Singapore to Explore Next-Generation Digital Government Services with Conversations as a Platform Proof-of-Concept

SINGAPORE, 12 July 2016 – Singapore is partnering with Microsoft on its "Conversations as a Platform" to explore opportunities in co-creating next-generation digital government services for a Smart Nation. At this year's World Cities Summit "Innovative Solutions for a Smart City" conference track, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister-In-Charge of the Smart Nation Initiative, announced that the Government will explore next-generation government services based on a shift towards conversational computing - specifically, the use of intelligent software programs known as chatbots for selected public services where appropriate. These chatbots will function as digital representatives, simulating human behaviour in order to make interactions simpler, more efficient, and more consistent.

In the mobile-first and cloud-first world that we all live in, citizens and constituents want public and business services that can interact with their digital lives – intelligent services that respond, act and communicate in fundamentally new ways that can augment human abilities and experiences and do so in a trustworthy manner. The Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) will explore with Microsoft on a new computing proof-of-concept (POC) that builds conversational intelligence into public services, with the aim of making them more anticipatory, accessible, engaging and inclusive for citizens and constituents.

"I believe there are more intuitive ways for government services to be delivered to our citizens. Everybody expects responsive and personalised interactions in real time. The recent quantum improvement of natural language processing means that 'conversations' will be the new medium. This joint research project with Microsoft to demonstrate the utility of conversational computing for public services will be all the more pertinent," said Dr Vivian Balakrishnan.

Conversations as a Platform represents a fundamental shift where the power of human language, artificial intelligence and machine learning are applied pervasively through computing interface and interaction. Essentially, computing systems, their apps and services, are infused with intelligence and context that shows up in the form of a bot to enable productive human to machine interaction within a single conversation – whether spoken or text – rather than needing individuals to navigate through a sea of icons to find and use multiple applications or look through pages and pages of Websites to accomplish tasks.

"As everything around us becomes more digitised, Conversations as a Platform is a new shift that applies the understanding of human language to computers and computing, which can transform every industry," said Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft. "We're excited to partner with organisations like the Government of Singapore to help transform its engagements with citizens and businesses to seize the opportunities ahead."

"As part of a Digital Government, IDA continues to explore partnership opportunities with the industry to co-create digital solutions for citizens and businesses. We have done so with virtual assistant 'Ask Jamie,' which has been successfully rolled out to some government agencies including IDA. We are happy to work with more partners, including Microsoft, to test out POCs which may enhance the way citizens and businesses interact online with the Government," said Jacqueline Poh, Managing Director of IDA.

The POC, which will be implemented in three phases, will involve intelligent chatbots, where users are able to converse with and call upon any applications within a single website to complete tasks. It will also explore potential future scenarios, including services that cater to a multi-lingual and multi-generational population.

- Phase One will see chatbots drawing from a vast database to answer simple factual questions from users of selected public services.
- This will transit into Phase Two, where chatbots expand their capability to help users complete simple tasks and transactions within government websites.
- Following this, Phase Three will see chatbots responding to personalised queries from users, further enhancing user engagement by providing an interactive conversational experience.

A Microsoft Centre of Excellence for Leadership in Digital Transformation for Government and Industry will be established to originate, develop and showcase new and innovative solutions that transform digital citizen and consumer services for better living. The Centre will also design and develop the next generation of services and interfaces influenced by this new shift to conversational computing, and incubate and nurture local innovators to strengthen the capabilities of entrepreneurs and startups for the new economy. The CoE will also support the POC with IDA.

About IDA
The mission of the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) is to develop information technology and telecommunications within Singapore with a view to serve citizens of all ages and companies of all sizes. IDA does this by actively supporting the growth of innovative technology companies and start-ups in Singapore, working with leading global IT companies as well as developing excellent information technology and telecommunications infrastructure, policies and capabilities for Singapore. For more news and information, visit www.ida.gov.sg. Follow IDA on Facebook (www.facebook.com/IDA.Singapore) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/IDAsg).

About Microsoft
Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT" @microsoft) is the leading platform and productivity company for the mobile-first, cloud-first world, and its mission is to empower every person and every organisation on the planet to achieve more.

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About Smart Nation
Singapore strives to be a Smart Nation, in which our people are empowered by technology to lead meaningful and fulfilled lives. By harnessing the power of networks, data and info-comm technologies, we endeavour to improve living, create economic opportunity and build a closer community. We have the conducive environment to experiment, prototype and deploy innovative solutions that can be shared with other global cities. It is an exciting journey, and we want your ideas to help us realise our vision. For more information, please visit www.smartnation.sg.

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