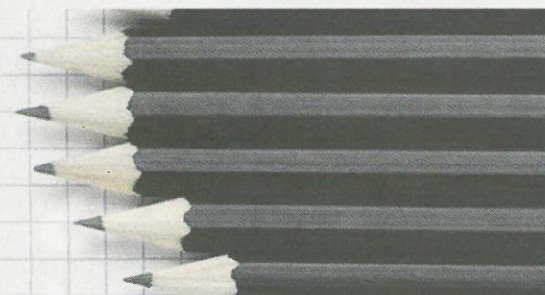




Work & Study
helping working adults study



The future of learning

FOR 13 years, Open University Malaysia (OUM) has always been one to bring innovation into the education industry, and with the launch of its new app on 2 July this year, it has taken one step further. The academic staff and partners of OUM have banded together to develop its new pillar of technology.

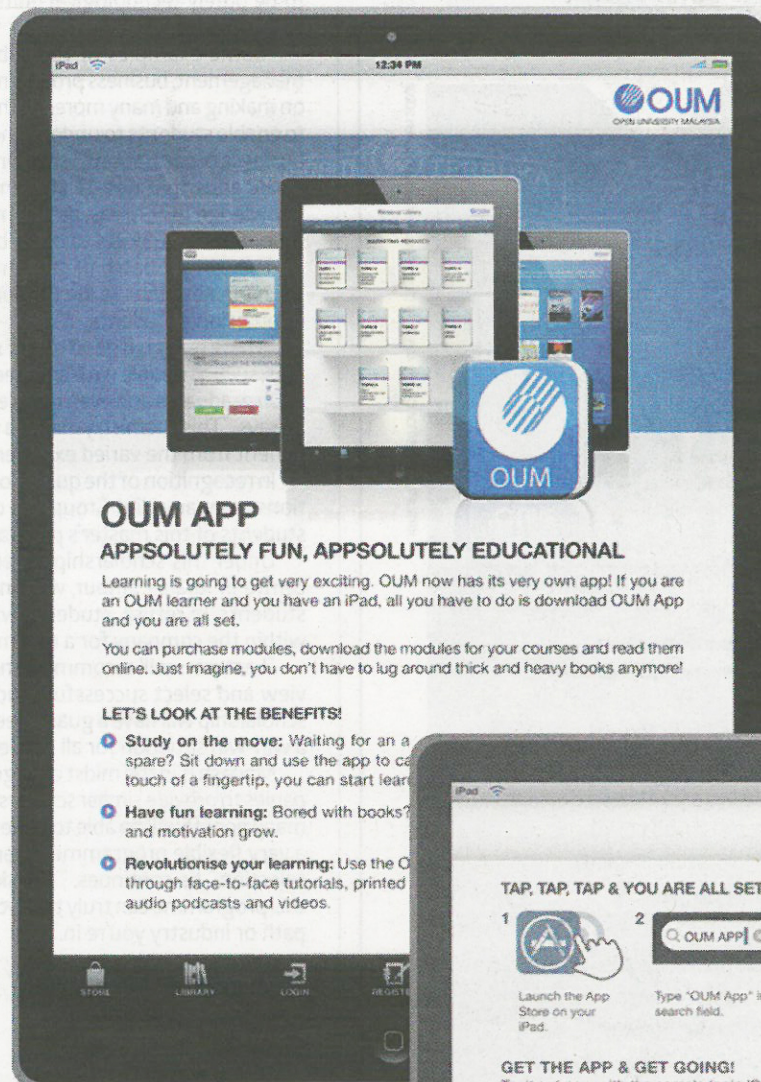
Before the inception of this idea, OUM had the physical modules in form of books, which in itself is very comprehensive and is 95 per cent of what a student requires. Each module had a development time of five to six months and a huge investment of resources. After providing a solid base for their students, OUM decided to bring things to the next level by developing e-content versions of its modules. This enhanced the convenience factor for students with desktops. With e-content, students had access to electronic version of the books in PDF format supplemented by video, audio, and links to additional resources.

If that wasn't enough, OUM is building upon this success and is making it even easier to access their study materials. The OUM app not only allows students to access the modules through its smartphones and tablets, but also gives them extra mobility and accessibility to learning materials. Once the modules are downloaded into the phones, they can be accessed without internet access. This makes a good supplement to students who wish to have information on the go.

The university has converted most of its modules to the application version, and is working on having all of its modules finished within the year. The application is currently made for the Apple store, but OUM is looking to expand to all platforms and operating systems ranging from Blackberries to Android phones.

Applications have always been at the forefront of smartphone technology. Not only are there numerous applications, but also a wide range of them, from practical applications to downright silly. Apple's application store has 900,000 apps and almost 50 billion downloads, allowing OUM to expose its application to a huge demographic at a quick pace.

Malaysians are no strangers to smartphone applications. Every smartphone you see has applications for chatting, gaming, navigation, calculation, and photo editing. Professor Dr Mansor Fadzil, Senior Vice President at OUM, says that he sees the next step for apps is in the direction of education. OUM is the first in Malaysia to adopt this concept of mobile learning. This



application is not solely for the perusal of students, but also for the public to take a gander at what OUM has to offer. They are allowed to look through OUM's syllabus and have a brief preview on what each subject contains. This is one of the ways OUM can reach out to the public and show them what it has to offer. It is also a good way to educate people about the possibilities of distance learning.

The university now has a blended learning method and an online learning method. Blended learning is where students attend a bi-monthly face-to-face class followed by online forum discussions, while online learning lets students study 100 per cent online, and is catered to students who have a restricted amount of time to attend face-to-face classes. Professor Mansor adds that the university's IT infrastructure is already established, so the possibilities of its

online features will now take off, and boost the accessibility to better performance overall.

Adding to this convenience is the SMS information system. OUM is implementing information on demand (IOD), which allows students to receive up-to-date information at the tips of their fingers. The SMS information system allows students to pull up syllabus information, timetables, and other information through their mobile phones.

Students who enrol in the university are also entitled to their own four gigabyte e-mail account on OUM's domain. They will also gain access to OUM's comprehensive digital and physical libraries.

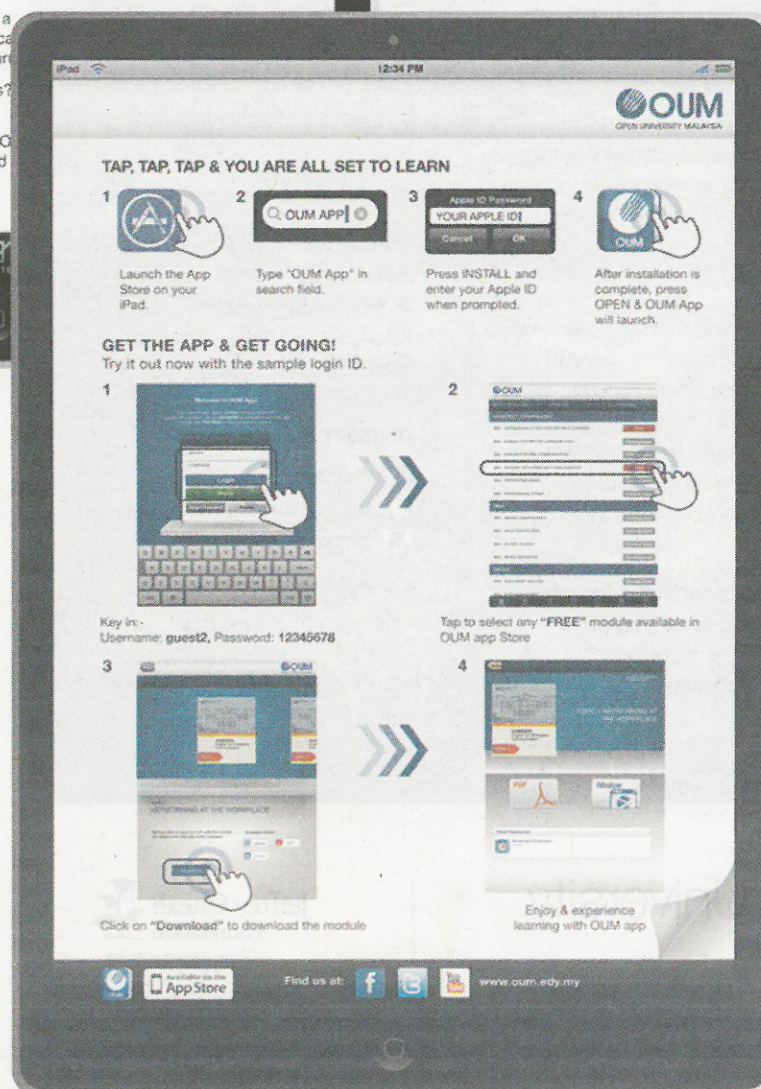
The Tan Sri Dr Abdullah Sanusi Digital Library has more than 30,000 volumes of printed books in the main campus and learning centres nationwide. The digital collection consists of more than 82,000 e-books and 32,000 e-journal titles. Also included are elec-

tronic theses, newspaper articles and legal acts.

The university has also embarked on translating of its modules in Bahasa Malaysia. There are people that want the content to be in Bahasa Malaysia, mainly out of preference. Students will be given English course materials by default, but will have Bahasa Malaysia materials as needed. The university has already implemented Bahasa Malaysia exams, so this is just another step in eliminating language hindrance. OUM wants to give education to people no matter what the challenges.

Professor Mansor says that the other reason for this implementation is to preserve the use of Bahasa Malaysia. OUM saw the need for Bahasa Malaysia a while ago and translated a few modules, but just recently decided that it wants to fully incorporate the language in learning. It will be available gradually, but estimated to be completed within two years.

The university also plans to extend its business to rural areas since it already has locations in key parts of Malaysia. The places it has in mind are Mersing, Manjung and Kuala Kerai. With all the facilities in place, it seems that OUM is steadily reaching out to the masses and providing better and more accessible education for everybody.



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Professor Dr Mansor Fadzil,
Senior Vice President, OUM