Recipe for Success
Productivity and collaboration are key ingredients for growth in Singapore’s food industry.

Making Every Egg Count
Enhanced productivity helps N&N Agriculture to produce more eggs and reduce waste.

Cooking Up Productivity Gains
Old Chang Kee introduces a creative self-service model to boost productivity.
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SPRING Singapore is an agency under the Ministry of Trade and Industry responsible for helping Singapore enterprises grow and building trust in Singapore products and services. As the enterprise development agency, SPRING works with partners to help enterprises in financing, capability and management development, technology and innovation, and access to markets. As the national standards and accreditation body, SPRING develops and promotes an internationally-recognised standards and quality assurance infrastructure. SPRING also oversees the safety of general consumer goods in Singapore.

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EpiCentre Doubles Sales Revenue with Customer-Centric Initiatives

Pursuing service excellence as a core business strategy has led to a doubling of EpiCentre Pte Ltd’s sale revenue from 2010 to 2013. Faced with manpower constraints and rising business costs, EpiCentre managed to enhance its customer engagement through the creative use of technology to understand consumer preferences, building a community to enhance customer loyalty and enabling employees to focus on delivering quality experiences. This was shared during a Service Excellence Learning Journey on 10 October.

The event was graced by Mr Lim Swee Say, Minister for Prime Minister’s Office and NTUC Secretary-General and Mr Lee Yi Shyan, Senior Minister of State for Trade & Industry and National Development. At the event, Mr Lim announced the findings of the Customer-Centric Initiatives (CCI) Impact Study, which revealed that retail companies which implemented CCI projects saw improvements across key financial and productivity indicators such as profit and sales per worker.

SMEs Head Back to School to Attract Fresh Talent

The Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (ASME) Forum 2013 on 23 October saw SME employers setting up recruitment booths at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) College East, eager to attract skilled young talent to join the SME sector. At the event, Mr Teo Ser Luck, Minister of State for Trade and Industry, encouraged the students to consider a meaningful career by looking for employers who would be willing to train and develop them. Mr Teo advised the students to apply for the SME Talent Programme, which provides students with sponsored study awards and job opportunities upon graduation. He also encouraged SMEs to continually upgrade their HR systems and processes to make themselves more attractive to young talent.

World Entrepreneurship Forum Returns to Singapore for the Second Time

Back in Singapore for the second time, the World Entrepreneurship Forum explored ideas and recommendations aimed at promoting and spreading entrepreneurship worldwide. It drew some 450 entrepreneurship experts and thought leaders from 45 countries. Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister (left), also announced the winners of the 2013 Entrepreneur for the World Awards at a Gala Dinner on 31 October. Representing four continents, they symbolise, through their achievements, the very essence of entrepreneurship, one that creates both wealth and social justice.
Organisations on Business Excellence Journey
Team Up with SMEs to Co-innovate and Upgrade Capabilities for Growth

Organisations which have benefited from their Business Excellence journey can now help others to do better. A group of 20 organisations on the Business Excellence journey have stepped forward and will be working with SMEs to form such win-win partnerships under the newly initiated Partnerships for Capability Transformation (PACT) Circle.

This was announced by Mr Teo Chee Hean, Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs (left) at the Business Excellence Awards Ceremony on 31 October. The PACT Circle aims to benefit some 100 SMEs within the next year, through projects to share the best practices of these large organisations in areas such as service delivery, productivity, product innovation and business continuity management with SME suppliers and partners.

Wing Tai Retail Continues to Innovate, Boost Productivity and Engage Customers

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance (far left), and Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, Acting Minister for Manpower, along with members of the National Productivity and Continuing Education Council, visited Wing Tai Retail on 29 October to look at some of the initiatives which it has put in place to boost productivity. Like other industry players, Wing Tai Retail faces challenges like a tight labour market, high operating costs and stiff competition. To overcome this, Wing Tai Retail has been capitalising on technology and using resources more efficiently.

It also believes in understanding and engaging its customers, as well as investing in specialised in-house training to develop its staff. During the visit, Mr Shanmugaratnam noted that productivity in the retail sector has been making steady improvements, having grown three to four per cent a year between 2009 and 2012. He also said that there would be significant improvements in the retail industry in years to come if industry leaders push ahead with productivity initiatives.

Grassroots Advisors Continue to Reach Out to the SME Community

To deepen understanding of the common issues faced by SMEs across the board, the different challenges that are peculiar to certain sectors, as well as the unique circumstances which individual SMEs encounter on a day-to-day basis, Grassroots Advisors Mr Yeo Guat Kwang, Ms Jessica Tan, Er Dr Lee Bee Wah and Ms Foo Mee Har engaged SMEs in their respective constituencies with dialogues and walkabouts in October and November. These are part of the SME Workgroup’s continued outreach efforts to SMEs.
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With the food industry facing a tight labour market and rising costs, Singapore’s restaurants and food manufacturers face an increasing need to improve their productivity. By working more efficiently and introducing innovative processes and products, they can overcome today’s challenges to build a robust industry with long-term prospects for growth and success.

A vibrant food industry is also important to Singapore’s economy, as the industry employs more than 120,000 people and contributes almost 1.6% of the nation’s GDP. The industry also plays an important role in ensuring Singapore’s food security.

However, Singapore’s domestic market is small and highly competitive. For many companies, the opportunities for significant growth therefore lie beyond our borders.

Speaking at the recent Food Productivity Conference 2013, Minister for Trade and Industry, Mr Lim Hng Kiang noted, “Our companies need to build business models that allow them to compete globally. One way is to upgrade and restructure our industry.”

“Companies in Singapore can also improve productivity and stay competitive through collaboration on many fronts, and with different stakeholders,” he added.

Making progress on productivity
To support companies in their productivity efforts, and to facilitate collaborations within the industry, the government rolled out productivity plans for the food services and food manufacturing sectors in 2011. Over the past two years, more than 850 food companies have embarked on productivity and service upgrading projects. The areas that the companies have looked into include service excellence and the adoption of food standards, improving processes through automation and workflow redesign, and upgrading the workforce. Each of these areas play an important role in enhancing productivity.

An example of a company that has benefitted from improved productivity is Eng Bee Foodstuffs, a local noodle manufacturer that has introduced a customised noodle weighing and transfer machine to its workflow. Developed in partnership with the Food Automation Unit (FAU) at Singapore Polytechnic’s Food Innovation & Resource Centre (FIRC), the machine is expected to increase output per worker and packing speed by up to four times.
The FIRC is just one of the many resources available to food companies. Food companies can take the first step forward to make incremental improvements to their businesses by tapping self-help productivity toolkits. For example, the Process Redesign and Menu Analysis tools available in the Productivity Toolkit, illustrate how food companies can simplify their workflow and streamline their menus.

Food companies can also make use of the Innovation & Capability Voucher (ICV) to enhance their capabilities in the areas of innovation, productivity, human resources and financial management with the help of professional consultants.

Companies seeking the next phase of growth can look to programmes like the Capability Development Grant (CDG) to help them improve their capabilities and achieve greater operational efficiency through a series of front- and back-of-house productivity initiatives such as Wireless Ordering and Kitchen Automation.

Having the right people with the right skills is another important factor contributing to improved productivity. To this end, more than 2,200 CEOs, productivity managers and workers have been trained to provide them with the relevant tools to implement and sustain productivity enhancements in their operations.

In addition, the Restaurant Association of Singapore (RAS) has worked with SPRING on the SME Talent Programme to match promising young graduates to local food companies. This will help to provide a valuable talent pipeline to these companies as they embark on their productivity journeys. Since the launch of the programme in June, RAS has reached out to over 500 students.

Collaborating for bigger wins

This partnership between SPRING and RAS is an example of how collaboration will be a key success factor for the food industry in Singapore. Indeed, there are many other opportunities for collaboration within the industry, and companies should seek these out and leverage them to achieve their full potential.

Having tapped on SPRING’s Collaborative Industry Project (CIP) grant, the RAS, Singapore Food Manufacturers’ Association and the Singapore Manufacturing Federation are helping restaurants to outsource the preparation of non-core food items to food manufacturers. This will not only free up the restaurants’ resources to focus on their core business and improve their overall product and service delivery, but will also allow food manufacturers to achieve greater scale and efficiency in their operations. To date, more than 90 food companies have participated in business matching sessions for this CIP.

Companies can also work together on the sharing of resources to achieve economies of scale. For example, through logistics aggregation, three noodle manufacturers – Jia Jia Wang, Seng Kang and Leong Guan – have leveraged Jia Jia Wang’s distribution vehicles to deliver noodles to clients in the same hawker centres. This resulted in a reduction of delivery cost for all three companies.

Ultimately, companies need to take the first steps to engage with industry partners to explore the possibilities for higher productivity. There are many programmes and schemes in place to assist them along the way, and many companies have already taken the plunge and serve as examples of what can be achieved.

Read on to find out how food companies like Yum Cha, Old Chang Kee and N&N Agriculture have invested in productivity improvements to enhance their competitiveness and business performance.

Companies in Singapore can improve productivity and stay competitive through collaboration on many fronts, and with different stakeholders.”

Mr Lim Hng Kiang
Minister for Trade and Industry
PUTTING ITS HOUSE IN ORDER

Implementing the 5S system has helped Yum Cha reap productivity gains.

To organise the workplace, Yum Cha uses the 5S system: Sort, Straighten, Shine, Standardise and Sustain.
Despite operating two successful dim sum restaurants – one in Chinatown and another at the Serangoon Gardens Country Club, Ms Melody Tan, Deputy General Manager of Yum Cha Restaurants, felt that there was room to improve Yum Cha’s operations.

Ms Tan joined a study tour to Japan organised by the Singapore Productivity Association to learn some of the productivity measures that restaurants there had implemented. What she saw in Japan, and on subsequent visits to other restaurants in Singapore, convinced her that it was worthwhile to take action to raise productivity.

“It was very impressive to see how some restaurants were operating very efficiently and effectively with limited staff numbers. I felt that adopting some of these practices could help us enhance the management and operations of our restaurants,” she says.

5 ways to improve
Yum Cha decided to implement the 5S system, a method for organising the workplace based on the five principles of Sort, Straighten, Shine, Standardise and Sustain. It places a strong emphasis on keeping the workplace orderly and clean through the clear posting of instructions, responsibilities and the designated location for every item in the workplace.

With a grant from SPRING Singapore, Yum Cha began implementing 5S last year. The project was completed in April this year, and Ms Tan believes that despite some initial resistance from staff to the changes, it has been a positive development for the two restaurants.

“The staff were used to doing things a certain way, and saw the introduction of 5S as a lot of extra work,” explains Ms Tan. “It took a fair bit of convincing and some compromise to get 5S implemented at our two restaurants.”

“However, it has been well worth it,” she adds. “The operations of the restaurants are now much more systematic, with less time spent looking for missing items or trying to figure out who is responsible for what. When new staff come in, they are able to adapt to our system much faster, as everything has labels, and there are clearly defined responsibilities for everyone.”

She believes that this last point is particularly important given the high turnover that many restaurants in Singapore experience. With 5S in place, it greatly reduces the time, effort and cost of training new staff.

A quick tour of Yum Cha’s Serangoon Gardens restaurant provides ample evidence of the effects of 5S. Everything from chopsticks and take-away containers to staff uniforms and even the bottle opener behind the bar counter has a “home” – a designated place where it must be stored.

Cash registers and order-entry terminals are labelled with supplier contact details for faster servicing in case of a breakdown; there are also lists of staff responsibilities and operating instructions for equipment at each station in the restaurant. In addition, the storeroom shelves now include labels showing minimum and maximum stock levels for each item to ensure timely re-ordering.

Pleased with all these changes, Ms Tan will be implementing 5S at the newest Yum Cha location in Changi Business Park, which is set to open in November this year. She also has a number of other productivity improvement measures in the pipeline. These include outsourcing some of Yum Cha’s non-core kitchen operations through a SPRING-supported Collaborative Industry Project, introducing automation in the kitchen, and outsourcing the dishwashing for the upcoming outlet.

With these initiatives in place, as well as the continued benefits of implementing 5S, Ms Tan believes that Yum Cha is well-placed to continue offering customers the excellent dining experiences that will keep them coming back for more.

“...The operations of the restaurants are now much more systematic, with less time spent looking for missing items or trying to figure out who is responsible for what. When new staff come in, they are able to adapt to our system much faster, as everything has labels, and there are clearly defined responsibilities for everyone.”

Ms Melody Tan
Deputy General Manager
Yum Cha Restaurants

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Ms Melody Tan
Deputy General Manager
Yum Cha Restaurants

KEY TAKEAWAYS
- Implementing a new system in the workplace can be challenging and unpopular at first, but once it is in place it becomes easier to sustain as staff see the benefits of improved productivity and efficiency.
- To find out how SPRING Singapore can support your productivity efforts, please visit www.spring.gov.sg/CDG.
Manpower constraints and rising business costs are driving players in the food industry to actively boost their productivity. For Old Chang Kee, a home-grown chain specialising in curry puffs and other savoury snacks, these challenges serve as a powerful motivation to innovate.

“We have adopted several strategies to tackle the tight labour situation, such as optimising our existing labour force and adopting technology to automate some parts of our business,” explains Ms Chow Hui Shien, Old Chang Kee’s General Manager. “Space productivity at the outlet is also important as rising rents are another challenge that we have to manage. Therefore, having smaller units which can generate higher sales at the same time is vital.”

Empowering the customer

The need for greater productivity is what motivated Ms Chow and her team to adapt Old Chang Kee’s Curry Times brand into an all-day dining restaurant with a self-service twist. While Curry Times is popular for its extensive menu of old-time favourites, its full-service model is labour-intensive. After some creative re-thinking of the business, Curry Times Tingkat was born. Launched in May 2013 with a first outlet at Alexandra Retail Centre (ARC), this Curry Times sub-brand offers a self-service concept tailored to the needs of busy office workers.

The idea is simple yet effective. Customers use one of two self-service kiosks to place their order and make payment. Featuring the 10 bestselling items served at Curry Times, the Curry Times Tingkat menu is purposely kept small in order to streamline operations. Payments are made electronically by either NETS or NETS FlashPay, eliminating the need for cash handling. The kiosk then prints a receipt, and customers collect their meal from the collection counter for takeaway or a quick dine-in.

“The Curry Times Tingkat model gives us substantial savings in manpower costs, which we pass back to customers through the elimination of GST and service charges. This setup also allows us to reduce customer waiting time to just 10
The Curry Times Tingkat self-service concept at Alexandra Retail Centre helps to boost our space productivity, and of course reduce manpower cost through shared labour and the adoption of new technology.”

She admits that some customers were initially sceptical about the self-service approach. To address this challenge, staff were stationed at the ordering counter to help customers with the touch-based order and payment process. As the self-service concept is still quite new in Singapore’s F&B industry, Ms Chow notes that education of both customers and staff is crucial to successful adoption.

“Singaporeans are still very reserved in this area. Similarly, many staff started out thinking that self-service equates to leaving customers to figure things out themselves. This is not the case. In fact, staff play an important role in helping our customers transit to a self-service model. That’s why we are now training our staff on the importance of having a human touch and adopting a customer-centric mindset. This is the only way for the self-service concept to succeed.”

Pursuing ongoing innovation
The Curry Times Tingkat self-service concept, which was supported by SPRING Singapore’s Capability Development Grant, seems to be a winning recipe for improving both labour and space productivity. In addition, the Curry Times Tingkat at ARC shares its premises with an Old Chang Kee outlet. This two-in-one setup of co-locating two Old Chang Kee brands gives customers greater variety and allows the company to reduce its costs through shared labour.

While Curry Times Tingkat is off to a good start, Ms Chow notes the importance of continued efforts to boost productivity through innovation. “Singapore’s F&B industry is small and competitive, so innovation is the key to sustainable growth. Even for a heritage brand like Old Chang Kee, it is crucial for us to continue strengthening our business and raising our profile.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS
• The use of technology and a self-service approach can help F&B companies boost productivity while continuing to serve affordable meals at the customer’s convenience.
• To find out how SPRING can support your efforts to boost productivity, visit www.spring.gov.sg/CDG.
Raise productivity with the right tools

**GENERAL**
- **IMPACT Primer**
  - Assess productivity performance
- **5S**
  - Practise good housekeeping
- **7W**
  - Cut out waste
- **Manpower Scheduling**
  - Design efficient work schedule

**RETAIL**
- **Process Redesign**
  - Simplify workflow
- **SKU Analysis**
  - Determine the right product mix
- **Stock Control**
  - Manage inventory

**FOOD SERVICES**
- **Process Redesign**
  - Simplify workflow
- **Menu Analysis**
  - Create a menu that sells

Download the productivity tools online at [www.waytogo.sg](http://www.waytogo.sg) or approach advisors for assistance at any of the SME Centres.

AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

Satellite SME Centres are also located at the Community Development Councils (CDCs).
Enhanced productivity helps N&N Agriculture to produce more eggs and reduce waste.

When Mr Ma Chin Chew took over N&N Agriculture in 2010, the farm was producing as few as 160,000 to 200,000 eggs per day – well below its potential. Several factors were contributing to low productivity and a business model that was limiting growth.

As the new CEO of N&N Agriculture, Mr Ma’s first task was to address these challenges. He did this through a series of investments in new machinery and changes to key processes that enhanced productivity and increased revenue.

More eggs...
A key issue was the lack of proper temperature control in the farm’s six hen houses. “High temperatures were limiting the number of chickens that could go into each house, as well as reducing their egg production rate,” explains Mr Ma. “By installing insulation panels in the ceiling in the hen houses, we are able to keep the upper tiers cooler and populate them more densely, thus increasing the total hen population per house from 62,000 to 85,000.”

Total production at the farm is now 380,000 to 420,000 eggs per day, more than double that in 2010. There are not only more chickens, but they are also laying eggs at a higher rate.

With more chickens on the farm, there has been a corresponding increase in the amount of waste they produce. This has benefitted the farm, as the waste is used as fuel for the farm’s waste-to-energy plant to generate electricity.

To keep the hen houses clean, Mr Ma made another productivity-enhancing investment in a robotic cleaning machine for the hen houses. “The cleaning process...
is one of the most tedious and labour-intensive jobs at the farm,” says Mr Ma. “The new machine reduced the number of people required to clean a hen house from eight to one, and cut the time required to clean one hen house from one month to just six days.”

...and higher revenue

In addition to improving productivity at the farm, Mr Ma has also focused on boosting revenue. Besides simply selling more eggs, the farm is also positioning itself to compete in niche markets such as the production and sale of liquid eggs to food manufacturers and restaurants.

“About 10% of all the eggs we produce are considered ‘off-grade’ – they are not suitable for retail sale in the grocery store due to discoloration, dirtiness or hairline cracks,” says Mr Ma. “These eggs are nonetheless safe for consumption, and can be sold in liquid form.”

Previously, staff at N&N Agriculture had to crack all the off-grade eggs manually before selling them to a middle man for pasteurisation – a process that heats the liquid eggs to kill bacteria. With support from SPRING Singapore, N&N Agriculture automated its egg-cracking and liquid egg pasteurisation processes, resulting in less wastage and higher revenue.

Importantly, with the new pasteurising equipment, Mr Ma can now sell liquid eggs directly to food manufacturers and restaurants. This allows him to charge almost double the price offered to him by the middle men under the previous arrangement.

All these changes have had a positive impact on N&N Agriculture’s business, notes Mr Ma. “Our investments in productivity have helped to increase our revenue and made us a more efficient and safer producer of eggs.”

Yet he is not resting on his laurels. Mr Ma is always on the lookout for new opportunities to enhance productivity. For instance, he is considering adding a second egg collection line, which will automate much of the collection and inspection process, reducing the number of staff required from 35 to 15.

“Our competitors are always doing more, so we need to find ways to stay a step ahead and ensure we are operating as efficiently, and safely, as possible,” he adds.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Investing in productivity can help to increase revenue and reduce reliance on labour-intensive processes.
- To find out how SPRING Singapore can help you improve your productivity, please visit www.spring.gov.sg/CDG.
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For Heatec Jietong, a leading provider of piping and heat exchangers for the marine and oil & gas industries, the past five years have seen its business and workforce undergo significant changes.

The makeup of its workforce has changed with the company employing more management, engineering and specialist professionals as it focuses on moving up the value chain to offer more value-added services such as design and engineering.

With the changes taking place in Heatec Jietong’s workforce, it was important for the company to examine its HR management practices, says Ms Jacqueline Soon, the company’s Human Resource Manager. In 2011, she was introduced by SPRiNG Singapore to the HR Capability Toolkit to help her with this process.

“We were looking to strengthen our HR management processes in line with our shift to more value-added services and the increasing professional and management headcount,” she explains. “The toolkit was a very useful reference for us as we tried to introduce a more structured approach to our management of human resources.”

Introducing consistent HR practices

Prior to using the toolkit, performance management at Heatec Jietong was conducted in a relatively disorganised manner, with increments given on an ad-hoc basis. “We scheduled increments based on the day an employee joined us, so there wasn’t a standard time of the year where every staff was evaluated and awarded increments. This was rather confusing for the HR department and management,” explains Ms Soon.

“We used the toolkit to help streamline the performance management and appraisal processes, and converted them into an online system. E-appraisals have made our HR management much more organised and effective,” she adds.

Moving performance management online has helped the company introduce consistency to the process. “Previously, we had a standardised form, but it was one that was filled in manually, and it was more qualitative. The e-appraisal is now more quantitative, with a point-grading system as well as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) section. This allows for a more standardised assessment process,” notes Mr Jeffrey Soon, General Manager of Sales & Operations at Heatec Jietong.

The system has also improved traceability and comparison with previous appraisals to track progress. “Appraisals are now more justifiable as a grading can be given based on clear quantitative measures, in addition to qualitative assessment,” explains Mr Soon. “This makes it easier to communicate the final outcomes of the appraisal to staff, so that they understand what they have done well, and what they need to improve upon.”

In addition to performance management, Heatec Jietong also used the toolkit’s compensation and benefits module to streamline the benefits offered to employees. The toolkit helped Ms Soon devise a grouping system for staff, so that staff in a certain group would receive a standard set of benefits.

Using the toolkit

With the wealth of information available in the HR Capability Toolkit, Ms Soon suggests users start by focussing on the most critical areas first. “Everything a company might need for HR management is there – you just need to pull out the specific parts that are most relevant to you at the start. Once you have a better understanding of the toolkit, you can start looking at what else may be useful for you.”

Indeed, Ms Soon notes that while the major changes to Heatec Jietong’s HR practices were made almost two years ago, she still refers to the toolkit regularly for guidance on specific topics or to access useful forms. “It’s a great source for tips and best practices as we continue to improve our HR management processes,” she says.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Adopting clear, standardised performance appraisal processes can improve HR management and motivate staff.
- To find out how the HR Capability Toolkit can help you upgrade your HR management systems, visit www.hrcapability.sg/tool-kit.
- SMEs can also engage qualified HR consultants to customise the toolkit to their needs through SPRiNG’s Innovation & Capability Voucher (ICV) scheme. For more information, visit www.spring.gov.sg/ICV.
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