

Apple's tongue-tied Siri faces 'Singlish' rival

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A man makes a call from a Singapore Telecommunication (SingTel) public phone booth. Singapore's SingTel has developed an application to rival the voice-activated Siri on the iPhone 4S that is sure to go down well in the island state -- because it can understand "Singlish".

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When Apple unveiled its latest handset earlier this month most of the talk was about Siri, which can give directions or even advice to users simply by asking a question into the speaker.

However, since the new phone went on sale there have been numerous reports of Siri either responding with a completely irrelevant answer or

simply saying it does not understand.

YouTube videos of Siri misinterpreting the heavily accented words of iPhone 4S users in Japan -- the first Asian country to get the device on October 14 -- have been widely circulated on the Internet.

But Singapore Telecom (SingTel) says its new app, DeF!ND, will help Singaporeans who use "Singlish" -- a localised form of English with words borrowed from Asian languages -- avoid such problems.

SingTel said DeF!ND is a localised Siri-like application that is able to decipher uniquely Singaporean accents, names and locations.

It made its public debut at the stroke of midnight Thursday, when SingTel Singapore chief executive Allen Lew gave it an instruction in a decidedly local accent as he launched the [iPhone](#) 4S in the city-state.

"We have a [voice application](#) capability in DeF!ND that is unique because it understands the local language... which the [voice recognition](#) engine within an international device like Apple doesn't quite have," Lew said after the launch.

"When we tried to test different voice recognition systems including... [Siri](#), we found that the Singaporean accent is pretty unique and the common international voice recognition systems don't quite pick up the nuance of how we speak," Lew added.

"And of course our street names and our food names are very local so we developed and trained this new system to allow it to recognise it better."

DeF!ND will be available for free on the Android platform and Apple's iTunes "soon," a Singtel spokesman told AFP.

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