

# Their secret – win over customers

Winning firms say this is more crucial than ever in these difficult times

■ BY ELIZABETH WILMOT

BUSINESSES should persevere in these tough economic times, and not give in to the prevailing mood of fear.

That was the message from Mr Lim Boon Heng, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, speaking at the Enterprise 50 (E50) Awards dinner last night.

The E50 Awards recognise the most enterprising privately owned local businesses in Singapore. The top 10 collected trophies from Mr Lim last night.

"The recovery must come," he said, and praised the toughness of the E50.

"It is not easy to do business; it is much harder to be ranked among the top 50. Thus, you are the toughest among the lot. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. So you are our toughest."

He also urged businesses not to view trade unions as a problem, as they could be an advantage in aiding employers to access funding for training purposes.

Many of the winners backed Mr Lim's comments on the need for perseverance.

One key theme expressed by the winning companies was the vital role of maintaining good customer relations.

"In terms of the global crisis, customers may be reducing costs, but because of the trust that they have in the company, they will still come to you," said Ms Angie Tang, chief executive of Franklin Offshore Holdings, which took away the top award. Franklin provides services to major oil companies, oil rig owners and offshore contractors.

Ms Tang added: "We are lucky that for



Winners all – (from left) Ms Angie Tang, chief executive of Franklin Offshore Holdings which bagged the top award; Mr Lim Chung Chun, chief executive of iFAST Corp, which came second; and Mr David Loke, group managing director of TruMarine, which came third. Many of the winners agreed with Mr Lim Boon Heng's advice that businesses should persevere and not give in to the prevailing mood of fear. ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

Franklin Offshore, over the years, we have gained the confidence and trust of our customers so if they can, their first choice will be to come to us."

Mr David Loke, group managing director of TruMarine, a specialist in turbochargers which clinched third place in the awards, said: "We need to deliver better value so that if there's a requirement,

they (customers) will come back to you."

He said the company went out of its way to better cater to customers.

TruMarine had drawn on the assistance of Spring Singapore to improve the quality of its products and services to keep its customers happy.

The second-place winner, unit trust and finance services provider iFAST

Corp, had a similar outlook on maintaining a vigilant approach to satisfying customers.

"We had a clear vision, and we pushed ahead with our service delivery through good and bad times. That won us the confidence of our customers, and that allowed us to achieve a position of leadership for our business," said Mr Lim

## 'Toughest' firms

THE top 10 winners of Enterprise 50 Awards:

1. Franklin Offshore Holdings
2. iFAST Corporation
3. TruMarine
4. Greenpac (S)
5. Farlin Timbers
6. Pinnacle International
7. Wee Tiong (S)
8. Super Steel
9. Samwoh Corporation
10. Goh Joo Hin

Chung Chun, iFast's chief executive.

The E50 Awards, now in its 14th year, was jointly organised by The Business Times and accounting giant KPMG. OCBC Bank was the sponsor.

This year's elite 50 come from a broad spectrum of industries such as business services, information technology, engineering services, logistics and retail.

KPMG, a co-organiser for the first time, said judging criteria had been changed this year to become more forward-looking and qualitative.

"In particular, the projected growth of applicants, rather than just their historical financial records, has been given more weight," said Mr Danny Teoh, managing partner of KPMG in Singapore.

"Looking at the top 10, they all share several common characteristics. These include an established strong financial track record, which underlines their business acumen and financial prudence."

egwilmot@sph.com.sg