

Satisfaction with customer service highest in 7 years

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Customer satisfaction levels in Singapore last year were at their highest since an index was started in 2007 to keep tabs on customer service.

The overall score last year was 71.1 out of 100, thanks to higher points for the healthcare as well as finance and insurance sectors, according to the latest consumer index released yesterday.

"The continued improvement is a positive indicator for Singapore's service competitiveness on a world stage," said Ms Caroline Lim, director of the Institute of Service

Excellence at Singapore Management University.

Similar studies in other countries show that Singapore is not far behind economies with a traditionally strong service culture, such as South Korea, she said.

However, the latest index also found that customers were less satisfied with five of the nine sectors taken into consideration, namely tourism, retail, transport and logistics, private education, and food and beverage.

The performance of another two, the info-communications and public education sectors, was similar to that in the previous year, according to the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore.

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More than 41,000 Singapore residents and departing tourists were polled last year. The index rose by 0.6 per cent from its 2013 level, hitting a new high for the fourth consecutive year.

This was largely due to gains in the finance and insurance sector, which carries more weight in the index due to its higher contribution to Singapore's gross domestic product.

While complaints about the sector increased year on year, respondents felt that the service providers, namely banks and insurers, have become better at handling the complaints, said the institute, which started the index in 2007.

DBS Bank, the top performer in the bank sub-sector, recently developed a programme where service veterans would coach its frontline staff, and direct feedback would be sought from customers.

"We will continue to increase the number of access points for our customers and improve the quality of their interaction with us," said Mr Jeremy Soo, the bank's head of Singapore consumer banking group.

Last year's score for the healthcare sector was 71, up 1.09 points from the 2013 score.

Polyclinics did particularly well, with patients happier with the waiting time to see a doctor.

However, patients were less satisfied with the medication collection and payment process. This suggests that the bottleneck in the patient flow process was moved rather than removed, said the institute's academic director, Dr Marcus Lee.

When asked, the National Healthcare Group said its polyclinics introduced self-payment kiosks in 2013 to allow patients to pay via Nets or ez-link.

"We are exploring other modes, such as cash and credit card payment modes, to encourage more patients to use these kiosks," said Mr Ang Chee Chiang, its director of operations.

The survey also found tourist satisfaction last year was the lowest since 2009. This could be due to the increasing appeal of neighbouring destinations and changing tourist profiles, said Dr Lee.

"Tourists, in particular those from China, are staying a longer time here and spending more. They have different needs and higher expectations," he said.