



Accepting the Singapore Prestige Brand Awards for their firms were (from left) Mr Jimmy Fong, CEO of EpiCentre; Mr Choe Peng Sum, CEO of Frasers Hospitality; Ms Pengene Lee, executive director of Jollibean; Mr Ip Yiu Tung, chairman and CEO of Crystal Jade Culinary Concepts; and Mr Khoo Chow Huat, CEO of Mount Alvernia Hospital. ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

It lost its 'Apple' tag but kept core values

BY JONATHAN KWOK

IN 2006, the four-year-old Apple Centre had its name taken away by US electronics giant Apple Inc, which wanted to keep the name for itself.

But the home-grown retailer, which specialises in Apple products, did not let the setback dishearten it.

Founder and chief executive Jimmy Fong, 45, renamed it EpiCentre, which he says "is very similar to Apple Centre" and represents the firm's aim to be the epicentre of people's digital lifestyles.

It started from scratch to re-brand itself, working with marketing and public relations companies to spread awareness of the brand and its message.

The move has paid off, with EpiCentre being named the overall winner of the Promising Brands category at this year's Singapore Prestige Brand Award (SPBA).

The award, co-organised by the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises and Lianhe Zaobao, recognises companies

that have successfully managed and developed their brands to boost performance.

Now in its ninth year, the awards saw a total of 138 firms taking part this year, with 51 of them being named winners in five categories.

"Companies must claim 'mind share' by imbuing their customers with the unique ideas and values behind their products," said Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Education S. Iswaran, guest of honour at last night's ceremony at the Ritz-Carlton, Millenia.

"Today's increasingly sophisticated consumer base and crowded marketplace demand products with a distinctive brand and unique value proposition."

Mr Iswaran highlighted various government schemes to help firms in their branding and innovation efforts.

These include BrandPact by International Enterprise and Spring Singapore, and the Innovation Improvement Initiative Programme run by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency.

EpiCentre's Mr Fong said the SPBA

The winners

- **Promising Brands:** EpiCentre
- **Established Brands:** Jollibean
- **Heritage Brands:** Mount Alvernia Hospital
- **Regional Brands:** Frasers Hospitality
- **Most Popular Brand:** Crystal Jade Culinary Concepts
- **Special Merit:** Singapore Disability Sports Council, Singapore Eye Research Institute, Society for the Physically Disabled, Singapore Red Cross Society
- Jollibean and Cherie Hearts Group International were inducted into the SPBA Hall of Fame.

award will be important to his firm as it moves overseas. It has stores in Malaysia and China and is planning further expansion, especially in China.

Mount Alvernia Hospital bagged the prize of overall winner in the Heritage Brands category.

Its chief executive, Mr Khoo Chow Huat, said the hospital updated its logo three years back and that it communicates its brand and value propositions through its name cards, brochures and websites.

Serviced apartments chain Frasers Hospitality, the overall winner for the Regional Brands category, strives to achieve consistency in branding for its 43 properties in 25 cities worldwide, said CEO Choe Peng Sum.

"All the properties that we have need to meet a minimum standard, what we call the 'gold standard'," he said.

"So... someone who travels to London, when they go to Beijing or Sydney or Singapore, they will encounter the consistent 'home away from home'."

Crystal Jade Culinary Concepts was a winner in the Regional Brands category, and was also named Most Popular Brand.

Mr Ip Yiu Tung, who heads the restaurant chain, said it relies on satisfied customers to spread the word to others. It also engages overseas media when it expands its operations to new countries.