MacBook Air M3 now available at Power Mac Center stores

POWER MAC Center (PMC) on Friday announced the availability of the MacBook Air equipped with the latest M3 chip at its stores.

"It's 1.4 times faster than M2, it's super fast. It could handle if my Final Cut Pro was open, Google Docs, my PDFs for all of my readings were open — the MacBook Air M3 can handle it," content creator Janina Vela during a launch event on May 3 at PMC Greenbelt 3.

PMC Partner Trainer Eiron Valdez said among the new MacBook Air's notable specifications are "all-day battery life, which lasts up to 18 hours, its 13 times faster performance compared to an Intel-based model, seamless files migration even from a Windows computer, and portability."

The new laptop has 13-inch and 15-inch models. Available colorways are space gray, silver, starlight, and midnight.

The prices of the 13-inch MacBook Air M3 range from P79,990 to P102,990, depending on memory and storage options, while the 15-inch model will cost from P89,990 to P115,990.

The new laptop has a 13.6 Liquid Retina display with 500 nits brightness. The device also has one MagSafe 3 and two Thunderbolt ports and is fanless.

Power Mac Center rolled out promos for the launch of the new MacBook Air, with details available on its social media platforms. Customers can purchase the new laptop in PMC stores or online via The Loop.

"PMC always tries to come up with offers that would make it a little easier for average Filipinos to own one because that is what the Mac&Me campaign stands for, whether you're a student, entrepreneur, technical, creative, or professional," PMC Brand Manager Gio Ignacio said. — **A.R.A. Inosante**

PHL among most targeted by malicious URL attacks — report

THE PHILIPPINES placed fifth in a global ranking of economies that logged the highest number of accessed malicious Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) in 2023, cybersecurity software company Trend Micro said.

According to its latest annual cybersecurity report, Filipinos accessed 76.73 million malicious URLs.

Still, this was a 20% decline from 2022.

Ahead of the Philippines were Japan, which led the ranking with 823,06 million accessed URLs, followed by the United States with 382.88 million, Taiwan with 95.1 million, and China with 84.3 million.

"We're blocking more threats than ever before for our customers. However, adversaries showed a variety and sophistication of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) in their attacks, especially in defense evasion," Trend Micro Philippines Country Manager Ian Felipe said in a statement.

Mr. Felipe said network defenders should continue to proactively manage risks.

"Understanding the strategies favored by our adversaries is the foundation of effective defense."

Meanwhile, Trend Micro also reported that among other threats detected in the Philippines, e-mail threats went down by 27% year on year, while URL hosted and URL victim threats fell 34% and 20%, respectively.

The firm also saw botnet victims go down by 27% and online banking malware drop by 46%.

Meanwhile, malware detections in the country rose by 12% year on year.

Southeast Asian countries including the Philippines recorded an overall increase in ransomware detections, making up more than half (52%) of the global number, largely attributed to significant detections within Thailand.

"Other markets such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines saw a decline in ransomware detections, similar to the overall global trend. In the Philippines, the number of ransomware detections fell by 93%," Trend Micro said.

The report also showed that the Philippine government was mostly targeted in advanced persistent threat campaigns.

It said that threat actor Earth Estries, known to deploy cyber espionage campaigns, targeted government organizations and technology industries in the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, South Africa, Germany, and the US.

Earth Estries uses public services such as GitHub, Gmail, AnonFiles, and file.io to exchange and transfer commands and stolen data.

In addition, it also identified China-based group Mustang Panda attacked government organizations in the country using "components of legitimate software commonly used in Southeast Asia for DLL (Dynamic Link Library) sideloading."

Meanwhile, globally, Trend Micro said detected threats rose to 161 billion in 2023 from 146.4 billion in 2022.

It blocked 73.8 billion e-mail threats, 2.3 billion malicious URLs, 82.1 billion malicious files, 87.5 billion e-mail reputation queries, 4.1 trillion reputation queries, and 2.3 trillion file reputation queries. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Why digitization is critical for Philippine Customs to stay globally competitive

By Roberto Claudio

OPINION

Customs operations serve as the gatekeepers of international trade, regulating the flow of goods across borders and ensuring compliance with trade laws and regulations. These operations play a crucial role in facilitating trade by enforcing import and export regulations, collecting duties and taxes, and protecting against illegal trade practices.

In today's globalized economy, the volume of cross-border trade has increased significantly, leading to a greater need for efficient and effective customs operations. Efficient customs operations are essential for the competitiveness of countries in the global market. Delays in customs clearance can result in increased costs for traders and can hinder the timely delivery of goods. By streamlining customs processes and implementing modern technologies, countries can improve the efficiency of their customs operations and enhance their competitiveness in the global trade arena.

The Philippine customs system is confronted with substantial challenges stemming from its outdated practices and lack of digitization. A 2022 study released by the Bureau of Customs revealed that most delays in import processing are attributed to pre- and post-customs processes. The reliance on manual entry for product information reflects systemic weaknesses in our customs operations that hinder the system's ability to meet the demands of modern trade. The delays can also be attributed to the submission process of documents, with permits from government agencies not directly transmitted to the BOC. These practices underscore the necessity of improving customs digitization and enhancing trade facilitation.

The manual processes in the Philippine customs system make it difficult to keep up with the increasing volume and complexity of international trade. As trade continues to grow, customs operations become more challenging, requiring greater efficiency and transparency to ensure the smooth flow of goods across borders.

Digitization has been contributing to the dominance of several countries in global trade. China, for instance, has made significant strides in modernizing its customs operations. Its customs have adopted a systematic approach to product identification, moving away from traditional processes to digital systems. In the past two years, over 780,000 products from Chinese imports have been verified across 99 countries with the use of the Global Trade Item Number (GTIN), a unique identifier for trade items that is commonly encoded into barcodes.

The shift towards digitalization has led China's customs to mandate the inclusion of GTINs for certain products such as infant food, wheat-based foods, biscuits, beer, imported wines and liquors, and cosmetics since 2022. This requirement has enabled automatic product identification and the determination of tariff classifications. Through this system, a consistent application of tariff rules is enforced, improving transparency for both customs authorities and businesses and reducing opportunities for fraud or discrepancies.

GTINs allow for the automatic identification of imported products, with their classification, country of origin, and specification appearing in the single window system if their GTIN is provided. This represents a key step for the adoption of barcodes in customs clearance, which has helped China to standardize customs declaration procedures and efficiency. As goods are traded globally, border agencies worldwide can be overwhelmed by the growth in the volume of trade and the increasing regulatory requirements are putting pressure on border agencies to collect taxes, tackle illicit trade, and facilitate legitimate trade.

Adopting the use of GTINs has standardized the product attributes needed in customs declarations, helping China avoid information inconsistencies that often occur when importers manually fill in product information as it circulates across multiple steps of the supply chain process. This shift has not only improved efficiency but also enhanced transparency and reduced instances of corruption in the entire customs ecosystem.

This standardization is particularly beneficial when coupled with the Single Window System implementation. The system allows traders to submit all required documents through a single electronic platform, streamlining customs procedures and reducing the time and cost associated with clearance processes. It simplifies the complexities of import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements, benefiting businesses engaged in cross-border trade. By eliminating the need for traders to interact with multiple agencies separately, all clearances can be obtained through a single electronic interface, enhancing transparency and efficiency in trade operations.

Thanks to various government initiatives and trade agreements, the Philippines has experienced a significant increase in international trade. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) reported a 5.4 percent increase in the country's exports in 2023, translating into an increase of 48.42 billion USD from 45.95 billion USD in 2022.

To take advantage of this increase in trade and enhance its operations, the Philippine customs system must undergo a modernization effort, drawing valuable lessons from China's successful example. Embracing digitization is a pivotal step toward efficiency and transparency. By implementing digital systems for product identification and customs procedures, the country's customs system can streamline processes and minimize the risk of errors and corruption.

Much like China's adoption of the GTIN standard, the integration of a simple barcoding system can revolutionize customs operations in the Philippines. One of the steps taken for the digitization efforts in the country is the adoption of the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to the Electronic-to-Mobile (E2M) System. This system, introduced in 2004, is an internet-based technology that automates customs procedures and significantly reduces processing times for import and export transactions. Through the system, the BOC can streamline its core processes and improve trade facilitation between the agency and its stakeholders as well as other government agencies as well as reduce human interference that will induce corruption.

To sustain the momentum for modernizing its customs operations, the Philippines must keep up to date with newly implemented processes and technologies, such as the transition from 1D barcodes to 2D QR codes that enhance the accessibility of consumers with product information and interaction with manufacturers. These QR codes leverage new technologies and the existing barcoding system to store more essential information, boosting transparency and providing in-depth product information within reach. This commitment to modernization should be complemented by a focus on capacity building, informing manufacturers on these technologies to effectively operate and maximize modernized systems.

The Philippines must remain adaptable to change, embracing new technologies and regulatory frameworks as they emerge. By staying agile and responsive, the country can ensure that its customs operations remain efficient, transparent, and capable of meeting the evolving demands of the global trade landscape.

Roberto "Bobby" Claudio is president of GS1 Philippines, is a renowned figure in the retail industry and is the president and a founding member of the Philippine Retailers Association. With his extensive experience and unwavering dedication to the local retail industry, he has played a crucial role in the association's growth and success over the years.

D&L says Batangas plant contribution leads to 4% rise in first-quarter profit

LISTED D&L Industries, Inc. said it saw a 4% increase in its first-quarter net income to P618 million from P594 million last year, driven by higher sales and better performance of its Batangas plant.

PHILIPPINE STAR FILE PHOTO

Sales in the first quarter improved by 5% to P8.83 billion from P8.41 billion in 2023, driven by the almost breakeven performance of the company's Batangas plant, D&L Industries said in a statement to the stock exchange on Wednesday.

The Batangas plant recorded a P16-million net loss for the period from a loss of P315 million net loss during the start of its commercial operations in the third quarter last year.

Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization rose by 17% to P1.25 billion.

The performance of the Batangas plant may breakeven by the second half due to the steady ramp-up of its operations, D&L Industries President and Chief Executive Officer Alvin D. Lao said during a briefing.

The Batangas plant has already completed several orders for local and export customers. Several audit and certification processes are ongoing to onboard more customers, according to the company.

"While it is still early days, the Batangas plant has already shown remarkable progress with respect to the ramp-up of its operations as well as in surpassing its initial commitments with the Philippine Economic Zone Authority. With the current run rate, it is possible that we may see breakeven sooner-than-expected," Mr. Lao said.

Volume of the company's high-margin specialty products rose by 13% in the first quarter, led by better consumer demand, improving mix within the various categories, and relatively less volatile commodity price movements.

Revenue from exports surged by 39%, bringing the export contribution to total sales to 32% for the period.

Across the company's business segments, the food ingredients division saw a 24% jump in earnings, led by a 35% increase in volume.

Chemrez Technologies, Inc. logged a 9% drop in income, which is expected to gradually improve with new capacity from the Batangas plant.

The specialty plastics division recorded a 76% increase in earnings as total volume grew by 10%, led by its engineered polymers and colorants and additives subsegments.

Consumer products saw a 60% drop in earnings due to high inflation, weak consumer sentiment, and lower volumes.

Meanwhile, Mr. Lao said that D&L Industries is maintaining its target of double-digit growth in earnings this year.

"Over the longer-term, we have a lot of confidence that the investments that we have made over the past years will pave the way for higher and more sustainable profit growth," he said.

"Meanwhile, we continue to closely watch macro factors which can potentially dampen business sentiment such as the lingering effects of inflation, depreciating peso, and even the excessive heat that may impact consumer spending patterns," he added.

On Wednesday, D&L Industries shares gained by 0.65% or four centavos to P6.23 each. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

First Gen income falls on lower renewable energy contribution

LOPEZ-LED First Gen Corp. posted a first-quarter attributable net income of $78.82 million, marking an 11.7% decrease from last year's $89.23 million due to a lower contribution from its renewables unit.

First Gen's combined revenues for the first quarter fell by 8.5% to $596.4 million from $652.18 million as a result of lower volumes of electricity sold during the period, the company said in a statement on Wednesday.

Natural gas accounted for the majority of First Gen's revenue at 65.1% or $388.29 million, followed by geothermal, wind, and solar at a combined 31.1% or $185.28 million, while the remainder is for its hydro at 2.9% or $17.2 million.

Revenues from First Gen's renewable energy (RE) unit, Energy Development Corp. (EDC), excluding hydro's revenues, fell by 19.3% to $185.3 million during the period from $229.6 million in the corresponding period a year ago.

The company attributed EDC's decreased top line to the lower average sales volumes and lower average selling prices during the period.

Meanwhile, contributions from its hydro platforms soared by 8%, with recurring earnings of $8 million, 12% higher year on year.

The strong performance of the company's hydro platforms was due to its takeover of the Casecnan hydroelectric power plant, the company said.

First Gen's unit, Fresh River Lakes Corp., officially took over the operations of Casecnan in February, where the power plant generated $3-million attributable income for its one month of operations alone.

The operations of Casecnan mitigated the impact of lower recurring income from its Pantabangan-Masiway power plants, which ran on lower capacity due to low water reservoir levels, the company said.

The cost of electricity fell to $387.3 million compared with $423.8 million in 2023.

"As we expected, First Gen started the year slow with the expiration of San Gabriel's contract with Meralco. Prices in the market were also generally lower with adequate supply available in the first quarter. This was cushioned by our takeover of Casecnan last February," said Francis Giles B. Puno, president and chief operating officer of First Gen.

Listed energy company First Gen has a total of 3,668 megawatts of installed capacity, accounting for 20% of the Philippines' gross power generation.

At the local bourse on Wednesday, shares in the company shed 54 centavos or 2.79% to end at P18.80 apiece. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

ERRATUM

IN OUR May 8 article titled "Aboitiz group to invest P7B in Tarlac estate's Phase 1," the correct headline should be "Aboitiz group to invest P7B in Tarlac estate." The correct lead is: "The Aboitiz InfraCapital, Inc. (AIC) said it plans to invest P7 billion in its fourth economic estate, the 200-hectare TARI Estate in Tarlac City."