

Training, grants needed to help small businesses leverage online platforms

By Justine Irish D. Tabile
Reporter

TRAINING and financial assistance are needed to help small businesses leverage new digital platforms for growth, TikTok agency partner Huskee Digital said.

Platforms like TikTok have their own sets of features, algorithms, and user behaviors that many businesses struggle to deal with, Huskee Digital said.

“Many businesses lack the internal expertise to navigate these complexities effectively,” the company said in an e-mail to *BusinessWorld*.

“Without a deep understanding of how TikTok operates, brands may

struggle to create content that resonates with their target audience,” it added.

Small businesses are also being challenged to put in financial investment to capacitate themselves to make use and take advantage of the features offered by digital platforms, it said.

These investments are necessary in purchasing tools and software for content creation and analytics, as well as for hiring new talent or agencies that specialize in TikTok marketing, Huskee Digital said.

“For many businesses, particularly smaller ones, these costs can be prohibitive, and because they already don’t know how the platform works, these investments don’t make a lot of sense to them,” it added.

To address these challenges, both the public and private sectors need to make training and education programs, financial support and grants, and mentorship and consulting services available to small businesses, Huskee Digital said.

“Both the government and private companies can offer training and workshops to educate small businesses on effective TikTok strategies,” it said.

These workshops should include courses on content creation, managing an online storefront, and understanding the required financial investments.

Financial assistance and grants for small businesses will help them invest in the necessary tools and resources to succeed on platforms like TikTok, Huskee Digital added.

“Public sector initiatives can focus on offering subsidies or low-interest loans for digital transformation projects,” it said.

For the private sector, companies can offer consulting services tailored towards small businesses’ needs, it added.

Huskee Digital is a creator commerce marketing agency that specializes in transforming stories into sales through platforms like TikTok.

Last month, it launched its official training arm called TRENDS, which offers workshops designed to enhance marketing strategies and drive business success on TikTok.

TikTok is now the second largest social media platform in the Philippines is predicted to become the country’s leading marketplace in the next three to four years, Huskee Digital said.

Tayabas City rolls out digitalized civil registration system

THE CITY of Tayabas expects faster gathering of the records of its residents with the implementation of the Integrated Barangay Civil Registration and Information System (iBCRIS), which provides analytical reports that can be used for decision making.

iBCRIS is a local civil registration system that assists with demographic surveys inside barangays, serves as a centralized storage, and lessens errors.

“In 2022, they did a survey in January and after half of the year, the encoding was not yet finished. But with iBCRIS, they can encode it on the tablet itself. They took a month before — now it could take only a week,” iBCRIS Project Leader Raymond S. Bermudez told *BusinessWorld* on July 17.

The process of surveys conducted by the Tayabas City Civil Registrar’s Office would be long, “but the encoding and generating of the report will be instant,” said Mr. Bermudez, who is also the Tayabas Office of the City Mayor’s ICT Section head.

Mr. Bermudez said the server will automate the previously paper-based surveys for the city’s 112,000 population from 66 barangays, which were manually encoded via Excel.

Tayabas City Civil Registrar Maide O. Jader said the aggregated data will help the government in planning new programs and create comparative figures to track migration trends between barangays.

“What is their purpose? Why are they moving to that barangay? Is there a problem with the service of health, education, or infrastructure?” she said.

Ms. Jader added that the system is expected to ease the burden on barangay secretaries in terms of logging information and the process of computing the requested data.

During the celebration of Tayabas’ 17th Cityhood Anniversary last week, Mayor Lovely Reynoso-Pontiosio said the launch of iBCRIS supports Tayabas’ move towards becoming a smarter city.

The Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Industry, Energy, and Emerging Technology Research and Development (DoST-PCIEERD) invested P996,000 in creating the iBCRIS under its Good Governance through Data Science and Decision Support System (GODDESS) program. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

Google parent Alphabet beats Q2 revenue, profit estimates

ALPHABET beat second-quarter revenue and profit estimates on Tuesday, driven by a rise in digital advertising sales and healthy demand for its cloud computing services, but flagged that capital expenses would remain high for the year.

Alphabet’s results underscore the robust demand for digital ads, driven by events like the Paris Olympics and elections in several countries including the US, while a recovery in enterprise spending is boosting its software business.

Strong adoption of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technology drove its cloud business.

Advertising sales, Alphabet’s chief revenue source, rose by 11% to \$64.6 billion. The company sells ads in its search product using customer data to better target them.

Net income in the quarter ended June 30 rose 28.6% to \$23.6 billion, besting the average estimate of \$22.9 billion.

Investor reaction was mixed, with the shares initially rising about 2% before dipping by a similar percentage. They had gained more than 30% this year, outperforming a 20% rise in tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index.

“This was another stellar quarter from Google with beats across the board,” said Ido Caspi a research analyst with Global X, citing ad sales and artificial intelligence offerings as drivers.

Total revenue grew 14% to \$84.74 billion, compared with analysts’ consensus estimate of \$84.19 billion according to LSEG data. Ad sales in its YouTube division rose 13% to \$8.67 billion.

Revenue from cloud computing services, a widely watched barometer for the health of enterprise technology spending, rose by 28.8% to \$10.35 billion. Analysts had expected \$10.16 billion.

Alphabet reported capital expenditures of \$13 billion in the June quarter. Ruth Porat, in her last conference call as Alphabet’s chief financial officer, told investors that quarterly capital expenditures for the rest of 2024 would be at or above \$12 billion.

In the January-March period, the company’s capital expenditure had jumped 91% to \$12 billion, spooking investors.

Like its competitors, Alphabet is racing to roll out AI offerings as investors continue to pour billions into the technology.

But its AI searches have produced a series of embarrassing results, such as the widely ridiculed suggestion to put glue on pizza to better hold cheese. Google pulled back on the technology in May to work out kinks.

The technology will be rolled out to more countries, Alphabet Chief Executive Officer Sundar Pichai told investors on a call on Tuesday. “You’ll see us expand the use cases around it.” Mr. Pichai, without providing a timeline, said AI products could soon drive

revenue rather than just help companies through cost-cutting and greater efficiency.

Despite heightened regulatory scrutiny, Google had been pursuing its largest acquisition ever, a roughly \$23-billion buyout of cybersecurity firm Wiz. But Wiz told employees on Monday it was walking away from the deal and would instead pursue going public.

Google also held talks to acquire customer relationship management firm HubSpot before walking away from it earlier this month. The deal would have turned Alphabet into a rival of Salesforce, Oracle and others in that market.

Google said on Monday it is planning to keep third-party cookies in its Chrome browser backtracking function after years of pledging to phase out the tiny packets of code used to track internet searches.

It marked a major reversal after advertisers expressed concerns that the loss of cookies would limit their ability to collect and parse information for personalizing ads, making them dependent on Google’s user databases.

Sales for the Mountain View, California company’s so-called “other bets,” including experimental projects and its self-driving car unit Waymo, rose 28% to \$365 million. Ms. Porat said the company is planning a multi-year \$5-billion investment in Waymo, as rival Cruise slowly maps a course back to US roads after a highly publicized accident in October. — **Reuters**

Oil falls 2% to 6-week low on ceasefire talks

NEW YORK — Oil prices fell about 2% to a six-week low on Tuesday on rising expectations of a ceasefire in Gaza and growing concerns about demand in China.

Brent futures fell \$1.39 or 1.7% to settle at \$81.01 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude (WTI) closed \$1.44, or 1.8%, lower at \$76.96.

That was the lowest closes for Brent and WTI since June 7 and pushed both benchmarks into technically oversold territory for the first time since early June.

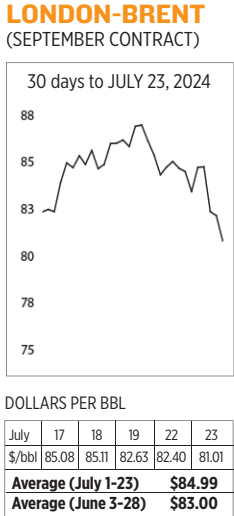
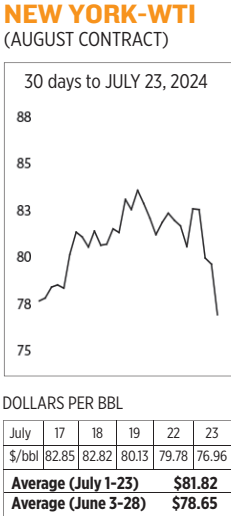
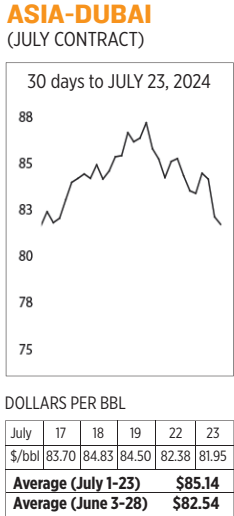
US diesel futures also settled at their lowest since June 7, while gasoline futures closed at their lowest since June 14.

In the Middle East, efforts to reach a ceasefire deal between Israel and militant group Hamas under a plan outlined by US President Joseph R. Biden in May and mediated by Egypt and Qatar, have gained momentum over the past month.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told families of hostages held in Gaza that a deal to secure their release could be near even as fighting raged in the Palestinian enclave.

Mr. Biden is expected to meet Netanyahu on Thursday at the White House.

The war in Gaza has lent support to oil futures as investors priced in the risk of potential disruptions to global crude supply in



Source: REUTERS

the key producing regions of the Middle East.

United Nations Special Envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg warned of a real danger of a devastating regional escalation following new Iran-backed Houthi attacks on commercial shipping and the first Israeli air strikes on Yemen in retaliation for Houthi drone and missile attacks on Israel.

Palestinian factions including rivals Hamas and Fatah, meanwhile, agreed to end their divisions and form an interim national unity government during negotiations in China.

“Ceasefire negotiations in the Middle East and an uncertain macroeconomic outlook in China are exerting downward

pressure on oil prices this week,” Claudio Galimberti, global market analysis director at Rystad said in a note.

Also weighing on prices, the US dollar strengthened to a nine-day high against a basket of other currencies.

A stronger greenback makes oil more expensive in other countries, which can reduce demand for the fuel.

INTEREST RATE CUTS

Growing bets on interest rate cuts in September, however, could provide a floor to oil prices, as lower borrowing costs tend to support oil demand.

European Central Bank Vice-President Luis de Guindos hint-

ed at a possible interest rate cut in September, while in the US, investors are betting the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates in September.

The Fed hiked rates aggressively in 2022 and 2023 to tame a surge in inflation. Higher interest rates increase borrowing costs for consumers and businesses, which can reduce economic growth and demand for oil.

China surprised markets by cutting major short and long-term interest rates on Monday, its first such broad move since last August, signaling intent to boost growth in the world’s second-largest economy.

US CRUDE STOCKPILES

The market is looking for direction from weekly US oil storage data from the American Petroleum Institute (API) trade group later on Tuesday and the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) on Wednesday.

Analysts projected US energy firms pulled about 1.6 million barrels of crude out of storage during the week ended July 19.

If correct, that would be the first time US crude stocks declined for four weeks in a row since September 2023 and compares with a decrease of 600,000 barrels in the same week last year and an average decline of 1.8 million barrels over the past five years (2019-2023). — **Reuters**

SPOT PRICES				
TUESDAY, JULY 23, 2024				
METAL				
PALLADIUM free \$/troy oz				916.25
PALLADIUM JMI base, \$/troy oz				921.00
PLATINUM free \$/troy oz				947.75
PLATINUM JMI base \$/troy oz				954.00
KRUGGERAND, fob \$/troy oz				2,401.00
IRIDIUM, whs rot, \$/troy oz				4,715.00
RHODIUM, whs rot, \$/troy oz				4,640.00
GRAINS (July 18, 2024)				
(FOB Bangkok basis at every Thursday)				
FRAGRANT (100%) 1st Class, \$/ton				941.00
FRAGRANT (100%) 2nd Class, \$/ton				913.00
RICE (5%) White Thai- \$/ton				584.00
RICE (10%) White Thai- \$/ton				583.00
RICE (15%) White Thai- \$/ton				567.00
RICE (25%) White Thai- \$/ton (Super)				567.00
BROKER RICE A-1 Super \$/ton				445.00
FOOD				
COCOA ICCO Dly (SDR/mt)				5,666.74
COCOA ICCO \$/mt				7,515.97
COFFEE ICA comp '2001 cots/lb				244.13
SUGAR ISA FOB Daily Price, Carib. port cts/lb 18.31				
SUGAR ISA 15-day ave.				19.61
LIFFE COFFEE				
New Robusta 10 MT - \$/ton				
	High	Low	Sett	Psett
Sept.	4,572	4,470	4,481	4,581
Jan.	4,200	4,132	4,142	4,208
Mar.	4,033	3,974	3,986	4,039
May	3,905	3,892	3,869	3,920

LIFFE COCOA				
(Ldn)-10 MT-E/ton				
	High	Low	Sett	Psett
Sept.	6,880	6,698	6,806	6,842
Mar.	5,161	5,035	5,121	5,156
May	4,934	4,830	4,917	4,921
July	4,760	4,669	4,753	4,739
COCONUT				
MANILA COPRA (based on 6% moisture)				
Peso/100kg			Buyer/Seller	
Lag/Qzn/Luc	24	3,950.00/4,000.00		
Philippine Coconut Oil - Crude				
CIF NY/NOLA				71.50
FOB RAIL/NOLA				76.50
COCONUT OIL (PHIL/IDN), \$ per ton,				
CIF Europe				
July/Aug.'24			0.00/1,500.00	
Aug./Sept.'24			0.00/1,500.00	
Sept./Oct.'24			1,475.00/1,505.00	
Oct./Nov.'24			0.00/1,510.00	

LONDON METAL EXCHANGE	
LME FINAL CLOSING PRICES, US\$/MT	
	3 MOS.
ALUMINUM H.G.	2,295.00
ALUMINUM Alloy	2,400.00
COPPER	9,166.00
LEAD	2,059.50
NICKEL	16,021.00
TIN	29,418.00
ZINC	2,688.50

Gold gains ground

GOLD PRICES edged up on Tuesday and were set to break a four-day losing streak, as investors awaited US economic data due later this week for more clarity on the timing of the US Federal Reserve’s expected rate cut this year.

Spot gold was up 0.3% at \$2,405.09 per ounce at 1810 GMT. US gold futures settled 0.5% higher at \$2,407.30.

The market has shifted its focus from US politics to economic data and “hypothesizing that we are well on track to start seeing rate cuts in September,” said Bart Melek, head of commodity strategies at TD Securities.

According to a growing majority of economists in a Reuters poll the Fed will cut interest rates twice this year.

Markets are anticipating a 96% chance of a rate cut by the US central bank in September, according to the CME Fed-Watch Tool.

The focus this week will be on the US gross domestic product report for the second quarter released on Thursday and the latest personal consumption expenditures price index — the Fed’s preferred inflation gauge — due on Friday.

“Anything weaker-than-expected (PCE data) would be positive, mainly because it would convince the markets that the US central bank is easing monetary policy in September,” Mr. Melek said.

Meanwhile, India slashed import duties on gold and silver in a move industry officials said could lift retail demand and help cut smuggling in the world’s second-biggest bullion consumer.

Higher demand for gold from India could boost global prices.

Local gold prices fell about 6% to their lowest level in more than three months after the announcement. — **Reuters**

Cocoa steadies after Monday’s blistering rally

NEW YORK — Cocoa prices steadied on Tuesday, following a rally of nearly 10% in the prior session, with trade remaining volatile amid thin volumes and the market underpinned by a steep supply deficit.

September London cocoa settled down £36 or 0.5% to £6,806 per metric ton, having soared 8% on Monday.

Swiss chocolate maker Lindt & Spruengli reported a 7% jump in half-year sales as customers bore the brunt of high cocoa prices.

The firm confirmed its full-year outlook for 6-8% sales growth.

BMI, a unit of Fitch Solutions, said the global cocoa grind, a measure of demand, fell 4.2% in the second quarter versus the first, its smallest decrease over the past five years.

It said the slow-down in cocoa grindings due to high prices could be more limited than previously expected “given the apparent market resilience.”

September New York cocoa fell 1.3% to \$8,286 a ton, having rallied 9.2% on Monday.

Meanwhile, October raw sugar settled down 0.14 cents or 0.8% at 18.16 cents per lb, having hit a seven-week low at 18.08.

Dealers noted some commercial buying as the market dips, and said Chinese importing interest increased as prices look attractive.

Brazil’s sugar production in 2024/25 (April-March) was revised down by 300,000 metric tons by one broker on Monday due to lower-than-expected cane allocation to produce sugar and poor cane quality. — **Reuters**