

## **The New Paper**

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### **Shop under fire for hamster giveaway**

*By Liew Hanqing*

IT WAS a marketing tactic that failed even before it started.

The offer: Spend \$35 in a single receipt and get a free hamster.

The promotion, offered by Pets' Station in Tiong Bahru Plaza, backfired after incensed netizens lashed out against it.

The advertisement had begun circulating online this week. The pet shop had planned to offer a free hamster for every \$35 spent in a single receipt, or \$25 for PAssion card holders.

The PAssion Card is a membership card for People's Association grassroots leaders and members of the Community Clubs.

The shop's e-flyer, which was later posted on a popular online forum, has caused an uproar among netizens. Many expressed the view that the promotion was cruel and that it was not right to give away an animal as a freebie.

### **Promotion cancelled**

After netizens bombarded the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) with e-mails and phone calls, the pet shop was instructed to cancel the promotion, which was supposed to run from 16-22 Mar.

A spokesman for Pets' Station confirmed that the promotion, to be held at the atrium at Tiong Bahru Plaza, is off.

She told The New Paper: 'We have responded to all e-mails and will stop all promotional activities which involve live pets.'

'We acknowledge negligence on our part, and would like to apologise to the public.'

A spokesman for AVA said it had received feedback from the public and had instructed the pet shop to cancel the promotion.

Said the spokesman: 'At animal exhibitions, AVA does not allow the sale or giving away of any animal. This is to prevent impulse buying of pets and animals being given to people who do not really need them or are unable to take care of them, resulting in the abandonment of pets.'

Discussion was lively on the forum thread related to the promotion.

One netizen wrote: 'After they adopt (an animal), they may abuse or just abandon them. It's ridiculous to give out pets.'

Numerous bloggers also posted entries criticising the pet shop.

One blogger, dead\_cockroach, wrote: 'This is a very irresponsible marketing tactic. I foresee a number of these hamsters being neglected or abandoned at the void decks in due time when the novelty wears out.'

Another blogger, Dawn, wrote: 'This is terrible. When you buy accessories, you get a free hamster?'

SPCA executive officer Deirdre Moss said: 'It is marvelous that so many people are speaking up for animal welfare. These are people who received the promotion via e-mail and had acted on it immediately by voicing strong objections.'

Mr Louis Ng, executive director of About Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres), a charity aimed at fostering respect and compassion for animals, agreed that animals should not be given away as freebies.

He said: 'People need to think of the commitment that comes with owning a pet. The whole family must be willing to commit to taking care of the pet.'