

# Embrace personalization, innovation in 'ber' months, expert tells small business

By Patricia B. Mirasol  
Reporter

INTEGRATING personalization and innovation into business strategies stands as a paramount move for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) looking to tap into the heightened consumer engagement and increased spending during the "ber" months, according to an expert.

The Philippines is known for its unique and extended holiday celebrations, which run from September through December.

This extended period of festivities results in heightened consumer activity and increased spending, making it a prime time for businesses to connect with their target market, said Armando "Butz" O. Bartolome, a business mentor and founder/president of GMB Franchise Developers.

"Opportunities are around, except that people would really need to identify which opportunities are there," he said in an interview with *BusinessWorld*.

By customizing their offerings and embracing innovative approaches, MSMEs can effectively engage with consumers and make the most of the extended festive period, he noted.

Customization involves tailoring products and services to closely align with consumer preferences during the festive season, he noted.

"Innovation is very, very important here," Mr. Bartolome said, highlighting the creativity underpinning

products such as personalized gift hampers or refrigerator magnets with sensors.

"Offer samples," Mr. Bartolome said. Business owners might be put off by the cost, but "sampling is very effective," he added.

He also advised MSMEs to use online platforms to market or sell their products.

Collaborating with established e-commerce platforms, like Lazada and Shopee, provides MSMEs with a wider customer base, he noted.

Both platforms have a history of above-average numbers of orders during the season. This is buoyed by their 9.9, 10.10, 11.11, and 12.12 sales days.

Lazada, for one, reported that electronics sales surged 230 times during its 11.11 sale in 2022. Makeup and fragrance purchases were also up seven and six times, respectively, as compared to normal days.

Shopee, meanwhile, noted that orders from Shopee Mall, a by-invite-only premium retail space reserved for brand owners and authorized distributors, surged "14 times" from an average day in its 12.12 sale in 2021.

Sellers can entice customers through promotions, which may or may not necessarily mean discounts, Mr. Bartolome said.

He said that they can bundle products so that buyers who want to upgrade can have the second product at 50% off.

"That's promoting your brand," Mr. Bartolome noted. "Another way is to provide a coupon for a product they can buy even after the Christmas season... People will say, 'Ok. I have a

coupon from this store. I'll probably redeem this coupon."

"You don't have to give a massive discount because your profitability will be affected. It cannot be a do-or-die," he added. "Know where your bottom line is."

He said that it is also crucial to set up a realistic budget that accounts for logistics, manpower, and expenses such as participation fees in pop-up stores and bazaars.

Attentiveness to customer feedback, he also said, can differentiate a business from competitors. The success story of Coffee Buddy, a coffee business in Quezon City, showcases how customer focus can lead to growth and expansion, he added.

"The husband-and-wife owners are very attentive to customers. That's one of the things I saw," he said. "[Second of all,] they get testimonials from people who love their coffee."

"There was a time during the season when they could hardly walk in their shop because of all the packages they had to prepare for pickup for all the food delivery platforms," he noted. Even with the proliferation of competitors, it is still possible to "establish your unique selling proposition...if you put all your efforts in it."

Mr. Bartolome also advised MSMEs against overstocking their inventories.

"Make sure you can move your goods. Make sure the people who are selling with you know how to move the products," he said.

Those who end up understocking, meanwhile, can capitalize on the circumstance by turning it into a relationship-building exercise with consumers.

Instead of saying, "Sorry, this item is no longer available,"... have that clincher," Mr. Bartolome suggested. "Say, 'Give me your number. I will have this product delivered to you within the next two weeks,' so then you have that promise you will never want to compromise."

Don't be afraid to start a business, Mr. Bartolome stressed.

"Be personal. You may have products that other sellers are also selling online, but you [can be] different because you have this personal approach. Start with whatever you want to sell but put your heart and soul into what you're selling."



MORALIS TSAI-UNSP/SHUTTERSTOCK

# PHL startup ecosystem needs clarity in 'nat'l vision' to grow — Angsana Council

By Miguel Hanz L. Antivola

A COMPREHENSIVE and clearly outlined "national vision" for the startup ecosystem is needed to facilitate its growth, according to a Singapore-based think tank.

The Philippines, like many other countries, recognizes the potential of startups to drive innovation, economic growth, and job creation. To fully harness this potential, it is imperative to establish a roadmap that outlines the desired trajectory of the startup ecosystem, Peng T. Ong and Doris Magsaysay Ho, trustees of the Angsana Council, said in an interview with *BusinessWorld*.

"The most important thing for alignment is a clearly articulated vision — what it looks like for the Philippines five to ten years from now in terms of the sectors and industries we want to create and develop," Mr. Ong said.

"You can systematically go through a high-level vision and ground it in the reality of what you need today for the next ten years," he added. "I think it's eminently possible, but someone needs to take the ball and run with it."

The Philippines slipped two places, now ranking 59<sup>th</sup> out of 100 countries, in the 2023 edition of the Global Startup Ecosystem Index by the research center StartupBlink. With a score of 2.469, the Philippines is still the seventh-lowest scoring country among its peers in the Asia-Pacific region.

Mr. Ong noted that local investment funds are key to startups' growth. "We could ramp that up. We could create policies that generate more funds to enable more startups."

However, economic development initiatives need to be better aligned with processes treated like one would approach a business, according to Ms. Ho.

"Maybe we can put money in building new technology that we own," she said on the proper allocation of government funds for a unified growth approach.

The country must come up with specific, grounded goals that maximize the abundant resources, according to Ms. Ho. "We actually do have a lot of the aspects. We just have to put it together."

Mr. Ong cited the Philippines aiming to become the artificial intelligence (AI) hub in Asia as an example.

"Maybe every year in the next five to ten years, there is an AI-based services company that IPOs (initial public offering) as a unicorn," he said on a daring vision grounded in reality. "How many companies should start up today? How much fund? Do I have enough people?"

"Because we have a huge BPO (business process outsourcing) industry, a fund can be put together to bring in all kinds of startups looking for AI solutions," Ms. Ho added.

"Just get clear with the results you want and how it is going to help the industry or replace parts of it," Mr. Ong said.

The private sector takes action, can help ideas flourish, similar to the technology innovation incentives and schemes in Singapore.

"We have to copy those things that work because it's better to have the government fund the decision made by someone who knows what they're doing, who has skin in the game."

While taking inspiration from other countries and how they manage their startup ecosystem, Mr. Ong and Ms. Ho mentioned the need to strengthen diaspora and academic participation.

"The diaspora is a grossly underestimated strength of the Philippines," Mr. Ong said. "If you can inspire three or five percent of global Filipino top-notch executives to have the vision of what this country can be, get them back here, and help them, I think it's a no-brainer."

"Give them the sense of mission to come back and bring the country forward," Ms. Ho added. "If the Vietnamese and Indians can do it, why not the Filipinos?"

Ms. Ho said that the academe plays an important role as incubators of thought for anyone to come up with the next bright solution to the country's problems and beyond.

"The problems in Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam are not that different from those in the Philippines," Mr. Ong said.

"There's a whole market that could be ready for companies, products from here going out towards not just Southeast Asia but the rest of the emerging markets, from Africa to South America."



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Logo of Lungsod ng Makati, Philippines

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SANGGUNIANG PANLUNGSOD OF MAKATI

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**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

|                             |                          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Secretary to the Sanggunian | Atty. DINDO R. CERVANTES |
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Upon motion of Hon. L.S. Javier, Jr., duly seconded, the Sangguniang Panlungsod of Makati, by a unanimous vote, approved City Resolution No. 2023-056 on second and final reading.

**CITY RESOLUTION NO. 2023-056**

Authors: Hon. A.P. Padilla, Hon. R.A.Q. Saguisag, Jr., Hon. D.B. Almario, Hon. B.B. Baniqued, Hon. V.V. Hilario, Jr., Hon. J.C. Villena, IV, Hon. A.J. Cruz, Hon. L.S. Javier, Jr., and Hon. E.M. Marquez

Co-Authors: Hon. M.D.M. Arayon, Hon. M.J.P.Q. Arenas, Hon. J.M. Ariones, Hon. C.C. Ortega, Hon. A.A.M. Yabut and Hon. J.K.G. San Mateo

**A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE HONORABLE MAYOR MAR-LEN ABIGAIL S. BINAY OR HER DULY AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE TO NEGOTIATE, ENTER INTO AND SIGN A NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT, AND ALL OTHER PERTINENT DOCUMENTS RELATIVE THERETO, FOR AND ON BEHALF OF THE CITY GOVERNMENT OF MAKATI, WITH SMS GLOBAL TECHNOLOGIES, INC. (SMSGT) IN RELATION TO THE EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS ON PROSPECTIVE TRANSACTIONS AND OTHER PROJECTS BETWEEN THE AFOREMENTIONED PARTIES, SUBJECT TO EXISTING LAWS, RULES AND REGULATIONS.**

**WHEREAS**, Section 2 of R.A. No. 10173, otherwise known as, the Data Privacy Act of 2012, provides that it is the policy of the State to protect the fundamental human right of privacy, of communication while ensuring free flow of information to promote innovation and growth;

**WHEREAS**, SMS Global Technologies Inc. (SMSGT), a corporation duly registered and organized under the laws of the Republic of the Philippines, is a pioneering and leading provider of core and access network infrastructure in the Philippines which purpose is to help the country embrace the next era of connectivity;<sup>1</sup>

**WHEREAS**, the City Government of Makati, through the Makati Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office (MDRRMO), continuously seeks innovations to enhance its delivery of emergency and disaster management services. As such, the city government intends to engage in exploratory discussions and negotiations and exchange vital information with relevant entities regarding the aforementioned matter which may be considered confidential and proprietary;

**WHEREAS**, the City Government of Makati manifested its desire to enter into discussions and negotiations with SMS Global Technologies Inc. (SMSGT) to explore opportunities to collaborate on prospective transactions and other projects;

**WHEREAS**, the execution of a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA), among other documents, between the City Government of Makati and SMS Global Technologies Inc. (SMSGT) is necessary to guide the parties in carrying out the abovementioned purpose;

**WHEREAS**, Section 8 (a) (6) of R.A. No. 7854, otherwise known as the Charter of the City of Makati, provides that the City Mayor, as the chief executive of the city government, shall, among others, represent the City in all its business transactions and sign on its behalf all bonds, contracts, and obligations, and such other documents upon authority of the sangguniang panlungsod or pursuant to law or ordinance;

**WHEREAS**, in consideration of the reasonableness and absence of any legal impediment to the aforesaid authority that will be given to the City Mayor, the Sangguniang Panlungsod of Makati, pursuant to the abovementioned provision of law, hereby approves this Resolution.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED BY THE SANGGUNIANG PANLUNGSOD OF MAKATI, METRO MANILA, BY THE POWERS VESTED IN IT BY LAW, IN SESSION ASSEMBLED**, to authorize the Honorable Mayor Mar-len Abigail S. Binay or her duly authorized representative to negotiate, enter into and sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement, and all other pertinent documents relative thereto, for and on behalf of the City Government of Makati, with SMS Global Technologies, Inc. (SMSGT) in relation to the exploratory discussions and negotiations on prospective transactions and other projects between the aforementioned parties, subject to existing laws, rules and regulations.

Let a copy of this Resolution be furnished to the Office of the Mayor, Office of the City Administrator, Law Department, Makati Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO), Urban Development Department (UDD), Information and Community Relations Department (ICRD), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG)-Makati City, and SMS Global Technologies Inc. (SMSGT), and other departments, offices, and agencies concerned for their information, guidance and reference.

This Resolution shall be posted and published in accordance with the provisions of R.A. No. 7854.

**APPROVED BY THE SANGGUNIANG PANLUNGSOD OF MAKATI, METRO MANILA**, in its Regular Session held on 31 August 2023.

Attested by:  
*D.R.C.*  
**ATTY. DINDO R. CERVANTES**  
Secretary to the Sangguniang Panlungsod

Certified true and correct by:  
*Monique Yazmin Maria Q. Lagdameo*  
**HON. MONIQUE YAZMIN MARIA Q. LAGDAMEO**  
Vice Mayor & Presiding Officer

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smsgt.com/about.php>