

The Straits Times Forum

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### **CASE has options to go after errant firms**

We refer to the letters, "Case can do little if a firm doesn't respond" (Jan 3) and "Can other party in a dispute just not cooperate with probe?" (Jan 6).

We are sorry to learn of Mr Alfred Ng's experience with his home renovation. Based on our checks, the interior design firm engaged by Mr Ng and his wife is not accredited by CaseTrust.

Businesses accredited under the CaseTrust scheme for renovation businesses are required to use the CaseTrust Standard Renovation Contract. They must clearly state the amounts to be paid at various stages in a payment schedule and put in place a refund policy stipulating the timeframe and conditions for any refund. When consumers request mediation with CaseTrust-accredited businesses to resolve a deadlock, they are required to do so as part of their dispute resolution process.

Consumers may visit the CaseTrust website to check if a business is accredited. In Mr Ng's case, as we did not receive a response from the interior design firm, we advised him and his wife to consider lodging a claim with the Small Claims Tribunal, which has jurisdiction to hear claims relating to contracts for the provision of services. Meanwhile, we have since established contact with the interior design firm and are trying to resolve the issue amicably.

On Dr Yik Keng Yeong's point on what happens if a party in the dispute refuses to engage with the Consumers Association of Singapore (Case), there are three things that Case can do.

First, where Case has reasonable grounds to believe that a business is egregious and has engaged in questionable or unfair practices, Case would flag up the business to alert consumers. Consumers may visit the Case website for the list of businesses that have been flagged up by Case.

Second, Case is empowered under the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act (CPFTA) to enter into a voluntary compliance agreement with a business to cease the unfair practices and compensate affected consumers. Since 2018, we have signed such agreements with 17 businesses.

Third, Case can also refer errant businesses that persist in unfair practices to the Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore (CCCS) for investigation under the CPFTA. Since 2018, five such businesses referred by Case to CCCS have been investigated or are undergoing investigation by CCCS. Three injunctions have been obtained by CCCS to restrain errant businesses from engaging in unfair practices.

We encourage consumers who have encountered questionable or unfair practices to approach Case for assistance on its hotline 9795-8397, or its website <https://www.case.org.sg>

**Lee Siow Hwee**

Executive Director

Consumers Association of Singapore