Singapore launches S$100m plan to improve customer service
By Hetty Musfirah Abdul Khamid, Channel NewsAsia

SINGAPORE: Singapore has launched a S$100 million plan to move its service standards up another notch. Part of phase two of the "Go-the-extra-mile-for-service movement" or GEMS will see companies being able to tap into more funds and training opportunities for staff.

Singapore is one of the top ten customer-oriented countries in the world. It successfully climbed up the World Economic Forum's service ranking from 26th in 2006 to 10th place last year.

But with the current economic downturn, there is a worry that service standards will suffer as companies may cut down service capabilities, thereby worsening the overall economy.

Lim Swee Say, Minister, Prime Minister's Office and Secretary-General, NTUC, said: "It is very important that we step up our efforts rather than scale back the effort because if you look at the service sector on the whole, customers will be more careful with every dollar that they spend. They will be more selective in terms of where they spend the money and what they spend it on.

"So what we have to do is to find ways to help the service sector companies in Singapore, not only to cut costs to save jobs but at the same time to cut back in such a way that they do not cut back on their services."

Of the allocated S$100 million, three quarters will go into boosting capabilities of the service sector such as funding for technology and training.

The Workforce Development Agency (WDA) will be expanding the training capacity for its Certified Service Professional programme on top of customising some of Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) courses to specific sectors such as retail, tourism and F&B.

S$10 million will go into research to develop better solutions in enhancing service quality. This will be done by the Institute of Service Excellence at the Singapore Management University.

The remaining S$15 million will be pumped into an extensive promotion and publicity campaign. The Singapore Tourism Board is expected to roll it out later this year.

Industry players welcomed the move, saying that it gives them the extra push to keep standards up.

Andrew Lee, CEO, Zingrill Holdings, said: "During this difficult time, it really is the time
when we really look at training and different ways at preparing the company, so that the company can do better in the future.

Edward Tan, director, Operations, HR & Administration, Metro, said: "It is very vital for organisations because as far as service is concerned, it is an ongoing business."

In fact, Metro has been "sailing upwards" and not compromising on service quality. Sales have improved and compliments have also been pouring in increasingly.

The initiatives include putting in place an online customer delivery system to reduce the waiting time of customers and streamlining stock replenishment processes to prevent stock-out situations so that sales staff can focus on serving customers. - CNA/vm