

# Leaping on board the tech bandwagon

*But before making that jump, SMEs should take note of their internal processes*

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**SINGAPORE** – Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) looking to punch well above their weight have one performance leveller they can turn to – innovation.

When used effectively, it can enable SMEs to produce giant-killing results. But it can also be a double-edged sword as it presents challenges to SMEs that, if not addressed effectively, can be detrimental to their survival.

Speaking at the Getting Real with Productivity forum on April 16, Mr Robin Speculand, Founder and Chief Executive of Bridges Business Consultancy International, said the biggest challenge leaders face today is that innovation is hitting them harder than ever before.

The increasingly rapid pace of technological development means that systems and processes that worked yesterday may not be suited to tomorrow's challenges.

Said Mr Speculand: "You can no longer rely on what was successful yesterday to take it forward."

"Companies that were started 50 years ago could last for 61 years. According to our research last year, companies (today) have an average lifetime of 18 years."

"The speed of change is one of the biggest challenges companies face; as soon as you've got everything up and running, you have to look over your shoulder and think about what's coming tomorrow."

Mr Speculand and other industry panellists at the forum, which was organised by MediaCorp and supported by the National Productivity and Continuing Education Council (NPCEC), shared their experiences with streamlining processes, and using technology and automation to help companies increase efficiency and maximise their potential.

## FOCUSING ON BETTER TOMORROWS

One of the keys to achieving this is to focus on improving processes – producing better results in the process.

Said Mr George Wong, Managing Director and Principal Consultant at Hoclink Systems and Services: "Companies would be able to realise their potential if they looked at their set of resources."

"For example, when the leadership and workforce mindsets are focused on doing things better today



From left: Mr Steven Chia, moderator at the event; Mr Robin Speculand, Founder and Chief Executive, Bridges Business Consultancy International; Dr Tan Guan Hong, Programme Director, Institute for Infocomm Research; Mr George Wong, Managing Director and Principal Consultant, Hoclink Systems & Services; Mr Lim Yun Fong, Associate Professor of Operations Management, Singapore Management University. PHOTO: NPCEC

than yesterday, tomorrow better than today, issues like what we're discussing would be minimised."

Technology can help companies become more competitive, noted the panellists. However, technology and automation investment should not be utilised just because it is "sexy", said Dr Tan Guan Hong, Programme Director at the Institute for Infocomm Research.

Companies must realise that technology must go toward serving the customer. Technology also has to help a business increase sales or decrease costs. But Dr Tan also noted that spending on new technology can be a long-term investment; profits need not come immediately.

## TECH DONE RIGHT

Investing in new technology doesn't necessarily mean spending money on the latest gear.

Associate Professor of Operations Management at the Singapore Management University Lim Yun Fong said: "If you visit the Khoo Teck Puat Hospital website and you go to the A&E department, you will find a live camera that tells you how long the wait is. That simple idea can be used for other businesses."

"A restaurant with many outlets, for example, can install this system to let it, or its customers, know how crowded

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**Mr Robin Speculand**  
FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF BRIDGES BUSINESS CONSULTANCY INTERNATIONAL

an outlet is. Customers who do not mind going to an alternative location can choose one that has the shortest waiting time. In this way, technology need not be a big investment."

## LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Before investing in new technology, it's important to first get your house in order.

"In most organisations, 33 per cent of work is non-value-added. This means we're doing duplication – we're checking things that have already been checked," said Mr Speculand.

"So before you automate, clean up your processes. You can save hundreds of thousands of dollars simply by eliminating the non-value-added work. Make sure you're automating the right processes."

SMEs can visit [www.waytogo.sg](http://www.waytogo.sg) to learn more about productivity or download the new Productivity+

app created by the NPCEC. Available on Android and iOS devices, the app provides tools such as a productivity calculator and a scheme-finder for key industries.

This is the final story of a two-part collaboration between TODAY and the National Productivity and Continuing Education Council.

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