

SmarTone

Anna Yip
叶安娜

SmarTone Chief Executive Officer
SmarTone行政总裁



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Grasp the present, look to the future – Anna Yip

既争朝夕 放眼未来 — 叶安娜

The price competition in the local mobile telecommunications industry is leading to perpetual price wars. With the dawn of the 5G era, there will soon be radical changes to the industry's overall eco-system. Anna Yip, Chief Executive Officer of SmarTone, believes price wars are merely short-term, stopgap strategies among competitors and that only a superior network with thoughtful and flexible services can truly stand out in the market, which she says "is exactly the competition edge of SmarTone".

Knowing the market and customer base

As Anna mentioned on a number of occasions, taking part in price wars is by no means a long-term or sustainable way to maintain a company's competitiveness. She points out that reducing prices is easy, however, what customers really value is service quality. One single strategy cannot cater for all customers, therefore, SmarTone continues to conduct market researches and focus groups in order to tailor-made service plans for customers with different needs. These include the SuperCare Family Plan with several SIM cards for families and mobile phone workshops for elderlies; monthly plans especially designed for tertiary students; multi-destination with free data-sharing service plans for frequent travellers, travellers can even choose different service day plans to meet their own needs; the recently launched all-digital self-service brand, Birdie, provides millennials with an online-only sales

and customer service platform with service plans that are even more flexible. Customers can download and use the Birdie mobile app to share their user experiences. She adds, "The key is still remaining relevant to the actual market conditions and needs because price is not the only factor customers consider."

SmarTone conducts market researches and collects customer feedback from different channels on a regular basis, and recognizes what customers value most is a good network experience. However, there is a general misunderstanding in the market that theoretical network speeds equal network performance. In fact, as many have already experienced, even when a network speed test result is satisfactory, online browsing is not necessarily smooth. Anna says that this is because online browsing experience will be affected by many other factors in addition

to network speed. For this reason, actual network quality and user experience cannot be assured when you only tout network speed. In view of this, SmarTone redefined a new standard of telecommunications services with a "5S" designation last year. 5S stands for Speed, Stability, Seamlessness, Security and Service. "People think the higher the network speed, the better the online experience. In fact, many factors, including network stability, seamlessness and even customer service, can directly influence the overall user experience of customers. That's why '5S' is the new standard that focuses squarely on the overall customer experience."

Opportunities despite fierce competition

Anna thinks fierce market competition also brings about positive impact to business development. "During last year's price wars,



Anna encourages creativity among her team members
叶安娜鼓励同事创新

SmarTone attracted many new customers by offering a superior network and thoughtful services. The telecommunications business actually involves a great deal of fixed investments, so operating costs don't vary much regardless of the number of customers. While we will continue to invest moderately, price wars have given SmarTone an opportunity to acquire more new customers, which has had a positive impact on our business."

While attracting new customers is crucial, retaining current customers is just as important. SmarTone's customer churn rate is the lowest among local telecommunications service providers. Anna points out that besides providing fast, stable and seamless network quality to customers, their enviable customer loyalty can also be attributed in large part to the efforts of their staff. "Our team has put a great deal of effort into bolstering customer loyalty, including offering suitable and competitive monthly plans to customers whose contracts are approaching to end soon. We also constantly provide thoughtful services and privileges like birthday cakes and free workshops for customers. Moreover, we reward selected customers with prestigious benefits, including a 24-hour service hotline, prestigious bespoke offers and diverse lifestyle experiences, to show them how important they are to us at SmarTone," she adds.

The 5G era early bird

The coming 5G network revolution will greatly increase data flow and reduce latency, providing a better online experience for consumers as well as providing a host of different business opportunities. SmarTone began developing its Information and

Communications Technology Solutions (ICT Solutions) a few years ago. Now with the 5G era approaching, SmarTone has sped up the development of its ICT business. SmarTone Innovation Hub, established in November of last year, develops new technology applications by building a cross-industry platform to assist and encourage corporate customers to move towards business digitalization. SmarTone's ICT business has achieved satisfying results in the early stage. Anna adds, "our ICT business is growing annually at 50%, generating positive word-of-mouth publicity by helping corporate clients increase overall productivity. We have discovered countless opportunities in labour-intensive industries such as manufacturing sector and service sector."

Standing at the cusp of the 5G era, SmarTone is certainly working hard to continually enhance its network quality. The territory's first 5G technology demonstration was successfully conducted early last year. Also, SmarTone became the first network operator to trial the FDD Massive MIMO technology and run a successful technical test of its License Assisted Access (LAA) technology, which will significantly boost current network speed and stability.

Seeing is believing

"Seeing is believing" is the core of Anna's management philosophy. She says that no one really knows whether a plan is good or bad until the results are seen. Therefore, she tries to avoid implementing plans that may take a very long time to see the results. The earlier results are seen, the sooner we can conclude if a project is effective or not. Monitoring interim results is what motivates the SmarTone team to continue working hard too. "Actually, I encourage my team to make mistakes, as long

as the costs aren't too high. If I don't tolerate some mistakes, my team will be exceedingly careful, which will just block their creativity. However, I do ask them to detect mistakes as early as possible. If we discover dead ends too late, it will be difficult for us to remedy the situation and get back on the right track," Anna notes.

Anna also believes strongly in the power of teamwork. She thinks senior staff bring experience and stability, while younger staff introduce innovation. Together they motivate a business to constantly strive for excellence. She adds that being decisive and determined is still an essential management trait today. However, unlike in the past, managers have to find out how to sustain a company's creativity more than just issuing orders. She also touched on how important it is to promote business creativity and development from the bottom up. "Even if we think a product is excellent and attractive, continued persistence will be futile if the market does not accept it. We must keep on improving and developing our products and services until customers truly like them. Under today's new economic model, more than ever we need our frontline staff to lead the company's creative thinking from the bottom up through their experiences meeting with and observing customers."

Balancing work and life

Focusing on one thing too much can hinder flexible thinking, so even though Anna is deeply engaged in her work, she insists on living a balanced life. Apart from her work responsibilities, this mother of one enjoys doing yoga, going to the gym, hiking and reading. She jokingly says she is also quite busy during her time off, adding - "I like getting in touch with the world and learning things outside of work. I'm always too busy to sit down and read a book, so I watch sharing clips on the net instead to help broaden my horizons."

She admits that obstacles in work and family are inevitable, but the most important thing is to find a step-by-step way to deal with issues when they arise. She explains her approach to problem-solving - "First, you need to understand the situation you are facing, then you examine the causes and effects so you can approach the issue honestly. Finally, it is important to fully let go of any unhappy memories." Only when we face adversity calmly can we be fearless against the challenges that confront us.

本地流动电讯业竞争激烈，减价战不时出现，而随着5G时代来临，行业生态即将出现巨变。SmarTone行政总裁叶安娜深信，减价战只是同行竞争的权宜之计，未来只有凭优质网络、贴心而灵活的服务，才能市场中脱颖而出——“这正是SmarTone的优势。”

需掌握市场情况客群结构

叶安娜过往在不同场合都强调，减价战并非长远及可持续维持公司竞争力的方法。她指出要减价是很容易，但客户看重的仍是服务质量，单一策略绝不能满足所有客群，因此SmarTone不断进行市场研究和分析，因应不同客户而度身订造契合其需要的服务计划——例如为家庭客户而设的多SIM“全家享”月费

计划，并为长者客户安排手机工作坊；为年轻客户而设的大专生月费计划；为经常往来香港及海外人士提供数据免费共享服务计划，外游人士亦可因应需要而选择不同的漫游日费计划；至于近期推出的全新网上自助服务品牌“自由鸟”，提供纯网上销售和客户服务平台，以及更具弹性的服务计划，更成立“自由鸟族群”，用户可于自由鸟手机应用程序内互相分享使用心得，则是针对千禧世代客户。“关键仍然是紧贴市场实际情况和需要，因为价钱不是客户唯一的考虑因素。”

SmarTone定时通过市场调查及不同渠道收集客户意见，了解到客户最着重的是良好的网络体验。然而，市场上

有很多误解，认为最高理论网络速度相等于网络表现，但很多时候即使网络测试速度结果理想，但上网时却不见得特别顺畅，相信是不少人共同的上网体验。叶安娜表示，因为上网是否顺畅，除受网速决定之外，还受到不同因素影响，故单纯标榜网速快慢，并不足以衡量真正的网络品质及体验。因此，去年SmarTone以“5S”来厘定电讯业服务新标准——快（Speed）、稳（Stability）、顺（Seamlessness）、安心（Security）及贴心（Service）：“坊间往往以为网速愈快，上网体验便愈好。事实上网络的稳定性、畅顺度，以至客户服务等，均直接影响客户整体网络体验，而5S正正是一套着重客户体验的新标准。”

“Actually, I encourage my team to make mistakes. If they are too scared to make errors and are exceedingly careful, that will just block their creativity.

我鼓励同事犯错，因为太害怕犯错，只会变得规行举步，窒碍创意。”



Anna reveals that SmarTone has sped up the developmental pace of its ICT business, which has achieved satisfying results in the early stage
叶安娜透露，SmarTone的ICT业务加速发展，初步取得相当理想的成绩



Anna considers her team to be close comrades
叶安娜视同事如战友，关系融洽



激烈竞争下的机遇

叶安娜认为激烈的市场竞争对业务发展也有正面影响。“减价战之下，SmarTone凭着优质网络及贴心服务，在过去一年吸纳了很多新客户。事实上电讯业涉及很多固定投资，无论客户人数多寡，营运成本亦不会有太大增减，我们亦会继续适当地投放资源，而减价战为SmarTone带来增加客户数量的机会，从而为我们的生意额带来正面影响。”

除了吸纳新客外，留住现有客户亦同样重要。SmarTone在香港电讯业内维持全行最低的现有客户流失率，除了为客户提供快、稳、顺的网络品质外，叶安娜亦归功于同事的努力。“同事在提升客户忠诚度及归属感方面花了很多功夫，如为快将满约的客户提供契合其需要而具竞争力的月费计划；公司亦不断为客户送上贴心的服务及优惠，如生日蛋糕及免费工作坊；更以优越礼遇回馈特选客户，包括设立24小时服务专线、安排度身订造的优越礼遇及多元化的品味生活体验，让他们感受到SmarTone对他们的重视。”

早着先机 迎接5G时代

未来的5G网络，能大大提升数据流量，兼能大幅缩短时延，除了令消费者有更佳的上网体验外，更衍生出不同的业务机遇。SmarTone早在多年前，已拓展信息及通讯科技解决方案（ICT Solutions），而随着5G时代临近，亦

加紧了ICT业务的发展步伐；于去年11月成立的SmarTone Innovation Hub，通过建立跨业界平台，研发新科技应用，协助企业客户迈向业务数码化，ICT业务初步取得令人满意的成果。“公司在ICT解决方案的业务规模按年增长50%，赢得知名企业客户口碑，协助他们提升工作效率。我们更发现在一些劳动密集型行业，例如制造和服务业等，仍然有很多发展机会。”

当然在5G时代来临前，SmarTone亦持续提升网络品质——去年初在香港进行首个5G技术展示，其后亦是首间网络商试行FDD Massive MIMO技术及首次成功试行LAA（License Assisted Access）技术测试，提高现时网络速度和稳定性。

Seeing is Believing

眼见为实（Seeing is Believing），是叶安娜的管理哲学核心。她笑言任何计划，只有看到结果才可判断是好是坏，故会尽量避免制定一些要经过很长时间才见成效的计划，因为愈早见到结果，便知道项目的可行性，同时这些“阶段成果”也可以成为同事继续坚持下去的动力。“其实我鼓励同事犯错，只要代价不太昂贵便可。因为若不容许他们有错，只会令同事变得例行举步，阻碍创意。不过我会要求他们及早发现错误，若太迟才知道行不通，事情便难以修正。”

叶安娜相信团队的力量，她认为年资长的同事带来经验和稳定性，年轻同事则可为团队引入新思维；相辅相成，企业才有不断进步的动力。她表示如今作为管理层，当然要有敢作决定的魄力，但要企业保持创造力，不能像以往一样，事事依赖管理层“发施号令”，更需要由下而上推动业务创新和发展：“即使我们以为某些产品多好、多吸引，但市场要是不接受，再坚持也是徒然，只有不断改进产品及服务，令客人喜欢才行。在今天的新经济模式下，我们更需要前线同事，通过他们亲身接触客人的经验和观察，再由下而上将创意思维引入企业之内。”

平衡生活之道

要有灵活的思维，就不能过分专注在单一的事情，叶安娜纵使投入工作，她也坚持活出平衡生活。工作以外，她是孩子的母亲，喜欢瑜伽、健身、爬山和阅读，她笑称业馀时间也忙过不休。“我喜欢接触工作以外的世界和知识，由于平日始终太忙，能够静静地看书的机会不多，因此较喜欢浏览一些分享短片，以扩展自己的眼光。”

她坦言在工作 and 家庭中，总会面对逆境的时候，但最重要是懂得一步一步离开艰难的处境：“先要明白眼前的景况，再确切理解当中的来龙去脉，然后认真处理问题，最后彻底放低不愉快的回忆。”大概只有能从容面对逆境，才能无惧面对挑战。