ShopBack crosses S$1b in cashback to users, says experimentation is still key

Being app-driven sets it apart from competitors in markets such as the US and Germany

By Benjamin Cher
benjamincher@sph.com.sg

LOYALTY platform ShopBack has crossed the S$1 billion in cashback to users since its inception 11 years ago, and is not looking to stop trying new things.

Its co-founder Joel Leong told *The Business Times* that crossing the S$1 billion threshold is proof that the flywheel for ShopBack is working, given the platform's efforts to drive value for its users, merchants and the platform itself.

"Our goal as a platform is to make sure this flywheel makes sense for them, the goals they are aiming for and how we can help them," he said. "We keep doing new things, new things that refresh what ShopBack is, and that's what makes it exciting for us."

For example, the loyalty platform started out targeting marketplaces like Lazada and Shopee, but now also has brands from other categories of products and services, including merchants such as Uniqlo, Guardian and Lego, and travel services such as Klook, Agoda and Emirates.

ShopBack offers users real money cash back for online and in-store purchases, vouchers and payments, by earning commissions from its partnered merchants and then sharing a portion of these with its users, allowing them to withdraw cash or use it for future deals.

In its new category such as ShopBack Play, for instance, users earn cashback for playing casual mobile games.

In markets such as Taiwan and Australia, another new feature, ShopBack Snap, lets users scan receipts for offline in-store purchases.

Some hits, some misses

The company has been through some failures as well, having shuttered features such as ShopBack Go, through which users designated a credit card to be tracked for offline use, and ShopBack Paylater, a buy-now-pay later (BNPL) service launched after the acquisition of Hoolah.

In May 2024, the company announced layoffs, cutting 195 roles or nearly a quarter (about 24 per cent) of its headcount then.

Despite these setbacks, Leong is undeterred. ShopBack is about experimentation and doing new things, he said, and evaluating if these new features make sense for all three parties – the users, merchants and ShopBack itself.

He noted: "I never want the team to stop experimenting, even if it means that now and then, there might be one or two that we might not get right."

The unsuccessful BNPL business was evaluated, and it emerged that ShopBack Pay, a pure payment business, was better for users, merchants and ShopBack.

This payment feature is growing and expanding into different markets, and would not have been discovered if ShopBack had not experimented with BNPL, noted Leong.

Aside from new features and categories, ShopBack has now expanded beyond the region, entering new markets in Germany in 2023 and the US, in 2025.

ShopBack's expansion beyond the Asia-Pacific is backed by what it has learned from the region nearer home. In the Asia-Pacific, it is in 11 markets – Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Vietnam and Hong Kong.

The foray into the US and Germany was based on the strength of the e-commerce market there. Germany, for example, is estimated to be one of Europe's largest e-commerce markets, with user growth projected to grow from 47.7 million in 2025 to 51.8 million by 2029, reported the International Trade Administration.

ShopBack's app-driven approach also differentiates it from its competitors in the US and Germany, which have favoured a desktop approach. ShopBack Play was brought to the US under its push to differentiate itself from the incumbents.

ShopBack had a banner year in 2025, clocking S$7 billion in gross merchandise value to merchants and brand partners, a growth of 30% year on year.



Joel Leong, a co-founder of ShopBack, says: "We keep doing new things, new things that refresh what ShopBack is, and that's what makes it exciting for us." PHOTO: SHOPBACK

"A lot of merchants tell us that they are willing to take a chance with us because they want to grow their app business … If you look at the incumbents in those markets, the majority of their orders come from the desktop computer," said Leong.

The platform's German and American competitors are formidable; they include Honey, a similar affiliate marketing platform acquired by PayPal for US$4 billion in 2020.

ShopBack has previously taken on incumbents and come out on top. When it entered Australia, for example, the incumbent Cashrewards was bigger than ShopBack's combined markets.

Cashrewards shuttered in September 2025, when its owner ANZ Bank's corporate-venture arm 1835i offloaded its major investments and then closed the following month.

Leong noted: "If we really play our cards right, we create a better experience for the user, we differentiate ourselves. There's a good chance we can get a good market share in these markets."

The US and German markets have been stable for a while and need someone to shake things up, he added.

Focus and funding

Looking ahead, Leong sees key areas of focus being not just in artificial intelligence, but also in the offline space. ShopBack is looking to tap AI for both efficiency and personalisation.

ShopBack's business model turns on having data on its users' spending habits across brands and being able to push personalised offers to them, benefiting both these users and the brands.

Moving more into the offline space would also give ShopBack's business model a boost, as it would gather data on users' offline spending for a more complete picture of their spending habits.

"How can we help them get rewarded for that on an everyday basis? I think that's important for us," said Leong.

Solid performance

ShopBack had a banner year in 2025, clocking S$7 billion in gross merchandise value to merchants and brand partners, a growth of 30 per cent year on year.

Orders by users grew 35 per cent year on year to 120 million in 2025; the platform remained earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation positive.

This financial performance comes amid work on a dual-listing bridge between the Singapore Exchange and Nasdaq. As ShopBack has taken on funding from 65 Equity Partners' Anchor Fund, there is some expectation of a local listing down the road.

Leong is not ruling out using the bridge, but stressed that ShopBack is agnostic about all funding options. "What I've come to learn in 10 years of business is that as long as you have a good business, all options will be on the table for you," he added.

Mapletree Investments, MPACT appoint SP Group to build district cooling system

By Chloe Lim
chloeljh@sph.com.sg

MAPLETREE Investments and Mapletree Pan Asia Commercial Trust (MPACT) have appointed SP Group to design, build and operate a new distributed district cooling (DDC) system at HarbourFront Precinct.

The system will connect five buildings – Bank of America HarbourFront, the new HarbourFront Centre, the existing HarbourFront Towers 1 and 2, and VivoCity – supplying chilled water through three injection nodes.

The buildings will rely on a shared system that aggregates cooling demand, to achieve economies of scale and improve cooling efficiency, instead of each building running its own chiller.

"This reduces operating costs and carbon emissions, while freeing up valuable space previously used for individual cooling plants for operational or commercial use," said the companies in a joint statement on Tuesday (Jan 20).

The DDC network will be implemented over two phases, commencing in 2027. It is targeted to be fully operational by 2031.

The project will be one of Singapore's largest brownfield district cooling deployments. Located at HarbourFront Precinct, it supports Mapletree's plans to "rejuvenate… and enhance building energy efficiency" across the area, they added.

The venture is part of Mapletree's commitment to achieve net zero by 2050.

The DDC system is projected to hit over 5 per cent of savings in cooling-related expenses a year, with an installed cooling capacity of 17,150 refrigeration tonnes, said the companies.

It is expected to be 8 per cent more energy-efficient than the National Environment Agency's minimum energy efficiency standards for water-cooled chilled water systems in industrial facilities, upon its full implementation.

The system "will also reduce carbon emissions by about 13,700 tonnes over the 20-year operating period", noted the companies. "This is comparable to the emissions from powering 550 three-room HDB households a year."

This is Singapore's second brownfield DDC deployment, after SP Group's work at Tampines Central in March 2025.

COMMENTARY

Forward guidance: Why it matters and how to get it right

By Tan Boon Gin and Michael Tang

INVESTORS do not just focus on a company's past performance; they also buy into its future.

In a market where confidence drives capital, forward guidance – the practice of sharing credible statements about future performance and strategy – matters more than ever.

Singapore's stock market is gaining momentum. The Monetary Authority of Singapore has announced initiatives such as the S$5 billion Equity Market Development Programme to catalyse investor demand and a S$30 million Value Unlock programme to help listed companies strengthen investor engagement and sharpen shareholder value creation.

While these two programmes are significant levers, they cannot replace the power of clear communication from listed companies themselves.

With investor interest in Singapore stocks picking up, companies have a golden opportunity to strengthen fundamentals, enhance communications and demonstrate value creation.

In our many engagements with investors, forward-looking statements – commonly referred to as earnings or forward guidance – rank high on investors' wish lists. Research analysts and institutional investors consistently emphasise the importance of anticipated earnings and the strategy the business will employ to achieve those results.

Yet, few companies provide such statements. Why? Misperceptions. Let us clarify three biggest myths.



As investor interest in Singapore stocks picks up, companies have a golden opportunity to strengthen fundamentals, enhance communications and demonstrate value creation, say the writers. PHOTO: CMG

Myth 1: Forward guidance is frowned upon by the authorities

Many companies fear regulatory backlash if projections miss the mark. One common misconception is that forward guidance will attract regulatory scrutiny – particularly if the forward guidance subsequently proves inaccurate – and result in disciplinary consequences.

In reality, companies can and should offer such guidance. While not mandatory, Singapore Exchange Regulation (SGX RegCo) strongly encourages issuers to provide forward guidance to inform shareholders of their strategic direction and business targets.

The key lies in ensuring that the forward guidance is carefully prepared, based on credible methodologies and assumptions, and is realistic and defensible, in line with the principles set out in the Listing Rules.

Internal models, historical performance and external market data should underpin these projections. Offering a range rather than single-point estimates is acceptable when it reflects the inherent uncertainties.

If an issuer is not confident to provide quantitative forward guidance, giving forward-looking disclosures in narrative form around the companies' strategies, or intended activities, would still be helpful.

These practical guidelines ensure that investors can reasonably rely on the forward guidance.

Issuers should decide, based on their own industry and business model, which metrics are appropriate for forward guidance. Examples observed in the market include traditional metrics such as revenue, earnings and costs, as well as other metrics such as assets under management or project completion milestones.

Myth 2: Companies need an auditor to sign off forward-looking guidance

Another myth is that an auditor must sign off on forward-looking statements.

This is not the case. Auditor confirmation applies only in specific circumstances under the Listing Rules, such as when a profit forecast is accepted from a vendor in a Chapter 10 transaction.

What truly matters is that the issuer follows the guidelines above, and the board stands by the issuer's forward guidance.

Myth 3: Forward guidance must be updated immediately

A third misconception is that forward guidance must be updated immediately in response to changes in the issuer's circumstances.

Again, that is not correct. Regulators understand that forward guidance relates to an uncertain future and therefore do not require instant updates for every change.

This means that issuers are not required to amend forward guidance immediately when a material event, such as winning or losing a major contract, occurs, or when there is firm evidence of significant deviations between projections and actual results.

Instead, they need only announce the material event or the existence of such significant deviations, and whether the forward guidance can still be relied on.

The magnitude of the differences between the forward guidance and the actual results, as well as any updates for future periods, need only be provided at the next financial report or business update.

For example, while preparing its financial statements for a particular period, if an issuer finds that actual results materially deviate from prior projections, it should promptly announce the fact that the actual results may materially deviate from the forward guidance – similar to a profit warning.

It would also be helpful if the issuer discloses whether the actual results would be better or worse than the forward guidance. The issuer need only provide the magnitude of the deviation, as well as updates to forward guidance for future periods, in the upcoming financial report or business update.

While issuers are encouraged to provide forward guidance consistently, issuers may also choose to pause or stop if they assess that conditions are too uncertain for guidance to be meaningful and disclose the reasons for doing so.

We would also encourage companies to update shareholders on their performance against previous guidance, even when such guidance has been met, as this helps to build trust.

Forward guidance is an opportunity, not a risk

There are three key points about forward guidance that issuers and investors should remember.

First, issuers are always and ultimately responsible for the accuracy and integrity of their announcements, including forward guidance. Importantly, all material information including forward guidance must be made public via SGXNet to ensure a level playing field.

Second, investors should equally recognise that forward guidance, by its nature, relates to an uncertain future. It would therefore not be reasonable to expect issuers to meet their projections with absolute certainty.

Third, in reviewing compliance with the Listing Rules, SGX RegCo will adopt a sensible approach. Forward-looking disclosures that issuers announce in good faith, accompanied by appropriate disclosures to enable investors to appreciate both the basis for the projections, as well as the inherent uncertainties involved, should in the ordinary course of events not attract regulatory queries.

SGX RegCo continues to support disclosures that promote transparency and informed decision-making. Forward guidance should not be viewed as compliance, but a competitive edge. It signals confidence and builds credibility, which can underpin value.

Forward guidance, when thoughtfully and responsibly prepared, can be a useful tool in achieving these outcomes.

The writers are from SGX RegCo; Tan Boon Gin is CEO and Michael Tang is head of listing compliance