

For Immediate Release

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CASE complaints hit record high in 2013

Consumer complaints have reached record levels, with a total of 29,254 complaints received by the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) last year, an increase of 13.7% from the recorded 25,733 complaints in 2012. CASE successfully helped to resolve 77.5% of the cases handled last year, an increase of 2% from the 75.5% resolution rate in 2012, as well as helped consumers to recover a total of \$2,356,072.70.

	2011	2012	2013
No. of complaints	22,240	25,733	29,254
Filed cases	1,396	1,765	1,452
Resolution rate (filed cases)	70.5%	75.5%	77.5%
Amount recovered	\$3,585,299.81	\$3,378,675.38	\$2,356,072.70

Table 1: Comparison of total complaints, filed complaints, resolution rate and amount recovered for consumers in the past three years

However, the rise in complaints does not necessarily mean that business standards have fallen. A number of factors could have contributed to the figures, including greater willingness and empowerment by consumers to complain, higher expectations of quality services and lower tolerance for poor business practices within the industry.

The breakdown of the top 10 industries with the most number of complaints can be viewed in the table below. Please view *Annex A* for some examples of complaint cases under these industries.

No.	2012	Total	2013	Total	% +/-
1	Motorcars	2,255	Motorcars	3,302	+ 46.4%
2	Beauty	1,984	Electrical & Electronics	2,314	+ 23.5%
3	Electrical & Electronics	1,874	Beauty	1,937	- 2.4%
4	Timeshare	1,870	Handphones	1,909	+ 52.2%
5	Contractors	1,532	Furniture	1,785	+ 36.7%
6	Travel	1,436	Contractors	1,779	+ 16.1%
7	Telecommunications	1,435	Timeshare	1,512	- 19.1%
8	Maid Agencies	1,351	Telecommunications	1,511	+ 5.3%
9	Furniture	1,306	Travel	1,378	- 4.0%
10	Handphones	1,254	Maid Agencies	1,250	- 7.5%

Table 2: Comparison of the ranking of the top 10 industries complained against in 2012 and 2013

Motorcar Industry

In 2013, the motorcar industry still remained as the number one industry with the highest number of complaints with an astounding 46.4% increase. The majority of the complaints were about defective motorcars as compared with the previous year, where the majority of complaints were about unsatisfactory services. This large increase could be due to the fact that COE of new cars have continue to rise. Hence there are more transactions for second-hand cars which are generally less costly.

Electrical & Electronics and Handphone Industry

Last year, the beauty industry switched ranks with the electrical & electronics industry, with the electrical & electronics industry now at number two and the beauty industry at number three. The number of complaints involving the electrical & electronics industry increased substantially by 23.5% while the beauty industry complaints fell slightly by 2.4%.

The industry that made the greatest shift in ranking is the handphone industry, which jumped six ranks from number ten to number four with a 52.2% increase in complaints.

With greater wealth and more affordable living, more people are buying electronic devices like cameras and mobile devices like handphones and tablets. The top nature of complaints for these two industries is defective goods, followed by misrepresentation for the handphone industry and unsatisfactory services for the electrical & electronics industry. CASE has been discouraging unfair practices from errant retailers in this industry by working with the management organisations of malls to put up alert lists to identify retailers with the highest number of customer complaints filed with CASE at Sim Lim Square and People's Park Complex. The alert lists have helped to make consumers more aware of the retailers who persistently commit unfair practices. Consumers will be more wary and keep alert for these stores when shopping. We may expand this practice to other shopping hubs that have high volume of complaints as well.

Beauty Industry

Although the number of beauty complaints fell slightly by 2.4%, the overall complaint numbers are still high, with the beauty industry ranked at number three. The top nature of complaints for the beauty industry is on requests for refunds due to pressure selling of beauty packages, inappropriate beauty treatments and unsatisfactory services provided by the beauticians. Common sales tactics include using free gifts or highly discounted beauty treatments to entice consumers to enter the beauty salon in order to hard-sell beauty packages to the consumer.

Furniture Industry

The furniture industry jumped four ranks from number nine to number five due to a 36.7% increase in the number of complaints. Once again, the top nature of complaints is on defective goods, followed by failure to honour the contractual agreement, such as delivering the furniture at a later date than promised or delivering the wrong set of furniture. In November 2013, CASE highlighted to the public about two furniture companies with a high number of complaints on

delayed deliveries through a consumer alert on our website. The alert reminded consumers to exercise prudence and not to pay in full up front to the retailer before the furniture is delivered.

Timeshare Industry

There was an improvement in the number of complaints for the timeshare industry which fell by 19.1% from 1,870 complaints to 1,512 complaints. This could be because consumers are more aware of timeshare scams in recent years and current timeshare owners know that they should be on guard against firms who claim to be able to dispose of their timeshare memberships.

Travel Industry

The complaints for the travel industry fell in numbers from 1,436 complaints to 1,378 complaints and in rank, a drop from number six to number nine in the top ten industries ranking list. The top nature for complaints involving the travel industry usually includes unsatisfactory services and requests for refund.

Despite the fall in numbers, complaints involving the travel industry remain an area of concern, especially with the sudden closure of Five Stars Tours recently which left a large number of consumers in the lurch. CASE will be working on the implementation of an insurance scheme for our CaseTrust accredited travel agencies, similar to our Spa and Wellness accreditation scheme, to ensure that consumers will be insured if a travel agency suddenly closes down without warning. Meanwhile, consumers should always purchase travel insurance immediately upon booking and paying to protect themselves from any unfortunate incidents that could occur.

Moving Forward

CASE will continue to embark on mass education programmes and increase the number of education talks. We will also set up booths at various locations to educate the public on the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act and their rights as consumers. One major event this year is the annual World Consumer Rights Day where we will be setting up a Carnival at SAFRA Toa Payoh on 15 March to celebrate the day. We hope that consumers will bring their families down to enjoy the games and activities, and learn more about consumer rights at the same time.

We are also planning to work with more business partners and associations to educate and promote consumer rights. CASE will be organising a “New Home” seminar in late March for people who are planning to buy new homes. We will be partnering with several organisations to conduct this seminar.

CASE will continue to put in our utmost effort in championing consumers’ interests and promoting an environment of fair and ethical businesses practices in the future.

Lim Biow Chuan
President
Consumers Association of Singapore