

**OPENING ADDRESS BY MR THARMAN SHANMUGARATNAM,
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR FINANCE,
AT THE 6th ANNUAL PR ACADEMY CONFERENCE
“MARKETS AND BRANDS: POSITIONING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY”
ON WED, 23RD MAY 2007 AT 9.00 A.M., ORCHARD HOTEL SINGAPORE**

Distinguished Speakers,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

The PR Academy's 6th Annual Conference is on marketing and branding for the 21st century. It is a large theme, enough to intimidate an opening speaker.

2 It is also an ambitious theme, because any strategy of branding for the 21st century has to contend with the reality of a world of remarkable change and fluidity. Each day brings a new product, a new idea or a new fad. The marketplace is crowded - many new players jostling to capture mindshare or eyeballs. In every sector and niche. Talented and enterprising individuals are crossing borders, on a scale never seen in history. Often moving a few times in a career and ending up regarding a new society as home. It used to be so amongst cities in the US, and even then moving from the west coast to the east was a big thing. It is now commonplace in Asia and Europe. Common not just for students or refugees as was the case after the War, but for working professionals, entrepreneurs and community activists in search of opportunities on a wider map.

3 In short, globalization is driving a new pace of life, opening up huge new opportunities, and fuelling competition for loyalties and allegiances - loyalties to products and companies, and to countries.

Finding Our Own Buzz

4 The temptation in branding is to respond to all this fluidity with fluidity - by re-packaging or rebranding our product. If it doesn't work, try another brand, another image, another shake at catching attention. But I think we all know that the great companies, those that stay on top of the competition consistently and over long periods of time, do not survive by changing brands and defining a new image for themselves with every change in circumstance.

5 What is true for companies is more true for cities. A city stays ahead when people feel that what it promises is real. They believe a track record. And they can easily suss out whether changes and promises are credible, will be delivered, and are consistent with its past record.

6 In other words, people know whether a city is matching words and taglines with actions. And the city taglines and images that are compelling are then those that draw attention to what is real, what is lived and experienced by its citizens and residents. Nothing captures the imagination more, and nothing survives in the imagination more than what is matched by reality.

7 Singapore as a brand did not happen overnight. It has been built, consciously and unconsciously, over decades. And it has been defined not only by what we project ourselves to be, as by how others see us. What is the Singapore brand in the eyes of others?

8 There are both positives and negatives, both of which keep cropping up in the surveys and interviews. The positives include a stable, multiracial society. Forward-looking and corruption-free government. Safe streets, a clean and green city. High educational and medical standards. A quality of life in public housing neighbourhoods that remains a bit of an anomaly in a world where public housing often means trouble.

9 There is no lack of negatives. We are referred to affectionately as a nanny-state. That must be high on the Google count. An overly-sanitized city. A “fine-city”, with penalties for numerous offences. “Kiasu” people. (I just found out that a restaurant called Kiasu has recently opened in Bayswater, London - Straits-Singaporean cuisine. It better succeed.) We are often thought of as lacking in creativity and an innovative culture, although things are seen as having improved over the last 10 years.

10 We are also often described as being in a constant state of paranoia. But I haven’t been able to decide if that’s a positive or a negative.

11 We should watch the negatives, and strive to improve on them where we can. I suspect though some of the negatives will come with the positives for some time to come. We should not be defensive about every negative. Zurich does not try to be as exciting as Madrid or San Francisco. It has an interesting fringe culture, but it is by and large a very predictable city, even boring by some accounts. But it comes out near the top in many polls as a city that attracts talent, especially those with families. It is a city at the forefront in some areas of science and with an assured sense of its own culture. The Swiss do not want Zurich to become as exciting as every other city, and we can easily see why.

12 We should never be complacent about the negatives that people perceive as being part of Singapore. But we have to find our own balance over time, not remake ourselves in the image of other cities. We have to find our own buzz as a global city - our own distinctive appeal - do what we can deliver consistently, and stay true to our people’s aspirations.

13 We should not get stuck in our past, or be afraid to experiment and provide space for things that are new but risky in society. But there is no reason to be embarrassed by the fact that Singapore is different from many

other cities by reason of our history and peculiarities as a city that is also a nation. No reason to be defensive about the fact that we are more conservative in some of our social norms than many other cities even in Asia, and lacking in some of what they consider to be their own, indispensable buzz.

An Enduring Singapore Brand

14 How do we keep the value and appeal of the Singapore brand, not just now but for many years to come? How do we keep our verve and dynamism, so that we remain a city of choice to live and work in, and a nation that provides its citizens a home for the heart?

15 I think there are a few fundamentals. Let me count this up the way we always do in Singapore, and set out 5 key planks that we have to preserve and build for an enduring Singapore brand.

16 The first is trust. People trust Singapore. That's probably our most important asset, and something that both companies and our people benefit from. Trust in Singapore will depend on us keeping up the highest quality of governance. We can never lose sight of that - keeping up a system of governance that allows Singapore to anticipate challenges and opportunities over the horizon, to respond quickly to problems as they come up, and to deliver by consistent rules. That's what builds trust.

17 It is also continuous work. It is not just about what goes on within government. Good governance means we keep our channels open with citizens, keep strengthening our social compact, keep building bridges between different segments of our society – the youth and the elderly, heartlanders and cosmopolitans, locals and foreigners staying in Singapore.

18 Our quality of governance is well recognized internationally. Just this week, we were informed that Singapore had won the prestigious United Nations Public Service Award for last year's Progress Package. Singapore was one of the winners in the category of improved transparency, accountability and responsiveness to the public. *[MOF is releasing details today.]* It's a reflection of the high quality throughout our system, not just a few individuals. The Progress Package was about the ability to seamlessly deliver government services as one package despite having different schemes, each with a different agency in charge. But it was also about reaching out to Singaporeans, especially those in the lower income groups and the elderly, through a partnership between the Government, unions, grassroots organisations, VWOs and other volunteers. It was a demonstration of Singapore's social compact at work.

19 The second plank in an enduring Singapore brand has to be our openness to people, enterprise and ideas from all over the world. We have to be relentless in this. It will give us value, and we can do this better than most other Asian cities. And the people who come in are not just adding value to the economy or augmenting our population. They are each a statement about the Singapore brand, and helping to take that brand forward. To take a few very recent examples. Accor, the French hotel group, announced that it would be moving its Asia-Pacific headquarters from Sydney to Singapore by the year's end, as it seeks to expand its global hotel network. The Bahrain-based Islamic investment bank, Arcapita Bank, set up its regional hub in Singapore last month, just as DBS established an Islamic bank together with a group of Middle-Eastern investors. German chemicals giant BASF set up a second R&D laboratory here, this time for organic electronics, as part of its plan to invest \$30 million in R&D in the coming three years. They are each statements of how Singapore keeps plugging itself into the world, and moving up the value curve.

20 The third plank is about being willing to remake ourselves as a city and people. Our image must be that of a city that never stays stuck in its past. The new Integrated Resorts, the upcoming Gardens by the Bay and F1 are big new moves. We must continue to make such moves, and to redraw what is possible in Singapore from time to time. We will embark on each initiative after careful calculation to assure ourselves that it has a good chance of succeeding. But we must expect that a few things will fail. If over time we find that nothing has failed, it will almost certainly mean we have failed to take enough risk.

21 But remaking Singapore is not just about taking bold new steps in redrawing our infrastructure or economic activities. The last two planks I wanted to talk about are about our people.

22 The fourth plank is about Singaporeans who are unafraid of venturing out and breaking new ground. We are trying to nurture this from young, through the education system. But it is now common to read of stories in the media, of Singaporeans who are taking a different path, and following their hearts. People like Mr Vong Yonghow, now 28, who majored in animation in Temasek Polytechnic, won a Young Designers award, went to Tokyo and spent 3 years learning Japanese and studying film-making, and is now working with a leading Japanese animation company (Sunrise) on a major project. Or Hisham Haiyon, an engineer at Keppel FELS, who has chosen to take part in the full round-the-world Clipper Yacht race, on board the "Uniquely Singapore". It's not just about our youth. Mrs Margaret Rajarethnam, a 59 year old former administrative manager (also former netball player) has been working tirelessly to bring relief to children and women in Sri Lanka following the Dec 2004 tsunami. For her efforts, she was recently named Woman of the Year by Operation USA, a US-based relief and development organization.

23 This leads me to the fifth plank in the Singapore brand that must endure, which is about a culture of excellence in every field. We must encourage Singaporeans to go far, to want to do something exceptional. This too we must keep nurturing in education. Just last week, at the Intel International Science & Engineering Fair 2007 held at Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, in the company of some 1,500 students from 47 countries, Amelia Nong Shin Chang from RJC received 2 awards, including 1st Award for the Medicine and Health Sciences category for her work on genetic diagnosis of Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. The NJC team comprising Du Ying Sewa and Navin Brian Ramakrishna was awarded the 2nd Award for Team Projects under the Cellular and Molecular Biology category. And last month in Shanghai, Li Haoyi from Anglo Chinese School (Independent) became the first the first Singaporean student to obtain a Gold Medal at the Asian Physics Olympiad. *[MOE will be releasing details of these achievements later today.]*

24 Aiming for excellence is not just about those who make it on the international stage, or reach the highest peaks. A culture of excellence has to be about everyone wanting to do their best, overcome the difficulties we face along the journey, and discover strengths in themselves that take them further. It is also the determination to overcome starting difficulties. Like Tao Qi, now in Sec 3 in Zhenghua Secondary. In 3 years, she progressed from the EM3 stream, to the Normal (Technical) stream at Sec1 and 2; did well enough to move to the Normal (Academic) stream at Sec 2; did well again and moved up to the Express stream in Sec 3. Tao Qi took advantage of the bridges that we provide in our system. It does not matter where you start from. There is always a way to get ahead. She epitomizes the culture of excellence.

Conclusion

25 The Singapore brand is ours to make. We must keep the trust in the Singapore system. We must be the most open city in Asia, and keep

remaking ourselves by redrawing what is possible in Singapore. We must nurture and support individuals who want to venture out and break new ground. And we must strengthen a culture of excellence for all.

26 I believe this Singapore brand will endure, and make Singapore a leading global city in Asia 15 years from now. But it will only be so if we are also willing to keep looking at ourselves critically, to constantly learn from others around the world, and keep improving.

27 I wish you an interesting and successful conference.