

Darwinbox raises \$72M, to invest in Southeast Asia talent

DARWINBOX, an Asia-based human resources (HR) technology platform, is looking to invest in more talent in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, after it raised \$72 million from a new funding round.

The Software as a Service (SaaS) startup raised \$72 million through a funding round led by Technology Crossover Ventures (TCV). This boosted its valuation past \$1 billion.

"We made a conscious decision to really invest in offices and people in the Philippines," said Juancho Jerusalem, Darwinbox's vice-president and head of expansion in Asia Pacific and Japan, at a virtual briefing on

Tuesday. "We want to revolutionize the user experience of every person. We want to help both white-collar and blue-collar workers."

Darwinbox provides a cloud-based platform that caters to digital HR needs in all industries across the entire employee lifecycle, from the recruitment and onboarding process to streamlined employee data and work force management.

It is used by over 650 enterprises across the globe, including Filipino enterprises such as JG Summit Holdings, Inc., Robinsons Bank Corp., and NutriAsia, Inc. among others. Most recently, it partnered with Shakey's Pizza Asia Ventures, Inc. to optimize HR tech for over 1,000 employees.

With a 300% revenue growth year on year, the platform aims to grow the team by three times in the Philippines in order to sustain this momentum, added Mr. Jerusalem.

"A lot of things have happened globally that have fast-tracked the recognition of HR management solutions in all industries... Entering the pandemic, it's unanimous that companies now believe that the most important piece in the puzzle is people," he said.

He also noted the wide range of industries that can benefit from Darwinbox, including retail, banking and finance, manufacturing, which has a large number of blue-collar

workers, and fast-growing startups that want systems to sustain their growth.

Jayant Paleti, co-founder of Darwinbox, pointed out in a statement the importance of technology in helping organizations unlock their employees' potential.

"This has especially found resonance in this rapidly evolving world of work over the last two years, with companies having to rethink how they attract, manage and retain their talent," he said.

Mr. Jerusalem added they are in talks with some Philippine universities interested in partnering for training programs.

Google offers new replacement for advertising cookies after 'FLoC' falls short

ALPHABET, INC.'s Google on Tuesday announced its second try at enabling advertisers to buy ads based on users' browsing interests without having to rely on what it has described as privacy-invasive tracking cookies.

Google wants to block tracking cookies in its Chrome web browser by the end of next year, which would prevent advertising companies from logging the websites someone is visiting. Advertisers, website owners and privacy groups have all raised alarms over the planned transition, and complaints have led antitrust authorities in the United States, United Kingdom and elsewhere to watch Google's plans closely.

Online ad buyers and sellers are weighing successors to the cookies. Options include tracking users by asking for their e-mail addresses to access websites or adopting new technologies that Google, Mozilla and other browser makers could build into their software.

Google's initial solution, known as Federated Learning of Cohorts, or FLoC, aimed to constantly group people into big baskets designed by algorithms based on websites users visited in the last week. Advertisers could show ads to a preferred basket, but they would not know the individuals in it or what interest they shared in common.

But in tests last year, some advertisers found FLoC less effective than cookies for choosing users to target and the system carried the risk of exposing an individual's browsing history, Google product director Vinay Goel told Reuters.

Companies in the \$250-billion global online display advertising industry fear the loss of cookies will make them more reliant on buying ads from Google and Facebook because of their big user databases.

The new browser system, which is called Topics, groups each user in up to 15 baskets out of about 350 human-designed choices such as "fitness" and "travel" based on three weeks of browsing. Advertisers will see up to three baskets per user as they decide whether to show that individual an ad.

Mr. Goel said browsing is tracked only on websites that enable Topics, and users can dissociate from a topic or turn off the technology altogether. Testing will begin within months, he said. — **Reuters**

MSI to release new gaming laptops

MSI on Monday announced it will release new gaming laptops equipped with 12th generation Intel H series processors.

"MSI demonstrated their determination and vision for the coming era of the metaverse. The new laptops boasting the Meta-ready logo are equipped with Intel Core™ i7 or above processors and NVIDIA GeForce RTX 3070 or above, for anyone who'd like to experience Metaverse-compatible performance," MSI said in a statement.

The company said NVIDIA GeForce RTX laptops are based on the Ampere architecture, with second generation RT Cores for ray tracing and third generation Tensor Cores for deep learning super sampling and artificial intelligence.

The new GeForce RTX 3080 Ti Laptop GPU features 16GB of GDDR6 memory. It is up to 70% faster than RTX 2070 SUPER laptops and can deliver

100 frames per second at 1440p resolution, MSI said.

"Additionally, the new fourth generation of Max-Q Technologies, with CPU Optimizer, Rapid Core Scaling, and Battery Boost 2.0, further enhance efficiency, performance, and battery life."

MSI said its latest lineup of gaming laptops have a "significant" improvement versus previous models, such as a 30% to 45% increase in CPU performance, as well as a new cooling mechanism called the Phase Change Liquid Metal Pad.

The Stealth GS77/66 features a larger touchpad and keycap size, as well as six speakers for improved sound and webcam lock switch and support for better speech and mobility.

MSI said the Stealth GS66 12UG S-086PH and the Stealth GS66 12UG S-011PH will be priced at P209,995 and P177,995 respectively.

Meanwhile, the Stealth 15M, priced at P114,995, has a stylish design and is portable at 1.8kg and 18.2mm thin.

On the other hand, the Raider GE series' performance can reach up to a total of 220W with GeForce RTX 3080 Ti via MSI OverBoost. It has displays up to 4K with the support of Discrete Graphic Mode. Two Raider GE laptops will be released in the Philippines: the Raider GE76 12UHS-228PH will cost P272,995 and the Raider GE66 12UGS-020PH will be priced at P172,995.

The Vector GP76 12UH-088PH, priced at P177,995, and the Vector GP66 12UH-095PH (P167,995), meanwhile, are geared for those doing gaming, engineering, or scientific computing. With Cooler Boost 5 Technology, the Vector's performance can reach up to 210W via MSI OverBoost.

Meanwhile, the Crosshair GL series, a collaboration between MSI and Ubisoft, feature a futuristic design with exclusive sci-fi elements inspired by the feeling and mood of gameplay, and are equipped with Intel Core™ i9 processors and Cooler Boost 5 Technology.

The Crosshair GL Series comes in three variants: Crosshair 15, Crosshair 17, and also the limited edition Crosshair 15 Rainbow Six Extraction Edition. The Crosshair 15 B12UG SZ-207PH and Crosshair 15 B12UG SZ-206PH will be priced at P156,995 and P135,995 respectively.

The MSI Pulse GL66 12UEK-028PH, priced at P114,995, has a titanium power armor and Cooler Boost 5 increases airflow by 15%, even with a 33% reduction of wall thickness.

Lastly, the slick and thin Katana GF66 12UGS-269PH will cost P125,995.

YouTube will explore NFT features for creators

YOUTUBE is exploring features for its video creators to capitalize on non-fungible tokens (NFT), its chief executive officer said on Tuesday, becoming the latest tech company to tap into a digital collectibles craze that has exploded in the past year.

"We're always focused on expanding the YouTube ecosystem to help creators capitalize on emerging technologies, including things like NFTs, while continuing to strengthen and enhance the experiences creators and fans have on YouTube,"

wrote YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki in a letter on the company's 2022 priorities.

NFTs are a type of digital asset which exist on the record-keeping technology blockchain. They have seen a surge in popularity over the last year, with people buying artwork and video highlights from sports games as NFTs.

Sales of NFTs reached some \$25 billion in 2021, according to data from market tracker DappRadar, although there were signs of growth slowing toward the end of the year.

A spokesperson for Alphabet, Inc.'s YouTube declined to share more details about the potential NFT features, which were first reported by Bloomberg News.

Last week, Twitter, Inc. announced the launch of a tool through which users can showcase NFTs as hexagonal profile pictures. *The Financial Times* reported this month that Meta Platforms, Inc. was working on ways to let users create and sell NFTs on Facebook and Instagram. In December, Instagram head Adam Mosseri said the company was exploring NFTs. — **Reuters**

Half of local job posts offer increased pay, says JobStreet

By **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**
Reporter

ALMOST HALF of the job posts across 22 industries in the Philippines have offered increased pay as of September last year, according to a salary report released by online job portal JobStreet.

During a virtual briefing on Wednesday, JobStreet Philippines Country Manager Philip A. Gioca said data gathered between the first and third quarter of 2021 showed that 49.7% of job posts in the online job platform offered higher compensation.

In contrast, 35.9% of job posts offered lower pay while 14.4% had no change during the period, he said.

Mr. Gioca also noted that there was an average salary growth of 22.9% across all companies during the period, which he said was an indication that the Philippines is heading toward recovery.

According to the report, the top industries that showed pay increases in 2021 were companies involved in education at 67%, followed by public service at 64%, social services at 52%, and electrical/electronics at 50%.

Other industries that had pay increases were computer/information technology at 48%, marketing/advertising at 48%, telecommunications at 48%, healthcare at 48%, construction and building at 47%, and communication service at 46%.

"The report aimed to provide candidates with information and insights to manage their salary expectations and to help improve their career planning, while also assisting employers in making strategic hiring offers and decisions," Mr. Gioca said.

Mr. Gioca said the report also showed higher salary offers were observed for job seekers specializing in education/training at 65% increase, computer/IT at 50% increase, administration and human resources at 54% increase, healthcare at 57% increase, and manufacturing at 49%.

Meanwhile, he disclosed that lower salary offers were seen for companies involved in call center/IT-enabled services/business process outsourcing (BPO) at 46%, property and real estate at 45%, consumer goods at 44%, banking and finance at 42%, and oil and gas at 41%.

"The pandemic has had a huge impact in the labor market in the past couple of years. This also made the competition for quality talents steep among hirers, causing employers to make adjustments to their offerings, policies, and work environment," Mr. Gioca said.

For job offers by companies in the National Capital Region, JobStreet Senior Sales Manager Ryan C. Tordesillas said 16 industries including public service, science and technology, legal, beauty, and human resources had pay increases during the first nine months of 2021.

Further, the report showed that salary increases were also recorded in provincial areas such as in Angeles City, Iloilo City, Calamba City, Bulacan, and Cavite.

Mr. Tordesillas recommended job seekers to consider upskilling to in-demand jobs amid the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

"Salary is just one factor when it comes to career planning. We recommend candidates to ask their potential employers about other items like benefits and company culture. It also pays to explore new skills relevant in specializations and/or industries with stable or rising pay," Mr. Tordesillas said.

For 2022, Mr. Gioca said the trend of higher salary offers will continue as private firms and BPOs have started to reopen many of their sites at full capacity despite the Omicron variant.

He added that the country is currently at 75% in terms of job conditions compared to pre-pandemic levels.

"There are many opportunities that came out from this pandemic. Digitalization is one. We are now doing the majority of our transactions on a personal and business sense on digital platforms," Mr. Gioca said.

AllDay Supermarket opens store in Worldwide Corporate Center

ALLDAY Marts, Inc. launched its 35th branch along Shaw Boulevard in Mandaluyong City in line with the Villar-led supermarket's goal to grow its store network to 100 by 2026.

The company told the exchange on Wednesday that it opened AllDay Worldwide Corporate Center (WCC) just a month after it launched AllDay Eastlake in Muntinlupa.

"The opening of AllDay Supermarket WCC not only adds to the convenience and promise of one of our busiest commercial developments in WCC but is also a key addition to our Metro Manila presence," AllDay Chairman Manuel B. Villar, Jr. said.

"We believe that this is a timely addition to the AllValue portfolio, as we anticipate a surge in the need for essentials as we manage the latest

challenges posed by the pandemic," he said, referring to AllDay's parent firm AllValue Holdings Corp.

The company said the new store "is the product of the infusion of fresh capital into chain operations," following its successful P4.53-billion initial public offering in November last year.

"On the strength of our sustained success thus far, we believe that our 35th store will not only perform to our expectations but also bring delight to our newest community in Mandaluyong," AllDay President and Chief Executive Officer Frances Rosalie T. Coloma said.

AllDay's WCC branch also features the company's so-called "elevated in-store experience," including wider aisles, calibrated lighting, upgraded design elements, and "intuitive customer-facing technology."

The branch will also be carrying AllDay's grocery products, which include an international selection.

"What's more, we recognize that the Mandaluyong market is one that will truly benefit from our dual-format model, as this newest location adds a ready e-commerce hub for www.allday.com.ph, further strengthening our e-commerce reach in the Metro Manila area," AllDay Vice-Chairman Camille A. Villar said.

The Villar-led supermarket now has 35 stores across the country. It previously said it aims to have 45 stores by the end of 2022 and reach a 100-store network by 2026.

AllDay shares at the stock market went up 1.69% or one centavo to close at 60 centavos apiece on Wednesday. — **Keren Concepcion G. Valmonte**

PAL says passenger insurance now has COVID-19 coverage

PHILIPPINE Airlines, Inc. (PAL) on Wednesday said its insurance package for passengers now covers coronavirus-related medical expenses.

The package includes emergency medical evacuation and repatriation, travel cancellation in case the passenger or a family member is infected with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) within 30 days prior to flight departure, and trip curtailment in case the passenger is hospitalized due to COVID-19, the airline said in a statement.

"Passengers departing from the Philippines and traveling within the Philippines may avail of the COVID Max Protect for maximum coverage during their travel," it added.

The underwriter is the flag carrier's program partner Alliedbankers Insurance Corp.

The insurance package includes a medical expense benefit of P1.2 million for domestic travel and up to \$125,000 for international travel.

Policyholder must be a minimum of one month old up to 75 years old.

"With the ongoing pandemic, it is important to invest in peace of mind and preparedness," said Oscar Reyes, PAL senior vice-president for marketing and sales.

"PAL's travel insurance with COVID coverage is designed to give our passengers a financial cover against their medical expenses, if affected by the virus. One can select from a variety of insurance packages for their flights," he added. — **Arjay L. Balinbin**

Shakey's starts COVID-19 booster shots for workers and dependents

SHAKEY'S Pizza Asia Ventures, Inc. has launched its coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine booster shot program for its fully vaccinated employees as well as their dependents.

All employees of its company-owned stores have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, Shakey's said. It also procured vaccine booster doses with another Po-led listed company, Century Pacific Food, Inc.

"The health and safety of our employees and our guests remain paramount," Shakey's President and Chief Executive Officer Vicente L. Gregorio said in a statement on Wednesday.

"With the Omicron variant's high degree of transmissibility, we have made it our imperative to implement vaccination and boosting to continuously protect our people and community," he added.

Shakey's said the COVID-19 vaccine booster shots will be administered for free for employees, as well as for employee dependents. The company said it will also provide support for its suppliers' personnel.

As pandemic regulations shift according to the country's COVID-19 situation, Shakey's assures its customers that it can readily adapt to capacity restrictions after putting in place "strategic pivots."

This includes adopting operational efficiencies and improving the company's off-premise business.

"We built smaller stores aimed at delivery and carryout, launched a new and improved delivery app, and rolled out our 31-minute delivery guarantee anywhere in Metro Manila," Mr. Gregorio said.

Despite the pandemic, the company was able to launch 31 stores last year, exceeding its 30-store target.

Shakey's also reassigned employees to ensure that they are only 30 minutes away from their assigned stores for the health and safety of their personnel and to minimize disruption of operations.

Shakey's shares on the local bourse declined 0.95% or nine centavos on Wednesday to close at P9.41 apiece. — **Keren Concepcion G. Valmonte**