaper *Lianhe Zaobao*, Rong Heng's founder Zhang Zhinong first thought of the

idea when he saw robots serving food in a restaurant in Kunshan city near Shanghai in 2014. His robots cost just over S\$14,000 a piece, compared to an annual salary of around S\$30,000 for a staff. And there are other advantages besides costs.

“Disputes can sometimes arise between waiters and customers. Robots don't need pay rises, bonuses or welfare. They can work 24/7, do not need to take annual or sick leave, and will not quit,” said Mr Zhang.

Made in Singapore

Local technology companies are helping to develop robot technology. For instance, the robots to be used at Park Avenue Rochester Hotel were developed by Singapore-based Techmetics Solutions. The company recently signed a partnership with Konica Minolta's Business Innovation Centre Asia Pacific (BIC). The deal will see Techmetics design, develop

8.7m Number of service robots sold globally in 2009

US\$190b Estimated value of robotics market in 2020

and supply the robots, while BIC provides enterprise market access, value-added onsite implementation and support services.

“Our aim is to replace the repetitive, tiring jobs for human beings, so that they can concentrate on more productive work,” said Techmetics’ chairman and technical director Mathan Muthupillai. “If you talk about the F&B side, waiters are spending more time on taking items and delivering them to the table – that work can be taken care of by the robot.”

With robots freeing up their time, staff can focus on interacting with patrons and dealing with special requests, thus improving the overall customer experience.

Robots could also soon be making an appearance in education. Nanyang Technological University (NTU) researchers have developed a robot prototype

that can guide children through their lessons.

“We plan to put a more structured curriculum into the robot to help tutor the lower primary school kids, like those in Primary 1 and 2 – a companion robot to help them go through their syllabus,” explained Dr Chen I-Ming, director of NTU’s Robotics Research Centre. The children can control the movements of the robots using sensors. Meanwhile, teachers can record stories to get the robots to play them back to the students. This gives human teachers more time to observe students’ behaviour.

While businesses here are slowly starting to embrace robotics as a means to deal with persistent labour shortfalls, the bigger question is whether customers are ready to be served, taught or engaged by these metallic workers.

“We have to educate customers to manage their expectations. Some guests may not like the idea, they still prefer the concierge, wearing a nice uniform, to greet them,” said Park Avenue Rochester Hotel’s general manager Ryan Sun.

He does not wish for the existing staff to feel that their jobs will be taken away. He said: “We want them to view the technology from a more positive angle – that it will help offload some of their duties rather than replace them.”



Boosting the backend

Outside of the services industries, robotics solutions are also being used in the back-end of business operations. These include robots on wheels that can traverse a retail shop floor to take stock or those that can help with related tasks at a manufacturing facility.

US-based Adept Technology, for instance, specialises in autonomous robots that move parts and products around more efficiently. The company said that while its robots do not directly help in the manufacturing process, they help improve a company’s overall productivity. Adept recently showed off its wares at the RoboUniverse Singapore Conference and Expo.

“The way we have been participating is by improving the processes involved in making things and not the things themselves,” said Adept’s managing director Swami Vangal-Ramamurthy. “For instance, in a silicon manufacturing plant, we are improving the way these things are handled, and not how silicon is manufactured. We’re focusing on improving processes and improving the productivity of the manufacturing rather than new advancement.”



AWARDS

CHAMPIONS OF PRODUCTIVITY

From a seafood restaurant chain to a telecommunications operator, eight local businesses from various industries were recognised at the Singapore Productivity Awards 2015 for their successful efforts at becoming more efficient

The second edition of the awards, an initiative of the Singapore Business Federation (SBF), saw winners coming from six sectors: food and beverage, hotels, retail, logistics, manufacturing and infocomm.

The manufacturing and infocomm sectors were added to the 2015 awards, reflecting their importance to the Singapore economy. The manufacturing sector accounts for 18.4 per cent of Singapore's GDP



and employs over half a million people. Faced with key challenges such as rapid changes in technology, tight domestic labour market and globalisation of supply chains, there is a critical need for the manufacturing sector to transform through innovation and productivity, SBF said in a statement.

“In the manufacturing sector, productivity growth has lagged behind the increase in labour costs. Over the longer term, the only

sustainable way for the sector is to cope with the impact of rising business costs by enhancing productivity through higher skills, innovation and automation,” said Mr Douglas Foo, president of the Singapore Manufacturing Federation.

As for the fast-developing infocomm sector, the emergence of new technologies such as the Internet of Things will create new opportunities and uplift all sectors. Held at the Shangri-La Hotel, the

awards ceremony was graced by Minister for Trade and Industry (Trade) Mr Lim Hng Kiang.

WINNERS OF THE SINGAPORE PRODUCTIVITY AWARDS 2015

JUMBO Group
Singapore Marriott Tang Plaza Hotel
M1
CWT
Poh Tiong Choon Logistics
Mencast Holdings
YHS (Singapore)
Charles & Keith (Singapore)





TRAINING

MAKING BUSINESSES MORE RESILIENT

Twenty-one Singapore companies were commended by SBF for raising their level of operational resilience at the annual Business Continuity Management (BCM) conference.

These businesses had been certified ISO 22301:2012, an international BCM standard

At the event, the guest of honour, Minister of State for Trade and Industry Dr Koh Poh Koon, unveiled two new BCM initiatives. One involves companies developing a business continuity plan (BCP) with the government's support, while the other is the introduction of a handbook that will help logistics companies raise their BCM-readiness.

The BCP programme will enable SMEs to develop a basic plan to manage specific disruptions such as haze and pandemics. To ensure that the plans are robust, verification is performed by internationally accredited BCM standard certification bodies. The second initiative, a BCM-Readiness Framework handbook, enables logistics companies in the cold chain, warehousing and storage industry to assess how prepared they are to deal with business disruptions. The 56-page handbook will be distributed to the logistics companies and is a collaborative effort between SBF and



the Singapore Logistics Association.

Mr Ho Meng Kit, SBF CEO, also shared key findings of the BCM survey that was conducted from September to November 2015 at the conference. "Besides having the ability to continue their business operations, more than 80 per cent of companies shared that their readiness also provides stakeholders with the assurance that their businesses are sustainable. This is important in view of the unpredictable economic outlook ahead," he said.



The portal was launched by (from left) Mr Anthony Tan, Executive Vice-President of SPH's Chinese Media Group; Mr SS Teo, Chairman of SBF; Guest-of-Honour Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Secretary-General of the National Trades Union Congress; Dr Lee Boon Yang, Chairman of SPH; HE Mr Chen Xiao Dong, Ambassador of People's Republic of China to Singapore; and Mr Ho Meng Kit, Chief Executive Officer of SBF

RESOURCES

“ONE BELT, ONE ROAD” PORTAL LAUNCH

Companies can now access information and news on the “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) initiative through a new portal jointly developed by SBF and Singapore Press Holding's *Lianhe Zaobao*. The OBOR

portal (beltandroad.zaobao.com) was launched by Mr Chan Chun Sing, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, on 8 March 2016.

OBOR, a collective term for the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road combined, was first mooted by Chinese president Xi Jinping in 2013, and aims to build a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa along the ancient Silk Road

routes. This development framework and strategy is expected to benefit 4.4 billion people, or 63 per cent of the global population, and boost 29 per cent of the global economy.

The news reports, articles and discussions featured on the portal will help Singapore companies understand OBOR's business potential and risks, as well as better assess the investment opportunities in regional markets.

SUMMIT

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE CITIES

The fifth edition of the biennial World Cities Summit (WCS), to be held in Singapore from 10-14 July, will see government leaders and industry experts gather to address liveable and sustainable city challenges, share integrated urban solutions and forge new partnerships.

In particular, WCS 2016 will explore how cities can plan and better govern to serve their residents and build up resilience through policy, technology and social innovation. Jointly organised by Singapore's Centre for Liveable Cities and Urban Redevelopment Authority, the summit's key highlights include the



Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize, which recognises outstanding international initiatives for city excellence, and the annual World Cities Summit Mayors Forum, a platform for city leaders to

discuss pressing urban issues and share best practices. WCS 2016 will be held in conjunction with the Singapore International Water Week and CleanEnviro Summit Singapore.

SEMINAR

OPPORTUNITIES ALONG THE SILK ROAD

Businesses were given an update on a China-led plan to develop infrastructure in the region as well as the internationalisation of the Chinese currency. Organised by SBF and Bank of China (BOC), the seminar on “One Belt, One Road” and “RMB Internationalisation: Challenges & Opportunities” was held in January 2016 and attended by close to 130 participants.

In his welcome remarks,

Mr Eugene Wong, chairman of CrimsonLogic Pte Ltd and vice chairman of SBF's China and North Asia Business Group, highlighted the importance of RMB as a trading currency, especially after the International Monetary Fund officially added it to its reserve currency basket.

He added that SBF and BOC have many potential areas of collaboration, and encouraged SBF member companies to tap on this

platform and benefit from the “One Belt, One Road” initiative.

Mr Ai Hao, head of BOC's treasury department, shared his outlook for China's economy in 2016, and the challenges and opportunities of RMB's internationalisation.

BOC also provided one-to-one consultation for participants who were keen to know more about RMB-related services, as well as other products and services that the bank offers to its customers.

Mr Eugene Wong,
Chairman of
CrimsonLogic
Pte Ltd and
Vice-Chairman of
China-North Asia
Business Group,
delivering his
welcome remarks



CONVENTION

A FORUM FOR SMES

Attended by some 500 C-suite and management executives, the SME Convention 2016 focused on ways for businesses to grow through internationalisation, innovation, and leadership and management.

Organised by the SBF-led SME Committee (SMEC), this year's convention aimed to address three key elements in growing companies: internationalisation, innovation and leadership, and management skills.

Presentations and panel discussions covered topics such as opportunities for regional and global growth for SMEs, accelerating growth through technology adoption, and understanding how leadership is critical for business growth. SMEC also shared its recommendations for Singapore Budget 2016.

"Innovation is key to our goal to



transform companies from value-adding to value creation. In one of our recommendations for Budget 2016, we asked the government to look at developing a vibrant and more SME-friendly innovation environment. There is a need to find a better way to promote and

support innovation-based businesses here," said Mr Lawrence Leow, SMEC chairman, in his welcome address at the event.

The SME Convention 2016 also featured a segment dedicated to government procurement in collaboration with several government departments and agencies.

EVENTS Here are some upcoming SBF workshops*. Register at and receive event updates on sbf.org.sg



MALAYSIA GST (WEF 1 APRIL 2015)

Date: 9 June 2016

Venue: SBF, Keppel Towers

For businesses with operations in Malaysia, GST is compulsory for those with an annual taxable turnover exceeding RM500,000. In order to avoid missteps that will result in non-compliance or penalties, this half-day session will shed light on what needs to be considered in your company's GST readiness plan.



UNDERSTANDING CORPORATE GOVERNANCE FOR INDEPENDENT DIRECTORS

Date: 16 May 2016

Venue: SBF, Keppel Towers

This programme aims to provide participants with an overview of recent developments in the corporate governance arena in Singapore. This includes an examination of the Corporate Governance Code that is relevant to independent directors of listed and non-listed companies.



HOW TO ACHIEVE EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

Date: 16 May 2016

Venue: SBF, Keppel Towers

Participants will be equipped with the skills required to confidently manage high levels of customer service. This course will also be looking at different types of customers and their behaviour. There will be practical techniques and checklists to help participants manage difficult and awkward situations.

*All information correct at time of printing.



Singling out prospects in the AEC

The ASEAN Economic Community is set to transform the region's business landscape

WORDS AJ LEOW

US President Barack Obama played host to ASEAN heads of government in sunny California back in February – the first such summit on American soil. That is a testament to Southeast Asia's growing importance in the global arena, coming soon after the formalisation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) on 31 December 2015, which creates a single market, similar in some aspects

to the European Community, to facilitate free trade.

For businesses, the boon from lower trade barriers will mean smoother and higher trade flows and hence access to bigger markets. The free flow covers goods, services, investment and skilled labour. With a collective gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$2.6 trillion last year, AEC is currently the seventh largest economic bloc in the world and the

third largest in Asia after China and India, with the potential to become the fourth largest by 2030.

Grab Singapore, which provides tech-based transportation services such as cab hailing apps, believes that the trade bloc will help boost its regional business.

“The AEC seeks to boost the competitiveness and connectivity of the region as a whole, an objective aligned with what we do at Grab. With freer movement of skilled labour, capital and investment, barriers to entering and working with markets will be reduced and companies will have greater access to skilled talent who can contribute to solving the region's key challenges,” said Lim Kell Jay, general manager, Grab Singapore.

By turning ASEAN into a single market and production base,



“Given the AEC blueprint for infrastructure development and the gradual elimination of non-tariff barriers across member countries, the logistics market will be a key beneficiary”

- MR DESMOND SIM, HEAD OF CBRE RESEARCH

AEC aims to raise the region's competitiveness and connectivity, a move that may lift aggregate output by seven per cent by 2025 as Southeast Asian economies become better integrated into the global economy.

That would also enable small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to not only grow beyond their own backyards, but also expand globally, including taking advantage of an initiative mooted by the Obama administration known as the ASEAN-US Connect, which is aimed at firming up ASEAN business ties with US companies.

“ASEAN trade is on course to double to US\$2.8 trillion by 2025, which will fuel a doubling of its middle class to 120 million – mirroring China between 2000 and 2010,” noted Guy Harvey-Samuel, group general manager and CEO, HSBC Singapore.

Indonesia in the spotlight

One ASEAN neighbour that has showed indications of opening up is Indonesia. It unveiled plans in February to lift long-standing restrictions on foreign ownership in the healthcare and entertainment sectors, as well as allow 100 per cent foreign ownership in businesses, including toll roads and restaurants.

The sheer size of the Indonesian market should offer a whole gamut of opportunities for Singapore firms.

It would also provide a convenient hedge to the Republic's interests in China, Vietnam and India, said Barclays' chief economist Mr Leong Wai Ho.

He pointed out that Singapore companies with expertise in infrastructure development such as road, rail, urban planning and clean water technologies will be sought after by the Indonesians.

Meanwhile, a research report by property consultant CBRE expects a ramp-up in both demand and supply of industrial and office space in most ASEAN markets in the short- to medium-term as more SMEs and multinational corporations raise their profiles in the region.

“Given the AEC blueprint for infrastructure development and the gradual elimination of non-tariff barriers, the logistics market will be a key beneficiary. Likewise, financial and legal services in the emerging markets will be in demand,” said Mr Desmond Sim, head of CBRE Research (Singapore and Southeast Asia). Mr Sim noted that the focus on enhancing air and land transport infrastructure will also attract more visitors to the region, giving tourism a boost.

The CBRE report, however, also listed some potential pitfalls along the road to regional integration. The crunch in skilled labour, for instance, may hamper the expansion of high-value industrial manufacturers.

The ABCs of AEC

The AEC creates a single market that is made up of 10 ASEAN members: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Impact for businesses

With lower trade barriers leading to higher trade flows, regional firms can have greater access to bigger markets and enjoy uniform incentives regardless of the country they operate in, while tapping on the integrated production base. These enable SMEs to expand their footprints regionally and, eventually, globally.

Key areas of co-operation among members

- Closer consultation on macroeconomic, financial policies and trade measures
- Better infrastructure and communications connectivity including electronic transactions
- Facilitation of private sector involvement
- Human resources development and capacity building; recognition of professional qualifications

Challenges

While most import tariffs for products of ASEAN origin have been lifted, non-tariff issues such as licensing and land acquisition requirements remain stumbling blocks. Labour mobility is another issue due to national legislation and regulations.

PHILANTHROPY

Making corporate giving easier

The National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre and the Singapore Business Federation Foundation have developed a programme to help local businesses with their efforts to give back to the community.

To be launched this year, the Company of Good programme utilises a framework that defines good and holistic giving for businesses. Here are some of the programme's features:

Company of Good Quiz

Take a five-minute quiz online and receive a Giving Profile that will highlight strengths and areas of improvement. An Individual Benchmarking Report shows how

companies compare with their peers in Singapore.

Company of Good Resources

Receive tailored resources and toolkits that will help companies give better in focused areas.

Company of Good Network

Meet, share experiences and collaborate with other companies to do good. Advocate for corporate giving and be given exclusive permission to carry the Company of Good badge as part of your company's corporate identity.

▶ For more information, visit companyofgood.sg or email programmes@sbffoundation.org.sg



FUNDING

NEW CHANNEL FOR FUNDING

Fundnel is a new fundraising platform that offers promising private businesses access to financing by connecting them to a community of investors, including many experienced angel investors. Through a due diligence process, Fundnel gathers early feedback to ensure that businesses are in the best shape to approach investors. Since the platform went live in October last year, it has completed five transactions that have raised about US\$5 million for companies. Some 30 more deals are in the works.

Business owners can raise funds in various ways, including selling shares and issuing convertible bonds.

► For more information, visit fundnel.com



DIVERSITY

CREATING DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE



To help ensure that the workplace is inclusive and diverse, business owners can tap on several online tools offered by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP). Studies have shown that diversity and inclusion (D&I) increases employee engagement and satisfaction, as well as boosts creativity and innovation.

TAFEP's "Creating an Inclusive Workplace – Your Online Start-up Kit" is an online course that introduces key steps to businesses to achieve their D&I goals. Also available is a "Workforce Diversity E-Calculator", designed to evaluate an organisation's workforce diversity representation and provide recommendations towards creating an inclusive workplace.

► For more information, visit tafep.sg

How to look your professional best online

In today's digital age, recruiters regularly scrutinise the social media profiles of their candidates. Look your virtual best with this handy checklist

WORDS ERLIANA ZAID

1. How do you rank on Google?

Savvy recruiters make use of Google to find out as much as they can about their candidates. Get a head start: do a quick search of your name or business alias.

You received pages of recommendable results? Good job! You have made a great first impression on your prospective employers.

You see a page full of negative results? Where possible, remove anything you prefer not to be seen – whether they are raunchy party photos or bad reviews of your work. Replace these with portfolios of your work and outstanding testimonials.

You received no results at all? For professional speakers, actors and anyone who depends on being searchable online, this could affect their employability. For others, it is good news since nothing detrimental has been mentioned about them.

2. Regularly update your social media profiles

Consider the following tips for different platforms.

LinkedIn

Ensure that the resume portion is up to date. Refresh your job scope, include any notable associations you are a part of, and add any skills and volunteer experiences you have.

Twitter

Optimise your Twitter bio to be more searchable. Include the city you are



in, as well as hashtags relevant to your occupation and industry (e.g. #technology) and issues you feel strongly about (e.g. #climatechange).

Facebook

Keep your friends abreast of your professional achievements and one of them might just refer you to your next employer. Hiring managers often look at their candidates' profiles, so be wary of what you post.

Instagram

As this is a picture-heavy platform, it

is highly recommended for designers, photographers and other creative folks to showcase their portfolio. Proper use of hashtags will also help in searchability.

3. Join communities

Actively participating in social media communities is an efficient way to connect with peers, like-minded professionals and experts in the field. Comment on queries, respectfully share your opinions and knowledge on topics you are interested in.

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Schedule




SilkAir
Studio



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Meal



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Allowance



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