When doing business, having all the latest and meaningful information one can possibly get matters most. However, with markets here and abroad moving too fast, sometimes it seems so hard to keep up with the developments.

If one needs information in commerce, whether about foreign or local markets, the ‘how-to-dos’ or ‘what-not-to-dos’ in exporting, importing or other business deals, trade statistics, and so on – the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is the right place to start. The DTI has numerous services and projects that support entrepreneurs, one of which is Tradeline Philippines.

Managed by the Bureau of Export Trade Promotion (BETP), Tradeline Philippines is a web-based information system that contains Philippine trade statistics, exporters and buyers listings, as well as relevant trade information such as trade-related sites/addresses, product and market profiles.

Moreover, Tradeline Philippines’ information base has been expanded by the Bureau of Domestic Trade Promotion (BDTP) so as to include exporter/supplier and local buyer profiles, as well as Philippine Regional profiles.

“Tradeline Philippines was actually an offshoot of a previous project – the Philippine Trade and Investment Network System (PhilTINS),” begins Jason T. Lao, BETP director. “PhilTINS, however, was non-interactive and was a very old project. Besides, we believe that we had to make use of cutting-edge technology in giving services to our people. Thus, Tradeline Philippines was created, and was finally implemented in year 2000.”

**People-oriented and web-oriented services**

“With BETP’s Internet capability, we can easily provide information such as trade statistics and links to other web sites,” informs Lao.

However, Lao says that they cannot post everything in detail on the web. “We still encourage people to call. Aside from having that human touch factor, there is an automatic feedback.”

The BETP has an Exponet Center (Export Assistance Network), which actually guides entrepreneurs on the basics of exporting. One can either call Exponet or go straight to the BETP office.
On the other hand, there are people who prefer electronic services, and this is where Tradeline Philippines comes in.

Through www.tradelinephil.dti.gov.ph, one can easily search for available Philippine products or raw materials. There is also a guide for those who may want to venture in exporting, importing or investing. Moreover, there is a feedback form for inquiries, suggestions or even complaints.

“A large number of those who are willing to use the technology belong to the younger generation,” observes Lao. “But there are also progressive minded managers who, despite their maturity, are willing to go to the web.”

The BETP maintains people-oriented and web-oriented services. “Our segments in targeting clientele are encompassing,” Lao continues. “We believe that only about 20% of Filipinos are adept in the new technology, the rest are still averse to it. For this reason, it is important that we give a two-way service.”

**Inside Tradeline Philippines**

Tradeline Philippines is just like doing business with almost anybody and almost anywhere in the world through the Internet. It aims to support the Filipino exporter, supplier and local buyer in gaining a foothold to new market opportunities all over the world.

Aside from trade statistics, product and market profiles, and other relevant trade information, what is noteworthy in Tradeline Philippines is the business matching system for registered Philippine-based exporters/suppliers and local/foreign buyers.

This means that registered exporters can post their products for business matching with the requirements of foreign-based buyers. Registered buyers, on the other hand, shall be provided with a facility to match their requirements with the products being marketed by the exporters or domestic suppliers.

Registration is open to legitimate Philippine-based exporters, suppliers and buyers. The free registration to exporters and domestic suppliers has been extended to December 31, 2001. There are no fees for the buyers. However, Lao says Tradeline Philippines will be charging minimal registration fees in the future.

“Tradeline Philippines has yet to be launched,” discloses Lao. “We are not yet comfortable to open up promotions. We have to clean up certain databases and improve some designs.”
Perhaps in the near future, Tradeline Philippines can be fully interactive, or can actually give subsidized services on actual negotiations, or will have actual link with suppliers and buyers. But at present, Lao says that they still need the help of the communications industry to guide them through.

“We need a lot of help from any agency, private or government, with regard to communications,” Lao points out. “We are trying to reach out to as many of our domestic base that we can tap for prospective exporting, so we need all communications agencies to help us farm out information.”

“We want the Tradeline Philippines to become like a portal,” vows Lao. “By providing everything on trade and industry in a web page.”