

Prescription advertising

Drug ads may help to raise awareness and competition, but the side effects of the medicines they push must be made clear.

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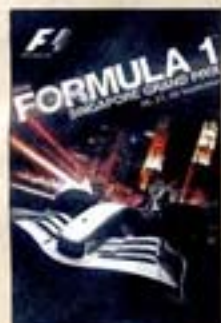


SPORTS

INTER'S TITLE TO LOSE

Inter Milan can clinch their third straight Serie A title with victory over Siena.

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TICKET SALES ROARING

About 82% of 90,000 three-day passes to the Singapore Grand Prix sold.

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WAR ON DOPE GOES ON

Singapore's bodybuilding federation vows to continue its efforts to clean up the sport.

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SPECIAL REPORT

GEN Y @work

There are close to 400,000 Generation Y workers – aged 15 to 31 – in the Singapore job market now. They are bright, brash and raring to go. But are their baby-boomer managers ready for them? **Sandra Davie** finds out.



GEN Y a work



The Generation Y workers are upon us – bright, tech-savvy, self-assured twentysomethings occupying positions from interns to middle managers. Senior writer Sandra Davie explores their psyche to find out what makes them tick

AVID blogger Cecelia Lai was shocked when she got the boot from her sales job in an electronics company a year ago for criticising her boss online. Referring to her sales-manager boss as "Hitler", she ranted about his "Nazi-style" management on the Internet forum Hardwarezone. Although she wrote it under her online moniker and did not name the company or her boss, a colleague saw her posting and alerted her boss to it.

The next day, she was hauled up for questioning. When she defended her actions by saying that what she did in her private life was none of the company's business, she was sacked.

The 25-year-old, who has since "moved on" to another sales job, thinks she did no wrong. "Surely, I am entitled to my opinion. It is not as if I identified the company," says a defiant Ms Lai, who sports a tattoo of her former boyfriend's name on her ring finger.

When contacted by The Straits Times, her boss' side of the story goes like this: Although Ms Lai did not name him on the online rant, she gave enough information to identify the company.

"It's fine if you are talking about your private life, but not about the company or colleagues," reasons the 51-year-old who is married with two teenage boys and did not want to be named.

According to him, this incident was the last straw that led to his decision to sack Ms Lai, who "irritated" him from her first day at work.

He recounts: "She came to work in jeans and a T-shirt. When I called out to her, she did not respond because she was listening to music on her iPod. I walked up to her desk and she was on the MSN as well."

But he admits that she also surprised him by landing a sales deal in her second week.

"She is not stupid, I give her that. She's a pretty good talker and relates well to young people. But there were just so many things that did not sit right with me," he says.

Enter the Wikipedia generation

BUT as his human resource manager warned him, employers should get used to managing the Cecelias of the world. They are the Generation Y workers – bright, self-

assured, multi-tasking, technology-savvy twentysomethings who have just descended upon the workplace in droves with their freshly minted degrees or diplomas.

Born between 1977 and 1999, they are children of parents who make up the tail end of the Baby Boomer generation. Hence, they are also called the Echo generation.

There are just over a million Generation Ys in Singapore, making them a considerable group within the workforce. Currently, close to 400,000 – aged 15 to 31 – are already in the workforce, occupying positions from interns to middle managers.

Companies are now beating down the doors of human resource consultants who specialise in profiling the work habits of different generations of workers, in a bid to demystify these new corporate arrivals.

Ms Cheryl Liew of Lifeworkz, 43, one of the "go-to people" in the Gen Y field, notes that even the Civil Service College, the training arm of the public service, has wised up to the need to study these twentysomething workers.

In March, she taught a two-day course on managing a multi-generational team and has been asked to repeat the course in a few months.

Although profiling a particular age group is tricky since there will always be outliers, management consultants and talent recruiters pointed to some standard traits among Gen Ys.

First, their most obvious trait is being tech savvy, which explains why this group is also termed the "Net Generation", "MySpace Generation" or "iPod Generation".

The iPod, Ms Liew says, is an apt metaphor for this generation – "they want this cool-looking device which everyone else has and yet want to be able to customise it for themselves in the music they pick".

A typical polytechnic or university graduate entering the workforce today is likely to have owned a digital music player, snapped photos or recorded a video clip with a phone; posted comments, pictures and video clips on forums, blogs and YouTube; and created a profile on a social networking website such as MySpace.

"The bulk of this generation has grown up immersed in technology," she says.

Such tech-literacy is both a boon and a bane to their bosses. Mr David Leong, 38, who heads

human resource company People-Worldwide Consulting, says employers are impressed at how Gen Y workers can put up a website and get a network going, just like that.

But that is until they start checking and verifying the work.

"Unfortunately, they accept uncritically the top results from a Google search or Wikipedia," notes Mr Daryl Han, 48, an investment manager.

His consultancy company has had to run workshops to teach them how to evaluate information.

Big technology companies, including IBM and Intel, have had to draw up guidelines governing online behaviour.

IBM, for example, has set up sales centres online in virtual worlds such as Second Life for its staff to dabble in, but has also set rules to rein in any free-wheeling behaviour.

This addresses the Gen Y's habit of sharing information freely online. The online IBM rule book reads: "Creation of...content must be done with care to avoid copying or using the content of others unless permission is first granted by the owner."

It also has appropriateness guidelines for those who take on personas (avatars) when entering online gaming worlds, such as Second Life. "Building a reputation of trust within a virtual world represents a commitment to be truthful and accountable with fellow digital citizens...Dramatically altering, splitting or abandoning your digital persona may be a violation of that trust..." says the rule book.

Like a tumbleweed

BUT if Mr Gen Y crosses the line one too many times and you give him the sack, don't expect him to come pleading to get his job back.

Job, even career, hopping, is another Gen Y characteristic.

Mr Leong says it is rare for the young ones he talent scouts to stay beyond three years with a company. Their lack of company loyalty stems from seeing their parents slog long and hard for their companies – only to get laid off when

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ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM

YOUNG MAN IN A HURRY

JIM LIM TIAN CHUN, 20, self-taught chef

He came up with a recipe for spicy squid spaghetti within the first week of joining Wild Rocket restaurant in Mount Emily.

Before Wild Rocket, the O-level holder worked in Japanese and Italian restaurants.

He intends to set up his own Italian restaurant within the next three years.

"I want to be my own boss and decide what I want to cook and serve. My aim is to serve fusion Italian food, fusing Asian flavours into pasta and pizza."

GENERATION X, Y and Z?

WHO IS GEN Y? There is no consensus over the exact birth dates that define Gen Y. But the broad definition includes those born between 1977 and 1999.

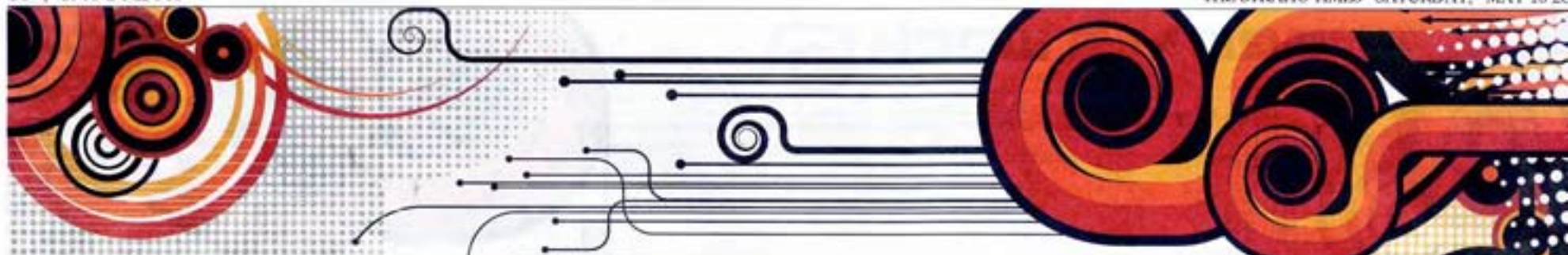
Narrower definitions place Gen Ys as those born between 1980 and 1994. The argument is based on the thinking that as the pace of change in society accelerates, the time frame of a generation gets shorter. Gen Ys are also often referred to as the Millennials.

ORIGIN OF TERM It derives alphabetically from the generation that came before – those born from 1964 to 1976 were called Generation X.

There is some dispute over who invented the term, but it was popularised by Canadian author Douglas Coupland's 1991 book, *Generation X: Tales For An Accelerated Culture*. Before Generation X, there were the Baby Boomers – referring to those born between 1946 and 1963.

WHAT'S NEXT AFTER Y? Some marketers and recruiters have already started using the term Generation Z for those born from the year 2000 onwards. Some websites such as www.generationz.com.au classify this group as those born from 1995 to 2009.

But some have argued that the more apt term for Generation Z is Millennials, as they were born in the new millennium.



GEN Y @ WORK

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the economy hits a rough patch.

Another reason is that they see staying on in the same job as boring.

"Gen Ys are the ones who were shuttled by their parents to computer lessons; ballet, speech and drama classes; and even child modelling classes," explains Ms Liew.

She tells bosses who want to retain their Gen-Y hires to rotate them. Move them to different departments and jobs, even overseas.

This is something that companies such as KPMG Singapore have taken to heart.

The auditing firm's executive director of human resources Stephen Tjoa says he has to pay heed to Gen Y's expectations as this group forms 70 per cent of KPMG's 1,900-strong staff here.

One of the things his firm does is to offer "careers within a career" that allow young employees to try out different positions. Overseas postings used to go to senior staff, but are now open to those below 30 as well.

Yet another management tip to retain Gen Y workers: Show them what they can aim for if they stay, and what they need to do to get there.

Bosses with twentysomethings in their office say they are often struck by Gen Y workers' brazen self-assuredness. They believe in themselves and are not shy to announce just how good they are, from Day One.

Mr Willin Low, 36, owner-chef of restaurant Wild Rocket and gourmet hamburger joint Relish, says his new hires surprise him by coming up with new recipe suggestions weeks into the job.

"Some of it actually works," he says, adding that he has added dishes such as Spicy Squid Spaghetti developed by his young kitchen staff.

The flip side, though, is their

impatience to be recognised and get ahead.

He has let go of some who showed promise but wanted a promotion within months. "What they have in enthusiasm, they lack in experience. In the restaurant line, you need to learn the ropes before you can run a kitchen."

What's it with you people and 9am?

ANOTHER difference is - unlike Baby Boomer and Generation X hires - Gen Y workers expect their work to accommodate their family and personal lives, not vice versa.

They demand jobs with flexibility, telecommuting and the option to go part-time to upgrade or recharge themselves through extended holidays.

Ms Liew's two youngest employees, for example, recently took a three-month break to learn pottery in the United Kingdom.

There is a higher value placed on undelayed self-fulfilment.

Engineering graduate Nancy Chua, 24, who resigned from a high-paying job to travel around Africa, sums it up this way: "A very good friend went missing in the tsunami that hit Phuket. I don't want to wait."

Thus, Mr Leong advises bosses who want to keep their Gen Y talent to consider their requests for time out.

"If not, they will quit to go on the trip anyway. Then they will come back to work for your competitor."

These are fighting words worth heeding for employers who want to win the talent war.

If not, Gen Ys will be out of the door before you can say "Hey, what's wrong?" But not before spilling the beans on how draconian their Baby Boomer bosses were in that torrid tell-all blog.

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ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

SEEKING THRILLS, SPILLS, VARIETY

CLAUDIA LIM, 27, community manager for Yebber.com

Ms Lim holds two diplomas in business and education. She started her working life as a primary school teacher but left after three years to be the operations manager in an art and crafts shop. She is now a community manager at Yebber.com, a website where the public is invited to post online reviews of shops, restaurants, hotels and a range of lifestyle services.

Gadget-loving Ms Lim owns a Macbook, two cameras, a Sony camcorder, a Creative Zen digital music player and a Motorola PDA phone. Of her apparent Generation Y habit of job-hopping, she says:

"I am just looking for the right fit in terms of a career. One that will give me variety and constantly challenge me."