

SPEECH BY MS SIM ANN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY AT THE SINGAPORE RETAILERS ASSOCIATION SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2017, 15 NOVEMBER 2017, 3.05 PM AT KALLANG THEATRE

Mr R Dhinakaran, President, Singapore Retailers Association,

Council Members,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

Introduction

1. It is my pleasure to join you today as we celebrate good service in retail, and recognise the efforts of the many retailers, brand owners and customer service professionals who provide outstanding service to their customers.

The Retail Industry's importance to Singapore

2. In today's highly-competitive retail landscape, designing and delivering excellent customer experience will be an increasingly important differentiator. Singapore's retail industry, as with others worldwide, is undergoing disruption due to new technologies and ways of doing business. The pace of change in consumer preferences, enabled by these new technologies, has also accelerated.
3. To help our retailers seize new growth opportunities, the Retail Industry Transformation Map (ITM) was launched last year. Our vision for the retail industry is to have omni-channel retailers adopting productive technologies, home-grown brands growing in influence and reach, and importantly, a skilled and professional retail workforce who are committed to delivering the highest standards of customer service. I am glad to see that the industry has responded well to the ITM. I have been engaging SRA and the retail industry closely and have heard our retailers' feedback that sales have been soft in the past few years. The numbers have shown an improvement in recent months: the latest Retail Sales Index in September 2017, excluding motor vehicles, showed that the industry clocked year-on-year growth of 3.3%, driven by growth in subsectors like wearing apparel and footwear, department stores, and supermarkets.

Service in an age of e-commerce

4. Technological disruption may have changed the way consumers browse and buy, but it has not eradicated the desire for good service and the human touch. Even online, retailers have to ensure that browsing and purchasing experiences are made as seamless as possible, and engagement channels are open for customers to enquire, leave feedback or even to share ratings and reviews with other shoppers. There is also a strong social angle – consumers often browse reviews before committing to a purchase, and follow brand pages and influencers on social media.

5. As such, brick-and-mortar stores will continue to have strong relevance as they are able to offer customers a full-fledged experiential retail experience. To fully deliver this experience, sales personnel must have extensive product knowledge and be able to offer personalised experiences to customers. For example, Atlas Sound and Vision (Atlas), a distributor of high-end audio consoles and one of the SRA Platinum ACE Award winners, designed their service around their customers. Atlas embarked on an initiative to segment its customers and understand their journeys across both online and offline touch-points. Findings from these customer journeys informed the design of a seamless omni-channel experience through their e-store and physical stores. Additionally, staff at their physical stores display a high level of consistency in service delivery to customers. For instance, staff are always available to welcome customers the moment they set foot in the stores. They also go the extra mile to find out about the customer's needs and wants, and make recommendations based on his or her music taste, desired aural experience and any space constraints. Such experiences can increase a brand's value proposition and encourage repeat customers. This was shown by the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG) 2017 report released in the first quarter of this year, which studied the main drivers of Perceived Quality and Customer Loyalty in the sub-sectors of Department Stores, Fashion Apparels, and Supermarkets. While products and promotions were important to customers, staff availability, their helpfulness and their product knowledge also featured as key drivers of Perceived Quality and Customer Loyalty.
6. The focus on experiential retail will also drive the need for a highly-skilled, professional workforce, with deep and specialised skills. These are captured in the Skills Framework for Retail, which lays out the critical skills and competencies for retail professionals across key job roles. Delivering good service and improving the customer experience through service innovation are common across all career pathways. Retailers must be able to develop a good customer service philosophy and train staff at all levels, especially front-line staff, to hone these critical service skills.

SRA Service SuperStar Award Finalists

7. Today's three finalists for the SRA Service SuperStar Award exemplify these critical service attributes.
8. Our first finalist, Ms Krishnavane d/o S K Rajoo, is a Concierge Service Officer with Far East Organization. Ms Vane truly goes the extra mile to provide Orchard Central's shoppers the gold standard in customer service. Once, a group of tourists approached Ms Vane for directions to Raffles Place. She literally went the extra mile walking them to Somerset MRT Station, assisting them with their ticket purchases, and even passing the gantry herself to guide them to the correct platform to board the train.
9. The second finalist, Ms Norlinda Binte Zainuddin, is an ION Orchard Concierge. She serves every customer with compassion, sincerity and professionalism. Last year, during the Christmas peak season, Ms Norlinda assisted an elderly lady who was in a state of panic after losing her grandchild in the mall. Arranging for her colleagues to cover her post, she accompanied the shopper to search the mall as public announcements were broadcasted and the security team was dispatched.

Ms Norlinda's composure and calm demeanour helped allay the shopper's mounting fears, until grandmother and grandchild were happily reunited.

10. Our third finalist is Ms Kamisah Binte Samat, a Branch Manager at the Ang Mo Kio Branch of Singapore Post Limited. In addition to managing the branch operations, Ms Kamisah also walks the talk by providing knowledgeable and stellar service to her customers. On one occasion, a customer had left her PAYU key, which is used for the pre-paid electricity metering system, at the post office. Ms Kamisah managed to return the PAYU key after diligently attempting numerous ways to contact the customer, as she did not want the family to go without electricity for the day.
11. With these great stories, I look forward to finding out the winner later.

SRA's role in driving service improvement in the retail industry

12. SRA has constantly challenged the industry to uphold the highest standards in customer service excellence. As the lead association for the retail industry, SRA has been an important partner to the Government, and I am glad to see that you continue to champion both productivity and service initiatives in order to drive retail transformation.
13. As omni-channel becomes the expectation, retailers will have to drive service excellence and shape customers' journeys at every customer touchpoint. I am happy that SRA's Achievement in Customer Experience (ACE) Programme, the first omni-channel mystery shopping programme, has taken this into account. I look forward to seeing how the SRA Platinum ACE Award companies, who represent the best in key retail categories, will continue shaping and refining their customers' experience over the coming years.

Conclusion

14. I have every confidence that with SRA continuing its good work in driving industry transformation, combined with the efforts of our retail professionals, we will be in a position of strength to take the retail industry through its next stage of progress and transformation.
15. I would like to congratulate all the finalists and winners of the Excellent Service Award, including the SRA Service SuperStar Award Finalists and Winner, and the SRA Platinum & Gold ACE Award companies. I hope that the stories of the good and hard work of our retail professionals exceeding customers' expectations will continue to inspire everyone in the industry.
16. I wish you all a memorable afternoon ahead.
17. Thank you.