MARKUS SPISKE-UNSPLASH

UK cybersecurity firm eyes PHL expansion

NCC Group, a cybersecurity advisory company from the UK, said that it is looking to expand its operations in the Philippines, citing client demand.

"Our plan is to really embed the colleagues that we've hired in Manila to really grow the cybersecurity community that we've built. Right now, we've got 70 consultants, and we're now starting to hire some other skills and some other disciplines," NCC Group Chief Operating Officer Kevin Brown told *BusinessWorld*.

"We're going to continue to grow very much, led by client demand and our growth aspirations. But we certainly see Manila as a key component of our global footprint," he added.

He said that the company bases its hiring and upskilling decisions on the volume of demand.

"It's more about… really understanding where we see the demand coming from clients, like what types of skills and services," he said.

He added that the company has invested in cross-skilling, which gives consultants the opportunity to learn new skills.

"That really helps us with the future demand that we may need. So, it's going to be very much a continued growth story in Manila," he said.

He said that the company decided to locate in the country due to the enthusiasm among Filipino consultants to learn more, and amid positive feedback from clients.

"It was just awesome to see how people have really grasped the training and have a real appetite to do more. And then the feedback from our clients, where we've got our Filipino colleagues working with them, has been really, really positive," Mr. Brown said.

Meanwhile, he said that the Philippine government's approach to cybersecurity is on par with what the company has seen in other countries.

"What's been impressive is how the government and the cybersecurity strategy really (recognize) that cyber is an important enabler to the growth of the economy in other sectors. And that's really pleasing to hear," he said.

"Cybersecurity, in fact, is actually a differentiator. It's a thing that will attract businesses to come to the Philippines. If people have confidence that the Philippines has infrastructure that is perhaps safer or more secure than the next country, you'll have that early mover advantage," he added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

EPIRA needs way to sanction weak power franchises — NGO

LEGISLATORS should amend the power industry law to give regulators the authority to revoke franchises of underperforming concession holders, an industry advocacy group said.

"Our policy makers should consider revising Section 27 Franchising Power in the Electric Power Sector of the EPIRA (Electric Power Industry Reform Act)… to address problematic electric cooperatives that have consistently underperformed for 10 years or more… suggesting the potential revocation of their franchises," Nic Satur, Jr., chief advocate officer of Partners for Affordable and Reliable Energy, told *BusinessWorld* via chat.

Congress is currently looking to amend EPIRA, noting its failure to lower the cost of electricity.

"It is important to recognize that access to affordable and reliable energy is not a privilege but a fundamental right… which should not be undermined by the poor performance of certain electric cooperatives," Mr. Satur said.

He said consumers are dealing with inconsistent access to power due to the "inefficiency or mismanagement" of underperforming electric cooperatives.

Congress should also look at strengthening a section deterring anti-competitive behavior among electric cooperatives, he added, referring to it as a "significant threat to market fairness."

House Bill (HB) No. 3430 seeks to strengthen the clause by stiffening regulations governing cross-ownership by restricting the ownership of a power distributor in a transmission company to 15% from 30%.

"The clause remains weak in practice as cross-ownership is only prohibited between the transmission company and any company in the other two sectors," according to the explanatory note of HB No. 3430.

"Currently, large private distributions are able to enter sweetheart deals with affiliated power generators which give them control over pricing and market behavior, to the detriment of consumers," it added.

EPIRA divided the power industry into four sectors under the law: generation, transmission, distribution, and supply; however, it only prevented cross-ownership among transmission, generation, and supply entities, Party-list Representatives Sergio C. Dagooc and Presley C. de Jesus, authors of the bill, said in the explanatory note.

Strengthening cross-ownership regulations would prevent market manipulation as well as ensure the competitiveness of the energy sector, Mr. Satur said.

Amendments to EPIRA are among the priority bills set by Philippine President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. for the 19th Congress.

House bills seeking to amend the EPIRA Act remain pending at the House Committee on Energy. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

Restaurant recovery expected this year, chain eatery firm says

By Justine Irish D. Tabile
Reporter

CAVALLINO, INC., which operates the Racks chain of rib restaurants and holds the master franchise to the Tenya Tempura Tendon chain, said it expects its businesses to recover this year, powered by so-called "revenge spending."

"I'm sure, like every company, everybody has their own way of recovering. But so far, recovery is ongoing; we're slowly getting out of that pandemic and slowly coming back to what it used to be," Cavallino Managing Director Leopoldo M. Prieto III told *BusinessWorld* in a chance interview.

"We are almost there. You could say it is near… (Probably) within the year," he added.

Asked what makes the company optimistic about achieving recovery this year, he said: "I think a lot of revenge spending is still there… that's also why we (have an airport location), as a lot of revenge spending is centered around travel."

"Aside from that, Racks and Tenya are very popular with families. So that goes along with the sort of revenge spending on a family level," he added.

On Thursday, the company opened a Racks and Tenya restaurant at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3.

"I think we found out it was a good opportunity for us to expand in the airport because we get a mixture of local as well as foreign tourists," he said.

"And we would also like to get our name around, so we thought the airport was a good place to do that," he added.

With the two newly opened restaurants, the company now has 21 Racks and 11 Tenya restaurants in its portfolio.

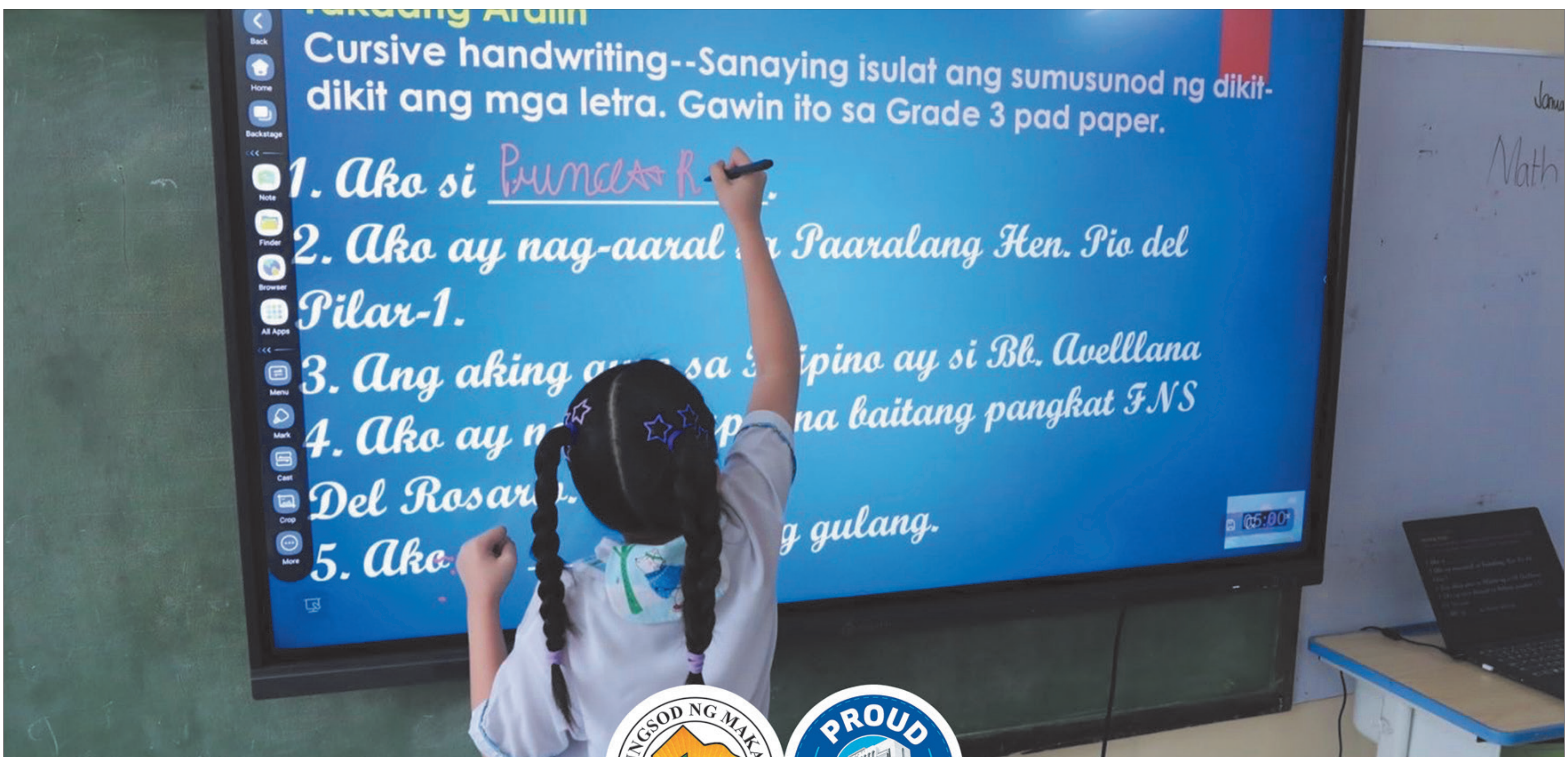
Asked about expansion plans, he said: "Usually, we tend to have around between 2 or 3 openings per year for each brand. So I think we're going to open another two more within the year."

"With what we have in the pipeline… for now they'll usually be in Metro Manila. For provinces, I think maybe in a couple of years," he added.

He said that the company is also looking to acquire brands that are not limited to restaurants.

"We don't really have any set kind of concept to be looking at. So as long as something catches our eye, we will go for it," he added.

He said that restaurants, in general, are being affected by the rising cost of fuel, which raises the cost of ingredients, though his company's restaurants will try to absorb higher costs.



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