Singapore is becoming a leader in data analytics and agencies such as the Economic Development Board have been working to establish this position. Capabilities in this field will create economic value and jobs. Arti Mulchand talks to three people working in the sector.

Dance with customer data, let it lead you

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Creating A Future-Ready Singapore

The way Mr Nanthekumar Tamilselvan tells it, consumer engagement is like a well-choreographed dance.

“It is all about making the right move, at the right time and in the right context,” explains the avid Latin dancer and senior data analyst with direct marketing and customer relationship management agency Wunderman.

The catch, though, is that the customer is “leading”, adds the 32-year-old, who is also in charge of enhancing consumers’ shopping experiences through personalisation and data analytics.

“The power has shifted to consumers. To thrive in the digital age, retailers must use data that is available to anticipate consumers’ wants and needs, and make targeted offerings,” he explains.

It could be as simple as a coffee retailer monitoring social media conversations before reaching out to a caffeine-craving regular who tweets about mugging nearby.

“Responding with a simple ‘good luck’ and an extra shot on the house could create goodwill and a loyal fan,” he explains.

Mr Nanthekumar’s personal journey into data analytics began with a few missteps. Orphaned at four, he was brought up by relatives but entrusted to the Ramakrishna Mission Boys’ Home as a teenager.

He was “every teacher and policeman’s bane”, he says, but a brush with death— he fell off his school’s third-floor rooftop— set him down a different path. He miraculously escaped with only minor injuries and turned his life around, doing well for his N and O levels and getting his diploma in engineering informatics before receiving an SAF local study award to do his Bachelor of Computing in e-commerce and entrepreneurship at the National University of Singapore.

It was there he discovered data and, while serving his bond as an army officer, did his Masters in Analytics, commuting from Pulau Tekong to Singapore Management University three times a week.

“Data was not yet the big thing then, but I was convinced that it was core to many industries and would eventually become a driving force,” he remembers.

He worked in the industry for two years before EDB’s tie-up with Wunderman to create a centre for advanced analytics prompted a move there in March this year, just months before he got married. It is at Wunderman that he has been able to do some of his most exciting work, he says, including with clients such as Starbucks and Procter & Gamble.

He says: “The increasing use of digital devices means that virtually anything and everything online can be tracked, and this will lead to even more personalisation. This dance with data creates limitless possibilities.”