

3.15 Case Study of Philippines¹

3.15.1 Profile of a Woman Entrepreneur

Headed by its President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ms. Kim Lato, Kimstore Enterprise Corporation is able to introduce and accelerate quality e-commerce services in the Philippines. Within over a decade of operations, this enterprise have set the bar of quality and excellence in e-commerce for tech and electronic gadgets and accessories in the country.

Business familiarization and orientation came early in Ms. Kim Lato's life, having been born in an entrepreneurial Filipino-Chinese family and being the eldest of 2 siblings, she is often brought by her parents to their textile business operations. When she was old enough, her parents started assigning her simple roles and responsibilities in the business, especially during school summer breaks, intermittently doing business responsibilities and vacation time. From there she learned business basics, critical business values and, more importantly, she was able to earn money for herself as she was given a form of "salary" if she does her roles and responsibilities well. According to Ms. Kim Lato, her parents always implement "fair wages for fair work," and this policy applies to all, even to family members. While her business acumen is slowly being developed during those times in their shop, she could already see a pre-determined future – that she would inherit their textile business and continue her parents' legacy, as this is what her family is expecting from her and her brother. While she does not dread the thought of inheriting their textile business in the near future, keeping the thought to herself, she knew by heart that her interest does not lie in textiles or its distribution.



Ms. Kim Lato, President and CEO of Kimstore Enterprise Corporation – one of the most trusted and leading e-commerce portal for tech gadgets in the Philippines

¹ This case study was conducted by Joy Munsayac-Cacal, Researcher | Project Management Consultant, Coca-Cola Philippines, Philippines.

Attending higher education in one of the premiere business schools in the Philippines, she took a degree in Marketing. College education further honed her business capabilities, both in theoretical and in practical terms. Ms. Kim Lato was still in her 2nd year of college education at the De La Salle University Manila, when the concept of establishing an online gadgets business came into being.

She was a budding photography enthusiast and she always stays up to date in the latest trends and technologies by researching through the internet and engaging in her photography group. As a passionate photography hobbyist, she came across the challenge of finding a reliable and affordable source of top-of-the-line photography gadgets and accessories locally and even more difficult to locate an online store catering worldwide. This difficult situation sparked her business inspiration, it struck her the idea that it is really difficult to acquire photography gadgets online from a Philippine based portal and being a student means she had limited time to go from one physical store to another in order to scout and buy the exact gadget that she needs.

She investigated why online purchasing or shopping is not a hit in the Philippines that time, given its potential practicality for busy students like her and career professionals alike. But she did not stop at just being curious about the absence of reliable e-commerce in the Philippines, from there she envisioned to introduce and popularize it in the country. She firmly believed that the future belongs to the curious, and that “curiosity is the spark behind every great idea.” Her greatest challenge at the onset of her business was how to transform shopping mall-loving Filipinos, or at least a niche or slice of the shopping population, into an enthusiastic online shopper.

Coming from a family of entrepreneurs and armed with a (more or less) solid online business concept, it did not take long for Ms. Kim Lato, then 18 years old, to set-up her first online store via, the now defunct social media platform, Multiply. With an initial investment capital of Php20,000 (about US\$400) borne from her lifetime savings, she made her first sales transaction on a premium digital camera worth Php15,000 (about US\$300) to an equally passionate photography hobbyist and organization colleague. She started selling cameras, lenses, and other photography accessories from the social networking site, as this is where she communicates with her friends, classmates, fellow hobbyists, and networks. From this endeavor, she also easily accomplished her schoolwork requirement for her Sales Marketing subject, in which they are tasked to sell Php30,000 (about US\$600) worth of any products, as a learning by doing exercise, before the term ends.

Her product policies were simple: quality is always paramount in everything that she sells, seconded by affordability since her target market is mainly students like herself. Undoubtedly learned from her informal and formal business trainings, she mentioned that “from quality and

affordability, you get customer satisfaction and that is how your business will grow.” A business value that she would carry in the next years of her operations.

As a very “techie” person or one who is versatile on technology gadgets, usage, and concepts, she is offering more than just tech electronic products. She always painstakingly study, review and research the products that she sells so she could give the best advice and recommendations to her customers. She would always be the first to be in the know about the latest gadgets or accessories and anticipates inquiries from her customers about these latest trends online. After only a year of operations within her university, her market grew to other schools in Metro Manila, such as Ateneo de Manila, University of Sto. Tomas, and University of the Philippines through word of mouth, online referrals and good customer reviews or feedback via social media. From there, her inventory grew from photography line, as her buyers also look for laptops, smart phones, tablets and other tech gadgets. With commitment, hard work and the desire to offer the best deals across the country, she found joy and fulfillment in knowing the satisfaction of buyers when they got their hands on their favorite gadgets through her store.

Still having a one-woman team operation in 2007, she felt a surge of determination to continue her online business, and she began to operate purposively by arranging her schedule between school and business. On her 3rd and 4th year in college, she attends classes from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm, then do business from her laptop and mobile phone from 1:00 pm to 6:00 pm, managing all business processes from order handling; payment receipt and confirmation; delivery; technical advisory on product specs, features and functionality; and ordering from suppliers. Her initial thoughts was this online business is good while still in the university, as a side job while earning her degree.

Upon graduating in 2008, Ms. Kim Lato again faced another challenge, this time with her career path after college. She would have wanted to experience a few years in the workforce sector after graduation. However, the Philippines was undergoing serious economic crisis at that time, which means she had limited employment opportunities locally, and she also did not want to venture abroad for work. So instead of looking for employment, she continued to grow Kimstore into a full pledge online store for quality and affordable gadgets. She formally registered her sole proprietorship business as Kimmy Enterprises under the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and hired their house helper as her first employee, mainly to help her fulfill deliveries across nearby meet-up points or handle package shipments for outside of Metro Manila orders. She kept her network even after college, so the connections and communications continued up to when her friends, classmates and customers from college years became young professionals. She gradually grew her business and her team support as she firmly believed that every businesswoman should be ready to adapt to changes, be open to feedback, accept challenges, and keep up with trends. By

the end of year 2009, she already made her first 1 million pesos (about US\$20,000) sales from Kimstore business transactions.

The business growth continued, multiplying every year the number of satisfied customers and the subsequent sales through various online channels; however, Multiply social media was still the main portal for her business. She continued to grow her business portfolio, so by the end of year 2012, her business capitalization is already worth more or less 10 million pesos (about US\$200,000). It is also within this period when Multiply recognized Kimstore among its most successful online seller of the year.

Not short of challenges and lessons along the business operations, Ms. Kim Lato again encountered a major obstacle when Multiply suddenly closed its operations in the year 2013. The platform did not also give enough time for its users to migrate their profiles or communicate adequate announcements to their social media networks and followers. For the first time in her life, she felt a degree of uncertainty regarding the future of her online business. She described her feelings as being in a state of shock, as Kimstore was hugely offline for at least 3 days. Luckily, she already began building her profile and portfolio on Facebook and Twitter, which enabled her avid customers to locate Kimstore again.

But learning from third party social media experience with Multiply, she began developing her own website. Establishing her own e-commerce website was not an easy breezy endeavor, and a shrewd person bought kimstore.com and kimstore.com.ph URLs ahead and waited for the right moment to sell the web addresses. She was forced to spend a huge amount of money to buy the Kimstore website addresses, as she was not able to secure intellectual property rights to “Kimstore” as a brand name yet at that time. After securing her rightful web addresses, and with ample amount of help from her friends and networks in the web development field, <https://kimstore.com/> e-commerce platform became operational within 3 months’ time. She also secured patent for her brand names from the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) of the Philippines.

While the 2013 business year was full of challenges, the following year 2014 was a year of abundance. She was able to double her business value and sales. She took advantage by investing in online advertising across all search engines and social media platforms that enabled her to establish a strong and more stable customer base. By year 2015, she renamed her business to Kimstore Enterprise Corporation and registered it under the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Overcoming these challenges earned the favor of her family towards her business. Her family supported her throughout the business obstacles, and respected her decision to continue growing and sustaining Kimstore as a business endeavor. She even hired her fresh graduate brother as a business management executive under training.



Ms. Kim Lato, then 23 years old, is the youngest among the 50 Young Entrepreneurs awardee of GoNegosyo in 2011. Source: Taken during the book launching and signing of the GoNegosyo publication 50 Inspiring Stories of Young Entrepreneurs where she is featured.

As President and CEO, Ms. Kim Lato is very much hands-on in the strategic direction and operational management of her company. Throughout its operations of more than a decade, Ms. Kim Lato received numerous awards and accolades from various institutions, recognizing her revolutionary work in the field of e-commerce business in the Philippines. In 2011, she became one of the 50 Young Entrepreneurs Awardees in the Philippines by GoNegosyo and one of the 12 Young Starpreneurs recognized by The Philippine Star. Not resting on her laurels, Kim Lato started the year 2014 by being a Brand Ambassador of TackThis Philippines, a new e-commerce program under Smart Communications. She was hailed as the PLDT Boss for E-commerce in 2015 and Brand Ambassador of the MAKE IT BIG campaign by PLDT SME in 2016.²

3.15.2 Profile of a Company

Point of Sale and Product Range

Now operating 11 years of profitable business in the Philippines, Kimstore Enterprise Corporation already came full circle as it is now among the longest running and most trusted e-commerce service platform when it comes to procuring electronic gadgets and accessories online. Kimstore envisions a full e-commerce ecosystem that will provide all Filipinos the latest gadgets and technological advancements that will take the Philippines at the forefront of the tech industry.

² <https://www.businessnews.com.ph/success-story-kim-store-20170202/>; and <https://www.entrepreneur.com.ph/news-and-events/who-are-the-leading-foreign-and-local-players-in-ph-e-commerce-a00200-20171024>

The main online platform of Kimstore is via its website: <https://kimstore.com/>, where a full online e-commerce shopping experience can be accessed by online customers. Likewise, business traffic and transactions also come from social media platforms, mainly from its Facebook business page: <https://www.facebook.com/kimstorePH>; twitter account: <https://twitter.com/kimstoreph>; and Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/kimstorePH/>.

Kimstore's retail products range from digital cameras; gaming consoles; mobile phones; tablets; music players; powerbanks; earphones; speakers; action cameras; mirrorless cameras; photography accessories; wearables; health and sports gadgets; and other latest tech gadgets in trend. Each product sold through Kimstore undergoes quality review through a company tradition called the "unboxing," to ensure that it will deliver to the specifications and features advertised. This tradition is attended by the full Kimstore team, as this is where they get their education and orientation about the latest products that they will sell. Kimstore also adheres to standard product warranty and product return policies, as mandated by the DTI and other enterprise regulatory bodies.

Kimstore is a trusted online partner of several tech gadget brands: they sell products of Anker; Apple; Asus; Garmin; Nokia;Huawei; Oppo; Samsung; Sandisk; and Transcend, to name a few. Worldwide network of suppliers and distributors ensure the supply of gadgets demanded by Kimstore customers is fully complied all the time.

Kimstore has a very broad digital footprint: Kimstore's Facebook profile alone have over 2.5 million followers; daily traffic from website surpasses its target each day mainly coming from organic and paid online advertisements. Brand partners of Kimstore are also subsidizing the advertising or marketing costs for their products promoted on Kimstore channels. Awards and citations from well-known institutions and ICT corporations received by Kimstore and its CEO continue to flourish as an organic online press and video release and, in some way, also serve as an advertisement for the company as the featured releases accentuate the good performance and values of Kimstore as an online e-commerce business.

While Kimstore is mainly accessible online, they also started partnerships with established physical retail tech gadget stores, wherein online orders can be complied if the customers would like to pick-up the items immediately. Currently, there are 12 Kimstore partner stores strategically located in prime spots around Metro Manila that releases orders and receive payments for company

Quality Customer Service and Honest Communications

What sets Kimstore apart from other e-commerce platforms is its personalized way of catering to customer's electronics and tech gadget needs. In-depth product knowledge starting from its leadership to its employees transcends quality service to buying customers. According to its President and CEO, *"e-commerce is more on personal relationships. It's not just about selling and earning. It's all about how you communicate your products to your customers in an online and telecom medium. It is important that your customers will be able to make an informed purchase decision every time."* With this perspective in mind, Kimstore also built a very detail oriented post-purchase service team to assist its customers in relation to the gadgets they have purchased online, whether about first time gadget use, product set-up, maintenance, and other technical related concerns.

In line with its company's mission *"to provide brand new and guaranteed original gadgets at unbeatable prices anywhere in the country,"* Kimstore brokered several exclusive online distributorship with electronics and tech gadget brands that enable the company to sell the products at very low prices, compared to physical outlet stores and mall shops of the same brand.

Over a decade of quality operations brought Kimstore its strong customer base following. The company now caters to a broader section of the shopping population from youth, college students, young professionals, tech gadget enthusiasts, photography practitioners, and, more recently, private corporations on their tech gadget requirements. Positive and raving reviews from loyal customers online also contributed to its ever growing customer base. At the same time, quick issues and concerns resolution mitigate or neutralized negative reviews or feedbacks.

Partners for Business Growth, Inward and Outward

As a rapidly growing business, Kimstore required reliable logistics and payment partners, and these partners ensure that orders are delivered on time. For product delivery compliance, the company is in partnership with LBC and Ninja Van.

While for payments processing, the current partners are Dragon pay online, MLhuiller Pawnshop and Money Transfer, Banco de Oro, Metrobank, EastWest Bank, Unionbank, and Cebuana Lhuiller Pawnshop and Money Transfer. Kimstore is currently piloting an installment payment program for higher priced tech gadgets and equipment, where customers can program their payment in an agreed period of time through a form of loan from Cebuana Lhuiller. If proven to be an effective business strategy, the installment program partnership will be expanded nationwide.

As a form of Corporate Social Responsibility, Kimstore launched an ambassadorship program wherein loyal online customers can become affiliate sellers and receive percentage of the sales

income as reward. Another form of giving back initiatives include assistance to select community programs by posting its campaign or projects in the Kimstore’s online communication channels to help in the information dissemination and encourage the general public to support the call to action.

Company Core Operations and Team Work

The President and CEO, Ms. Kim Lato, personally handles employee training and orientation. She also leads the “*unboxing*” tradition of the company. Through this practice, it is ensured that the Kimstore business values and commitment are inculcated in the company culture and in the conduct of quality business services through her employees. Explaining each role of employees and hands-on training in the Kimstore e-commerce ecosystem enables each of the teams to work in sync with the other steps and processes managed by other teams of the company. While there are clear role sorts and team leads, the central nervous system of the business is still the office of the President and CEO. In turn, Kimstore, as a company, ensures workplace ethics are followed and benefits mandated by the law are extended to all employees at all levels.

As her own brand ambassador, Ms. Kim Lato is also known online as “Ninang Kim” (godmother Kim) by its online customers. Ninang Kim is a caricature that serves as mascot or icon of the company, often used when communicating promos and discounts seasonally offered throughout the year. Their most recent promo to cap off 2017 is the “*What is your wish from Ninang Kim?*” online promo, wherein customers participate by answering the question. Kimstore team selects the best answer and Ninang Kim grants the tech gadget wish of the selected winner for free.



With the company’s sustained growth and with a growing team of 60 personnel, Kimstore began its process to full digital transition in the year 2016. Kimstore is now on full ICT based operations from order taking, marketing, customer servicing via phone and chat, payment processing, advertising, post-purchase assistance, logistics and delivery, and even financial accounting.

Company Milestones and Customer Testimonials

The table below shows the notable historical highlights of Kimstore throughout its 11 years of business operations. The summary also denotes the major challenges faced by the company.

Table 1. Business Milestones and Challenges of Kimstore

Milestones	Year	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inception of online tech gadget business with Php20,000 (US\$400) capitalization • Made first business sales transaction through Multiply social media 	2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capturing a niche among the shopping mall-loving Filipinos and turning them into online shoppers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of market to other major universities in Metro Manila • Expanded portfolio of gadgets inventory for sale 	2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time management between school and online order fulfilment, especially for meet-ups delivery across the universities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalized business and registered Kimmy Enterprises as a sole proprietorship business under DTI 	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retaining networks and customers after graduation from the university
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made first million from Kimstore sales • Hired first employee to help fulfill logistical requirements 	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing customer base needed bigger and better team to fulfill orders and process payments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Started team creation, hired initial 2 fresh graduates and trained them on order processing via call, text and chat • Settled physical office by renting office at Lakandula St., Tondo, Manila on a family-owned building 	2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team not enough to process all orders real time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded team to about 8 employees to manage order processing, warehousing inventories, delivery fulfilment and receipt of payment • Became one of the 50 Young Entrepreneurs Awardees in the Philippines by GoNegosyo • Received GoNegosyo Badge of Trust • Recognized as one of the 12 Young Starpreneurs by The Philippine Star newspaper 	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting safety procedures in cash on delivery meet-ups and handling money from payment of orders by employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiply recognized Kimstore are one of the Top Online Sellers of the year • Surpassed 10 million pesos business sales from Kimstore • Expanded team to 15 employees 	2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to improve financial accounting processes

Milestones	Year	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Started building Facebook and Twitter profiles and portfolio 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doubled the business value from 2012 bench mark Expanded the team to 30 employees and built the post-purchase customer service team Established own e-commerce website Started partnership with physical gadget stores to expand pick-up and meet-up locations for Kimstore customers' convenience 	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiply social media platform shut down, Kimstore was offline for 3 days Web address acquisition from prior owner Lack of intellectual property rights over Kimstore brand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patented Kimstore brand and related business icons at the IPO Hired more personnel for order fulfilment 	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encountered fraud transactions complaint from customers victimized by online scammers pretending to be representatives of Kimstore
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renamed business to Kimstore Enterprise Corporation and transitioned into a corporation type of business ownership Registered company to SEC Secured exclusive distributorship to a number of tech gadget brands Expansion of the number of partner stores Expansion of headquarters and warehouse to 3 floors of the building 	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some fraud transactions still continue to persist despite reports to the National Bureau of Investigation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grew number of partner stores to 12 outlets Formalized business partnerships with logistics companies Started transition of all business processes to ICT systems Expansion of team to 50 employees Piloted Kimstore ambassadorship program or web affiliate marketing as a form of CSR 	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selecting the right technology for the full ICT transition of all business processes Persisting fraud transaction cases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalized business partnerships with payment processing companies and banks Launched information drive in the form of organic and paid ads, informing the online public customers 	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warehouse expansion or relocation to a bigger facility About 10 cases of fraudulent transactions

Milestones	Year	Challenges
<p>about the legitimate Kimstore platforms for business transactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piloted installment payment program through micro-loans • Ended the year with 2.5+ million followers on Facebook • Ended the year with greater business value and highest annual sales record, as of yet. 		

Among the main factors that moved the company success forward is its growing number of satisfied customers. When good customer reviews and feedback are given, the word spreads like a lightning bolt online. These reviews add to the corporate reputation score of the company that helps increase brand recognition and trust, which is very important especially for online businesses because these values, more often than not, converts to actual customer sales. Here are some of the selected best customer testimonials for Kimstore throughout the years.

Chat Fores, Customer since 2008, Age: 42. Occupation: interior designer

“Kimstore has always been a lifesaver for me. Being a mother of 2 and busy with my interior design company, kimstore has made it very convenient for me to get the gadgets I need for my family and my business. Prices are lower than the usual stores and service is great! I get all the items at my doorstep! You can get the newest items faster than everybody else. All it takes is a one text and the item is yours the same day. I am also a big fan of Kim's little gadgets. She has the most fun stuff I can give out during Christmas! Kim has been my reliable source of all things techie since 2008.”

Zyla Quiambao

“Hi, I’m Zyla, 30, working in Digital Advertising. I’ve known Kim since college - we’re orgmates - and I’m Kimstore’s first customer. I remember I got a Canon point and shoot camera. I guess I can say I’m a lucky ‘buena mano’ (first customer), seeing as how Kimstore has grown to be one of the biggest players in e-commerce in the Philippines.”

“To be completely honest, Kimstore’s success doesn’t come as a surprise to me. Since our college days, Kim has already shown competitiveness, leadership, and strong business initiative. I mean, how else will you describe a college student who pioneered e-commerce in a time when people are apprehensive to purchase things, let alone gadgets, online. For a new

business venture like that, it would have taken great determination and a kick-ass strategy to succeed. Fortunately, Kim has had that formula down pat. Since the start, I already knew Kimstore would be the success that it is right now, and I couldn't be prouder of Kim for everything she has achieved at such a young age. I can only look to her for inspiration, as do a lot of young people who wish to be their own boss someday."

Rucci Ramos-Pacag, 29y/o, Finance/HR

"I've been buying gadgets and accessories from Kim for almost a decade now and it has always been a great experience - cheapest price in the market, authentic products, very responsive staff, even Kim herself quickly attends to my orders and inquiries. I've introduced Kimstore to my colleagues and friends, and like me, they never get disappointed on their purchases. I will never get tired of recommending Kimstore to anyone because I know that I will never go wrong. Kudos to Kim for creating Kimstore, you deserve the fame and recognition, good job and more power!"

Atty. Ernesto Tabujara III

"I am Ticky Tabujara, 52 years old, lawyer. I have been a Kimstore customer for the past 6 years, since 2011. At that time I was new to online transactions, but Ms. Kim Lato personally handled my first transaction and my trust was immediately gained from her. I bought a camera and Kim went the extra service mile and guided me on how to use it. Since then on Christmas and birthdays, or whenever I need a gadget I go to Kim for great service and affordable products. Since those early years many competitors have emerged, but I have remained loyal to Kimstore because I know that I am assured of getting the best possible deal, and friendly, convenient, service."

Mark Milan Macanas, Editor-in-Chief, TechPinas.com one of the longest-running, most followed, and most read technology blogs in the Philippines

"Kim Lato, through her trusted and successful Kimstore online business, has helped democratize the use of gadgets in the Philippines by putting these devices at arm's reach of many Filipinos across the country. Kim is not only a true trailblazer but she has also helped so many people through the years by providing jobs, by the consistency of the service that Kimstore provides, and simply by being an example of an empowered Filipina."

Prior to becoming one of the most trusted online gadget store in the Philippines, Kimstore had to overcome major challenges along the way. From a Php20,000 (US\$400) business value investment

in 2006, Kimstore is now a multi-million business venture capitalizing on e-commerce and vertical marketing. Starting from a one-woman team, it now employs over 60 sales, marketing and support team, creating economic value and sustained livelihood for more than a decade, not just to its owner but to its employees as well. Based on MSME classification in the Philippines³, Kimstore was able to grow from micro, to small, and now a medium sized enterprise.

Kimstore Enterprise Corporation is conducting its base central operations from its headquarters located at Lakandula St., Tondo, Manila. Surpassing its 2017 sales target, its business direction for 2018 is to double the sales mark and sustain its business growth. Ms. Kim Lato intends to remain as the President and CEO of a leading e-commerce online store in the country for the coming years and to continuously serve and address the tech-related needs of the Filipino people.

3.15.3 Findings

3.15.3.1 Success Factors

The success of Kimstore Enterprise Company can be attributed to many factors and circumstances, as shown in the initial sections. Many would attribute Kimstore as one of the pioneers of e-commerce business and have accelerated the promotion of this type of facility as a reliable, convenient and affordable means to shop. Particular to Kimstore, it became a leader in providing quality electronic tech gadgets, living up to its badge of commitment to be “*The Most Trusted Online Gadget Store*” in the Philippines. The following section highlights the top 5 attributable success factors of the company.

Maximizing ICT Utilization

As an online business, Kimstore fully utilized the power of ICT from the beginning, which has become its most powerful ally in bringing the e-commerce business to success. Being a digital native, Ms. Kim Lato understood the online environment very well and used it to her company’s advantage. Kimstore always make sure that they are keeping up with the technological trends that are being introduced in the industry. According to its President and CEO,

“It is really important to be one of the early adopters of the newest innovation for the simple reason that technology can do almost everything today. Being one step ahead in utilizing the right advanced technology for your business is when you can say that you’re on the right track.”

³ Senate of the Philippines, The MSME Sector at a Glance, Senate Economic Planning Office, March 2012

While bold in trying new or upcoming technologies, Kimstore filters the right technological fit for its business, the right technology that would answer the needs of the company now and the immediate future. Kimstore is now on full ICT based operations both for its end-to-end business processes and marketing communications. This full ICT transition brought efficiency in her team operations and cost reduction in terms of company operational expenditures.



Bringing your business to the next level means continuously inspiring your team and keeping head of your competitors when it comes of ICT tools for business.

The Right Mindset, Upbringing, and Education

We could say that Ms. Kim Lato is in an ideal environment or breeding ground for entrepreneurs. Having been raised by a very enterprising family and learning from top academic business institutions are among the attributable success factors. However, Ms. Kim Lato says that

“Entrepreneurs are not born to it. Succeeding in business takes a lot of learning about your market, hard work to achieve your goals, and the capacity to innovate in today’s fast-changing business climate. Before you throw yourself headfirst into entrepreneurship, first ask yourself: are you ready to take the risk?”

Indeed, back in 2006, a risk-taking go-getter attitude was the main driver why Kimstore was established in the first place. She really thrived to get educated in her business, both from formal and informal sources of valuable information, and thus, she took calculated risks when she made an informed decision to start and grow her own company. For Ms. Kim Lato, being an entrepreneur is a never ending educational journey - some you can learn from other people or online and some you can experience first-hand.

Creating That Win-Win-Win Scenario for Businesses and Customers

Success lies heavily on creating business value to all parts of your business ecosystem. Key stakeholders to Kimstore Enterprise Corporation are: (a) Kimstore as the online e-commerce point of sale; (b) Tech gadget suppliers and distributors as the manufacturers or source of products; and (c) online shopping customers of tech electronic gadgets. The steering wheel to create a triple winning scenario is at the helm of Kimstore, as the company need to bring value to all 3 stakeholders. Striking that right balance in between business-to-business (B2B) negotiations and business-to-consumers (B2C) is a business strategy that has been already mastered by Kimstore. In order to deliver quality service online, Kimstore have built its 60 personnel team gradually and meticulously. It is very challenging is to maintain the expected quality of service customers, that is why the President and CEO is personally attending to the employee's education and orientation, instilling to every employee the mission, vision, values, and the humble beginnings of the company. For Ms. Kim Lato,

“Every businesswoman should know how to value their employees, making sure that they are being taken care of by giving them a holistic approach to growth, not only monetary but for their personal well-being. As the company goes up, flourishes, and achieve its set goals, the employees also step up and flourish as well.”

The Kimstore e-commerce business is bringing sizeable financial value to its product suppliers. The continued business relationships and several exclusive distributorships secured by Kimstore can attest to the good business conduct of the company to its suppliers.

Likewise, Kimstore have maintained good customer service by delivering quality products at the lowest price. Kimstore is known to give the best customer service. Key to this is that

“Each client is given a personalized customer experience, starting from inquiring about the product to purchasing process to after sales concerns. Each concern is given the best customer relations and handling strategy, making sure that their concerns were not just resolved but the customers also feel happy and satisfied on the products and services delivered,” said Ms. Kim Lato.

Reputable Global Digital Footprint

The mass base of online customers of Kimstore is brought about by its online reputation and global digital footprint. Having a strong marketing presence online and a strong following customer base, Kimstore is able to partner with tech brands that have also provided the opportunity to be the exclusive distributor online and leverage its pricing to maximize profit to the company and value to its customers.

Online Marketing and Communications Consistency

This success factor contributes also to creating a reputable online global footprint. Consistent messaging and branding increases possibility of customer recall. Kimstore is known to be “*The Most Trusted Online Gadget Store*,” and this has been their company tag line and mantra since its inception in 2006. As the company grew, Kimstore established its own digital marketing arm, consists of in-house creatives and communications talents that take charge of managing the offline and online marketing and advertising campaigns. Apart from product inventory, marketing communications is the second biggest investment of the company.

3.15.3.2 Challenges

With over a decade of business operations, Kimstore Enterprise Corporation have already experienced a lot major challenges and obstacles along the way. Some of these challenges brought valuable lessons that made the company even better. The following section focuses on the top 5 business difficulties encountered by the company that required ICT based solutions.

Creating Your Niche of Online Shoppers

Back in 2006, the Philippine market is not used to online shopping, nothing beats malls when it comes to shopping. Filipinos would make purchase only after they see, feel and, in the case of electronic tech gadgets, tested the product. Mall shopping is such a phenomenon in the country that key cities, provinces and airports have malls all over.

Kimstore broke that glass ceiling when it is able to create or mimic almost the same customer mall experience when selling tech gadgets online. Each online engagement at Kimstore is personalized according to the customer needs or wants. Kimstore speak about products online in a factual and in-depth manner that they become the authority when it comes to securing the right tech gadget based on your preference and budget, it’s as if you are seeing, feeling and experiencing the products when you read its posted information or communicate with Kimstore online. According to Ms. Kim Lato,

“The web and social media can spread the word about a company's products and services like wildfire, it helps build brand awareness in a very unique and powerful way.”

Sustaining your niche or customer mass base is a continuing journey, especially with online type of business. The internet world for business is a powerful ally, but can also be a fickle friend,

“You may be the online e-commerce leader today but there will always be another disruptive idea that can challenge your organization. In order to sustain your online market share, you

and your company should work together to adapt to your customers' ever-changing needs," she added.

Among the biggest lessons in relation sustaining your online niche is establishing your own e-commerce website. Learning from the 2013 experience with Multiply, Kimstore realized the importance of having a 100% controlled and owned online facility. Third party social media platforms are still among top the sources of business transactions, but having its own website is a security blanket that will ensure that your online footprint will never be erased.

Inventory Management

As the Kimstore business grew, so has its inventories. Kimstore is already occupying 3 floors of their rented building headquarters and most of it are allocated for inventories. It is also challenging to monitor the inventory types and count all the time for a business that is conducting sales on a daily basis. There were also several cases of missing items in the warehouse.

Staying up to date with the latest technologies, Kimstore adapted early on an online inventory management system (IMS), and they have continuously developed this according to the changing needs and business process integration. The generated information from its IMS also helps in the sales projection, which becomes the basis for product procurement from manufacturers or suppliers. While physical inventory count is still being done on a regular basis, the tedious work of inventory management was made efficient by the IMS.

Maintaining Quality Customer Service in a Growing Mass Base

A growing customer mass base is always good for business, but it would also require larger number of team members to deliver that same quality customer service in order to maintain good business reputation. For online businesses, lag time in responding to customers is a big factor, it is always important to provide an almost real-time experience to buying customers.

With the current team of 60 personnel, about 70% are allocated to customer handling, yet still the volume of customer inquiries remain to be a challenge. Recently, Kimstore adapted yet another business process technology for inquiry response via chat message, it uses a level of artificial intelligence (AI) that clusters similar inquiries that can be replied with a more or less similar message, for example several customers asking for the price of a particular product can be replied all at once by a product specialist. The customer management application also automatically cluster inquiry per type of product, which makes responding more manageable for specific product specialists, especially for inquiries that will require personalized or extensive answers. Ms. Kim Lato shared that this new technology that they adapted have increased the sales and customer service team's efficiency by almost 50%.

Logistics and Payments Management

Increasing sales transactions is a good business indicator, but it will also require ease of payment processing and efficient logistics to get the products delivered on time. With the current business size of Kimstore, it is difficult to manually receive each payment and manually transact deliveries for each customer.

Kimstore forged partnerships with reputable logistics and financial companies to address these business challenges. They now have a fully integrated online system that confirms payments and delivery requirements along the ICT powered e-commerce system of Kimstore. The systems integration was initiated in 2016, now Kimstore have 2 logistics and 7 financial payment processing partners that helped increase business efficiency compared to having these processes managed in-house on per transaction basis.

Fraudulent Online Activities Using Kimstore Brand

Being a popular online store also have its pitfalls, Kimstore encounter fraudulent transactions done by online scammers using its brand name. With a batting average of 10 fraud incidents a year, the company management takes this threat very seriously and have fully coordinated and cooperated with the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI). While no culprit has been caught or convicted yet, Kimstore launched information drives online to warn the public of such fraudulent activities and at the same time inform them the legitimate online platforms of the company.

“It’s like fighting fire with fire, they use online means to scam people, thus, we will use bigger and better online information campaign to dispel and prevent their fraudulent activities,” said Ms. Kim Lato.

3.15.3.3 Policy Recommendations

There are about 5 policy recommendations that can be deduced from this research exercise that could help advance the plight of struggling women MSMEs in the Philippines.

Intensify and Ensure Equal Access of Men and Women to Entrepreneurship and ICT Education and Training at All Academic Levels

Learning from Ms. Kim Lato, it is never too early to learn business basics and business values, but not all can have that ideal environment. According to Ms. Kim Lato,

“While a good head start as a budding entrepreneur is always ideal, not all of us can have it, which is why commitment to education is very important. The right technology and entrepreneurial knowledge and information can take you where you want to go.”

Filipinos are talented and they got brilliant and creative minds. In fact, Filipinos ranked second next to India in terms of quality, cost, and availability of skilled IT workers in Asia, making them very much in demand in many parts of the world. But despite these skills and talents, there is a lack of support, access and use to ICT for productive entrepreneurial purposes. Also, the government should also acknowledge the need for ICT policies to narrow the digital divide by promoting competition, interconnection, and convergence in the ICT industry. This call for change will surely open opportunities for Filipino women entrepreneurs.

Women entrepreneurs who have enough knowledge and experience can be tapped to conduct seminars or trainings, providing insightful information, and recommend technologies to women entrepreneurs in the making and serve as inspiration to other women.

Create Enabling Environment and Avenues for Women Entrepreneurs Empowerment

The Philippines is way behind its co-ASEAN countries in terms of support to tech start-ups in the country. Much more, to women initiated tech start-ups. Throughout the Southeast Asian region, women are still perceived as the weaker sex. This notion automatically crosses out a lot of opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Stakeholders from the government, private sector and civil society should work together opens new doors for women entrepreneurs' active participation in economic building.

This can be achieved if women are given equal access to education, personal trainings, and skills formation. It was also discovered that women tend to not participate in business due lack of skills training and education, which later result in lack of confidence. Asserting this right in the society can give them better work and entrepreneurial opportunities.

It is also connected to giving women entrepreneurs a chance to be heard. Also, one major action that should be taken into consideration is to incorporate a women's entrepreneurial dimension in all entrepreneurship related policies.

“But at the end of the day, it is still wide-range information dissemination campaign to fully understand the role of women entrepreneurs in the economy that can possibly make it happen. While rounds of discussions and campaigns happen regarding the development of women entrepreneurs' image in the society, there is still a big gap on the information about the economic impact or contribution of women entrepreneurs. Women are still underrepresented and it's about time to let women get the right to be represented, especially in the 'non-traditional industries' for women,” said Ms. Kim Lato.

Create Institutions That Will Cater to Women MSMEs

One of the efforts in which the ASEAN region can adopt from the United States is by creating a government office of women's business ownership. This office can help in facilitating informational seminars and/or build women's business centers, encouraging women entrepreneurs and their organizations to be the voice in policy making and program development decisions.

Up to Date Monitoring of MSME-Related Policies and Instigate Modernization, as Necessary

Current MSME-related policies should also be evaluated periodically to counter-check which policies are still serving the best interest of the community. This is a very important step because it will determine what policies are still facilitative to the advantage of the members of the MSME community and what policies are causing disadvantages. This will also an opportunity to adopt best practices from other communities or countries. ICT can be a very strong component on this aspect, especially in the modernization policies for MSMEs.

Strengthen Cyber Security Capabilities to Protect E-Commerce Businesses and Customers

E-commerce operated businesses will only flourish in a safe and secured online environment. Increasing the capability of the authorities to track, apprehend and convict online scammers will be a very welcome development to online entrepreneurs in the Philippines. *"It will send a strong message to organized online criminals that cyber security in the country is being taken seriously, for the protection of both the business owners and online customers,"* said Ms. Kim Lato

3.15.3.4 Advice for Women Entrepreneurs

Throughout the Kimstore Enterprise Corporation journey, there are a lot of lessons that can be learned and best practices that can be adapted. Among the top 5 advices that can be imparted to women entrepreneurs, especially those at the onset or start-up phase are, from Ms. Kim Lato are:

Take the Risk and Take It Now

The only thing that makes a successful woman entrepreneur different from another person is that they didn't try and they just dreamed about it. Everything has a risk, and it's up to you to take that risk. Keeping in mind that, most of the time, these risks are worth taking when the timing is right.

"When you see a gap, you have to see this as an opportunity to be addressed by you, otherwise, someone else will address it."

Be Inspired and Continue to Aspire

Entering the tech world can be a bit overwhelming, especially the industry is dominated by men in the Philippines.

“It is important to surround yourself with people who believe in your brilliant ideas, who believe in your market, who believe in your strategy and share the same core values as yours. Through this, whatever problem and hurdle that you will face, you will be able to see it on a positive lens-shifting a struggle to your biggest breakthroughs.”

Study and Continue to Study Your Trade

“You won’t be on a high performance level all the time, sometimes there’ll be lows, so during the low periods you have to study and understand what’s causing the “low” performance.”

Remember that in business, learning never stops if you want to be on top of your game and remain in the leader board of your chosen industry.

Be Open to Innovations

“I think it is important that your business is open to learning and adapting new business technologies, these are tools and means that can help take your business to the next level.”

This is particularly true to every bit of obstacle faced by Kimstore.

Dream about Your Business, Then Learn from Someone or Something to Make It a Reality

“Continue to dream. It’s very important to have a dream. If you don’t have anything in mind, nothing will happen to you. Idolize someone or maybe follow their footsteps. Study something similar and apply it to your business concept.”

Every successful business starts with an imagined idea and the rest are just processes to fuel that idea into action.

3.15.3.5 Summary and Discussion

This research study on Women Entrepreneurship in the ICT/Smart Technology Industry in the Philippines have uncovered and rediscovered the vast untapped Filipino women’s potential in contributing or even leading this traditionally male dominated industry. While gender digital divide is still persisting, there are some Filipino women who made it to the ICT industry leader board in the country. Ms. Kim Lato, the President and CEO of Kimstore Enterprise Corporation, as fully discussed in this research paper, is among them.

As a signatory to the UN's SDG 2030, the Philippine Government and its development stakeholders must take definitive action to promote and utilize ICT as a means to accomplish SDG #5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. With easier and equal access to ICT tools and services, Filipino women can have their voices heard in the community and it will help them determine their own ways and means to achieve personal development and empowerment.

It is integral for policy makers and the government leadership to continue encouraging women to enter the ICT and STEM fields and to sustain their careers in these fields as they grow older. And by encouragement, we do not only mean creating opportunities and inviting women to participate, it is also creating lasting policies and enabling environments that will address the issues surrounding gender disparity in the ICT/Smart Technology field as a whole. Seeing more women emerge as leaders in these fields will encourage young girls to pursue such professions in the future.

While many Filipino women are still plagued by culturally dictated gender stereotyping and discrimination practices, ensuring that more women access can ICT to their advantage will provide new opportunities for women's economic empowerment. ICT can be a very powerful tool for women to leverage their stake in fruits of development and mitigate the gender disparity and discrimination. There are many possible ways of infusing ICT and women economic empowerment, such as (1) creating business and employment opportunities for women as owners, managers, and employees of ICT-based projects; (2) improving digital or technology driven services that are run by women; and (3) offering economic opportunities in salaried employment or entrepreneurship in the ICT field, to name a few.

ICT is a proven effective means to grow businesses, it is crucial that women entrepreneurs get proper education and training on the potential of ICT tools and strategies to help them sustain and grow their enterprises. Through this initiative, we help women increase their capacity to earn decent incomes. Likewise, growing businesses will enable women entrepreneurs to open up more economic opportunities to other members of their family and the community through job or employment creation.

Based on numerous development studies, when women are given the opportunity to earn an income, they reinvest almost 90% of this income to the welfare, education and health of their families. Economically empowering women can be a viable solution to breaking poverty cycles within families. Multiplying economically empowered women and families can help communities, or even the whole country, to address poverty and other social injustices.