Fashion Talent Blooms

Strategic initiatives such as the PARCO next NEXT fashion incubator project and Star Creation design competition are setting the stage for fresh talent to blossom.

MASH-UP SUCCESS IN THE MAKING
Funding from YES! Startups and incubation under PARCO next NEXT helped three young designers to develop their own streetwear brand.

FASHIONING A BRAND
The PARCO next NEXT programme was a stepping stone for a former marketing director at an energy firm to launch her own design label.
Fashion Talent Blooms

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Asian Productivity Organization Holds Top-Level Meeting in Singapore

The Asian Productivity Organization (APO), a regional inter-governmental organisation which aims to promote productivity as the means to improve socio-economic development in Asia Pacific, held its annual Governing Body Meeting (GBM) in Singapore from 17 to 19 April.

With the renewed emphasis on improving productivity in Singapore for the last two years, it was apt for Singapore to host the GBM this year. SPRING Singapore, as Singapore’s representative, has been working with the APO to build competencies to help raise productivity among enterprises here.

Singapore is also the first Centre of Excellence for Business Excellence appointed by the APO to help develop and strengthen the business excellence initiatives of its members. The Centre provides members and their companies with the platform to share best practices on management systems and processes. These platforms include the Business Excellence Sharing event, which took place on 18 and 19 April in conjunction with the meeting.

Look out for the 8-page Business Excellence special in the next issue of SPRINGnews! Business Excellence Award winners like Yokogawa Electric, Maybank and J&R Bossini Fashion will be sharing their best practices and key learnings on productivity, leadership, service, and more.
Strategic initiatives such as the PARCO next NEXT fashion incubator project and Star Creation design competition are setting the stage for fresh talent to blossom.
look out fashion capitals of the world: Singapore is ready to step into the spotlight. Long known as a major sourcing hub, its burgeoning fashion industry is now making a mark on the global scene, underpinned by high-profile fashion festivals and a strong foundation in garment manufacturing.

While the local fashion industry has made significant strides on international catwalks in recent years, its success as a major player depends very much on building up a strong base of highly creative local designers and brands that can achieve commercial success and global recognition.

Various strategic initiatives, such as the PARCO next NEXT fashion design incubator programme and Star Creation design competition, have been introduced to develop design capabilities and build a pipeline of talent for the industry.

INCUBATING FASHION TALENT

Jointly developed by Japanese mall retailer PARCO, SPRING Singapore and the Textile & Fashion Federation [TaFF] in 2010, the PARCO next NEXT programme provides emerging fashion designers with subsidised retail space to showcase their designs. The designers will also undergo an 18-month mentorship programme to pick up the necessary skills to run a business and participate in a study trip to Japan. The programme will find it easier to break into foreign markets.

With 18 fresh labels set to make inroads into the global fashion circuit this year under the PARCO next NEXT programme, the future of Singapore’s fashion scene looks brighter than ever.

The latest instalment will feature a diverse and eclectic mix of labels helmed by designers aged 23 to 39 who have been guided by mentors such as TaFF’s Vice-President, Mr David Wang [right], and established designers Nic Wong and Daniel Yam. They include early stand-outs such as evonodd’s Samuel Wong, who has a local celebrity following, and QUAINTHOOD’s Joy Ng with her unconventional womenswear collection.

“We want to put forward a good mix of designers. Each year, we discover new talents who may not have the means to launch their own labels but when given the opportunity, can prove they have what it takes to succeed,” says Mr Wang.

“It is hard to break into this industry, but to secure the future of Singapore fashion we need to pave the way for new talent to come on board and flourish,” he adds.

SUCCESS STORIES

Mr Wang says that this is a far cry from what he experienced when he started out as a young designer. While it took him five years to gain a foothold in the industry, the designers under the PARCO next NEXT programme will find it easier to break into foreign markets.

The programme has launched 37 labels to date. Some of the labels, such as MAE PANG, L’ILE AUX ASHBY and Yumumu, have found success in international markets. In addition, ten out of 25 designers from the pioneer batch of the programme will be given an opportunity to showcase their designs at PARCO Shibuya’s pop-up store in Tokyo.

The collections will be curated by Mr Yuji Yamamoto, son of Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto and owner of Japanese multi-label concept store Make One’s Mark (MOM). Mr Yamamoto also selected womenswear label Yumumu to be sold permanently at his MOM store in Tokyo.

The winner will also receive a $5,000 cash prize and an all-expenses-paid trip to Japan. Of the three winners, one will be picked by Audi Singapore for a special award – the Audi Young Designer Award. This will be given to the winner whose design embodies the Audi design philosophy of motivation, technology and progression. The winner will also receive a $5,000 cash prize and an all-expenses-paid three-week internship at the Audi Concept Design Headquarters in Munich, Germany.

Read on for how PARCO next NEXT helped to launch new labels like MASH-UP and Saloni Rathor!
entering into the world of fashion may seem like an unlikely choice for Saloni Shrestha, who has no formal design background. However, the former marketing director of an energy firm decided to take the plunge and make a career change after her mother convinced her that starting a fashion label was an exciting opportunity. “Everything was in place and we just needed a designer to kick it off. With encouragement from my friends and family, I thought: why not make the label my own? That was how Saloni Rathor was born last year,” says Ms Shrestha. She adds that it was her mother’s enthusiasm for fashion that influenced her to branch out on her own. As a child growing up in the Himalayas, Ms Shrestha was surrounded by a rich culture and beautiful textiles. “I grew up in an environment with great styling and fabrics. My mother was always putting together ensembles that were inspired by culture,” she explains. “That sparked my desire to create my own pieces one day, and offer a distinctive style with my designs.”

Getting a Foot in the Door
As one of the 18 emerging designers supported by the PARCO next NEXT fashion incubator programme, Ms Shrestha will get to showcase her creations in a retail space at PARCO Marina Bay. She says that the initiative has not only equipped her with the skills she needs to manage her label, but a better understanding of local market needs as well. “When I started out, I was very new to the industry and did not have access to the networks here. Through the PARCO programme, I learnt how to reach out to the media and potential customers. I think we were regarded more seriously as a result,” says Ms Shrestha (left), who moved to Singapore six years ago.

Through the PARCO programme, Ms Shrestha was paired up with industry veterans who guided her on the finer points of developing a business plan and finding an appropriate merchandise mix for the local market.

Despite having ten years of marketing experience, Ms Shrestha says that running a fashion business is an entirely different ballgame for her. “I’m good at multi-tasking because of my corporate experience, but running a fashion business is totally different. You have to manage the operations, accounts and business development while designing at the same time.” Fortunately, she was paired up with industry veterans who guided her on the finer points of developing a business plan and finding an appropriate merchandise mix for the local market.

“As a designer, I might end up over-designing something which I hold close to my heart, yet it might not strike the same chord with customers and sell as well as I think it should. The mentor helped me to understand the importance of striking a balance between creativity and producing something that appeals to the market,” she adds.

Breaking into New Markets
With a new Autumn/Winter collection in the works and plans to go global, Ms Shrestha is gearing up to make a mark in the fashion world. Besides discussions with online fashion retailers to carry her label, her other plans include focusing on B2B sales, which she believes will be the key to business growth. “Instead of selling on consignment, we want to take wholesale orders. The disadvantage of consignment orders is that if it doesn’t sell, you are stuck with a huge inventory,” she explains.

Ms Shrestha is also looking to take her label beyond Singapore’s shores. When asked about her confidence in bringing the Saloni Rathor brand overseas, she says: “I’ve received quite a lot of positive feedback that my designs resonate with current fashion trends in places such as New York.” “It’s not going to be easy, but I’m going to focus on getting a foot in the door at boutique stores in the US and Europe in the next five years, as well as participating in trade shows and fashion events. It is difficult but I’ll work for it,” she says.

The adage that success is one per cent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration holds true for aspiring designers. Find out how you can equip yourself with the business skills and expertise to run a retail fashion business through the PARCO next NEXT initiative at http://www.facebook.com/PARCOnextNEXT.
or emerging designers (below from left) Daniela Monasterios Tan, Nathanael Ng and Shaf Amis’aabudin, fashion is all about having fun. Brought together by their common passion for partying, music and fashion, the fun-loving creators behind streetwear label MASH-UP started the label with the aim to add a dose of humour to fashion.

“We seek to express ourselves through clothes and colours. Fashion should never be taken too seriously,” says Mr Amis’aabudin.

Inspired by everything from ethnic heritage and pop culture to cinematography, the label produces clothing and accessories that incorporate recycled materials and do-it-yourself craft techniques such as embroidery and beading.

“We basically take whatever inspires us and put it together, infusing it with a DIY aesthetic,” explains Ms Tan. “The term ‘mash-up’ is used to describe a song that is created by combining different styles of music together. We feel like deejays, blending different genres and personalities into this brand.”

For example, one of the dresses from their first collection, Totemania, features elements inspired by Native American mythology and modern symbols such as dollar signs embroidered on recycled denim. “The result is an amalgamation of the different stories that we want to tell through our designs,” says Ms Tan.

OVERCOMING THE ODDS
She adds that funding from SPRING Singapore’s Young Entrepreneurs Scheme for Startups (YES! Startups)*, which is tied to the PARCO initiative, enabled MASH-UP to focus more time and effort on developing its collections.

“We knew it was financially risky to start a retail shop,” she says. “While all of us dreamed of starting our own label, we didn’t know where or how to begin. The SPRING funding took a huge burden off our shoulders and gave us the courage to start our business.”

As part of the PARCO initiative, the team participated in an 18-month training programme and study trip to Japan, which equipped them with the practical knowledge required to cope with the realities of running a business. They were also paired with industry veterans who guided them on managing their finances and marketing.

“The areas of accounting, marketing and costing were new to us as we had never received any formal training in managing a fashion business. It really helped to have someone experienced like our mentor to show us the ropes,” notes Ms Tan.

Finding a suitable garment manufacturer that was willing to produce small quantities of their clothing at a reasonable cost and quality was also a major challenge for the designers. “Many manufacturers are used to producing in bulk quantities. They charge much more for small runs, but we cannot afford to sell our clothes at a high price or compromise on the quality,” says Ms Tan.

GEARING UP FOR THE FUTURE
Despite these challenges, the future looks bright for MASH-UP. The designers launched their first Spring/Summer collection in April at PARCO Millenia Walk and will showcase their creations at the Asian Fashion Exchange in May, alongside established labels such as Thierry Mugler, allthedressedup and RAOUL.

“This event is definitely a highlight for MASH-UP because of the exposure to and potential collaboration with established brands and buyers attending the event. This year, our main focus is to get exposure and a foothold in the local scene,” enthuses Ms Tan.

Apart from building up a customer base, the designers plan to offer DIY workshops on embroidery and demonstrate how to give old items a new lease on life. Expanding into overseas markets is also on the cards for the MASH-UP team.

“The fact that previous PARCO designers have gone on to do well overseas gives us hope that it was the right time to start out,” she adds.

*Replaced with the Action Community for Entrepreneurship (ACE) Startups Scheme w.e.f. 1 Feb 2012. Visit www.ace.sg/acestartups for details.
With a focus on quality and market responsiveness, fashion industry leader F J Benjamin has made the successful jump from retail franchising to designing and producing its own brand, RAOUl.

The brand it represents often take the spotlight, but Singapore-based retail group F J Benjamin can now lay claim to a strong and well-deserved reputation for its own designs. Building on its experience managing more than 20 brands and operating 166 stores across the Asia-Pacific, F J Benjamin decided to take what seemed like the logical next step in 2002 and develop its own fashion brand, RAOUl.

“We had a lot of experience dealing with luxury and lifestyle brands, which gave us valuable knowledge of the markets,” Mr Douglas Benjamin (right) explains. “While our franchise businesses will always be a major part of what we do, we decided we wanted to have our own brand that would allow us to run the business how and where we wanted.”

A brand is born
Building on its understanding of both the luxury and lifestyle markets, F J Benjamin sought to position RAOUl in between the two as an “affordable luxury” brand. RAOUl started out as a menswear brand focused on men’s shirts, and within two years it had successfully expanded to Malaysia and Indonesia. Together with its geographical expansion came a broadening of its product offerings, as it added accessories such as ties and cuff-links.

A line of women’s clothing soon followed. “Through feedback from the stores, we found that women were starting to buy the shirts designed for men, and have them altered to fit them,” Mr Benjamin recalls. “They looked terrible! So we developed a line of women’s work shirts. This later led to adding accessories for women as well.”

Initially the stores were kept separate for men and women. “The ‘shirt haven’ for men was still a strong marketing point at the time”, says Mr Benjamin. But as the brand grew it was decided to combine the stores, opening a regional flagship shop in Paragon Shopping Centre on Orchard Road in 2009.

Tailoring to market trends
RAOUl’s success was by no means a foregone conclusion, says Mr Benjamin, and there were some key factors that have allowed the brand to flourish. “Responding quickly to the market has been critical to our success, first by recognising the opportunity for our collection of shirts dedicated to men, and then by reacting to the demand for women’s clothing. Addressing the growing market for accessories has also been one of our main growth drivers.”

A focus on quality and design is another of the foundations of RAOUl’s success, according to Mr Benjamin. “Quality of materials and attention to detail were always at the top of the list when it came to developing a product,” he adds. “We would not sell anything we were not completely happy with.”

Venturing overseas brought a new set of challenges for RAOUl, explains Mr Benjamin. “When we started international expansion around 2009, there was a huge learning curve to overcome in terms of expectations and preparation. After many hard knocks, the lesson was: Don’t expect opportunities to fall into your lap, you need to plan, you need to be strategic, and you need to work for it.”

RAOUl’s first big breakthrough on the international stage was at the Paris Fashion Week in March 2011. RAOUl’s Fall/Winter 2011 Collection was met with overwhelming response and put the brand on the global fashion map. This momentum has continued with subsequent collections and strong demand from buyers across Europe and the US.

Engaging technology
On its journey to becoming an international brand, RAOUl and F J Benjamin have made significant investments into not only design and creative capabilities, but also the back-end of the business – areas such as retailing and technology. One example is a project to develop an iPad-based e-Catalogue application, undertaken with support from SPRiNG Singapore’s Technology Innovation Programme (TIP). The application replaced printed catalogues and allowed for a more dynamic presentation of RAOUl’s designs, as well as providing salespeople visiting buyers with access to real-time inventory information and electronic order processing.

Another initiative, also supported by TIP, was the development of RAOUl’s web presence, RAOUl.com. The new site was launched in February 2012, offering customers an engaging, content-driven online shopping experience. “The new site has helped us further strengthen our international fashion brand image,” says Mr Benjamin. “It also helped generate better, more targeted traffic. We are able to monitor consumer behaviour on the website to generate in-depth analytics that help us develop and market a better offering to our fans and customers.”

Tastes and styles change rapidly in the fashion industry, so it’s critical to understand your market and react quickly when new trends or opportunities emerge. Visit www.spring.gov.sg/enterprisegovernment/TIP to find out how the Technology Innovation Programme can help you leverage technology to give your business a competitive edge.

STEPPING out in style

Visit www.spring.gov.sg/enterprisegovernment/TIP to find out how the Technology Innovation Programme can help you leverage technology to give your business a competitive edge.
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Gain insights into MNCs’ sourcing methodologies that will help you better position your company as their partner of choice.

**Mr Manu Bhaskaran**
Partner & Head of Economics Research, Centennial Asia Advisors Pte Ltd

**TRACK 2**
**Winning Customers With Your Company’s Story**
Build and define your company’s value proposition as well as enhance your corporate collaterals to clinch business deals.

**Mr Glenndle Sim**
Executive Chairman & Chief Executive Officer, Mencast Holdings Ltd

**TRACK 3**
**Realigning Your Organisation Strategy**
Enhance your company’s competitiveness and efficiency against the new norm of slowing growth, rising costs and tightening resources.

**Mr Vincent Wong**
Director, Global Sourcing, Global Supply Chain, AB Sciex

**Date**: 23 & 24 May 2012  
**Time**: 8.30am to 5.30pm  
**Venue**: Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel  
**Fee**: $400.00 per participant (after grant from SPRING Singapore)  
$250.00 per subsequent participant from the same company (available only at time of application)

For more information contact  
Ms Brenda Wong at Brenda@businessleaders.sg or call 6338 2321
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While businesses are dealing with the challenges of rising business costs and a tighter labour market, there are bright spots on the horizon. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can look forward to more help from Enterprise Development Centres (EDCs), as the government steps up its engagement efforts to boost productivity in smaller firms.

By partnering trade associations and chambers (TACs), SPRING Singapore aims to reach out to 20,000 enterprises annually and help them capitalise on grant schemes to raise productivity. This marks an increase from the 14,200 firms that received productivity and business advice from the EDCs last year.

“We recognise that SMEs need help to make this transition to create innovative products and services, upgrade skills, design better jobs, leverage technology and find new markets overseas,” says Mr Teo Ser Luck, Minister of State for Trade and Industry, at the fourth EDC Conference on 28 March this year.

SMEs can approach any of the EDCs, which are located at the premises of five TACs, for one-to-one advisory services on areas such as financial and human resource management, branding, and overseas expansion.

“Companies today need to enhance their competitiveness in the marketplace and keep pace with rapid changes in technological innovation, market upheavals and changing consumer needs so as to ensure their survival and growth,” says Mr Hernaikh Singh, director of the EDC at the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

“The EDCs play an important role in helping companies identify and implement relevant assistance programmes to address their needs,” he adds.

Helping companies to work smarter
Orchid Laundry is one of the approximately 60,000 SMEs that has benefited from collaborating with an EDC over the past six years. Orchid Laundry’s Director, Mr Harry Toh, explains, “In 2011, our company reached a roadblock when we faced a manpower shortage. We knew the only way we could increase our capacity was with existing or fewer headcount. One option was to automate our laundry processes but we didn’t know how.” Acting on the advice provided by business advisors at the Singapore Manufacturers Federation, the company embarked on the Productivity Management Programme. Following an in-depth diagnosis of the company’s productivity issues, Orchid Laundry was able to streamline and automate its processes to improve its performance.

For family-owned food manufacturer Hock Lian Huat Foodstuff, process automation helped it improve its productivity. The company, which approached the EDC at the Singapore Manufacturers’ Federation for productivity advice, invested in a new machine to make prawn crackers, an ingredient in “ngoh hiang”, the traditional meat rolls that are one of its main products. Now only two workers are needed for this process, down from four.

EDCs provide one-to-one advisory services on areas such as financial and human resource management, branding, and overseas expansion.

The EDC also helped the company to tap $120,000 of tax rebates under the Productivity and Innovation Credit (PIC) scheme. To help more SMEs understand how they can benefit from the PIC programme, the EDCs will conduct a new series of clinics from May to October this year. About 500 SMEs are expected to benefit from these sessions. The clinics, which are run in collaboration with the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (IRAS), benefited some 300 SMEs last year.

To remain competitive in a rapidly changing global economy, it is critical for businesses to create value through innovation and productivity improvements. Find out how you can get expert advice to raise your company’s productivity at www.enterpriseone.gov.sg.

Developing SME capabilities
In addition to plans to expand the reach of the EDCs, SPRING has also increased funding support to $200 million for SME capability development programmes from April this year. This top-up will benefit an additional 1,800 projects aimed at building up capabilities and restructuring businesses for sustained growth and competitiveness for SMEs. The enhanced support will last for three years and will cover areas such as human capital development, technology adoption, innovation and productivity.

“The Government is committed to supporting SMEs in their upgrading efforts. SPRING Singapore will intensify its outreach to SMEs to help them understand how they can tap government assistance programmes to raise productivity,” says Mr Teo.
In this fifth instalment of a six-part series on productivity for enterprises, we join Service Excellence icon Wing Tai Retail on their journey towards greater productivity.

Wing Tai Retail

Dressing Up Success with Productivity Measures

Wing Tai Retail is a well-regarded company in the local fashion retail industry, operating 13 highly-visible brands such as G2000, Fox, Karen Millen and Topshop.

However, it could not avoid the challenges faced by the retail industry in recent years such as rising manpower costs and a tight labour market, and decided to tackle these head on by embarking on a productivity drive in early 2010. The company sought to achieve a more sustainable wage growth while managing operational costs to maintain its competitive edge in the market.

Several of Wing Tai Retail’s productivity initiatives came from its own staff – the productivity champions – who came up with recommendations to improve productivity after participating in the Singapore Workforce Development Agency’s Certified Productivity Practitioner (CPP) course. The course enabled them to better understand productivity tools and how these could be employed in a retail-specific setting.

One of the first few measures recommended by the team of productivity champions was to automate the reporting of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Prior to this, the management held regular meetings with store managers where performance measures were based on each manager’s observation. Realising that this was not an ideal measurable indicator of performance, the company decided to implement an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, which allowed real-time tracking of inventory levels, conversion rates, and average transaction values. The ERP system automatically generates reports which provide an analysis of each outlet’s performance.

Fuelling the ‘power hour’

Wing Tai Retail piloted the project by tracking visitor traffic at several of its outlets with the highest traffic, located in the Orchard area. In the retail industry, the ‘power hour’ is the time of the day when transaction values are the highest. While conventional wisdom may assume that cash registers ring the most during lunch hour and round the clock on weekends, the ERP system revealed that sales were highest in the late afternoon from 4 to 6pm.

Outlet staff were encouraged to track and take specific steps to improve their performance based on the real-time reports generated by the ERP system on their outlet’s sales. Store managers also challenged staff to convert walk-ins to paying customers through focused interaction with each customer.

“Our customers feel more valued when they get dedicated attention from our staff. The more time you spend with a customer, the better the customer experience. We have seen a direct correlation between positive customer experiences and improved productivity levels at our stores,” says Mrs Helen Khoo, executive director of Wing Tai Retail.

The pilot project generated a five per cent increase in sales within two months, which convinced Wing Tai Retail to extend the system to all its other stores.

Fuelled by the ‘power hour’

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Mrs Helen Khoo
Executive Director
Wing Tai Retail
Allocating resources effectively

At the same time, the company was able to plan its promotional activities and manpower allocation more effectively. For instance, more part-time staff were hired during the ‘power hour’. Backroom staff such as store packers were given the opportunity to be deployed to frontline roles during this period, which resulted in a greater sense of achievement and belonging.

Says Mrs Khoo, “When we set out on this productivity improvement journey, we wanted our people be deployed efficiently, and not for each person to take on more work. So if we can train each person to work more productively, we can achieve more while putting in the same amount, or even less. Our people are our service ambassadors and our greatest asset. They are Wing Tai Retail’s key to success.”

**PRODUCTIVITY HAPPENINGS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date / Time</th>
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<th>Venue</th>
<th>Organiser</th>
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<tr>
<td>16 May 09:00 – 17:00</td>
<td>Operation Planning and Control</td>
<td>2 Bukit Merah Central SPRING Singapore Building Singapore 159835</td>
<td>Singapore Manufacturers’ Federation (SMa)</td>
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<td>17 May 13:00 – 17:00</td>
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<td>47 Hill Street #09-00 Singapore 179365</td>
<td>EDC@SCCCI</td>
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<td>17 – 18 May 09:00 – 18:00</td>
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<td>22 May 09:00 – 17:00</td>
<td>Get Organised for Peak Performance!</td>
<td>2 Bukit Merah Central SPRING Singapore Building Singapore 159835</td>
<td>Singapore Manufacturers’ Federation (SMa)</td>
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<td>24 May 13:00 – 17:00</td>
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<td>24 – 25 May 09:00 – 18:00</td>
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<td>29 – 30 May 09:00 – 17:00</td>
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<td>2 Bukit Merah Central SPRING Singapore Building Singapore 159835</td>
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<td>15 Jalan Pinang, Singapore 19914</td>
<td>EDC@SMCCI</td>
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* Each PIC clinic is 45 minutes. Please register online at www.spring.gov.sg/pic-clinic. Walk-ins will not be entertained.
In today’s fast-evolving markets, organisations that stay ahead of the competition are those that can anticipate, understand and adapt swiftly to changing customer needs.

Companies face a more pressing need to recognise current trends and anticipate future ones as early as possible, in order to develop products and services that can connect with consumers. While trends cannot predict the future, they can inspire product design and drive strategic direction.

**Getting beneath the surface**

“When you are looking at trends, you are looking at the social and cultural influences that are going to be the precursors of business innovation,” says Ms Genty Marshall (below), founder of New Black Global Trends, a Melbourne-based design trend consultancy dedicated to tracking cultural and societal developments around the world.

“If you are producing something that is going to hit the market and appeal to the audience, it has to tap into the feelings of the time, their desires and needs. It helps to have a very clear idea of what the market wants,” she adds.

Ms Marshall explains that trend analysis, in many ways, is design thinking, which is a human-centred approach that puts the end user at the centre of the innovation process. “With design thinking, you start asking questions and identifying the problem and need. Trend analysis allows you to explore a little deeper,” she notes.

Using the example of furniture design to explain how changing consumer trends can present new opportunities for businesses, Ms Marshall says that businesses need to take into account how changing lifestyles can influence product design.

“The couch is more than just a place of rest – it has become an extension of my office and social life. I’m sitting there with my laptop and phone, so now my couch is expected to encompass all these other roles,” she says. “Now, it is important to me that I have a power outlet nearby and an arm rest for my laptop. If I am a producer of couches, I will need to know how to capitalise on these new needs.”

**Creating an open environment**

Besides identifying customer needs, organisations also need to translate inspiration into implementation, and turn design thinking into “design doing”. “Companies must be careful not to be bogged down by the rhetoric. Someone has to actually do the design for these processes to mean anything,” adds Ms Marshall.

The process of design doing is not about establishing rules and limits, but a cultural shift. As great design always involves risk-taking, creating an open-minded culture where staff members are willing to explore radical possibilities will lead the business in a new direction.

“Don’t expect to get real business innovation if you tell your team what to do, instead of giving them the power to do something amazing. Having regular brainstorming sessions with your designers or marketing department allows these ideas to be expressed,” says Ms Marshall.

**A worthwhile investment**

But before companies launch a revamp of their processes, Ms Marshall recommends that companies take a step back to identify what customers really need. While developing aesthetically-attractive products is important; it may not always raise revenues.

“It is not always about the design,” she says. “You can have a great product but still not achieve the sales targets that you want. What your business may need could be better marketing strategies or a brand new corporate identity. Design thinking allows you to see the entire situation and identify what the business really needs.”

Although many businesses do invest in some form of innovation, they tend do so in small ways. The fear of taking risks, as well as the misconception that design is a costly investment, may be some reasons why companies do not embrace design thinking.

“Investing a small amount in design thinking at the beginning of the process will save you a lot of money eventually, because it is expensive to produce products that don’t sell. There is no viability in selling products that don’t understand what the customer wants,” says Ms Marshall.

Businesses can gain a competitive edge by thinking like a designer and understanding consumer trends to develop user-centric products and services.

Organisations can no longer count on quality, performance or price alone to sustain leadership in the market. Design has emerged as a new competitive advantage and key driver of innovation.

Find out how you can deliver human-centric solutions, products and services with SPRING’s Design Engage Programme at www.designforenterprises.sg.
Raising Productivity: Help for SMEs

Productivity@Work: www.enterpriseone.gov.sg

Assistance

- **Productivity & Innovation Credit (PIC)**
  400% tax deduction on up to $400,000 or cash payout up to $60,000

- **Innovation Voucher Scheme (IVS)**
  $5,000 grant to adopt technology and tap expertise

- **Increase SME Productivity With Infocomm Adoption & Transformation (ISPRINT)**
  Up to 50 – 70% grant for adopting infocomm technology

- **Inclusive Growth Programme (IGP)**
  Up to 50% grant for business operations improvements and skills training

- **Local Enterprise Finance Scheme (LEFS)**
  Loan to purchase / upgrade factory and equipment

- **Micro Loan Programme**
  Loan for small businesses to fund operational improvements and automation

Training

- **Productivity Initiatives in Services & Manufacturing (PRISM)**
  Productivity training programmes

- **WSQ Certified Productivity and Innovation Manager Programme**
  Productivity and business innovation concepts and applications

- **Certified Productivity Practitioner Programme**
  Productivity tools and techniques

- **Productivity Manager Programmes**
  Productivity concepts and applications for retail, F&B and hospitality sectors

- **SME Quality Initiatives to Assist, Nurture and Grow (SME QIANG)**
  Productivity training contextualised for SMEs

Productivity Tools and Services

- **Productivity@Work**
  (www.enterpriseone.gov.sg)
  Productivity information and self-help tools

- **Productivity Management Programme (PMP)**
  Workshops, free diagnosis and advice

- **Integrated Management of Productivity Activities (IMPACT)**
  Productivity framework and diagnostic assessment tool

Seek help at:

- EDC@ASME
- EDC@SCCCI
- EDC@SICCI
- EDC@SMa
- EDC@SMCCI

Associaion of Small and Medium Enterprises
Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Singapore Manufacturers’ Federation
Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce and Industry

6513 0388
6337 8381
6508 0147
6826 3020
6293 3822
Technology Innovation Programme

Grow your business though technology innovation.
Technology can make a big difference to your business. Create new products, improve existing processes, find new ways to serve your customers and develop new business models.

We will help you access a ready network of technology infrastructure and provide the vital support to enhance your capabilities and catalyse technology innovation projects.

Visit www.spring.gov.sg/tip for more information.
**Enabling Enterprise Technology Innovation Programme**

Technology can make a big difference to your business. Create new products, improve existing processes, find new ways to serve your customers and develop new business models.

We will help you access a ready network of technology infrastructure and provide the vital support to enhance your capabilities and catalyse technology innovation projects.

Visit www.spring.gov.sg/tip for more information.

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**PRODUCTIVITY@WORK (WWW.ENTERPRISEONE.GOV.SG)**

**ABOUT THE PORTAL**

The Productivity@Work portal is a dedicated online portal to provide SMEs with information and resources that can help them to improve productivity. The portal helps SMEs to:

- Understand the basics of productivity
- Learn about tools that they can apply to increase productivity
- Select productivity seminars or courses to attend
- Find a productivity consultant
- Access case studies and relevant government assistance programmes
- Assess their productivity using the IMPACT Assessment Tool. The tool helps SMEs to compare their productivity performance against the industry average, and obtain recommendations on areas they should focus on to improve productivity.

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**DESIGN ENGAGE PROGRAMME**

**WHAT IS IT?**

This programme is for companies that understand the value of design and are ready to invest effort and resources to build up the company’s design capabilities. They learn how to integrate strategic design thinking into every step of their business process.

The programme consists of two phases.

In Phase 1, a design facilitator will help the company understand the role of design in business and how it can create value for competitive advantage. The company will also learn key design principles and tools to develop an actionable design strategy, critical in unlocking new business-building opportunities.

In Phase 2, companies will create new or improved products, processes and services with the design capabilities acquired in Phase 1 and use design as a strategic differentiator to produce tangible, sustainable output and solutions.

**WHAT LEVEL OF SUPPORT?**

For Phase 1, companies can receive funding support of up to 50% of the design facilitator’s fees.

For Phase 2, companies can receive funding support of up to 50% of the qualifying costs, which include manpower, equipment, materials, consultancy and acquisition of intellectual property rights.

**HOW TO QUALIFY?**

All Singapore-based companies may apply.

**HOW TO APPLY?**

Contact Design for Enterprises Centre
Hotline: +65 6333 3737
E-mail: info@designforenterprises.sg
Website: www.designforenterprises.sg

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**MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATE PARTNERSHIP**

**WHAT IS IT?**

This programme supports high-growth Singapore SMEs which intend to attract and train fresh graduate talents for grooming into future leadership roles. This partnership will build a strong pipeline of fresh talent for SMEs over the next five years. SPRING works with local universities to raise the profile of SME Partners as choice employers.

**WHAT LEVEL OF SUPPORT?**

Supports 50% of training costs, up to a maximum grant amount of $15,000 per Management Associate (MA). Eligible support items include on-the-job training, external course fees and overseas training including airfare and cost of living expenses.

The MA must be a Singaporean/PR local university graduate with less than three years of working experience.

Additional support extended to SMEs under the MAP include 90% grant support to attend SPRING’s Talent Management & Coaching Workshop and 50% grant support for the implementation of the HR Capability Package Consultancy project.

**HOW TO QUALIFY?**

Applicants must meet the following criteria:
- Have at least 30% local shareholding, and
- Have group annual sales of at least S$10 million and not more than S$100 million, or group employment size of not more than 200 employees

**HOW TO APPLY?**

Download application form from www.spring.gov.sg/MAP
For enquiries, email map@spring.gov.sg
Productivity Management Programme (PMP). Get expert advice on how to raise your company’s productivity.

Offered at any of the five Enterprise Development Centres (EDCs), the Productivity Management Programme (PMP) will connect you to Productivity Advisers who can help identify your business’ strengths, highlight areas for improvement and even guide you to schemes that can assist your company’s productivity journey.

Contact these EDCs today!

**EDC@ASME**
Association of Small and Medium Enterprises
T: 6513 0388
E: enquiries@edc-asme.sg
W: edc-asme.sg

**EDC@SCCCI**
Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry
T: 6337 8381
E: edc@edc-sccci.sg
W: edc-sccci.sg

**EDC@SICCI**
Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
T: 6508 0147
E: edc@edc-sicci.sg
W: edc-sicci.sg

**EDC@SMa**
Singapore Manufacturers’ Federation
T: 6826 3020
E: edc@edc-sma.sg
W: edc-sma.sg

**EDC@SMCCI**
Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce and Industry
T: 6293 3822
E: gadvisory@edc-smcci.sg
W: edc-smcci.sg

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Mr Nick Chong
General Manager
E-Steel Pte Ltd

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Our customers had complaints about late deliveries. And sales staff were frustrated with our operational performance.

The Productivity Management Programme (PMP) enabled us to identify the root causes of these issues and find solutions.

Through a series of improvements, we’ve achieved a 30% increase in productivity and satisfied our customers.
Useful Contacts

EnterpriseOne
Tel: (65) 6898 1800
Email: enterpriseone@spring.gov.sg
Website: http://www.enterpriseone.gov.sg

Enterprise Development Centres (EDCs)

**Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (ASME)**
EDC@ASME
167 Jalan Bukit Merah
Tower 4 #03-13
Singapore 150147
Tel: (65) 6513 0388
Email: enquiries@edc-asme.sg
Website: http://www.edc-asme.sg/

**Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCi)**
EDC@SCCCI
47 Hill Street
#09-00
Singapore 179365
Tel: (65) 6337 8381
Fax: (65) 6339 0605
Email: edc@edc-sccci.sg
Website: http://www.edc-sccci.sg/

**Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI)**
EDC@SICCI
SICCI Building
31 Stanley Street
Singapore 068740
Tel: (65) 6508 0147
Email: edc@edc-sicci.sg
Website: http://www.edc-sicci.sg/

**Singapore Manufacturers’ Federation (SMa)**
EDC@SMa
SPRING Singapore Building
2 Bukit Merah Central
#08-00
Singapore 159835
Tel: (65) 6826 3020
Fax: (65) 6826 3021
Email: edc@edc-sma.sg
Website: http://www.edc-sma.sg/

**Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SMCCI)**
EDC@SMCCI
15 Jalan Pinang
Singapore 191147
Tel: (65) 6293 3822
Fax: (65) 6293 3905
Email: gadvisory@edc-smcci.sg
Website: http://www.edc-smcci.sg/

**Singapore Accreditation Council**
EDC@SAC
1 Fusionopolis Walk, #01-02
South Tower, Solaris
Singapore 138628
Tel: (65) 6279 1855
Fax: (65) 6659 0640
Email: sac@spring.gov.sg
Website: http://www.sac-accreditation.gov.sg

**Sales of Standards**
Toppan Leefung Pte. Ltd.
1 Kim Seng Promenade, #18-01
Great World City East Tower
Singapore 237994
Tel: (65) 6826 9691
Fax: (65) 6820 3341
Email: singaporestandardseshop@toppanleefung.com
Website: http://www.singaporestandardseshop.sg

**Standards Collection**
National Library Board
100 Victoria Street
Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, Level 7
Singapore 188044
Hotline: (65) 6332 3255
Email: ref@nlb.gov.sg
Website: http://libguides.nl.sg/standards

Standards Development Organisations

**Singapore Manufacturers’ Federation Standards Development Organisation**
EDC@SMA
SPRING Singapore Building
2 Bukit Merah Central, #03-00
Singapore 159835
Tel: (65) 6826 3088
Fax: (65) 6826 3113
Email: tan_jinsoon@sma-sdo.org.sg
Website: http://www.sma.sg

**Singapore Chemical Industry Council Standards Development Organisation**
EDC@SCI
8 Jurong Town Hall Road
#25-04, The JTC Summit
Singapore 609434
Tel: (65) 6267 8930
Fax: (65) 6267 8893
Email: terencekoh@sicic.sg
Website: http://www.scic.sg