

Fully Engaged in Safeguarding Consumers

Committed to giving a voice to consumers and protecting their interests, CEA develops new initiatives and enhances its ongoing programmes to inform and educate consumers. By leveraging infocomm technology and collaborating with stakeholders and partners, CEA engages the public on multiple levels to deliver information to a wider audience.

*CEA organises diverse outreach
activities to engage consumers*



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In FY2013, CEA intensified its outreach efforts to engage consumers directly through more varied platforms and collaborating with partners and government agencies to launch several new initiatives. Through exhibitions and seminars focused on topics of current interest, consumers gained a deeper understanding of the procedures in property transactions and the responsibilities of salespersons. CEA also expanded its consumer resources and worked with the media to equip consumers with the relevant knowledge for making informed decisions in property transactions.



The CEA-CASE consumer seminar officiated by Tan Chuan-Jin, then Acting Minister for Manpower and Senior Minister of State for National Development

DIVERSE OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

CEA-CASE Consumer Seminar

On 27 April 2013, CEA organised a major consumer seminar jointly with the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE). The half-day seminar on "Safeguarding Consumer Interests in Property Transactions" was held at the NTUC Auditorium and graced by the Guest-of-Honour, Tan Chuan-Jin, then Acting Minister for Manpower and Senior Minister of State for National Development. Three new initiatives were announced – a new quarterly consumer seminar series, a joint CASE-CEA consumer guide, and the Professional Service Manual.

Topics at the seminar included outlook of the Singapore's property market, financing options for property purchases, responsibilities of estate agents and salespersons, and consumer rights in property transactions. The speakers were Ku Swee Yong, Key Executive Officer (KEO) of International Property Advisor Pte Ltd; Yip Woon Lye from the Association of Banks in Singapore; Dr Tan Tee Khoo, KEO of KF Property Network Pte Ltd; and Sebastian Quek, CASE Central Committee Member. They were joined by Soh Kee Hean, CEA Deputy Executive Director and



Q&A session at the CEA-CASE consumer seminar

Seah Seng Choon, CASE Executive Director for a lively question and answer session with participants. The event attracted close to 360 participants, media and industry representatives.

A key highlight of the seminar was the poster exhibition set up by CEA and CASE. Witty and informative comic-illustrated posters helped participants to better remember and understand the key messages heard at the seminar. There were also information booths set up by the Institute of Estate Agents (IEA), SAEA Ltd, Singapore Institute of Surveyors and Valuers (SISV), CASE, CaseTrust and the Credit Bureau of Singapore.



Key consumer messages communicated through comic-illustrated posters.



Participants at the CEA-CASE consumer seminar

Get It Right! Consumer Seminars

The partnership was enhanced with the involvement of industry associations – IEA, SAEA Ltd and SISV – which actively participated in putting together the programme and sourcing for speakers. The industry associations also took on the task of managing the seminars, from registration of participants, organising the seminar materials, managing the venue to liaising with speakers and compiling post seminar feedback.

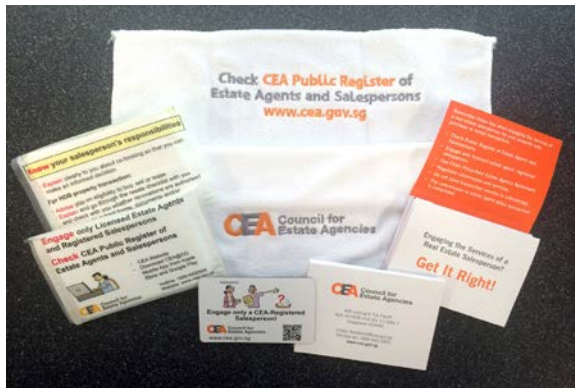
At the inaugural seminar on 17 August 2013, participants heard from three industry experts – Michael Tan of OrangeTee.com Pte Ltd, Dennis Tay of SAEA Ltd and Martin Tay from the Association of Banks in Singapore. They provided valuable advice on buying overseas properties, responsibilities of salespersons and property financing.

“ It was very well presented and informative, and value for money too. The speakers were interesting and knowledgeable. ”

“ I was happy to attend the seminar as the speakers were very good in their delivery. ”

- Feedback from the seminar participants

Other topics of interest presented at the half-day seminars include market outlook, buying new developments, and dispute resolution. Over 100 participants turned up for each seminar.



Souvenir items with educational messages

At the CEA booth, visitors learnt consumer tips through a poster exhibition and games. Specially-designed souvenirs bearing important consumer education messages were distributed to visitors. CEA established its first touch point with seniors and had lively interactions with some 2,500 visitors at the booth. A free Mandarin talk was also conducted to enable visitors to gain a better understanding of the responsibilities of salespersons, their role as consumers and what is involved in dispute resolution.

Type of Activities	No. of Activities	Attendance
HDB resale seminars	16	1,596
HDB public talks	3	547
CPF public talks	4	698
CEA-CASE Consumer Seminar	1	359
Get It Right! CEA-CASE Seminars	3	334
CEA booth at 50plus Expo	1	2,608
Total	28	6,142

CEA at 50plus Expo

Extending its outreach efforts to potentially vulnerable consumer groups, CEA participated in the 50plus Expo for seniors. Held from 28 to 30 March 2014 at the Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre, the event was organised by the Council for Third Age (C3A).



CEA participated in the 50plus Expo for the first time



Panel members taking questions at the Get It Right! CEA-CASE seminar

Partner Events

CEA continued its strong collaboration with government agencies such as the Housing & Development Board (HDB) and Central Provident Fund (CPF) Board. CEA staff spoke at 19 HDB resale seminars and public talks, sharing messages on the responsibilities of salespersons and roles of consumers in property transactions. These talks were conducted in English, Mandarin and Malay. CEA also participated in four talks organised by the CPF Board for consumers buying their next home. Each of these seminars was well attended by homebuyers and owners.

GROWING CONSUMER RESOURCES

CEA regularly monitors the changing informational needs of consumers in the evolving property market. In the year, CEA increased its range of consumer guides and educational information to enrich consumers in their understanding of property transactions and how to maximise the value in engaging real estate salespersons.

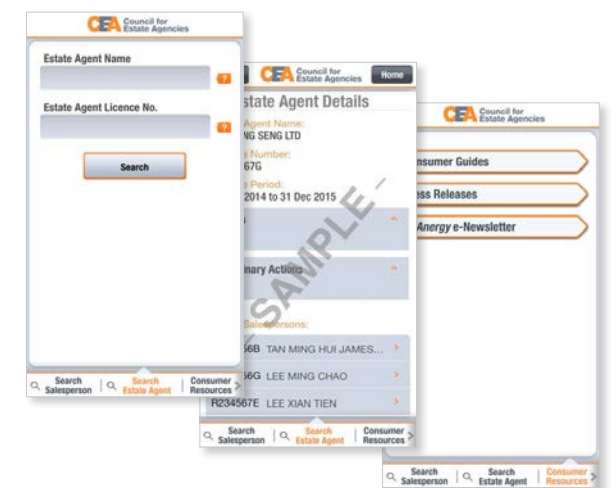
CEA and CASE jointly released a new guide on “Sale, Purchase and Rental of Properties” on 27 April 2013. It highlights important considerations in the transaction process for private and HDB properties, what salespersons can do for consumers, and how to resolve complaints or disputes.

Increasingly, more foreign properties are being marketed in Singapore. CEA deemed it necessary to caution consumers to exercise due diligence and do their homework before investing in such properties. A new consumer guide “Consumer Tips

on Buying Foreign Properties” was launched on the CEA website on 17 March 2014. It highlights some key considerations in investing in foreign properties such as taxes payable, restrictions on foreign ownership, dispute resolution mechanism as well as possible risks of sudden changes in foreign regulatory frameworks and foreign exchange fluctuation. The guide also urged consumers to understand their needs and be aware of the total financial commitments before making any purchase decision.

To reach out to non-English speaking consumers, the “Consumer Tips for Engaging a Real Estate Salesperson” guide was translated into Malay and Chinese. The guide provides key points on the responsibilities of salespersons and how consumers can play a part to achieve a smooth property transaction.

An enhanced version of the “CEA@SG” mobile application was launched to support effective distribution of CEA’s rapidly growing repository of consumer resources. CEA@SG was first launched in October 2012 as a mobile version of the Public Register of Estate Agents and Salespersons. The latest version enables consumers to access CEA consumer guides, press releases and CEAnergy e-newsletter on the go. Real estate salespersons can also retrieve useful information to explain to their clients and refer clients to the information found on the app. The app can be downloaded from the Apple App Store and Google Play.



Retrieve useful information on the go with the CEA@SG mobile app

CEA also introduced a new section “Tips for Seniors” on its online Consumer Resource Centre. Consumer tips were tailored for those who may have plans to engage a salesperson to help in the purchase, sale or rental of their property when they reach retirement age. The new materials and case studies aim to provide seniors the necessary knowledge to be savvy consumers.

The bimonthly e-newsletter *CEAenergy* remains an integral channel of communication and connection between CEA and its stakeholders. It publishes positive feedback and commendations from consumers for salespersons to help the public better understand the professional work done by the industry. A “Readers Mailbox” section was added to encourage readers to send in stories on positive experiences with their salespersons. Through this sharing, CEA hopes to inspire the industry towards a higher professional standard in their estate agency services. Members of the public can sign up to receive *CEAenergy* and other CEA news/information via the link www.cea.gov.sg/consumerresources.

Full page educational advertorials were inserted in the various Community Development Council (CDC) newsletters to teach consumers how to be savvy in property transactions. Reaching out to over 1.16 million households, the advertorials provided consumer tips on what to look out for when engaging salespersons, and explained what salespersons can and cannot do for their clients.



CEA's bimonthly e-newsletter *CEAenergy*

VALUABLE PARTNERSHIPS

CEA continued to work closely with the media and partner agencies in FY2013 to spread important educational messages to more consumers. Outreach initiatives, events, and news about prosecutions against errant salespersons were covered by both the mainstream and online media. CEA's consumer guides and educational articles were also carried by online media such as STProperty and property magazine Home Buyers.



CEA participates in a HDB public talk. (Photo: HDB)



Key consumer messages communicated through witty comic strips

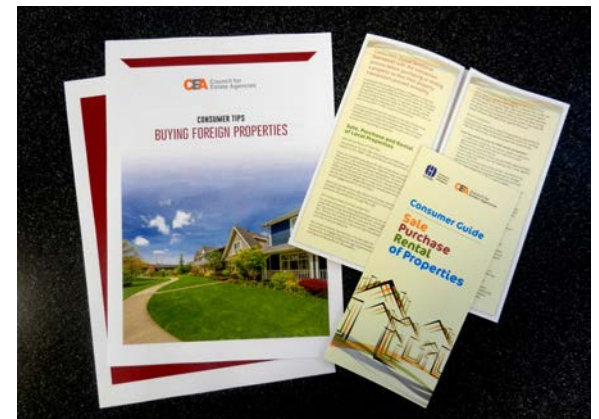
Efforts to reach out to consumers online were expanded through partners' communication platforms. CEA contributed an article on tips on engaging a real estate salesperson to MyNiceHome.sg, a website by HDB for home owners and buyers. A similar article was provided to eCitizen, a first-stop portal for government information and services. CEA consumer events were also publicised on the portal of MoneySENSE, a national financial education programme.

For the first time, CEA worked with the Singapore Police Force to disseminate consumer messages to a wider sector of the community. CEA contributed contents to an outreach poster and preventive advisory issued by the Police to educate the public on rental scams. In addition, the Police helped to distribute CEA consumer guides to grassroots leaders through its 35 Neighbourhood Police Centres island-wide.

CEA also collaborated with the Police on an episode of its commissioned television programme “Crimewatch”



A CEA officer speaking at a CPF Board talk (Photo: CPF Board)



New consumer guides

which focused on loan shark harassment. CEA fielded a spokesperson to advise consumers that salespersons have a duty to ascertain material facts and important information of a property on their clients' behalf. The episode would be produced in the four major languages and is scheduled for broadcast in April and May 2014.

Going forward, CEA will continue to identify areas in which consumers will require more information, and develop new guides to equip them accordingly. More resources will be provided to communicate key messages through the mass media and publications with relevant readership. Access to CEA e-services and resources will be enhanced with the development of a new website. CEA will also seek out opportunities for collaborations with more partner agencies and organisations to widen its network for public outreach.