

TAKING HEART

Singtel launches S\$3 million package to foster digital inclusion

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Singtel empowering seniors to go digital. Its initiative will help about 10,000 seniors pick up basic skills like using smart devices. PHOTO: SINGTEL

SINGTEL on Tuesday announced a S\$3 million community care package which comes in the form of a digitalisation initiative that is aimed at two groups - senior citizens and traditional SMEs.

The initiative will see Senior Activity Centres islandwide transformed into digital hubs and more than S\$1 million will go to helping about 10,000 seniors pick up basic skills like using smart devices.

The telco is partnering various social services agencies to sponsor upgrades at Senior Activity Centres, and will start with Thye Hua Kwan and NTUC Health Senior Activity Centres. The programme will roll out over a two-year period.

Jason Lee, chief operating officer of Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities, said: "Technology is an important aid for seniors to stay active as they age. We are intensifying efforts to encourage seniors to come to the centres to learn digital skills that are useful for their day-to-day activities."

A recent study by Singtel stated that seven in 10 SMEs in Singapore are planning to expand their business in the next three years and 89 per cent see investment in technology as a way to improve their competitiveness and sustainability.

However, it also found that SMEs have not acted on their digitalisation plans as they are intimidated by the prospect of investment costs (44 per cent), upskilling and training staff (38 per cent) and implementing and maintaining new systems (30 per cent).

Chua Sock Koong, Singtel's Group CEO, said: "We understand why SMEs have hesitated about going digital. The lack of know-how and questions over implementation and costs may seem daunting but it's critical they take the first step as the shift towards digital tools and channels that we have seen among consumers will be here to stay even post-Covid."

Hence, on the SME front, Singtel will launch the Let's Get Digital initiative. Backed by more than S\$2 million in investment in technological platforms and expertise, over 6,000 SMEs will get support in the form of digital consultations and solutions.

Open to all SMEs in Singapore for an initial one-year period, SMEs can seek advice on how to select and implement suitable digital solutions based on their requirements.

Ms Chua said: "The pandemic has seen a nationwide rush online but some sectors of society are still playing catch-up, perhaps none more so than the older generation, many of whom may not have access to digital devices like a smart phone nor high-speed Internet connections.

"SMEs without a digital presence have also found it challenging to shift their operations and transactions online. We hope that our digital inclusion initiative will help more seniors plug in and achieve a sense of autonomy and better quality of life. We also hope to give SMEs a hand in starting their digitalisation and innovation journeys."

The initiative is Singtel's second community care package since the Covid-19 outbreak. In April, a S\$2 million donation was made to help vulnerable groups in the community, frontline healthcare workers and volunteers.