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NEWS

Solutions for a Circular Economy in Singapore

Ricoh Asia Pacific's (Ricoh) 11th edition of the annual Eco Action Day campaign featured an inaugural industry roundtable discussion, which casted a spotlight on ideas to shift Singapore towards more responsible patterns of production and consumption, and achieve a circular economy. The event was co-hosted by Ricoh and Eco-Business.

Guest-of-Honour Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources & Ministry of Health, and senior business, government and academic leaders discussed ways on how Singapore can be more sustainable and resource efficient by applying circular economy principles.

Mr Kazuhisa Goto, Managing Director, Ricoh Asia Pacific, said: "To tap on the potential of the circular economy, businesses need to acknowledge that traditional methods must give way to newer and more dynamic operations and models. This will involve increased collaboration vertically and horizontally across industries. This roundtable discussion is a great starting point for businesses seeking to embark on the green journey."

"For Ricoh, we constantly strive to achieve environmental conservation and profits simultaneously by developing eco-friendly technologies and fine-tuning our manufacturing and procurement processes.

It is a journey that does not have immediate outcomes but will be worthwhile in the long run. We hope more companies can join us in this journey for the greater good of the environment. All these will complement the government's sustainability plans as per the Budget 2017, Paris Agreement and Sustainable Singapore Blueprint," he added.

The following points were raised during the roundtable discussion:

- Business opportunities in a circular economy
- Business leaders need to change mindset

and relook their business models to design circularity into their production cycle right from the start.

- Businesses cannot work alone, they need to work with all stakeholders to find new, regenerative ways of manufacturing goods.
- Resources are recovered but many are not designed to be recyclable. There are business opportunities that can stimulate new innovations, especially in the area of redesign.
- Employee buy-in and education are necessary for companies to transition into circular business strategies. Legislating for a circular economy
- Judicious legislation is needed. Otherwise, it will impede development and growth.
- Legislation can help in setting and facilitating the right conditions and environment to motivate and nudge development for a circular economy and its practices among businesses and individuals.
- Mandatory waste reporting will be introduced in the coming years in Singapore, along with guidelines for sustainable packaging – a move that will help to raise standards in the industry and encourage circular practices.
- The government can also play a role in introducing circular economy concepts to education curriculum from an early age.

Obstacles to the circular economy

- The circular economy concept needs to be simplified so people can understand and adopt it as a practice.
- Awareness and knowledge are key for the transition to a circular economy model.
- Consumer behaviour needs to change; and 'nudges' can be used such that consumers are motivated to return and/or recycle products.
- Businesses need to be engaged to help them realise the competitive advantage of adopting

circular economy principles.

New technologies for a circular economy

- New technologies and innovation will result in more robust and durable products.
- Technological innovations will enable the economic case for adapting all waste streams into useful resources.
- All stakeholders need to embrace both innovation and systems-level thinking to design and implement circular economy practices.

According to the United Nations, the demand for products and services will spike as the world population continues to grow to 8.5 billion by 2030, and 9.7 billion in 2050. If the population reaches 9.7 billion, the equivalent of almost three planets could be required to provide the natural resources needed to sustain current lifestyles.

In February this year, Ricoh and Eco-Business launched the inaugural Eco Action Day Circular Economy Challenge. Participants were challenged to create innovative solutions to improve sustainable consumption and production patterns in the city-state.

Team MSW (First Prize)

Team MSW, a group of four young professionals aged between 27 and 29 years old, clinched the overall win with its project on the upcycling of durian husks. Often considered as waste and byproduct by many Singaporeans, the team came up with a circular solution to reduce the use of virgin material.

The team proposed collecting durian husks from the point of sale and having them returned into the supply chain as raw materials to make takeaway containers for the durian fruit, hence reducing the use of non-biodegradable materials such as styrofoam boxes. Team MSW presented their idea to the distinguished guests at the roundtable. They also walked away with a sponsored trip to Japan, which includes a tour to Ricoh's newly built Eco Business Development Centre.

Team Hangary for Change (Merit Prize)

Team Hangary for Change, a group of three youths aged between 18 and 19, clinched the merit prize with its proposal for a fitness company to adopt a leasing model and using cradle-to-cradle design

to increase modularity of fitness equipment. The proposed idea is for the fitness company to start a trial by leasing equipment to customers, aside from the conventional purchase of fitness equipment. The idea of providing Singaporeans with better access to fitness equipment on a tiered basis as a circular solution would reduce bulky waste items tremendously.

Project Coop-erative (Special Prize)

Project Coop-erative, a team of four working adults aged between 25 and 27 years old, finished as special prize winner with their project on the use of egg shells to enhance flexibility of bioplastics.

They suggested the use of egg shells, something that is discarded without much thought, to enhance flexibility of bioplastic products due to its characteristics in its nano-particle form. Waste matter such as egg shells can be repurposed to generate additional income for businesses.

Eco Action Day is an annual nationwide campaign which encourages awareness and action for the environment. It is held in conjunction with World Environment Day, which is celebrated on 5 June every year. It is Singapore's largest and longest led environmental initiative.

Eco Action Day has come a long way since its inception. To date, 1,207 organisations, schools, buildings and individuals have pledged positive actions for the environment in Singapore.

The success of Eco Action Day in Singapore has led to the creation of a regional platform in Asia Pacific this year, where nine other sales companies have been roped in for Ricoh Global Eco Action. They are Australia, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam.

In Singapore, Eco Action Day has gained the support of several public and private sector organisations for over a decade. This year's partners include the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, National Environment Agency, Singapore Environment Council, Energy Market Authority, Building and Construction Authority, Keppel Land, Keppel REIT, Global Compact Network Singapore, SMRT, EcoBusiness, among others.