

Feature Article

## **The drive to survive: How Thai tech solution providers are capitalising on the digital economy**

*Contributed by Sirinun Jiradilok, Head of Digital Engagement and FinTech Innovation, UOB Thailand*

Thailand's digital industry is projected to rise by double digits this year, boosted by a robust digital service section, according to the Digital Economy Promotion Agency (depa). This demonstrates a shift in consumer behaviour under the new normal as more continue to transition to digital services. Over the past 12 months, the number of consumers using e-commerce increased by 35 per cent, a trend that was driven in part by ongoing movement restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19.

What does this exponential growth mean for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)? As their customers go online, SMEs are also embracing technology to remain competitive and sustainable. According to the depa survey, while the majority of SMEs remain in industry 1.0-2.0, digital adoption rate has continued to rise as digital technology gradually takes over as the primary driver of the global economy. Our UOB ASEAN SME Transformation study found that about three-quarters (71 per cent) of Thailand's SMEs ranked technology investment as their top priority, the highest among ASEAN countries.

Mr Chatchai Khunpitoluck, Senior Executive Vice President of depa said that encouraging SMEs to adopt technology into their businesses is part of driving Thailand towards a digital economy. Entrepreneurs across industries will become more reliant on technology, enhancing their ability to grow sustainably and boosting the digital economy as a whole. Not only does depa seek out and connect technology providers with SMEs in order to facilitate technology adoption, but it also provides funding to SMEs in overcoming challenges and deepening their digital skills.

This opens up a plethora of opportunities for business matchmaking between SMEs entrepreneurs and technology solution providers.

UOB and The FinLab have been helping SMEs and tech solution providers seize digital transformation opportunities. For example, through the Smart Business Transformation Programme (SBTP), an initiative by UOB Thailand and The FinLab, SMEs are matched to appropriate and innovative FinTech and technology solutions that can support their digitalisation needs. During a recent knowledge-sharing session with our SBTP alumni, we unearthed key insights into how Thai tech solution providers are capitalising on the digital economy.

### **With a customer-centric approach, new business opportunities emerge**

Mr John Persson, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Zaviago, an e-commerce platform and web development company, said, "The first wave of the coronavirus pandemic hit the world with full force and we were all mostly unprepared. We were not immune to the initial shock. During that first period of uncertainty, we took decisive action based on consumer feedback to focus on a new approach of developing a next-generation platform that responds directly to product-market fit with target customers.

"It is critical that our platform development remained true to the market needs of SMEs while also allowing for commercial flexibility. Our team has grown beyond our expectations in just four months,

outperforming other web platform competitors in Thailand. We have more 3,400 SMEs and users who have chosen our trial programme since the platform's inception. We also see around 40 SMEs signing up daily, which can add up to more than 1,000 new businesses monthly. Over three months, we saw a 500 per cent rise in our consumer base."

### **Changing the game with business ecosystems**

Mr Jutiphan Mongkolsuthree, Chief Executive Officer, Gofive, the software company who offers customer relationship management (CRM) solutions under the Venio brand, said, "High on the list of technology solution providers' pain points is how to get their digital solutions noticed in the market and chosen by customers.

"Fortunately, being part of depa's network and joining the SBTP as one of digital solutions offered to SMEs has introduced us to a slew of prospects both domestic and international. Venio, our CRM solutions brand, has grown in recognition, visibility and credibility among targeted SMEs as a result of the initiative. We have seen a 20 per cent rise in the number of SMEs adopting our solution when compared to when we first joined the programme.

"We have provided hands-on experience through depa and SBTP's network to help SMEs understand the importance of CRM and how to adopt digital technologies to manage customer relationships online. Venio is now supporting more than 50 SMEs that have joined SBTP in managing customer data systematically, allowing them to plan, record and track each client's status more effectively."

### **Accelerating tech adoption through trials**

Mr Chanakarn Chinchatchawal, CEO, Robolingo Co., Ltd, the developer of Zwiz.AI, the AI chatbot and analytics tools for business agreed with the notion of increasing credibility through the establishment of the right business ecosystem. He also underlined the importance of SMEs having access to solutions.

"By being selected as a tech solution provider under depa's network and SBTP, SMEs can be confident in our reliability, digital competency and relevance to their needs. We have joined many SBTP virtual trainings sessions. They have been an excellent opportunity to introduce our company, our solutions and our services to SMEs. However, we recognised that many SMEs are reluctant to adopt due to financial constraints, which is why we offer them a free trial. Once they have tried our product and determined that it meets their requirements, they are willing to make a financial commitment."

Zwiz.AI has seen 100 per cent increase in SMEs utilising its chatbot solution when compared with the period prior to joining SBTP in 2020.

In supporting SMEs and tech solutions, UOB Thailand has organised a series of complimentary virtual training sessions to help more SMEs gain the necessary know-how to tap digital solutions. This is as part of SBTP, an initiative by UOB Thailand and The FinLab and in collaboration with depa, National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) and the Office of SMEs Promotion (OSMEP). SMEs will benefit from an array of tech solution providers being introduced at each training session, as well as a free trial of tech solutions for up to 6 months.

The next session will be hold on 14 October 2021. Three Thai technology companies, including Zwiz.AI, a chatbot and analytic tools for social media tool, PEAK, an online accounting platform, and

SmartUp, an e-commerce platform, will introduce their digital solutions that can help SMEs increase sales, optimise accounting processes, and enhance their brand and customer base.

Thai technology solution providers looking for business opportunities or seeking to expose themselves among SMEs can visit [www.facebook.com/uob.th](http://www.facebook.com/uob.th) or <https://thefinlab.com/th/thailand> for more information.

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