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Digital initiatives launched to help Singapore F&B companies access global markets and improve efficiency

by Priyankar Bhunia — 24 April, 2018 in News, Singapore



SMF SMART App
A B2B digital initiative to ease food manufacturers' exports into Southeast Asia

- 1st ever B2B digital app for overseas
- Consolidates online orders for overseas
- Allows overseas buyers to check

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Enterprise

Singapore has introduced new digital initiatives at the Food & Hotel Asia (FHA) 2018 to support Singapore food and beverage (F&B) and food manufacturing companies in adopting technology to capture new overseas opportunities and improve operational efficiencies.

The initiatives launched include a B2B online platform for food manufacturers and a showcase of newer technologies that F&B companies can adopt, called RESTAURANT 3.0.

The food services industry contributes 5% of total employment in Singapore. Efficient technology-enabled processes can help improve workflow, enhance the working environment for staff and retain employees with the right skills and aptitude. According to the press release, as of end-2017, more than a third of food outlets in Singapore were already adopting technology such as digital services and kitchen automation.

B2B online platform

The SMF SMART App, conceptualised and executed by Enterprise Singapore and the Singapore Manufacturing federation (SMF) aims to make it easier, faster and more convenient for food manufacturers to export overseas.

The B2B online platform supports food manufacturers in gaining greater access to markets such as Southeast Asia as it allows for easier consolidation of online orders and checks on authenticity of products purchased.

Visitors at the show can use the smart app to scan barcodes of physical products to view more product details and checkout via the smart

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app. Additionally, to extend the reach of the Singapore Pavilion beyond the physical show, Enterprise Singapore and SMF introduced an online Singapore Pavilion on Alibaba.com. This enables the products to be showcased on a globally recognised business-to-business platform where overseas buyers can browse Singapore products and indicate business interest.

Key highlights of the app which was developed by Singapore technology company iPrint Innovations include easy consolidation of online orders for overseas buyers, where buyers can use the app to either scan the barcode of physical products at FHA, or access the SMF Digital Marketplace on the app. Details of Singapore products will be listed on the SMF Digital Marketplace for buyers to view.

The app facilitates automatic checks on quantities of product/s required to fill each shipping container through the shipping cubic meter calculation function. Singapore products can be authenticated with a track and trace function via the use of QR code and IT security technology. The app will also reduce paperwork for food manufacturers with an online procurement process.

Currently, there are 103 Singapore companies with 871 products on board the SMF SMART App and SMF Alibaba.com platforms. SMF is working to bring in more food manufacturers on board and exploring the feasibility of extending the digital initiatives to other industries. The digital initiatives are supported through Enterprise Singapore's Local Enterprise and Association Development (LEAD) programme. The programme aims to enhance industry and enterprise competitiveness by providing focused and customised support at the industry level for industry associations that are willing to take the lead in industry development and drive initiatives to improve the overall capabilities of SMEs in their industries.

Mr Sunny Koh, Deputy President of SMF and Chairman of the F&B Industry Group, said, "Today's launch of the digital initiatives enhances the effectiveness of our WIP programme. They will further benefit our SMEs in reaching out to users overseas including Southeast Asia. The track and trace function of the SMF SMART App also helps prevent counterfeit of goods." The WIP programme is a partnership between Enterprise Singapore and SMF to enable different Singapore food products to be consolidated in containers and exported to overseas retailers/importers through direct shipment.

Ms Kee Ai Nah, Executive Director of Lifestyle & Consumer Cluster, Enterprise Singapore, commented, "Enterprise Singapore's partnership with SMF enables Singapore SMEs to capture more overseas opportunities by making the buyer's procurement process easier through the use of technology. SMF has been proactive and forwardlooking in driving tech adoption; we hope to work with other TACs to implement such digital initiatives to benefit our SMEs collectively."

RESTAURANT 3.0

RESTAURANT 3.0 at FHA 2018 showcases the newer technologies that F&B companies can adopt. It presents how digital, robotics and technology-enabled modular systems can improve the overall supply chain of food services – from farm, processing and production (back-of-house) to service at the table (front-of-house).

The showcase is a multi-party collaboration by Enterprise Singapore, Workforce Singapore, Singapore Productivity Centre and Restaurant Association of Singapore.

Back-of-house

Urban farming: F&B

operators and hoteliers can experiment on an urban farming solution to grow their own vegetables and herbs in a controlled environment. This will cater to customers' increased preference for fresh ingredients and healthier food, and also help create a novel dining experience.

Outsourcing of food

preparation: F&B outlet kitchens can be made much more efficient by outsourcing parts of the meal preparation to larger and better-equipped central kitchens, operated by food manufacturers. This will reduce the need for smaller

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F&B operators to make big investments in fully-equipped kitchens. In addition, kitchen staff would have more time to review menu items, and work with the manufacturer to serve consistently good food.

Ready Meals: Many

successful F&B operators already use this model, by leveraging a central kitchen, to enable lean operations, where kitchen assistants only heat up, plate and serve. This reduces back-of-house manpower requirements and the chef's time is freed up for menu engineering. By extension, the concept of ready meals could open up new distribution channels, such as supermarkets and e-commerce, without having to open additional outlets.

Optimising workflow

with automation: RESTAURANT 3.0 demonstrates how smaller food companies can adopt bite-sized automation in their outlet kitchens, where workflow can be streamlined and redesigned to reduce labour-intensive tasks, such as inventory management (receiving, storage, drawing of stocks); food preparation; and dishwashing.

Food preparation with

robotics: Robotics, a step up from automation, can help achieve more complex tasks. For instance, a pre-programmed robotic arm that can grill beef, will pick up the raw meat from the chiller, cook it on the griddle, plate the steak and have it placed at service point, all at the touch of a button.

Front-of-house

Food vaults: This

enables a new business format, where meals can be ordered from anywhere through a mobile phone app or web-based platform, and then picked up at the allocated vault. This is convenient for the customer, and spares the operator the need to employ waiters.

RFID vending machines:

Food vending machines save manpower and space. The first Vendcafé, launched at Anchorvale Drive in 2016, has 90% less manpower than an eatery offering a similar menu and seating space. Open 24 hours, patrons can pop by anytime for a meal or takeaway. From an operator's standpoint, this completely man-less outlet, which delivers a meal in under three minutes from ordering, is productive. RESTAURANT 3.0 showcases new-generation vending machines that utilise Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) technology to serve up a variety of hot and chilled meals.

Robotics: Robotics

deployed at the front-of-house to serve customers have proven to be both efficient and entertaining. For example, a robotic platform may be programmed to fulfil an order of serving ice cream inside a coconut shell, or make coffee.

As with back-of-house processes, food companies can also automate front-of-house operations such as customer reservation and queue management, as well as ordering, serving, billing and payment.

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