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Department stores may join move to boost local retail brands, among other initiatives for sector



Spring Singapore is working with department stores to see if they could showcase local and regional designers, and serve as the brands' launchpad. PHOTO: ST FILE

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Kok Xing Hui (mailto:kxinghui@sph.com.sg)

SINGAPORE - Local brands and retail start-ups will get a leg up from agencies to boost their profile, as Singapore seeks to liven up the retail sector amid dwindling sales and fierce competition from online shopping platforms.

Spring Singapore is working with department stores to see if they can showcase local and regional designers, and serve as the brands' launchpad.

And by the end of next year, there will be a design incubator along Orchard Road featuring local brands. To be operated by local retailer Naisse, the space will allow local designers to conceptualise and develop products. It is expected to feature more than 60 local brands, ranging from fashion to lifestyle products and souvenirs.

A new scheme will also offer local retailers incentives for tapping digital solutions.

These upcoming moves add to the positive steps made since last year's launch of the Retail Industry Transformation Map. The roadmap wanted retailers to launch new concepts, use technology, redesign jobs and go overseas using e-commerce.

Mr S. Iswaran, Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry), on Friday (Sept 8) noted the "encouraging progress" on several fronts.

For example, there are now unmanned convenience stores and minimarts with self-checkout facilities.

Speaking at the Singapore Retail Industry Conference, Mr Iswaran also cited local shoe retailer Charles and Keith's initiative to focus more on its shopping app, after observing that traffic to its website from mobile devices had jumped from 20 per cent to 55 per cent from 2012 to 2015.

Retailer workers too, have benefited from the skills framework for retail launched last month, said Mr Iswaran. This framework supports training programmes for skills and career development for workers, such as learning about e-commerce.

"The retail industry is an important part of our economy," Mr Iswaran said. Last year, about 23,000 retail establishments chalked up operating receipts estimated at \$35 billion. That was a 1.4 per cent contribution to Singapore's gross domestic product, he said at the one-day conference, which was attended by about 200 from the sector.

At the conference, which was held at the Suntec Singapore convention centre, the Singapore Retailers Association (SRA) president R. Dhinakaran said the association will embark on a Local Enterprise and Association Development Plus (Lead+) Programme.

Under this, SRA will give its members incentives and subsidies to get into digital solutions such as the GoSpree app created for this year's Great Singapore Sale.