Microsoft Philippines offers hub platform for startup founders

TECHNOLOGY company Microsoft announced on Wednesday that Filipino startup founders can take advantage of its Microsoft for Startups Founders Hub Platform, which is aimed at supporting them at every stage of their journey.

"With the launch of Founders Hub, we're happy to see our services become democratized even further, allowing startups of all sizes to get started in their digital journey," Microsoft Philippines Chief Marketing and Operating Officer Abid Zaidi said in an e-mailed statement.

According to the company, the Microsoft for Startups Founders Hub Platform "will support founders in Asia at every stage of their startup journey with access to more than $300,000 in benefits including technology and tools from Microsoft and partners."

They will gain mentorship and skilling opportunities with industry experts and training platform Microsoft Learn.

The Startups Founders Hub Platform, which is designed for early-stage startups, is seen to help entrepreneurs innovate and grow "by connecting them with mentors who will provide them with industry, business, and technical support to guide them through their next business milestones."

Founders will be given access to Microsoft Learn and various startup and unicorn programs. The objective is to help them build connections with customers and accelerate their growth, according to the company.

"Asian startups have already played a role in transforming the region's economy," said Jesus Martin, strategy chief at Microsoft Asia.

"Asian-born businesses have changed e-commerce, fintech, social media and gaming. They have given us SuperApps, which are changing the way we live."

"We will continue to work with our partners and regional ecosystem to get technology and resources in the hands of startup founders in Asia to empower them to innovate and ultimately succeed," he added. — **Arjay L. Balinbin**

Japanese robot is able to peel bananas cleanly, most of the time

TOKYO — Robots in Japan are found on factory floors carrying out simple tasks or delivering food to restaurant patrons but researchers have now unveiled a robot capable of executing the delicate task of peeling a banana without squashing the fruit inside.

While the dual-armed machine is only successful 57% of the time, banana peeling points to a future where machines undertake more subtle operations than moving metal parts or delivering coffee.

Video from researchers at the University of Tokyo showed the robot pick up and peel a banana with both hands in about three minutes.

Researchers Heecheol Kim, Yoshiyuki Ohmura and Yasuo Kuniyoshi trained the robot using a "deep imitation learning" process where they demonstrated the banana-peeling action hundreds of times to produce sufficient data for the robot to learn the actions and replicate it.

In this case, the banana reached its success rate after more than 13 hours of training.

While still undergoing more testing, Mr. Kuniyoshi believes his robot training method can teach robots to do different simple "human" tasks.

He hopes the better-trained robots can alleviate Japan's labor shortage problems, for example at bento lunch box or food processing factories that are highly dependent on human labor. — ***Reuters***

Nearly 3 in 4 encountered at least one cyber threat via e-payments

By Brontë H. Lacsamana
Reporter


KALHH-PIXABAY

ALMOST THREE in four people in Southeast Asia (SEA) encountered at least one type of threat associated with digital payment technology, according to a recent study by internet security firm Kaspersky.

Titled "Mapping a secure path for the future of digital payments in APAC," the 2021 study found that 72% of respondents in SEA experienced cyber threats, while nearly all (97%) were aware of at least one type of threat related to e-payment platforms.

Of those with experience, 37% encountered them in the form of social engineering scams via texts or calls, making this the top threat in the region. The next common types of scams are fake websites (27%), fake offers and deals (27%), and phishing (25%).

A total of 1,618 working professionals from 10 countries in Asia-Pacific were included as participants in the study. The respondents ranged from 18 to 65 years of age, all of whom are digital payment users.

The Philippines, which placed fourth in Kaspersky's 2021 global ranking of countries most targeted by web threats, also saw social engineering scams via texts or calls as the top risk, with 42% of respondents having encountered them.

Sandra Lee, Kaspersky's managing director in Asia-Pacific, said the adoption of digital payment methods appears to be a double-edged sword, with convenience representing benefits and cybersecurity risks showing their less desirable aspects.

"On the contrary, we believe that categorizing digital payments in such binary ways is premature. As with any emerging technologies, there is no inherent good or bad characteristic to them; rather, how we use them to achieve beneficial outcomes is determined by how we interact with them," she said in a statement.

The study also found that the financial loss from a cyber-incident involving digital payments ranges from under $100 to $5,000, with a small number of respondents having reported a loss of over $5,000.

Over half (52%) said they lost money due to bank account and credit card fraud. Causes of financial loss in Southeast Asia included accounts getting hacked in a data breach (47%), fake and fraudulent apps (45%), ransomware (45%), and fake offers and deals (43%).

As for victims' response to the threats, 67% shared they became more vigilant while 32% reported feeling anxious about recovering the lost money. Some 36% said they still trusted that banks and mobile wallet providers could resolve the issue while 18% didn't.

TAKING ACTION

In March, the Department of Information and Communications and Technology (DICT) said the Philippines is still at level 1 in terms of awareness and communication as well as cybersecurity skills and expertise, with procedures not sophisticated enough yet.

The government's goal is to push the Philippines forward to maturity level 5 or a "resilient enterprise" in cybersecurity terms within five years, DICT Acting Secretary Emmanuel Rey R. Caintic said in an interview with *BusinessWorld*.

Ms. Lee of Kaspersky added: "If we are to fully realize the benefits of digital payments, it is important that all stakeholders, including the government, digital payment providers, users, and even cybersecurity firms, work together to build a stable, secure, and future-proof payments ecosystem."

The security firm suggested the following steps to protect against cyber threats:

• Beware of fake communications, and adopt a cautious stance when it comes to handing over sensitive information. Do not readily share private or confidential information online, especially when it comes to requests for your financial information and payment details.

• Use your own computer and Internet connection when making payments online. As like how you would make purchases only from trusted stores when shopping physically, translate the same caution to when making payments online — you'll never know if public computers have spyware recording everything you type on the keyboard, or if your public Internet connection has been intercepted.

• Don't share your passwords, PIN numbers or one-time passwords (OTPs) with family or friends. While it may seem convenient, or a good idea, these provide an entryway for cybercriminals to trick users into revealing personal information to collect bank credentials.

• Adopt a holistic solution of security products and practical steps. These can minimize the risk of falling victim to threats and keep your financial information safe. Utilize reliable security solutions for comprehensive protection from a wide range of threats to establish a secure connection and help check the authenticity of websites of banks, payment systems and online stores you visit.

The Kaspersky study also shared the top actions of respondents in Southeast Asia after they encountered threats:

• 64% changed passwords and other security settings on their banking and mobile wallet apps;

• 50% called the bank or related mobile wallet company;

• 45% informed their family members and friends about the incident;

• 26% installed security solutions on infected devices;

• 26% installed security solutions on both infected and uninfected devices; and

• 15% downloaded a new mobile wallet and created a new account.

Energy-efficiency inspections of government agencies kick off

THE Department of Energy's (DoE) Energy Utilization Management Bureau (EUMB), has launched a series of spot checks of government agencies to ensure their compliance with energy efficiency and conservation policies.

The first spot checks took place on March 30 to monitor compliance with the Inter-Agency Energy Efficiency and Conservation Committee's advisory on the "Mandatory Implementation of Energy Efficiency and Conservation Programs, and the Strict Observance of the Government Energy Management Program (GEMP) Guidelines" dated March 14.

GEMP sets a target for all government entities (GE) to reduce their electricity and fuel consumption by 10% via more efficient use of existing equipment.

The prescribed practices include operating air-conditioning systems for six hours a day, which can be extended to eight hours during the hotter months, at a temperature setting not lower than 24 degrees Celsius.

Each GE will be issued a star rating to be posted at its entrance, with a one-star rating being the lowest. Ratings will signify the degree of compliance.

Projected savings for GEMP amount to P550 million from this year's electricity and fuel budgets of P2.8 billion and P2.7 billion, respectively.


WWW.SLON.PICS-FREEPIK

The first agency to be spot-checked was the Department of Science and Technology-Industrial Technology Development Institute (DoST-ITDI) which showcased its solar streetlights and solar cell installations, aside from the use of LED lamps and inverter air-conditioners.

The DoE deemed the DoST-ITDI offices fully compliant with the GEMP, and issued an agency rating of five stars.

The National Housing Authority and the Public-Private Partnership Center likewise received five-star ratings, while the Department of Agriculture received a rating of three stars.

The EUMB said it will be continuing the inspections nationwide to strengthen the public sector's commitment to energy efficiency and conservation. — **Ram Christian S. Agustin**

ILO, Japan complete 11 water projects in Mindanao

ELEVEN water sub-projects were completed in Mindanao following a three-year partnership between Japan and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

"This may be the last of our 11 water system sub-projects with the ILO, but the assistance of the people of Japan to the Bangsamoro region will not end here. We are determined to keep our active contributions going until we see a very peaceful and progressive region that the Bangsamoro people truly deserve," Japanese Ambassador Koshikawa Kazuhiko said in a statement.

The program is the ILO-Japan Water and Sanitation Project signed in 2019 and funded by Japan. Beneficiaries of the water project are estimated at nearly 12,000 households in remote areas of Lanao del Sur, North Cotabato and Maguindanao.

"Despite the challenges brought by the pandemic, what matters is the immeasurable and lasting impact of the project to the people. The project not only provided potable water but also a decent source of income during the pandemic," Mr. Koshikawa said.

On April 5, a level II ground source electric water pump system in Tenorio, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao was turned over to the local government.

This sub-project in Tenorio also includes a treatment facility and four tap-stands.

The facility serves around 70 households of mostly indigenous families, retired military personnel and other residents. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**