

Celeteque says user awareness boosts science-based skincare

By Miguel Hanz L. Antivola

CONSUMER awareness about the scientific bases of personal care products has grown over the years, according to an industry participant.

Expert testing by cosmetic chemists and dermatologists should meet the demands of consumers, but the process is rigorous yet worthwhile for business growth, Ma. Christine C. Navarrete-Catanghal, segment head for skin and personal care at Unilab Skin Sciences, Inc. (ULSSI), said in an interview with *BusinessWorld*.

ULSSI is the company behind Celeteque, one of the first local skincare brands co-developed with healthcare at its forefront, which started in 2006 with an anti-aging moisturizer exclusively available through dermatologists.

"When we eventually saw that doctors latched on well to the product because of its efficacy, we realized this potential to market

it commercially," Ms. Navarrete-Catanghal said.

However, immediately addressing certain conditions was the trend in the personal care industry before, according to Ms. Navarrete-Catanghal.

"The difference that we're seeing right now is everyone is actually getting into the whole science in skincare trend," she said, citing whether it may be an "ingredient story or backed up by clinical studies and aggressive claims."

"Actually, it's not a trend anymore. That's the way of doing skincare nowadays, which was not present back then when the brand was launched," she added.

The skincare market in the Philippines is projected to grow to P74.8 billion in 2026 with a 7.7% compound annual growth rate from P51.8 billion in 2021, according to analytics firm GlobalData in a report.

However, GlobalData said that the "clean beauty" trend will be a driver for growth in the industry.

Clean beauty refers to personal care products marketed with

its use of natural ingredients and sustainable claims, which may be used by brands ambiguously due to the lack of formal regulations by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

With such emerging trends from social media, there is a thin line that creates misinformation, Ms. Navarrete-Catanghal said on current challenges in the skincare space.

"Social media has made everyone a skincare expert, and everyone can talk about what worked for them," she said.

"There are many claims being made, so consumers may need to be more vigilant in terms of distilling true claims versus claims that can't be backed up."

Investing in the science behind its multiple product lines allowed Celeteque to grow, according to Bernadette C. Fernandez, ULSSI brand lead.

"With consumers becoming smarter and preferential, what we're seeing right now is a lot of innovations and brands moving toward dermatologist-tested and science-based skincare," she said.

PRODUCT CERTIFICATION

Expert testing and certification of products take on a rigorous and labor-intensive process, according to Malica Mariam M. Maniri, ULSSI product associate.

The process starts with product development to identify claims and benefits according to consumer preference, followed by a series of clinical tests.

Ms. Maniri said that the sun protection factor (SPF) for sunscreens is stringently tested both in the lab and on human skin to pass FDA certifications.

The test includes monitoring by dermatologists on the product application on at least 30 people for about a month, alongside a skin patch and machine test.

SPF testing must show a series of precise and accurate results, which is equal to or greater than the target protection factor under uncompromising standards.

"That's how strict it is to go through a dermatologist-tested route, and to always ensure that all of our products go through that process," Ms. Maniri said.

Lending process for SMEs seen faster with AI

TECHNOLOGY that uses automated decisions on risks brings innovation to fintech and lending platforms, resulting in speedy services to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), an industry player said.

"Using alternative data sets which are not accessible to SMEs cuts down the time and requirements for the application process," Bharath Kumar Vellore, Asia-Pacific general manager at risk decisioning platform provider Provenir, said in an interview with *BusinessWorld*.

Access to formal data remains a key challenge among business owners, Mr. Vellore said, but artificial intelligence (AI) can shorten the loan application process for SMEs to less than 24 hours from 10 or more weeks under traditional lending institutions.

Lenders are provided an automated decisioning platform and integrated data marketplace to build their credit policy as accurately and efficiently as possible today, according to Mr. Vellore.

Credit onboarding and integrations are purely data-driven, pooling from banks' internal data, application data from the SME, third-party reference data, and alternative data.

Alternative data sources include web behavior on devices, participation in the e-commerce supply chain, and point of sale machines.

"In a traditional lending process, you would see that it is highly rules-driven," Mr. Vellore said about small business owners having to secure inaccessible data themselves and lenders manually processing applications.

Mr. Vellore noted that financial inclusion amid the lack of access to working capital is a challenge faced by SMEs, adding to the informal parts of the lending process.

According to the World Bank, access to capital is the second most cited obstacle faced by SMEs in growing their businesses in emerging markets and developing countries.

"SMEs are less likely to be able to obtain bank loans than large firms," the World Bank

said. "Instead, they rely on internal funds, or cash from friends and family, to launch and initially run their enterprises."

Mr. Vellore described the obstacle as a "vicious cycle" as SMEs "take lending from informal channels at very high interest rates."

AI has powered predictive decisions based on a vast number of datasets to help SMEs where they do not need any prior credit data or fixed collateral, he said.

"We have now gotten very disruptive lenders like fintechs and digital banks, proactively addressing the credit needs of the SME market," he said. "Over the next couple of years, we're going to see much more prevalent use of technology with very, very fast loan approvals."

"Lenders will be embracing digital technology, data, and advanced algorithms like machine learning to simplify and transform the application process," he added.

Hallucinations and risks must still be noted as the technology grows, Mr. Vellore said. — **Miguel Hanz L. Antivola**

AI for business can help SME growth — experts

ADOPTING a responsible learning mindset around the business uses of artificial intelligence (AI) can multiply the ways small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) drive revenues and innovate for future value, according to experts.

"As a machine, it learns from us, but as humans, we learn from it," Nikki L. Del Gallego, data and insights lead at Google Philippines, told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of the company's AIMagine Marketing forum with the Internet and Mobile Marketing Association of the Philippines (IMMAP) last week.

"When you have more understanding of what it can do, then you are more open to what you can use it for and how it will benefit the business," she added.

"The key for small business owners is to embrace learning opportunities," said Mervin Teo V. Wenke, communications and public affairs head at Google Philippines. "Whether AI or not, any form of technology can bring value to the business."

"Have that mindset. As a small business owner, you demonstrate that leadership by example, so your employees and staff will follow."

The global AI market is expected to top \$407 billion by 2027, with a compound annual growth rate of 36.2% within the 2022-2027 period, according to analytics firm MarketsandMarkets. The large total addressable AI market signals an opportunity for growth and profitability.

In the IBM report titled "Augmented Work for an Automated, AI-Driven World," the availability of external skills (58%) and the development of new skills for existing talent (48%) were recognized as the most pressing concerns among Filipino executives.

"AI is about people and skills,

not just technology," the study said. "Competitive advantage comes from scaling employee expertise and transforming how work is done."

"Organizations have to make human talent central to their AI strategy," it added.

Adopting AI technology poses benefits for businesses of all scales in terms of streamlining processes and allocating efforts to more important matters than those that can be automated.

"[AI] can free a lot of time for staff, employees, and small business owners to allocate their resources to more strategic activities, rather than waste their time and energy in admin tasks," Mr. Wenke said.

"That saved time means value and revenue, and it would really help the company focus on innovation, future value, expansion, customer experience, and many others."

AI can also enable enterprises to explore the boundaries of creative development in marketing and branding through democratizing creative assets for campaigns, according to Raymond Sison, partner and chief creative officer at Propel Manila.

"Like AI, technology allows us to explore uncharted territories," Mr. Sison said. "The more we democratize creative-making, [the more] it's going to bring the bar up for creativity."

Mr. Sison cited the "NotJustCadburyAd" campaign of global chocolate brand Cadbury, where small business owners in India were given the opportunity to create their own specialized advertisement featuring Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan

through AI.

However, AI applications tread on ethical issues such as copyright and intellectual property, causing resistance to such a rapidly growing technology. — **Miguel Hanz L. Antivola**

FULL STORY



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SEC warns vs. investing in Mono Mall and Dermacare-Beyond Skin

THE Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) warned the public against investing in Mono Mall and Dermacare-Beyond Skin Care Solutions/Beyond Skincare Solutions as these entities are unauthorized to solicit investments.

In two separate advisories posted on Sept. 11, the SEC said Mono Mall and Dermacare-Beyond Skin Care Solutions/Beyond Skincare Solutions do not have the necessary registration to sell securities or solicit investments as mandated by the Securities Regulation Code.

According to the SEC, Mono Mall claimed that it promotes and helps merchants to increase product sales and sell their products online. It also claimed to cooperate with online shopping platforms Lazada, Shopee, Zalora, and TikTok.

"The said entity claims that they are legitimate and is registered with the SEC but upon verification with the SEC database it turned out that Mono Mall is not duly registered and the SEC certificate they are showing to the public is fake," the SEC said.

The SEC said that individuals or a group of persons claiming to represent Mono Mall are encouraging the public to invest in the entity.

"Their tasking and recharging scheme works by luring unsuspecting victims to participate in fake online jobs, supposedly in partnership with large e-commerce platforms such as Lazada. Here, they complete tasks such as helping complete e-commerce

orders to earn commissions," the SEC said.

Meanwhile, the SEC said that Dermacare-Beyond Skin Care Solutions/Beyond Skincare Solutions is enticing the public to invest in the entity via a franchise partner agreement, which promises a guaranteed return of 12.6% interest every quarter for five years.

The franchise partner agreement also comes with complimentary services such as a 50% discount on all Dermacare/Dr. White and Glow Services, a 50% discount on all owned brand Dermacare/Dr. White and Glow Products, a 20% discount on doctors' services, complimentary services for two extensions of choice, and a maximum of two treatments per visit.

According to the SEC, the company's registered name is Beyond Skin Care Ventures, Inc.

"Republic Act No. 11765 or the Financial Products and Services Consumer Protection Act also prohibits investment fraud which is defined under the law as any form of deceptive solicitation of investments from the public," the SEC said.

"The public is hereby advised to exercise caution in dealing with any individual or group of persons soliciting investments for and on behalf of Dermacare-Beyond Skin Care Solutions/Beyond Skincare Solutions/Beyond Skin Care Ventures, Inc. and not to invest or to stop investing in the investment scheme being offered by the subject entities or its representatives," it added. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

Holderfin sets 2nd tender offer of Holcim shares

HOLDERFIN B.V. will conduct a second tender of the remaining shares of Holcim Philippines, Inc. held by minority shareholders until Sept. 28 amid the latter's voluntary delisting plan.

In a stock exchange disclosure on Tuesday, Holcim Philippines said that it received the order from the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) that directed Holderfin to hold the second tender offer of the remaining Holcim Philippines shares.

"The company (Holcim Philippines) was informed that Holderfin intends to conduct the second tranche on the same terms and conditions as the tender offer which opened on July 10 and ended on Aug. 30, or the first tranche," Holcim Philippines said.

The SEC also ordered Holderfin to update the tender offer report to include the second tender offer, or to submit a certificate of no changes if there are no substantial changes in the contents of the report.

Holcim Philippines is in the process of voluntarily delisting from the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE).

The PSE suspended the trading of Holcim shares when Holderfin B.V. bought 594.95 million common shares or 9.22% of the company's outstanding capital stock from Sumitomo Osaka Cement Co., Ltd.

As a result, Holcim Philippines' public float fell to 5.05%, below the minimum requirement for listed firms.

Holderfin conducted a tender offer for 325.58 million of Holcim Philippines' issued and outstanding common shares at P5.33 apiece.

In the first six months, Holcim Philippines recorded a 26.3% jump in its attributable net income to P834.72 million from P661.05 million a year ago.

The company's gross revenues for the January to June period rose by 6% to P12.90 billion compared with P12.17 billion in the same period last year. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

PLDT group backs country's e-governance drive

PRIVATE COMPANIES will be crucial in advancing the development of telecommunications and addressing the digital divide in the country, PLDT Inc. said.

"Governments around the world are now under pressure from rapid globalization, fiscal, social and technological changes to provide services that are citizen-centric, efficient, transparent, and effective," Smart Vice-President and Head of Regulatory Affairs Roy D. Ibay said in a media release on Tuesday.

He made the statement amid the government's digitalization thrust that aims to bring the benefits of the internet to more communities.

PLDT together with its wireless subsidiary Smart Communications, Inc. said it would continue to push for solutions to help narrow the digital divide while also advancing the government's e-governance ambition.

"For e-governance to succeed, a country must narrow and bridge the existing digital divide," he added.

The group has given its support to e-governance by continuously enhancing its integrated fixed and wireless networks.

Earlier, PLDT and Smart said they would explore the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for more efficient network operations and to boost customer experience.

PLDT has been considering AI and how to use the technology to grow its business.

Both PLDT and Smart have aimed to explore other emerging technologies to help elevate

the customer experience in line with the government's national digitalization ambition.

At the local bourse on Tuesday, shares in the company shed P23 or 1.92% to end at P1,172 apiece.

Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., has a majority stake in *BusinessWorld* through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Probe sought on spam texts sent to motorcycle riders

A NETWORK of digital advocates is asking regulators to investigate the spam text messages sent to motorcycle taxi riders allegedly by Grab-owned company Move It.

Digital Pinoys has requested "swift action" from the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) and the National Privacy Commission (NPC), accord-

ing to a statement by its national campaigner Ronald B. Gustilo.

Move It and the NTC have been sought to comment on the matter but have yet to give their reply.

Mr. Gustilo asked the NTC and the NPC to ensure that the data used by Move It were not acquired illegally.

"They should explain as to how they were able to get hold

of the data that they used," he said about Move It's accountability.

The spam text messages included an invitation to Move It's Sept. 9 onboarding of new MC taxi drivers in its training facility in Marikina City.

"Based on the complaints of the riders, it is clear that the riders were unaware as to why

they received text messages and that they did not want to," Mr. Gustilo said, referring to posts by message recipients who claim that they have not transacted with Move It.

"We find it suspicious that Move It was able to send an invitation via text specifically to motorcycle taxi riders," he said. — **Miguel Hanz L. Antivola**