SINGAPORE

Digital for Life in Singapore

TEXT: DOREEN TAN

Digitalisation is both an imperative and an opportunity. To build a more digitally inclusive society, a whole-of-nation effort is required to engage and equip individuals, families and youths, businesses and the community to participate in the new social and economic environment.

SINGAPORE ⊕

Doreen Tan
Assistant Chief Executive, Strategic Planning & Digital Readiness, Infocomm Media Development Authority

Doreen currently oversees strategic planning and digital readiness in Singapore's digital transformation efforts. She has over 20 years of experience in the public sector, with deep expertise in policy and planning, economic, public finance, and international relations.
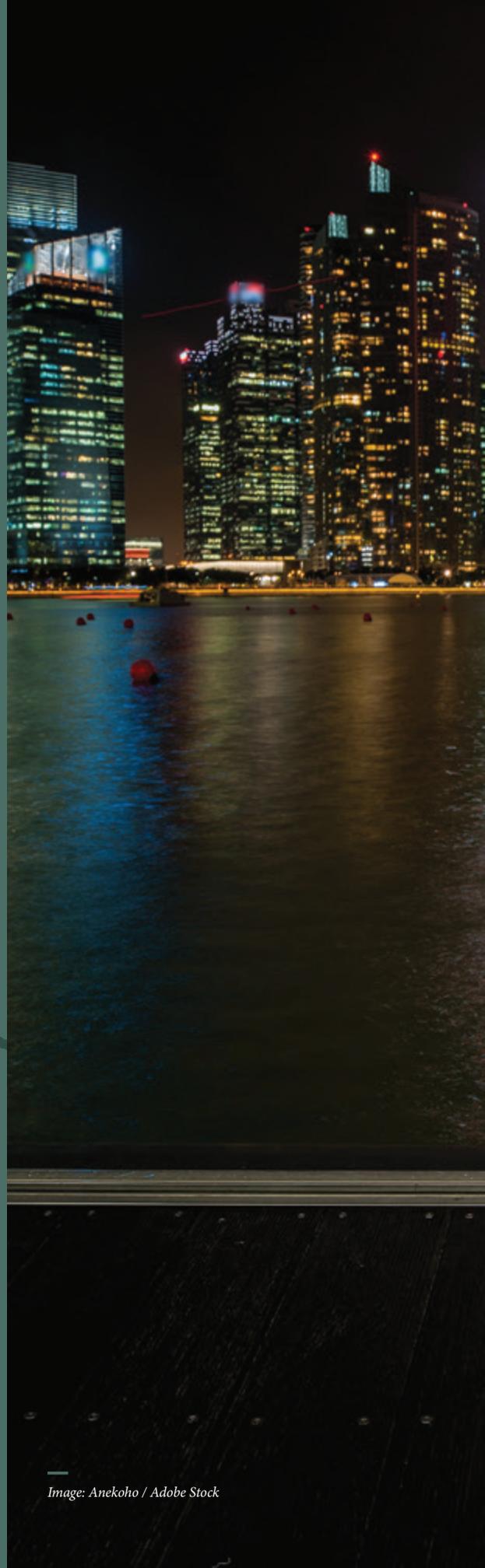
Image: Anekoho / Adobe Stock

A senior learner with family members after receiving his recognition at Digital for Life: Celebrate Digital @ Bukit Panjang community event.
Image: SG Digital Office

What does it mean to build a digitally inclusive society? At its core, it means that no one is left behind as Singapore becomes more digital in how we live, work and play. In 2022, Singapore became the first country in the world to be fully covered by standalone 5G.

To strive towards becoming digitally inclusive, a multi-pronged strategy is needed.

First, ensuring digital access for all is crucial. In 2022, 99% and 90% of resident households in Singapore have internet access and computers (desktops, laptops and tablets) respectively. Smartphone ownership has reached almost 100% among residents. To achieve this coverage, the Singapore Government has implemented schemes to subsidise digital devices and internet connectivity for specific groups such as lower-income seniors or families.

Second, digital inclusion needs to go beyond digital access to equipping citizens with essential digital skills for daily living, including staying well, safe and kind online.

Third, building a digitally inclusive society will require a whole-of-society effort, enabled by strong private, public and people sector collaboration, to strengthen digital for life efforts in Singapore.

SG Digital Office (SDO) – Upskilling Communities Towards "Digital for Life"

The SG Digital Office (SDO), under Singapore's Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), was set up in June 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic when many activities transitioned online. The aim of the SDO is to equip individuals

> **What Singapore strives to be is a digital-first—and not a digital-only—society. Digitalisation is not an end in itself, but a means to enrich quality of life.**

and small businesses with digital skills so that they can participate in an increasingly digital environment.

Seniors Go Digital

To date, the SDO has mobilised Digital Ambassadors (DAs) to help over 210,000 senior citizens acquire digital skills. To reach the seniors, DAs are deployed all over Singapore at 37 permanent high-human-traffic hubs (e.g. community clubs and public libraries) and 200 roving counters at workplaces and community spaces (e.g. clinics) where seniors frequent. The DAs teach the seniors in different ways to help them learn more effectively - such as through one-to-one or small group settings, or by using a vernacular dialect when necessary.

SDOs' DAs teach skills that are relevant to daily living so that seniors are motivated and confident in acquiring digital skills. This includes setting up smartphones, finding information and communicating online, and transacting electronically.

29

"You can learn whatever you want to learn. Do not worry and do not be fearful of the phone," said Mr Kulasingham Sabapathy, a senior learner who was recognised for his efforts to pick up digital skills at the Digital for Life: Celebrate Digital @ East Coast Digital Festival on 10 Jun 2023.
Image: *SG Digital Office*

To develop programmes for specific digital skills, SDO collaborates with different partners, including local banks to design a hands-on e-payment learning journey for the seniors, and the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore and Singapore Police Force to raise awareness of cybersecurity . Having a deeper understanding of users' experiences also equips the SDO to provide feedback to government agencies to facilitate design of more user-friendly digital government services.

As a form of motivation, seniors who have done well in their digital learning are recognised publicly at major community events, often in the presence of their family members. This brings much joy and pride to the senior learners.

Recognising the power of peer learning, 365 Silver Infocomm Wellness Ambassadors (SIWAs) have been trained under a joint initiative by IMDA and another government agency, People's Association. SIWAs are digitally savvy seniors who volunteer to teach and encourage their peers. They help to lead the 45 Digital for Life: Digital Clubs at Community Clubs and community spaces in collaboration with the People Association's Active Ageing Council.

Hawkers Go Digital

Singapore's hawkers are a unique and integral part of our local food scene. As Singapore's adoption rate of cashless payments is now the highest in Southeast Asia, SDO sought to ensure that hawkers would not be left behind in the digital economy.

IMDA established the Hawkers Go Digital programme, which has helped about 11,000 (>50%) stallholders adopt e-payments. This was especially relevant during COVID-19 when people were averse to handling cash. Besides providing training for hawkers through the DAs, SDO also worked with e-payment solution providers on system features that could overcome challenges faced by hawkers in busy and noisy environments. These include bigger fonts that hawkers can view easily from a distance, the use of colour to highlight the latest transaction, and a distinct audio alert for incoming transactions that is loud enough to be heard in a hawker environment.

30

SIWAs (in blue T-shirts) appointment ceremony in Nov 2022
Image: SG Digital Office

A SDO Digital Ambassador promoting e-payment solutions to a food hawker.
Image: SG Digital Office

Galvanising Businesses and Communities in the Digital for Life Movement

In February 2021, IMDA launched the national Digital for Life movement to galvanise private and public sector organisations and people in the community to rally and equip more vulnerable Singaporeans with the skills, habits, and tools to thrive in a digital future. Since then, more than 130 partners have kickstarted approximately 140 ground-up initiatives and pledged support for different programmes to benefit more than 270,000 beneficiaries. These initiatives include providing low-income residents, persons with disabilities and seniors, among others, with digital tools and skills, as well as promoting digital wellness among our youth and communities.

As a result, the Digital for Life Movement was recognised as a Champion Project at the prestigious World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) Prize Ceremony 2023, organised by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) under the United Nations (UN).

Digital-First, Not Digital-Only

What Singapore strives to be is a digital-first – and not a digital-only – society. Digitalisation is not an end in itself, but a means to enrich quality of life. Putting people first in Singapore's digital transformation journey is vital, as this directs our focus towards building a digitally inclusive society and future where no one is left behind. 🔎

To find out more about SG Digital Office programmes, please refer to www.imda.gov.sg/sdo