Empowering Businesses in Singapore with Seamless Efficiency and Growth Opportunities
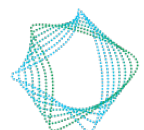
A case study of **GoBusiness**

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Developed by

GOVTECH
GOVERNMENT TECHNOLOGY
AGENCY OF SINGAPORE

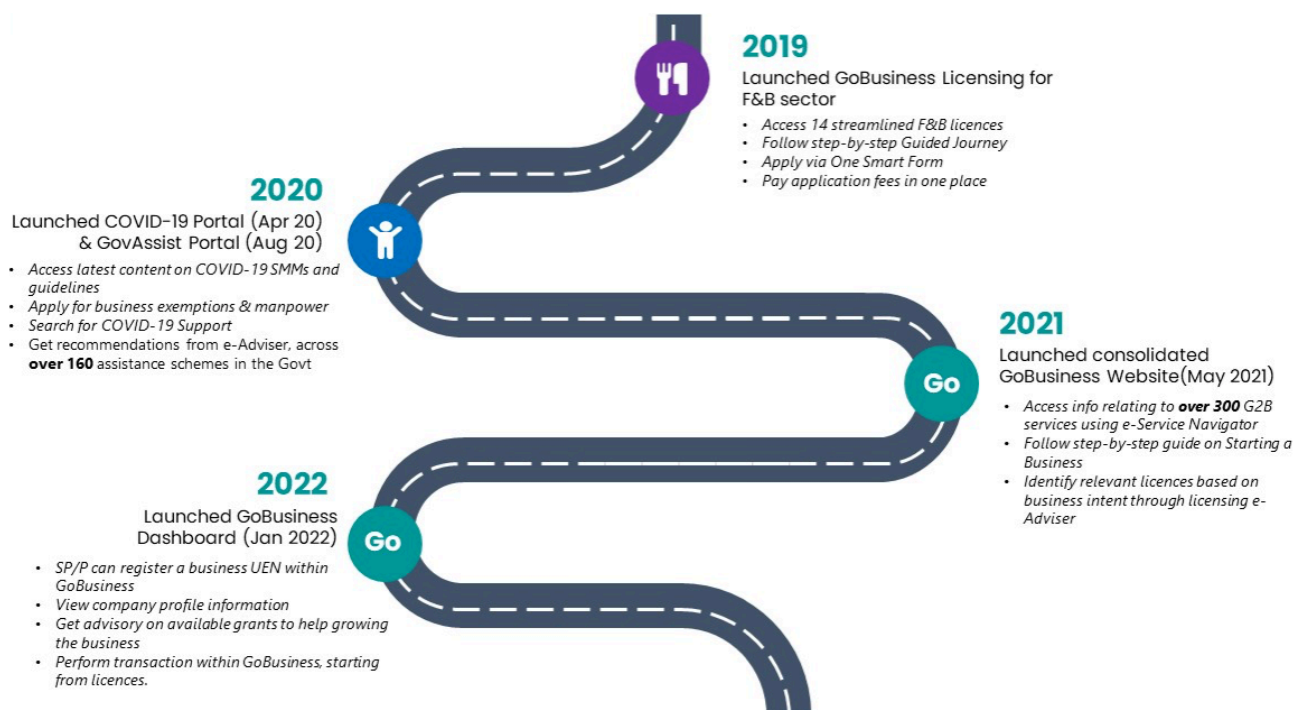# Evolution of GoBusiness

Figure 1. The GoBusiness evolution from 2019 to 2022.

What is GoBusiness?

GoBusiness serves as a central digital touchpoint for businesses in Singapore with integrated, personalised and seamless access to business information and services from the Singapore Government at every stage of their journey – from starting, to running and growing the business.

Businesses can easily access more than 300 government e-services from over 40 agencies, find the most updated business regulatory information and obtain relevant business recommendations, all on one platform.

Beyond the Business Start-up Guide, GoBusiness offers a suite of useful services and resources including online applications for licences and grants. Since its launch in 2019, the platform has received about more than seven million visits annually, with three million transactions taking place over the last three years.

Jointly developed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), the Smart Nation and Digital Government Office (SNDGO) and GovTech, GoBusiness is also part of the Moments of Life family of products that includes the LifeSG app.

But how did GoBusiness come about?

In the beginning: The F&B Service Journey

GoBusiness started out as an effort to solve the key challenges and problems faced by F&B business owners. The F&B sector in Singapore is a vibrant industry, with an average of three new F&B entrants to the market almost every week in the pre-Covid years.

But there were some issues. **F&B business owners faced long processing times for their licences, with some having to wait for 3-6 months** before they can start serving customers. And some had to deal with **as many as 14 government agencies, while others might have to fill in as many as 845 form fields**.

The application process can be somewhat confusing for new entrepreneurs who may not know the relevant licenses that they need to apply for – and in which order.

As part of the initial service journey analysis, the GoBusiness team interviewed over 40 F&B business owners on their experience in applying for licences, and the challenges they faced during the entire process. There were also brainstorming sessions with representatives from the various government agencies that have a stake in supporting business owners to figure out other existing service gaps to address.

Following this research phase, MTI partnered SNDGO and GovTech to explore how technology could address these common pain points faced by F&B business owners. As a result, the team envisioned GoBusiness as a one-stop portal to address these common issues.

The first phase, **GoBusiness Licensing for the F&B sector**, was launched in Oct 2019 and quickly achieved the following outcomes:

- Reduced the number of digital touchpoints from 14 to just one
- Reduced the number of Form Fields from as many as 845, to just 90
- **One Smart Form**: Introduced a smart form with a Tell-Us-Once policy, where business owners indicate their business intent, and the platform will consolidate the various forms required into one
- **One-stop online payment**: Once the business owners have filled up the One Smart Form and paid the required fees online, GoBusiness will forward the applications automatically to the agencies based on the sequence generated by the system, removing one hassle for business owners

The biggest achievement was **reducing the typical licence application waiting time from 12-16 weeks to less than 4 weeks** – saving valuable time and money for businesses.

One firm that benefitted was Seoul Shiok, a food stall offering Korean cuisine. Owner Sim Joe Yee said: "In the past, licence applications were rather tedious, we had to be at the government agency physically to apply.

"With GoBusiness, it is now much easier and we can save a lot of time. The process was seamless as the information is readily available, and everything can be completed online."

Expanding GoBusiness to serve other sectors

Right after the successful launch of F&B service journey, the team was confident that the GoBusiness could be scaled up and extended to help businesses in other sectors.

Three key issues were identified through further research and analysis with businesses across different sectors:

1.   Silos of information

Business users had to search through different government websites to obtain the information needed. Applying and tracking their applications via different government systems was also tedious for some.

2.   Lack of Awareness

Business users do not know what they do not know about. For example, they might not know the mandatory licences for their specific business, what regulations to comply with, or which agencies to contact.

3.   Processes that were hard to understand

Business users often did not understand what they are supposed to do when using the various government websites and online services. There was little guidance available on what to do.

To solve this set of problems across the different sectors, the GoBusiness team expanded the mission: **To make GoBusiness the go-to platform for businesses in Singapore to transact with the government**.

It then took months of consultation and collaboration with the different government agencies to identify other paint points faced by businesses, and map out how to streamline processes to improve their experience.

This massive exercise had a big goal: To save time and costs for all businesses in Singapore.

Redesigning the user service journey for business owners was a complex process, involving multiple backend systems from different agencies with different technology stacks – and even disrupting the existing workflows and longstanding processes.

It took a few more months and additional dedicated effort to smoothly integrate the various systems belonging to different agencies, and re-design a better service experience for business owners.

Overcoming the COVID-19 challenge

But one black swan event put a pause to expansion plans: The global COVID-19 pandemic that struck in early 2020.

Due to the evolving nature of the pandemic, businesses had to operate in a challenging environment and under constraints, as rules and regulations had to be updated frequently by the authorities – as in the case of dining-in restrictions for F&B outlets, or the number of visitors allowed per household. As a result, some businesses offering onsite services like plumbing or furniture delivery needed to apply for exemptions. Some were afraid of being penalised for flouting the regulations unknowingly.

The GoBusiness team pivoted to create two solutions for the businesses to help them tide over the difficult period:

The COVID Portal

A single source of truth that allowed businesses to access updated and accurate information on the latest Safe Measurement Measures (SMM) during the various phases of the Government's pandemic measures between April 2020 and June 2021. The portal also allowed them to submit applications for Time-Limited Exemption and General exemptions so that they can fulfil their service contracts with customers under safety guidelines.

The COVID Portal was launched a mere three days after the announcement of the Circuit Breaker phase in April 2020. This was made possible by the strategic use of the GoBusiness Technology Stack.

The GovAssist Portal

This portal allowed businesses to find out what are the relevant government support schemes available for them, including not just the current ones but also new schemes introduced in the wake of COVID-19. There were approximately 160 such schemes that included grants, tax incentives, loans, and even training programmes and directories of technology solutions.

The team also collaborated with other government agencies to feature relevant support schemes that could give businesses a technological boost.

These two portals were of great help to businesses during the peak COVID-19 months between 2020 and 2021, allowing them to continue operating within the latest safety measures, and providing additional support for those deeply impacted by the pandemic.
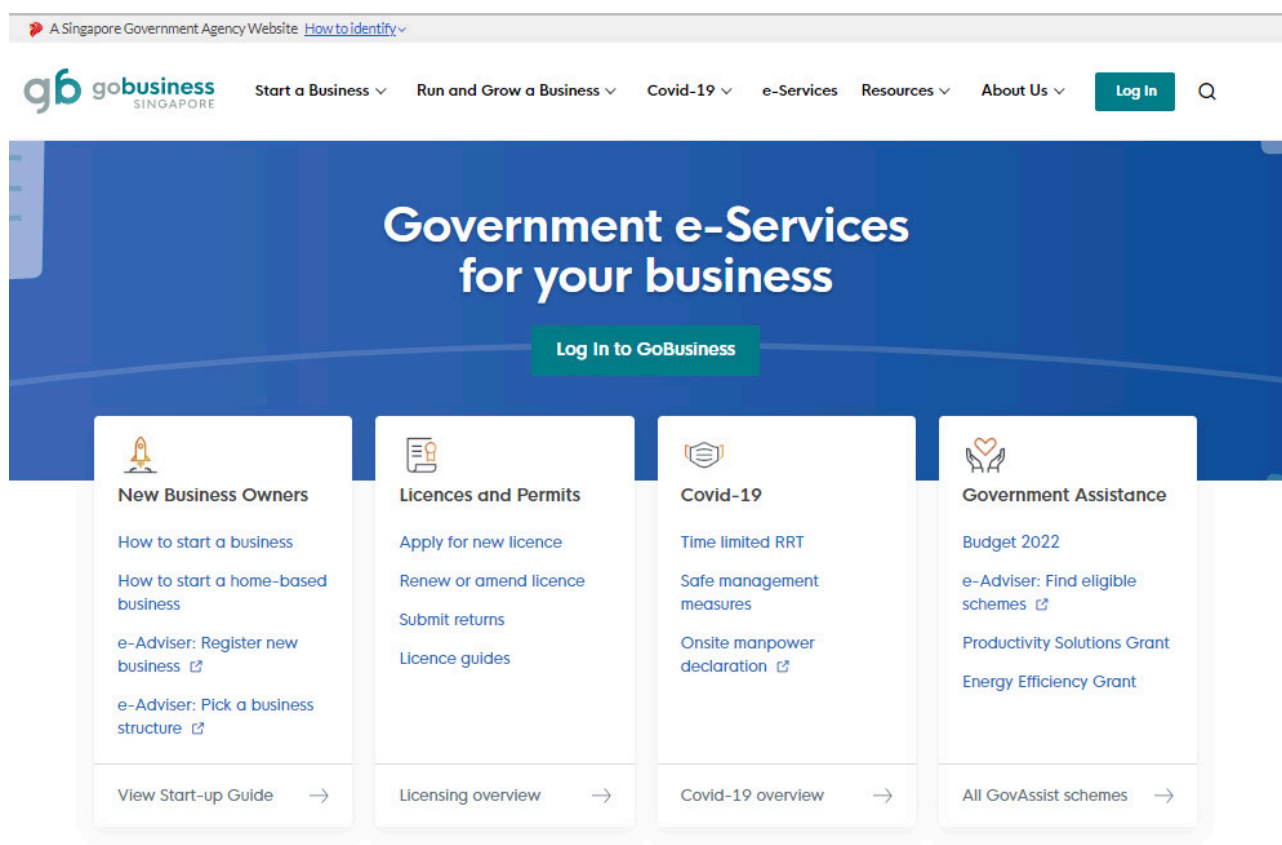
Back to Business

Figure 2: A screenshot of the GoBusiness platform.

When the COVID-19 situation began stabilising by May 2021 in Singapore, the team was able to go beyond GoBusiness' initial licensing capabilities and worked on resolving the salient issues.

During the pandemic from 2021 to 2022, the team updated its strategy and focused on the following features:

- **A Consolidated Website**

GoBusiness was expanded to host a full suite of consolidated business information and services on the portal, completing the vision of being a direct and trusted link to services in addition to being a source of trusted information from the Government. A handy e-Service navigator helped business owners to access the information of over 300 Government-to-Business (G2B) services available on GoBusiness.

- **A Consolidated Dashboard**

In Jan 2022, the GoBusiness Dashboard was launched to offer businesses a holistic, consolidated view of their business profiles and online transactions. Businesses could now perform transactions like license applications directly within GoBusiness – and even register for a unique entity number (UEN) issued by the Singapore Government to entities with different types of business structures.

- **Recommendation Module (e-Advisers)**

e-Advisers are self-help tools that businesses can leverage to quickly locate the relevant information suitable for them. By answering a short questionnaire, businesses will receive recommendations from the e-Advisers on the suitable support schemes available, training courses, and licences based on their needs.

The Government Assistance e-Adviser, which provides recommendations on the relevant government grants and schemes for businesses, was one of the most popular features on GoBusiness.
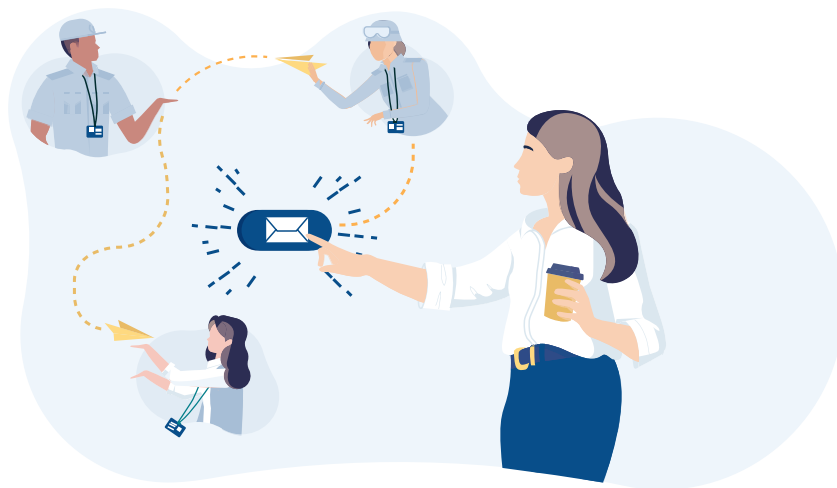
The team also launched new business initiatives that include guides for different kinds of businesses, including:

- **Start a Business Service Journey**

With this, aspiring business owners can easily register and obtain the necessary permits using GoBusiness with a step-by-step guide, without having to engage an external consultant.

Aspiring business owners can also complete their sole-proprietorship and partnership registration, as well as apply for a Corppass admin account (the corporate digital identity), all on GoBusiness.

- **Large Scale Events Organising Service Journey**

The e-Adviser for Events feature is designed to help businesses identify the required licences and permits to organise large-scale events. It also allows event organisers to submit proposals to various government agencies through a single portal, instead of having to contact them individually.

Crystal Tan, Strategy and Innovation Lead at First Wave said, "The e-Adviser is extremely helpful to ensure we have covered all grounds during event execution when it comes to licence applications."

The Future of GoBusiness

GoBusiness continues to transform in an agile manner to meet evolving needs. The team is constantly analysing the data and feedback received, to identify new pain points to address.

One priority is enhancing GoBusiness' recommendation module to put Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in the driver's seat, which will enable the platform to bring information and services closer and quicker to the doorstep of businesses.

The team is also working very closely with Trade Associations and Chambers in Singapore to understand the challenges that different industry sectors are facing – and armed with that knowledge, to continue to collaborate with MTI as well as SNDGO to address the gaps in the areas of operations, policy and technology.

Learning Points

What accounts for GoBusiness' success? The team shared the following learning points:

1.   Engage the community of users and stakeholders

GoBusiness prioritises the user journey and experience of businesses when they navigate the plethora of government services across various agencies.

At the heart of the user-centric perspective is Design Thinking. End-user interviews and user testing helped the team understand the key areas in which public agencies could collaborate to streamline and simplify the various G2B processes.

In fact, the team has engaged more than 500 companies from different industries over the years, and the fruits of the consistent consultation has resulted in new features such as the consolidated GoBusiness dashboard. The close partnership between the business community and the public sector has been – and continues to be – instrumental in making GoBusiness a success.

2.   Stay agile and act swiftly to close the digital gaps

The team has a relentless focus to close the digital gaps that exist in the current WOG interactions with businesses to provide a seamless experience and bring about time and cost savings for businesses, in particular SMEs and micro-SMEs that account for over 80 percent of business entities in Singapore. Key areas included addressing gaps in how business users transact with multiple agencies, and resolving possible service gaps when one agency hands over the same user to another agency.

The GoBusiness team remained agile throughout the development and growth stages of the platform. It was able to react and respond to an array of challenges over its development, nimbly shifting resources and adapting to address new needs. For example, during COVID-19 the team put expansion plans on hold to focus on providing the necessary information and resources to help businesses tackle the challenges posed by the pandemic.

3.   Use technology in a pragmatic way

The team opted to be flexible and agile, using tried-and-tested resources already available – such as the [Singapore Government Tech Stack](#) (SGTS)'s reusable software components, and open-source technology. This has allowed the team to deliver services quickly by enhancing speed-to-market, and to test and iterate before investing time to build the necessary deep tech that could be used in the long term.

A conscious effort was made to not chase after the latest and greatest in technology, but to focus on what works to solve the biggest problems in the long term. The end result was the GoBusiness Technology Stack that helped the team to stay agile and innovative.

For more information about GoBusiness:

- Visit the GoBusiness website to see the plethora of G2B services and resources available.

- Explore the features and resources of GoBusiness at the Singapore Government Developer Portal: https://go.gov.sg/gobusinessoverview

- Have a question about GoBusiness or other GovTech products? Get in touch at tmo@tech.gov.sg.

- For more information about Singapore's Digital Government Journey page, visit here.

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