Financial institutions step up presence on campuses

Initiatives to boost awareness, recruit talent, capture student market

By DANIEL BUENAS

FINANCIAL institutions here have started increasing their presence on campuses to try to promote brand awareness, recruit talent and capture the student market.

Banks and other financial players that BT spoke with said that students are becoming increasingly savvy with their finances, and have also started spending more as consumers — making them more attractive as a market segment.

Initiatives that they have started on campuses range from financial education programmes to recruitment drives. Some banks have even gone so far as to set up campus branches; for example, both United Overseas Bank and OCBC Bank have branches at Singapore Management University.

The two banks also offer opportunities for students to gain part-time working experience at the branches.

OCBC went a step further, and is collaborating with SMU’s School of Information Systems on a partnership to develop a curriculum for a course on financial services business IT.

The course includes field trips to the bank and face-to-face sessions with the bank’s personnel. OCBC will also play a key role in the final term project for the course.

Koh Ching Ching, head of group corporate communications at OCBC Bank said that it has increased the number of programmes that reach out to “young adults in tertiary institutions” over the last few years. “We have also seen a general increase in interest by these younger consumers in various areas, including general financial planning and investing.”

The Nanyang Business School at Nanyang Technological University has a similar tie-up with accounting giant KPMG to teach a control and risk management course. Under the programme, students carry out consulting projects for real-life companies.

With young people becoming more interested in investments and financial markets, financial literacy has been another avenue used by financial institutions to reach out to students.

Broking house Kim Eng Securities, for example, sponsored an investment “bootcamp” earlier this month for SMU students, which included talks on investment trends and online trading.

“Such a camp illustrates industry endorsement of raising financial literacy among tertiary students and how the industry is supportive of student activities that further the objective of making young people more financially savvy,” said SMU spokesman.

Although the banks BT spoke with declined to specify figures, it is understood that they spend up to millions of dollars on such education-linked tie-ups.

UBO group communications and investor relations head Quak Hiang Whai said that UOB sets aside a budget towards varsity-linked sponsorships each year.

For example, the bank committed $1 million to the UOB-SMU Entrepreneurship Alliance Fund which was launched in April this year, which aims to help promising local enterprises by partially financing business projects undertaken by SMU students.

“We’ve seen an increase in take-up of our products and services by this customer segment,” Mr Quak said. “In addition, there’s also been an increase in usage by our debit card customers.”

He added that UOB has a number of existing tie-ups with most tertiary institutions, and plans to “continue strengthening” its acquisition of customers from this segment.

A spokesman for DBS Bank said that it has seen a “consistent increase” in the number of students and people from that age group using their financial products, although he did not provide details.

He added that the number of tie-up programmes they’ve had with tertiary institutions has been consistent, and that the bank was also involved in both local and regional recruitment drives at universities. “As a sign of our commitment to sustaining brand awareness among students, DBS also offers financial support for student academic awards in the form of prizes and medals to the polytechnics,” the spokesman said.

Local banks are not the only financial players getting into the game — Citigroup supports a number of initiatives, including financial education seminars.

It also offers education loans to tertiary level students pursuing their studies, which is bundled with an insurance component. Banks have also started to be more active in scouting for talent on local campuses. For example, the University Scholars Programme at the National University of Singapore has tie-ups with banks like HSBC and Citibank on internship and career recruitment under the banks’ Management Associate programme.

Those selected for the programme are given a project, which may not necessarily be research-based, to complete within the period of internship.