

Ayala's ACTIVE Fund to invest in Featherless.AI

AYALA Corporate Technology Innovation Venture (ACTIVE) Fund, which is managed by Kickstart Ventures, is investing in artificial intelligence (AI) platform Featherless.AI to help bridge the AI adoption gap among Philippine organizations.

"One of the ACTIVE Fund's core investment theses around the future of work is that technologies like AI can augment human productivity," Kickstart Ventures General Partner Joan Yao said in a statement on Tuesday.

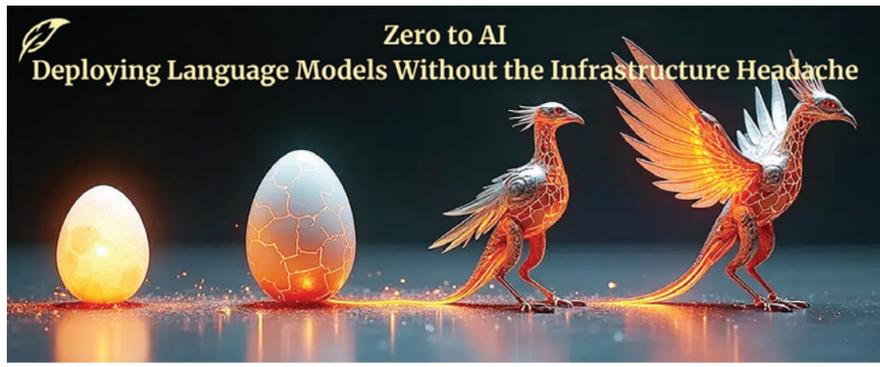
"We believe in [Featherless.AI's] mission of democratizing access to AI [by] making it cheaper for both enterprises and individuals to run the latest open-source models through technol-

ogy that optimizes GPU utilization costs and lowering inference costs," she added.

Philippine businesses are hard pressed to integrate AI in their operations to boost productivity and sales. However, many struggle with high investment costs and language barriers.

Featherless.AI enables businesses to scale AI use without unexpected charges or rate limits. It offers a flat capacity pricing model and AI workload scaling that ensures cost predictability and scalability.

Co-founded by Eugene Cheah and Harrison Vanderbyl, Featherless.AI provides instant and affordable access to the world's largest collection of open-source AI models.



The startup has more than 4,000 AI models including popular options like DeepSeek and Llama and is onboarding new models weekly.

With the latest funding, the company seeks to support all major AI modalities including embedding, vision and speech.

Casual AI users can access a wide range of the latest open-source models without the need for expensive high-end GPUs (graphics processing

units) for as low as \$10 (P573) a month.

Under its new funding, Featherless.AI will also advance research into next-generation AI architectures that can dramatically lower inference costs. This would help make AI deployment possible on lower cost hardware instead of requiring high-end GPUs.

"I don't want a future where AI is controlled by the few," Mr. Cheah, who also serves as the startup's chief executive officer, said in the statement. "I want to empower individuals globally."

The Philippine economy could generate more than P2 trillion each year if businesses in the country adopt AI, the National Economic and Development Authority said last year. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

Sprout Solutions eyes more industries for AI sales assistant

SPROUT SOLUTIONS is looking to expand its artificial intelligence (AI) sales assistant Inbound to other industries to help accelerate deal closures.

"For anyone in sales, one of the hardest things isn't really closing the sale; it's getting enough customers to even talk to you at the very beginning," Gian Paulo G. dela Rama, chief product and AI officer at Sprout Solutions, said in a video interview on March 4.

"It's that specific pain point that we're trying to address, so we want to deliver actionable leads to sales people, and to do that, we built this AI tool that will automate the lead engagement at the very beginning," he added.

About 50 entities in the real estate and automotive sector use Inbound.

Launched in January, Inbound seeks to increase Philippine companies' competitiveness by streamlin-

ing workflows, providing high-value leads and accelerating deal closures. It initially catered to the real estate and automotive sectors.

"With Inbound, managing and converting leads have never been easier," Patrick Gentry, chief executive officer at Sprout Solutions, said in an e-mailed statement. "Automating complex workflows frees teams to focus on the most promising buyers and real opportunities, instead of getting bogged down in manual tasks."

The platform provides businesses with data-driven analytics to track crucial metrics, namely conversion rates, lead engagement and product performance, sales volume and revenue.

It can also be integrated with other business tools, including customer relationship management, listing or inventory platforms and scheduling software like Google Calendar.

Inbound also has a setup guide and a team of experts to help businesses use the platform effectively.

Mr. Dela Rama said companies could train Inbound with its own information through the platform's "state-of-the-art generative AI."

Before, companies had to anticipate what questions customers would ask and create answers, he said.

"[Now,] our clients basically just need to upload whatever materials that they have, and our Inbound chatbot will be able to answer questions or generate answers based on the information that it has been trained on."

The Inbound chatbot can also be customized according to the company's branding and tone.

Customers can integrate Inbound's chatbot into their website and Facebook Messenger accounts. Sprout Solutions is looking to integrate the chatbot to corporate e-mail accounts. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**

Philippine F&B companies told to fast-track automation

THE PHILIPPINE food and beverage (F&B) industry should quicken their automation push to boost efficiency and scale operations, according to a Malaysian software firm.

"The Philippines has a very mature food and beverage business environment," Benny Chan, business development director at Codemax Pte Ltd., told *BusinessWorld* on the sidelines of Thaifex Horec Asia 2025 in Bangkok.

"The problem is that they are very much still dependent on labor and they have very much room to improve their efficiency and have a very big potential to grow," he added.

Codemax, which provides automation and software solutions to the F&B sector, is interested in working with Philippine companies, Mr. Chan said.

He said they see the Philippines as a "huge market" and are in talks with a "Philippine representative" for their expansion plan.

He added that big companies and conglomerates in the Philippines are still very "backward," relying on manual labor and processes, which could hinder operations.

The National Economic and Development Authority earlier said the economy could gain P2.6 trillion annually if domestic businesses adopt AI solutions.

The International Monetary Fund has cited data showing the Philippines' share in the global outsourcing market at 15%. In 2024, it ranked 56th out of 188 countries in the Government Artificial Intelligence Readiness Index. — **J.V.D. Ordoñez**



L-R: MMDA General Manager Procopio Lipana, DPWH Regional Director Loreta Malaluan, DoTr Usec. Mark Steven Pastor, DPWH Usec. for Regional Operations in NCR, Regions III, IV-A, IV-B, V, VI, VII, and VIII Roberto Bernardo, Green EDSA Movement and Management Association of the Philippines Chairman Eduardo Yap, DoTr Secretary Vivencio "Vince" Dizon, SM Prime Holdings President Jeffrey Lim, MMDA Chairman Romando Artes, and Move As One Coalition Co-Convenor Dr. Robert Siy, Jr.



The SM North EDSA busway concourse is located in front of SM North EDSA.

SM North EDSA busway concourse now ready to serve commuters

Commuters in the north now have another convenient and safe transportation access point as the SM North EDSA Busway Concourse formally opened on March 13.

Strategically located in front of SM North EDSA, this state-of-the-art busway concourse is a key interchange station along the Quezon City section of EDSA, conveniently connecting commuters to various transportation options and commercial establishments. It also aligns with the Department of Transportation's (DoTr) goal to provide a Comfortable, Accessible, Safe, Sustainable, and Affordable (CASSA) transportation system.

The new facility features well-lit and covered walkways, with ramps and elevators that ensure accessibility for all commuters, particularly senior citizens, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities (PWDs).

At a February 2025 press conference, newly appointed Transportation Secretary Vince Dizon hailed the SM North EDSA and

SM Megamall concourses as "model stations" for its plan to construct dedicated bridgeways for the entire EDSA carousel system.

The EDSA Busway Project is a flagship initiative of the DoTr. It aims to enhance mass transit efficiency, safety, and accessibility along EDSA, Metro Manila's main thoroughfare.

To fast-track the development of well-structured and efficiently

managed concourses, the DoTr partnered with private stakeholders like SM Prime Holdings, Inc. (SMPHI). As part of the partnership, SM Prime committed to design, construct, and manage the busway concourses situated in front of its malls along EDSA.

For more information, visit www.smsupermalls.com and follow SM Supermalls' official social media accounts.



DoTr Secretary Vince Dizon



SM Prime President Jeffrey Lim



In photo: Commuters strike a pose during the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the SM North EDSA busway concourse inauguration.