



## EMPOWERING CONSUMERS

We believe in empowering consumers to play an active role when working with their property agents to buy, sell, or rent property. CEA proactively creates touch points to share tips and tools on how consumers can protect their interests in such transactions. Our multi-channel approach allows us to reach out to a broad segment of the community.



# > EMPOWERING CONSUMERS

A property is a long-term commitment and a valuable asset for many Singaporeans. This is why raising public awareness of the roles and responsibilities of consumers, property agents, and agencies is a high priority for CEA. We believe in empowering consumers to work effectively with the property agent they engage, and to make the best decisions for themselves in their property transactions.

## TARGETED CONSUMER OUTREACH

In FY2015, CEA's public education efforts reached out to a diverse base of consumers, from first-time home buyers and tenants, to foreign property investors, and the more vulnerable groups of consumers. To maximise our reach to targeted segments of the community, we teamed up with several public, private, and non-profit agencies and utilised various communications channels and platforms to engage consumers.

For example, we partnered public agencies to organise education events. These included talks by the Central Provident Fund Board (CPF) for consumers buying their next home, as well as seminars by the Housing and Development Board (HDB) for those looking to sell or buy resale HDB flats or intending to sublet rooms.

Over the past five years, CEA has reached out to more than 10,000 consumers in collaboration with CPF and HDB.



Reaching out to consumers through events and talks like the 50Plus Expo 2015 and HDB Heartland talks (Bottom-right photo: HDB)

CEA's outreach to seniors centred around two major events: 50Plus Expo 2015, the largest fair for seniors in Singapore by the Council for Third Age (C3A), and U Live Symposium 2015, organised by NTUC U Live community for senior workers and retirees aged 55 years and above.

During these sessions, seniors participated in activities that equipped them with tips on safeguarding their interests in a property transaction.

We have also struck up new collaborations that enabled us to bring our education messages to the heartlands.

Working with the National Library Board, we presented talks at several public libraries on how consumers can maximise the value of engaging property agents in property transactions. Through the People's Association, we engaged with residents at the Kampong Kembangan Community Club's multi-racial dumpling festival. At both events and fairs for seniors, we displayed comic-themed posters at our booth that illustrated useful tips for engaging property agent services and minimising foreign property investment risks.

CEA also worked with MoneySENSE-Singapore Polytechnic Institute for Financial Literacy to spread our message to the public sector. We incorporated key messages in the "Buying a Home within Your Means" module of a two-day financial planning course for officers in the Ministry of Home Affairs.

## CONNECTING WITH FOREIGN PROPERTY BUYERS

Prospective foreign property buyers were another segment of consumers that CEA connected with during the year. Through participation in events, advertisement campaigns, media stories,

and resources for consumers, we informed potential buyers about important financial considerations and pitfalls to avoid when purchasing foreign property.

In 2015, we leveraged foreign property marketing events such as the ST Property Seminar & Expo and SPH Digital Property Seminar & Showcase. Our information booths at the events provided ideal platforms for us to engage in face-to-face discussions with consumers and share advice using educational posters and consumer guides.

To coincide with these events, CEA also placed advertisements carrying cautionary messages on purchasing foreign property

in the print media. The use of cartoons in the advertisements was an effective way to convey the key messages to target audiences in a light-hearted and impactful way.

Another strategy to raise mass market awareness was through mainstream media coverage. We worked with the media on messages relating to CEA's regulatory safeguards, guidelines, and practical tips for consumers, which were incorporated into the news stories. Story contents ranged from the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore's new guidelines for marketing foreign properties, to cases of Singaporeans at risk of losing their overseas property investments.



Sharing advice at a foreign property showcase

CEA's public education features appeared in lifestyle magazines such as NSman and M Lifestyle; Community Development Councils' newsletters such as Heartbeat, Cohesion, and Contact; as well as Homebuyers and CASE's The Consumer magazine



**ENHANCING ONLINE TOUCH POINTS**

Following up on feedback from a readers' survey, we revamped and relaunched our corporate bi-monthly e-newsletter CEAnergy in October 2015. The redesign involved creating a more reader-friendly layout and aesthetically-pleasing colours.

Timed to commemorate CEA's fifth anniversary, the special launch issue carried a joint message from our Council President Greg Seow and then-Executive Director Chionh Chye Khye, together with a showcase of CEA's achievements over the past five years. The commemorative issue also included messages from industry partners that reflected the industry's

progress and development since CEA's formation in 2010.

Work on the design and development of a new CEA corporate website started in FY2015. Targeted for relaunch in the second quarter of FY2016, the new website will offer new functions to better address the needs of different industry stakeholders. An example is a dedicated Continuing Professional Development (CPD) microsite that will provide Key Executive Officers, property agents, and course providers with new e-services to allow updating and tracking of attendance at professional training sessions.

**EXTENDING MESSAGE IMPACT**

To further increase the impact of our messages, CEA placed consumer education advertorials

featuring current topics of interest to industry stakeholders and consumers in newspapers as well as various community and lifestyle publications. We also co-authored a series of articles on best practices in property agent engagement with the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore. These were published on e-citizen, a one-stop public portal for government services and information.

To provide consumers with timely and practical information on the process of resolving contractual disputes with property agents, CEA distributed copies of our dispute resolution guide at the Law Society of Singapore and the four appointed Dispute Resolution Centres - Consumer Association of Singapore (CASE) Mediation Centre, Singapore Institute of Arbitrators, Singapore Institute of Surveyors and Valuers, and Singapore Mediation Centre.

We worked closely with the media on feature stories to better explain CEA's policies and projects. These included CEA's CPD schemes and our contributions to the industry over recent years. News coverage of CEA's disciplinary actions taken against individuals who carried out estate agency work without registration also included messages that reinforce the steps that consumers can take to protect their interests.

Visitors checking out CEA's segment at MND's roving exhibition that chronicled Singapore's transformation since 1965



Seniors at the U Live Symposium learnt how they can be empowered consumers in property transactions involving property agents

**RAISING CEA'S PROFILE**

From 15 to 17 October 2015, CEA joined 15 other public agencies at the Public Service Festival to showcase the contributions of Singapore's public service towards improving the daily lives of our people.

CEA also participated in the roving exhibition organised by the Ministry of National Development (MND) to commemorate Singapore's 50th year of independence. Themed "50 years of Transforming Our City, Our Home", the exhibition featured MND's six statutory boards,

including CEA, and their roles in shaping modern Singapore. CEA's role in safeguarding homes as valued assets was a highlight. The event was opened by then-Minister for National Development Khaw Boon Wan, on 6 August 2015 at JEM in Jurong East, before travelling to five other locations islandwide between August and November 2015. Members of the public can visit the exhibition at the MND Complex until mid-2018.

**THE NEXT STEPS**

CEA completed its second Public Perception Survey in March 2016. Through

interviews with more than 2,200 consumers and members of the public, CEA gained insights into public awareness levels of the roles and responsibilities of CEA, property agents and agencies. We also had a good sensing of consumer satisfaction on the services provided by property agents, and general consumer perceptions and expectations of property agents.

The findings, together with a comparative analysis of results from the first baseline survey in 2012, will enable CEA to design and fine-tune policies and programmes for industry development and public education. The survey results will be released in the second quarter of 2016.

CEA's Public Outreach Division has been renamed Corporate Communications and Public Outreach Division to reflect the expanded role of the team. The team will increase its focus on strengthening the CEA brand and explaining the value and relevance of CEA's responsibilities and functions to our various stakeholders through more creative and innovative platforms. The team will continue to work with CEA's partners to build mutual understanding and garner support on key industry issues, in order to safeguard consumers' interests.