

Business app Enstack looks to grow Southeast Asia presence

By **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**
Reporter

BUSINESS super app Enstack is eyeing to broaden its presence in the Southeast Asian region as more businesses are digitalizing their operations.

Macy Castillo, Enstack chief executive officer, said the company is looking at Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries for potential expansion, while also growing its operations in the Philippines and Vietnam.

"I think that Thailand might be a similar market also... That is one of the markets we are looking at. We are also looking at Southeast Asian countries also," Ms.

Castillo said at the sidelines of a media roundtable in Taguig City last week.

"We are taking our learnings in the Philippines to see where it would be easiest to expand to and to find partners in other countries that would make our roll-out faster," she added.

Enstack has an all-in-one mobile application that allows small and medium (SMEs) to operate their businesses from their phones.

The app helps SMEs to sell their products online and offline. It also allows SMEs to access payment and delivery solutions such as cash on delivery, GCash, credit cards, same-day delivery, and standard delivery.

Ms. Castillo said Enstack has on-boarded nearly 100,000 merchants and close to 30 partners since it was launched in February last year. Some of Enstack's partners are Lalamove, Grab, GCash, Maya, and Ninja Van.

"We are still looking for a lot of new merchants. However, our concentration is going to be on developing the merchants that we have from last year and the ones we are onboarding. You want them to learn more and give them the right features that can help their business," Ms. Castillo said.

"As we expand and grow, we have a lot of interest from additional investors locally and internationally. It is about finding the right partners with the venture

capitals, investment firms..." she added.

Ms. Castillo said SMEs should invest in tools that allow them to be flexible despite surging e-commerce transactions following the coronavirus pandemic.

"To stand out in an increasingly competitive and challenging market, SMEs need to tap into new tech and understand the latest trends to attract and engage with customers who now expect the lines between online and offline shopping to blur. At the heart of this transition to digital is an all-in-one platform that presents numerous opportunities for SMEs to scale up and future-proof their businesses," Ms. Castillo said.

Filipinos spent more time using lending apps in 2022

FILIPINOS spent more time on online lending applications in 2022, with financial tools and credit services becoming more accessible, a study showed.

An analysis from consumer finance company Digo showed a total of 14.2 million downloads were recorded for ten digital lending platforms that have mobile applications as of December last year.

This is higher by 35.2% from the 3.7 million downloads seen as of December 2021. This also represented 3.4% of the cumulative downloads of apps from Finance categories across all platforms.

"Our recent analysis of select digital lending services is a clear indication that responsible credit services continue to be an effective means of breaching inequality in accessing financial tools. We encourage the wider segment to continue in promoting responsible

lending," Digo Country Manager Farit Shakhov said.

At least one of the ten platforms recorded about 2.3 million active users, or those who have frequently logged in the application over the last six months. These active users have spent a total of 75,305 hours in using digital lending apps in 2022.

Digo said the active users are approximately 3.2% of the adult population in the country, which also shows that one of every 30 adult Filipinos access the services of the ten digital lending platforms at least once a month.

The average duration of use session of these apps monthly was at 12 minutes and 46 seconds, while the average duration of one session per user was at one minute and 14 seconds.

"Significant bursts of user login activity in 2022 occurred in March, July and Novem-

ber, mainly due to the positive dynamics of certain platforms working with small and medium-sized businesses, which account for approximately 36% of the country's GDP (gross domestic product)," Digo said.

"Possible reasons behind these surges include ongoing promotions, favorable conditions, or the launch of specialized loan products for entrepreneurs," it added.

Digo is part of the Singapore-headquartered Robocash Group, which is serving clients globally, particularly the key markets in Europe and Asia.

Services under the Digo platform are financed by Digo Finance Corp.

Aside from Digo, the other nine digital lending platforms analyzed were Casha, Cashalo, GoodKredit, Pesoloan, Plentina, Pera247, UnaCash, Upeso and Vidalia. — **K.B. Ta-asan**

HONOR launches premium budget phone x9a in the Philippines

By **Brontë H. Lacsamana**
Reporter

SMART devices brand HONOR launched in the Philippines last week the X9a 5G, its first-ever premium budget phone and the latest addition to the HONOR X series.

Priced at P16,990, the X9a's key features are its "superior curved display and long-lasting battery in a compact design," HONOR said. Its recent social media ad campaigns have also shown the phone being dropped, smashed, or run over and sustaining no damage.

"We at HONOR believe that hardware is as important as the software. We believe that now, post-pandemic, everyone is on the rush, everyone is trying to get the three years back. We believe that a very good smartphone can do a lot for you," Stephen Cheng, HONOR vice-president for marketing, said in an interview with *BusinessWorld*.

"I'm sure you've seen the trend... We are just emphasizing the durability of the project," he added.

The phone's 6.67-inch 120Hz OLED curved tempered glass display is durable, based on tests *BusinessWorld* did along with other media outfits on X9a review units.

Like other smartphones with curved displays, its appearance had a premium feel but showed no dents or scratches despite being dropped from five feet, smashed into pistachio nuts, or

hit by badminton shuttlecocks and BB gun pellets.

The X9a's display supports a resolution of 2400x1080 pixels and displays up to 1.07 billion colors to reproduce detailed and vibrant images, HONOR said. *BusinessWorld* found that its 93% screen-to-body ratio offered immersive viewing for video.

For gamers looking for responsiveness, the X9a screen has a 120Hz refresh rate and a 300Hz touch sampling rate. The device instantly registered and reacted to user inputs, and had touch prevention features.

Certified by TÜV Rheinland for low blue light emissions, the display was easy on the eyes. HONOR said the phone also features industry-leading dimming technology to reduce screen flickering and alleviate eye fatigue.

"HONOR wants to change the standard. Premium is not just about the design, but it's also having powerful features packed in a beautiful design that is durable enough to serve your daily needs," said Joep Libo-on, HONOR brand marketing manager.

Other features include a Qualcomm Snapdragon 695 5G processor, a 64-megapixel main camera sensor, and a 5100mAh battery with 40-watt charging capacity.

Available in titanium silver and emerald green, the X9a can be purchased starting Jan. 20 at all HONOR kiosks and online stores in Lazada, Shopee, Tiktok Shop, and Home Credit, with free HONOR earbuds worth P3,999.

RLC Residences launches 50-floor upscale condo

THE residential division of Robinsons Land Corp. (RLC) has launched the first tower of Le Pont Residences located in a 31-hectare master-planned estate in Pasig City.

The 50-storey tower, which is set to rise in Bridgetowne estate, will house 431 condominium units with varying sizes — from one-bedroom, two-bedroom, and three-bedroom to penthouse units.

It is RLC Residences' first in 2023, signifying its optimism about registering growth this year despite rising inflation.

"We had a very good 2022. Actually, 2022 is a record-breaking year for us. We feel that our business is growing, and we are very positive in 2023," said Stephanie Anne C. Go, business development and design head of RLC Residences, on the sidelines of the launch on Wednesday.

Le Pont Residences is considered to be under the luxury market as it is targeted to more affluent investors.

"We are targeting the more affluent market," Ms. Go said, adding that the project is for those with "a little bit more income."

"We are also trying to target the empty nesters — those who are living in big houses right now with kids who are already married, and who seek to downsize their homes. This would be a perfect project for them," Ms. Go said.

The tower's one-bedroom unit will have 46 square meters (sq.m.) of floor area, while a two-bedroom unit will have 104-sq.m. up to 127-sq.m. floor area. A three-bedroom unit will have 150-sq.m. up to 197-sq.m. floor area.

The initial prices of the one-, two- and three-bedroom units are around P14 million, P32 million and P60 million, respectively,



ARTIST'S perspective of Le Pont Residences

while the prices of penthouse units will range from P80 million to P100 million.

The project is the second for RLC Residences in the estate after Cirrus, a 40-storey residential condominium right beside Le Pont Residences.

Le Pont Residences will allocate three floors for amenities. On the third floor, the tower will house a clubhouse, kids' play area, function rooms, gym, and lounge areas, among others.

On the 26th level or the mid-level amenity floor, homeowners will have a yoga room, landscape areas, and lounge spaces.

The roof deck of the tower will have open spaces for lounging and reading, and function rooms with a kitchen area, among others.

The first tower is expected to be turned over to buyers by the second quarter of 2023. It will be followed by a 50-storey tower and the final tower of Le Pont Residences. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Poe to MWSS: Reexamine penalties to make them more effective

THE chairman of the Senate public works panel on Wednesday told the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) to reexamine penalties imposed on water concessionaires, saying these are no longer effective.

"At some point, the MWSS RO (Regulatory Office) should recognize that its fines are not working with Maynilad [Water Services, Inc.]," Senator Mary Grace Natividad S. Poe-Llamanzares said in a statement.

The MWSS RO on Tuesday announced that it is penalizing Maynilad via a P27.48-million rebate to customers served by its Putatan water treatment plant for depriving them of

uninterrupted 24-hour water service from December 2022 to January 2023.

The senator said that this was the third time Maynilad was penalized for issues related to the said plant.

"The MWSS must step up and take its role as regulator accordingly and effectively," Ms. Poe said.

She said customers in Las Piñas, Parañaque, Muntinlupa and some parts of Cavite suffered serious water interruptions during the Christmas holidays, with some experiencing interruptions even up to this week.

The customers, she added, also had the same issue in December 2021.

The MWSS should do more than just "slapping fines on those who fail their obligations" to ensure concessionaires fulfill their obligations, Ms. Poe said.

"Regulators are expected to primarily protect consumers and take it to heart. Maynilad customers in the south of Metro Manila have had to deal with the harrowing situation for two consecutive Christmases now. This is too much," Ms. Poe said.

"With all that declared income earned by the concessionaire as many consumers' taps turned dry, not only do they ask why the fine remains small in relation to the extent of their suffering, but also why they have to continue to live

with such inconvenience," she added.

Citing Maynilad's financial statement, she said the concessionaire's net income exceeded P6 billion in 2021 and 2020.

Metro Pacific Investments Corp., which has a majority stake in Maynilad, is one of three Philippine units of Hong Kong-based First Pacific Co. Ltd., the others being Philex Mining Corp. and PLDT Inc.

Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., has an interest in *BusinessWorld* through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls. — **Alyssa Nicole O. Tan**

Property,
from SI/1

The BSP should also expand the capacity of the team through training courses and further technical assistance, it added.

The IMF said the central bank also "committed to increasing the coverage of the statistics to include both cash purchases and other forms of nonbank lending."

To access new data sources, the IMF said the central bank is also planning to convene an interagency working group on property price statistics, composed of members from the BSP, Philippine Statistics Authority, the Land Registry Authority and other agencies.

At present, the BSP uses quarterly reports from the commercial banks for its property price statistics.

"The BSP are in the early stages of researching new data sources for their property price statistics. The recommended approach devised during the mission are only initial steps. It will take time and resources to realize the goal of moving to new administration data sources," the IMF said.

Cities,
from SI/1

Mr. Tan encouraged the private sector to build low-cost housing or socialized housing for the informal settlers as "they are the number one polluters in our river ways."

"At SM Supermalls, we believe that sustainable property development is the key. We make every effort to future-proof our country through the practice of disaster resilience that addresses the increasing demand for urban areas and the threat of climate change," he added.

The previous administration had identified six smart city projects in the country as part of its commitment to the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, which facilitates cooperation on smart cities development in the region.

Such projects are a command center upgrade and e-government services in Metro Manila, digital traffic systems and a bus rapid transit system in Cebu City, and the convergence of command and control, intelligent transport, traffic systems, and security in Davao City.

"Even if you have the right data, the science and technology, all of these approaches, and plans, if there's no political will to implement these plans, that would be a big problem," AIM's Ms. Legara said.

GDP,
from SI/1

Meanwhile, the following services subsectors recorded slower expansion during the July-to-September period: wholesale and retail trade (9% from 9.1% previously), professional and business services (8.9% from 9.3%), information and communication (7.7% from 7.8%), and human health and social work activities (5.1% from 5.9%).

Only the industry sector was unchanged with 5.8% third-quarter growth. Notably, three of its subsectors saw upward revisions: manufacturing (3.8% from 3.6%); electricity, steam, water, and waste management (4.2% from 3.9%); and mining and quarrying (10% from 9.1%).

On the other hand, the construction subsector's growth was downwardly revised to 11.7% from 12.2%, as previously reported by the PSA.

Likewise, the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector was revised downward to 2.1%, from 2.2%. — **Ana Olivia A. Tirona**

FULL STORY

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