Giving services industry a boost

New courses in Service Science are in line with the iN2015 goal of producing ‘techno-strategists’, writes AMIT ROY CHOUDHURY

A move that will give a further boost to the robust services industry in Singapore, the Republic’s three universities will start offering courses for Service Science, a multidisciplinary research and academic discipline, in collaboration with IBM.

The courses will begin from the academic year starting in August 2008. Different departments of Nanyang Technological University (NTU), National University of Singapore (NUS) and Singapore Management University (SMU) signed separate memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with IBM Singapore yesterday for this purpose.

The MoUs cover Service Science curriculum development and research exploration with IBM, leading to the full programme called Service Science, Management and Engineering (SSME).

Speaking to BlT, IBM Singapore’s managing director Teresa Lim said Service Science complements, rather than replaces, the main disciplines that contribute to knowledge about service.

“Service Science is a new academic discipline that integrates aspects of established fields such as computer science, operations research, engineering, management sciences, business strategy, social and cognitive sciences, and legal sciences,” she said.

Ms Lim noted that part of the world’s labour force is now employed in the services sector, compared with 38.7 per cent in agriculture and 21.3 per cent in manufacturing.

She added that despite this global shift towards a services economy, there was until recently no concerted effort or formalised educational programme to nurture services professionals and researchers. “SSME is an urgent call to action to develop a science of services.”

According to IBM, the services sector in Singapore comprised 138,700 establishments in 2005. A total of 1.07 million workers were employed in this sector.

IBM signed the MoUs with the NTU College of Engineering, NUS School of Computing and the Institute of Systems Science (ISS) of NUS, and SMU School of Information Systems.

IBM has designated Jim Spohrer, director of Service Science, and Paul Maglio, senior manager, Service Systems Research, both from the IBM Asia, the Land Transport Author-

IBM’s Ms Lim: Businesses expected to invest more to make innovation in services more systematic

Almaden Research Centre in San Jose, California, to lead IBM’s collaboration with the university faculties and ISS, Ms Lim said.

The collaboration includes the review of existing curricula, development of new coursework and case studies, and defining areas for service research.

Ms Lim noted that the MoUs are part of a larger push by IBM, the three universities and 15 organisations, supported by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), to collaborate to push the frontier of service innovation through Service Science education, research, talent development and collaboration with government, academia and industry.

The IDA, together with Avaya Singapore, DBS Bank, IBM Singapore, Singapore Computer Systems (SCS) and Singapore Telecommunications (SingTel) are sponsoring talented students who are keen to pursue informat i on technology and SSME-related courses through the National Infocomm Scholarship (NIS).

“The scholarship aims to identify and nurture a group of talented students for a career in infocomm,” Ms Lim said, adding, “Together, the six organisations have pledged their support to sponsor up to 38 new scholarships from 2008, enhancing next year’s NIS.”

The companies in Singapore which have expressed their support for Service Science and SSME include Avaya Singapore, Cisco, DBS Bank, Fuji Xerox Singapore, Intel Technolo-

“I’m very pleased to see this bold move by the SSME group and IBM. It is a landmark event for Singapore,” Dr Xin Sun, an IBM Fellow, said in a statement yesterday.

“This initiative will provide a tremendous opportunity for the local industry to learn from the best and position itself to lead in the rapidly evolving service science field. I am confident that the initiative will help to develop the next generation of service science professionals.”

“Over the years, IBM has been at the forefront of research and development in the area of service science. We are excited to expand this collaboration with local universities and companies,” Mr Paul Kennedy, IBM’s vice-president for global services research, said.

“By working with the local universities and businesses, we hope to provide a pathway for local students to gain experience and exposure to the latest trends and technologies in the field of service science.”

IBM’s Ms Lim added that given the importance of services as a key growth driver in Singapore, businesses are expected to invest more to make innovation in services more systematic.

“Greater and more open collaboration among the academia, government and industry will also lead to initiatives to capture the vast quantities of service data being generated by the business world every day, and leverage them for research which is the need for generating new service value and innovation,” Ms Lim said.

The collaboration with the universities aims to develop a new breed of service business leaders and entrepreneurs who understand service systems, are trained to enable efficient and systematic approaches to service delivery, and serve as catalysts for service innovation in organisations and for various industry sectors,” Ms Lim said.

According to her, SSME-trained graduates will likely enter the workforce as solution designers, consultants, engineers, scientists and managers.

“After gaining practical experience across multiple industry sectors and with rapidly evolving technology tools and solutions that transform businesses and institutions, they will then go on to be successful entrepreneurs, executive researchers and practitioners, with a solid grounding in theory and best practices in designing high-value service solutions.” Ms Lim said.

IDA’s new chief executive, Rear-Admiral (NS) Ronnie Tay, noted that the introduction of the SSME programme by IBM and the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) was a timely one for Singapore.

“It’s aligned with the iN2015 (intelligent Nation 2015) masterplan where nurturing a pool of ‘techno-strategists’ is critical in helping to achieve the vision of an intelligent nation, global city powered by infocomm,” Rear-Admiral Tay said.

Developing a multi-disciplinary infocomm workforce ready for the service-based economy will certainly enhance Singapore’s status as an information hub, he added.

“The efforts by industry leaders like IBM and the IHLs are most encouraging,” Ms Lim said.

IBM’s Ms Lim added that given the importance of services as a key growth driver in Singapore, businesses are expected to invest more to make innovation in services more systematic.

“Greater and more open collaboration among the academia, government and industry will also lead to initiatives to capture the vast quantities of service data being generated by the business world every day, and leverage them for research which is the need for generating new service value and innovation,” Ms Lim said.