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Mr Mark Yong, manager of Ewins, says he gets more bargaining power when exhibiting with others as a group. TREVOR TAN

VENTURING ABROAD

More bang for your buck at trade fairs

Companies can join forces and apply for subsidies

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FED-UP with getting lousy booth positions at overseas trade fairs, Ewins decided to join forces with other furniture firms to exhibit in a pavilion for the first time last November.

It teamed up with five other Singapore firms to exhibit together at a trade fair in Paris and actually had a more fruitful trip.

"For other trade fairs that we go to, we're alone, and we don't have that kind of image and strength that the group did. With a pavilion, you have a big booth, you get bargaining power, you get to enjoy a better stand location," said Ewins manager Mark Yong. "If you go alone, they usually chuck you in some small, lousy corner."

The firm also managed to save about 50 per cent of the costs of exhibiting thanks to both economies of scale and subsidies from IE Singapore.

Entrusted with a mandate to help local firms venture abroad, IE Singapore is tying up with trade associations to reach out to companies that need assistance.

Mr Wong Toon Joon, deputy director of events management in IE Singapore, said: "Increasingly, SMEs are relying more on overseas market growth to sustain their revenue and profitability flows. Participating in

international trade fairs and business missions are effective methods of getting to know potential foreign business partners."

While attending such trade fairs can be costly, programmes like the International Marketing Activities Programme (iMAP) (see box) helps to subsidise some costs, such as renting exhibition space, constructing booths and marketing.

Mr Andrew Ng, president of Singapore Furniture Industries Council (SFIC), said: "This is useful to our local furniture players, many of them SMES, who are new to export and keen to penetrate new markets."

Furniture, being bulky in nature, is difficult to take on individual marketing trips. As such, trade fairs are a better platform to showcase products to a variety of potential clients at one go, added Mr Ng.

The council helps to link firms that want to band together to occupy a pavilion, whose costs will be subsidised only if there is a minimum of six companies.

"By being part of SFIC-organised Singapore pavilions in prestigious overseas furniture trade fairs, local furniture companies could also benefit from the clustering and tap on the grouped marketing efforts to garner better publicity and exposure," said Mr Ng.

Ewins was incorporated in 1967, focusing mainly on industrial and engineering hardware products. Over the past 40 years, it has grown steadily to become a major provider of furniture fittings to manufacturers in Singapore, as well as a supplier of builders' hardware.

Today, it exports to countries in Europe, Asia, and North and South America.