

Professional Awards have Asia appeal!

In a potentially wide-reaching initiative ICS has embarked on a joint venture with a Corporate Member organisation to pilot the ICS Professional Awards, initially in Singapore, prior to a proposed wider roll out across significant parts of Asia.

The initiative is being undertaken in partnership with Customer First Group in Singapore, based in Swindon.

It has identified a growing demand for



ABOVE
David Parsons, Jim Pymmer and Stephanie Edwards, ICS Special Projects Executive, welcome a delegation from Singapore's Workforce Development Agency (WDA) led by Gog Soon Joo, Director, CET Quality Assurance, who is supporting the initiative.

qualifications and development programmes in customer service across Asia, particularly in Singapore, and recently established Customer First Singapore Ltd to deliver the ICS Professional Awards.

As the manufacturing base decreases in many South East Asian countries the move to service based economies has taken on greater significance. Increased disposable income, lower air travel costs and the desire to travel further has also made Asia a popular tourist destination.

Competition for the lucrative tourism market is intensifying and further highlights the importance of countries like Singapore increasing their reputation for good customer service. The point was reinforced by Lim Swee Say, Second Minister for National Development in Singapore, at the 2004 Excellent Service Award (EXSA) presentation ceremony.

"We must not be satisfied with just being 'nice'; we must aim to offer our customers an

unforgettable experience," he said. "This requires not just training, skill and knowledge, but also an environment where workers take pride in serving customers.

"Maintaining our standard of service excellence at the current level is not good enough. Others have been closing the gap and some are ahead of us." Singapore's rating for customer service has dipped from eighth position six years ago to 21st in this year's Global Competitiveness Report by the World Economic Forum.

EXSA was launched in 1995 as a national award to recognise individuals who deliver outstanding customer service. It seeks to develop role models for staff to emulate, create service champions and professionalism in customer service.

Customer First Group Chairman Jim Pymmer said: "EXSA provides a very simple form of individual eligibility for the award, but this does not relate to any formal level of customer standards such as those of the ICS. Customer training or qualifications programmes focus on front-end staff, with little reference to higher-level supervisors or management staff.

"Many prominent organisations understand the necessity of having recognised customer service standards and related levels of customer service qualifications and the ICS Professional Awards will satisfy that demand."

The next few years will see a sharp increase in numbers of people across Asia seeking recognition

for their work in customer service and - following the trend set in the UK - a much greater demand for Customer Service Professionals.

Jim Pymmer and his team understand the changing markets of Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Japan and China. The company is well placed to develop the market for ICS Professional Awards and Organisational Membership in these countries having successfully operated a leading quality management consultancy business in the region for nearly 20 years.



Koh Kah Tiong (left), Managing Director of Customer First Singapore, will head up the Approved Centre for the delivery of ICS Professional Awards in Singapore. "This is a wonderful opportunity to develop a customer service ethic in Singapore," he said, "and we are particularly excited about the opportunity of being ICS ambassadors for the Awards."

Stephanie Edwards, ICS Special Projects Executive responsible for international initiatives, including the development of activities in Singapore, said: "ICS and Customer First Group both deliver services to assess and develop individuals and organisations against recognised standards.

"This partnership is a natural step forward towards raising the profile of ICS globally and the ever increasing need to recognise customer service professionalism worldwide."

"Many prominent organisations understand the necessity of having recognised customer service standards and related levels of customer service qualifications and the ICS Professional Awards will satisfy that demand."

Customer First Group Chairman
Jim Pymmer

Innovation - are you tapping into your team?

Speed of communication and ease of travel mean that today companies face competition on a global level and, says ICS Companion Member Terry Houlihan, innovation is essential in winning new customers.

All companies should ask themselves: 'What will happen to our market share if we fail to innovate and ignore new ideas marketed by competitors?'

Governments across the world accept that ideas are vital to sustain and develop a vibrant economy. In the UK the DTI has presented the Innovation Report which focuses on 'Competing in the global economy: the innovation challenge'.

In his foreword to the report Prime Minister Tony Blair says: "Innovation, the exploitation of new ideas, is absolutely essential to safeguard and deliver high quality

jobs, successful businesses, better products and services for our customers, and new, more environmentally friendly processes".

The DTI has a clear view on how critical the development of ideas is for 'UK plc'. To maintain and develop global market share it is encouraging innovation by granting awards to support the generation of ideas and new research.



RIGHT
Terry Houlihan (right) with Anton Good, President of Swiss Inn Hotels.

Key to this is the need to develop a 'whole company' culture so ideas can be discovered, grow and be implemented to maximum benefit.

As Managing Director of TDI International, I've spent several years guiding managers in a wide range of businesses to develop their own ideas. More than 200 projects have been successfully implemented but not one of the companies involved had an effective policy to encourage ideas from staff. Suggestion boxes are not enough!

Now, though, senior managers are waking up to the fact that their staff are a largely untapped resource in respect of ideas that can benefit their customers.

One company that welcomes ideas from staff is the Swiss Inn Golden Beach Resort hotel, set on a beautiful beach beside the Red Sea in Dahab, Egypt. All members of staff provide excellent customer service. Anton Good, President of Swiss Inn Hotels, is, however, aware of the high level of competition and he asked me: "How can I encourage all my team to put forward their ideas to improve the service we offer our customers?"

We designed and developed the 'TDI Innovation

Challenge' to meet this precise need - to develop a 'culture for growth of ideas' - and the Swiss Inn Hotel chain is now working to meet this challenge.

To motivate, encourage and bring out the best from staff, organisations need to:

- demonstrate their commitment to create a culture for 'the growth of ideas'
- participate in development programmes and put in place acceptable procedures to facilitate innovation
- ensure that the ideas put forward by at least four employees are accepted and implemented within one year.

When an idea is successfully implemented the employee concerned is rewarded with an Innovator Award and the organisation receives an Innovation Centre Award.

Interest in this initiative has now spread to companies in Egypt, Greece, Eastern Caribbean, Singapore, Africa, as well as the UK.

Terry Houlihan is an ICS Companion Member and helps to promote and raise awareness of the Institute internationally. TDI International specialises in designing training that brings innovative ways of dealing with existing issues or new initiatives. For more details go to: www.tdi-ltd.co.uk