

**TOP
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Studying PATHWAYS

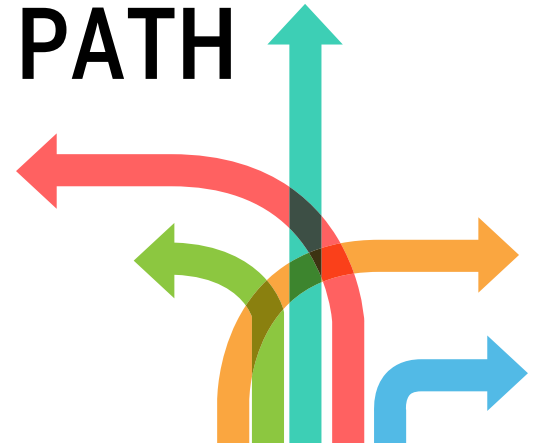
Which route should a student
take after SPM?



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Studying pathways

With SPM results due out on March 16 what is the best next step for your child to take to further his educational journey

CHOOSING
THE RIGHT
PATH

OUR cover story this month deals with an issue that all parents and their children face. The decision on what to study after SPM is not an easy one to make and has far reaching consequences because it's truly the first step a person takes into the real world. From this point onwards, education is an elective - it is no longer something that is compulsory, rather you make a choice. As a result it's hardly surprising that most think long and hard about courses to pursue.

There are some limiting factors to it though. One big hurdle to overcome is financial because as our article shows, costs differ wildly depending on the route you choose. Get your child to sit for the STPM exams and then study locally at a public university and the total cost of tertiary education could be less than RM50,000. If on the other hand they choose to do the International Baccalaureate and then pursue a degree in a foreign university you could be looking at a price tag of more than 10 times that. More if they have ambitions to be a medical doctor.

Still, as parents we all want the best for our children so it's hardly surprising that making the decision for tertiary education sometimes comes down to our own perceptions about what is best. Unfortunately, each person is unique and we have to accept that sometimes traditional routes to education don't fit everybody.

That's where vocational training comes into play and while our cover story debates the pros and cons of each route to university, we've also mentioned the option of going to a technical school and learning a skill instead. Don't laugh. Developed nations like Germany and France offer the teaching of trade skills for free with the only prerequisite being fluency in their language because they know how valuable a skilled workforce is.

Even in the local context, many vocational students are hired even before they graduate, which they do sooner than their counterparts studying for a degree who also have no guarantee of employment. Sure, having a certificate or a diploma isn't as prestigious but getting a head start in working life and then maybe going back to school later has its merits.

Whatever path is chosen, do remember to evaluate each choice carefully with your child. This is their future so let them have a big say in it too. Otherwise, you could end up paying a lot for an education that won't benefit them.

FAISAL SHAH
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A playful approach

New preschool uses play to promote learning

| Text by KEVIN WONG |
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ANYAMAN Preschool is where play is not only encouraged but is celebrated as an essential component of learning. Inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, a world renowned early childhood education model, it affirms the uniqueness, strength, and potential of young children. This philosophy is different from mainstream pedagogical approaches in that teachers create the curriculum in collaboration with the children, depending on where their interests lie.

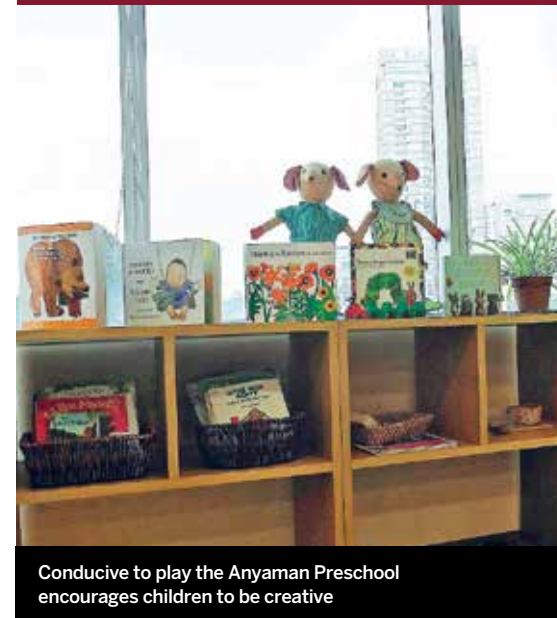
Anyaman Preschool founder Joanna Lim said that their teachers would begin lessons with a set of possibilities rather than a rigid curriculum. "The learning plan for the children will be based on close listening and following of their interests. Anyaman Preschool is ideal for parents who are looking for an environment that goes far beyond rote learning and even structured play programmes. It is for parents who want their child to grow up confident; to be able to express what they feel and think and grow to be individuals who feel that they have agency in their lives," she said.

Lim added that children at Anyaman Preschool are given the freedom to make their own friends, solve their own problems and explore real materials and media.

"At the same time, our teachers will be constantly listening and documenting each child's words and work to nurture his or her individual interests. The focus is on the child, and rather than the implementation of a standardised curriculum, facilitating an environment that honours belief and trust in child-led learning," she said.

The preschool is backed by a diverse panel of early childhood experts from around the world. Their advisors include Professor Catherine Snow of Harvard University, one of the world's experts in language and literacy development for young children; Barbara Acton, formerly co-chair of the North America Reggio Emilia Alliance; Dr Hartini Zainuddin, the country's leading expert on the welfare and protection of children; Hilary Craig, a specialist educator on learning difficulties; and Dr Sangita Terumalay, a consultant paediatric neurologist at Hospital Kuala Lumpur.

Anyaman Preschool is centrally located at Wisma Guocoland, within the Damansara City development of Damansara Heights. ■



Conducive to play the Anyaman Preschool encourages children to be creative



Students will be able to practice their broadcasting skills thanks to SEGi University's new facilities

Lights, camera, action

New studio offers advanced facilities to SEGi students

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

SEGi University has recently opened its state-of-the-art studio facilities to equip students with skills needed for communication and creative design industries. The RM300,000 studio is housed at the SEGi Tower in Kota Damansara on the 13th and 14th floor and is equipped with a broadcasting studio, photography studio, creative design and studio gallery as well as a newsroom.

During the launch of the studios, SEGi University vice-chancellor Prof Dr Patrick Kee said the facilities were aimed at nurturing the skills that are needed for students who are pursuing degrees in Broadcasting, Creative Design and Journalism. "The opening of the studios today will testify to SEGi's commitment to fulfil its mission of placing quality education within the reach of willing minds and natural talent. The facilities provided are the latest addition to the Faculty of Communication and Creative Design (FoCCD) at the SEGi Tower," he said.

He added that the facilities would also be a conducive learning environment for the students, particularly those studying mass communication.

The new broadcasting studio is equipped with the standard multi-camera production set-up, with lighting, Chromakey backdrop, cameras and professional grade audio equipment along with a variety of vision mixing systems. Meanwhile, the photography studio has three digital SLR cameras, four studio lights and backdrops. Students will



From Left : SEGi College Kota Damansara principal Norman Chu Su Jiun, Research, Innovation, & Quality Assurance deputy vice-chancellor Brig-Jen Professor Dato' Dr Hj. Shohaimi Abdullah, Student Affairs deputy vice chancellor Prof. Dr. Azrin Esmady Ariffin, vice-chancellor Professor Dr. Patrick Kee Peng Kong and Faculty of Communication & Creative Design dean Assoc. Prof. Dr Mohammad Firdaus Low

have the opportunity to experience handling photography studio equipment in the studio or out on location too while their work would be exhibited both inside and outside of the studio.

ARTchive is the gallery and art studio and is equipped with technical desks, studio working tables, storage cabinets, drafting chairs and studio tools. The gallery will display final projects like Packaging Illustration, Digital Imaging, Interior Design, Typography, Advertising and Art Direction, Book Design and many others. The gallery will also serve as a source of inspiration for the students.

The purpose of providing a newsroom is to expose students to the newsroom culture and news writing and editing processes. It serves to enhance their understanding of teamwork in editorial processes and help them to adjust to the working culture of the actual newsroom.

Kee added the new facilities will serve more than 600 students who are pursuing various degrees under FoCCD. Among those present at the launched were Malaysian artists and personalities including Naddy Rahman, Fiza Fizzy, Syifa Melvin, Sarah Lian, Razif Hashim and Sharifah Amani. ■



Conducive to play the Anyaman Preschool encourages children to be creative

Representatives of Honeywell, Safe Kids Malaysia and Fire and Rescue Department of Malaysia with students from schools participating in the Safe Kids at Home programme

Burn prevention

Safety programme to educate children about fire safety

| Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com

ACCORDING to the World Health Organization's Global Burden of Disease, it is estimated that 265,000 childhood deaths worldwide occur as a result of fire-related burns each year, with a majority of them occurring in low- and middle-income countries. More than half the deaths take place within the Southeast Asia region, including Malaysia, where it is reported that one child dies every two weeks due to fires or other burns.

Recognizing the need to increase awareness of this global public health issue, Safe Kids Malaysia Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Safe Kids Worldwide and Honeywell launched Safe Kids at Home, an educational safety programme

designed to help prevent fires, burns and scalds among children aged 7 to 12.

The program was developed based on the findings of a 2016 survey conducted by Safe Kids Malaysia and UPM. A new research report, *How Safe is Your Home? Protecting Children from Fire, Burns and Scalds* in Kuala Lumpur, was formally released by Datuk Halimah Mohamed Sadique, Deputy Minister of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government at an exclusive launch ceremony on the UPM campus in Serdang.

"The research has identified a critical need for fire and burn education for children, and we look forward to starting

to implement the Safe Kids at Home programme in nine schools in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur", said Dr. Kulanthayan of Safe Kids Malaysia UPM.

Among the key findings highlighted by the research were statistics that show more than half of the parents reported their children had suffered one form of a burn or scald injury in the past two years while 51% are worried they are more likely to suffer a burn or scald than any other injury. Only one in three parents consistently teach their kids about fire safety with more than 80% stating they use toothpaste as a remedy, which actually makes the injury worse. ■

Changing teaching

Agile and Google sign agreement to collaborate on promoting new teaching practices

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

ADVANCED Global Institute of Learning Excellence (Agile) and Google have signed a memorandum of agreement (MoA) to promote excellence in learning and teaching practices for the education community.

The partnership will be a concerted effort to make teaching across the classrooms an empowering learning experience through leveraging on Agile's strength in developing and organizing pedagogically sound workshops for various institutions in Asia and leveraging Google's innovative and user-friendly collaborative technologies already being used and implemented in many classrooms in the region.

Agile vice president Mohamad Ridwan Othman said Agile is always open to collaborate with key industry players to come up with innovative learner-centred pedagogical approaches in using technology, to further enhance the education system in Malaysia.

"Google is one such player and that is why we decided to partner with Google in the hope to change the education landscape from good to great," he said.

Meanwhile, Google for Education Malaysia head Rahayu Ramli added their collaboration with Agile would enable them to leverage on a proven training institute platform that will empower educators by encouraging innovation and promoting best practices.

Through the MoA, Agile will equip educators with the skills to use collaborative tools and Google technologies in the classroom as well as be a testing centre for Google for Education Certified Educator examinations. ■



Agile vice president Ridwan Othman and Google for Education Malaysia Rahayu Ramli



From L-R: Tan Ling Ling, Tim Bulow and Yang Berhormat Hannah Yeoh and Dr Jane Lim

For the future

New development at Inti to facilitate a dynamic learning experience

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

INTI International College Subang has just launched its newly redeveloped South Block, offering a fresh, cosmopolitan learning environment to suit its dynamic student population. The multi-million ringgit redevelopment has leveraged innovative and creative designs within its classrooms and throughout its five collective blocks, offering an enhanced teaching and learning setting that emphasises openness and collaborative learning.

Inti International University and Colleges chief executive officer, Tim Bulow said, that the redevelopment of the South Block would provide a conducive, student-centred experience that reflects the dynamism of 21st century learning.

"It will also promote opportunities for students to collaborate and practise their capabilities as they become the next generation of leaders. These redevelopments were heavily-based on the feedback and insights from our students, through on-going conversations and our annual student survey. This ensured that the new facilities were designed with students' expectations in mind and reflects Inti's commitment to act on our students' input and feedback," he said.

The development will house three facilities - the University of Wollongong, the School of Business and the School of Hospitality, and will also include an open garden space with a giant chess set that promotes cognitive stimulation, a new café for students from the School of Hospitality to train in F&B management, and uniquely designed locker cum discussion and tutorial spaces.

At the same time, it also boasts a 3-storey Student Hub complete with café at the ground level, a one of a kind "snooze area" for students to recharge at the first level and a cosy open space for discussions at the top level - aptly named Refresh, Recharge and Reconnect respectively.

Present at the launch were Selangor State legislative assembly speaker YB Hannah Yeoh, selected leaders from Inti's industry partners, the university's representatives from their partner schools and their senior management including Dr Jane Lim, the newly appointed chief executive for Inti International College Subang. ■

FEATURE

A degree in business studies often sounds like a qualification pursued by students who either can't decide on a specific area of study or are looking to get a general degree so that they have something to show their parents after spending three years in a university. The reality though couldn't be further from the truth.

"The business studies degree has evolved extensively over the years as the subjects taught also to take into account the changes we've seen in the business environment. So, while core subjects like Economics, Financial Accounting and Marketing remain as component modules, the contents of these subjects has changed to suit the times," says Dr S. Sugumaran, dean for the faculty of business for SEGi University.

"For instance, as recently as a decade ago the business model for retailers still revolved around having brick and mortar shops to physically store, display and sell items but these days a huge percentage of purchases are done online with the customer never interacting with the seller or even touching the product until it's been paid for and arrives at their doorstep," he adds.

These changes are coming thick and fast due to the use of information technology and increasing levels of global connectivity, so how then do universities ensure their curriculum remains current?

"At SEGi University's faculty of business, we ensure that the curriculum taught isn't just relevant to the current business environment but we also incorporate elements of future trends that are on the horizon. So a student who is studying for three years doesn't just learn theoretical knowledge but via real world experiences and visits to companies they're learning about the current way business is done too," says Sugumaran.

"We also invite industry leaders to speak to our students so that they may gain insights not usually available in study materials and they get a feel of the challenges awaiting them after graduation," he adds.

What about the view that business studies students lack the technical skills to be true business professionals and require a second more specialised qualification?

"SEGi University offers many Bachelor of Business degrees with specialisations in a number of areas. For instance, students who study for a Bachelor of Business Management (Hons) degree are awarded a double degree from SEGi University and Abertay University and will study subjects ranging from law to economics, entrepreneurship and business-government relations.

"Another educational partner of the business faculty is Keele University, which ranks in the top 4% of the global university rankings. Keele has also been ranked first for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey (NSS) for three years running and are also tops for graduate employment in the UK according to Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) numbers for 2016. We currently offer BA (Hons) International Business &

ALL ENCOMPASSING

By obtaining a business studies degree from SEGi University students are preparing themselves for every facet of working life

| Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com



PHOTOS BY SEGI UNIVERSITY & COLLEGES



ABOVE:

An international enrolment ensures that business students gain from a global perspective

LEFT:

Dr S. Sugumaran says business graduates at SEGi University are well versed in the theoretical and practical aspects of the subjects they study

Finance and BA (Hons) International Business & Marketing degrees from Keele University where students are exposed to a wide range of modules that will prepare them to work in an international business environment.

"Therefore, while a business graduate may not have the same level of in-depth knowledge about business law as a law graduate or have the same financial accounting skills as an accounting graduate, he will have been exposed and gained experience in numerous other competencies that are required to become successful business owners and managers. Furthermore, if a professional qualification is desired, most of our degree hold-

ers will gain exemptions due to the course credits they have already earned," Sugumaran says.

The business faculty currently has students from more than 85 countries, which highlights how respected and globally recognised a degree from SEGi University and its partners is. It also offers masters programmes, MBA programmes with a number of specialisations and DBA and PHD qualifications awarded either by SEGi or one of its partner institutions.

"Ultimately obtaining a business studies or business degree at SEGi University offers a springboard into the business world. Aside from the knowledge gained from modules taught, we also ensure our students are well versed in areas of analytical and critical thinking, communications skills and entrepreneurship. We will also give them a global perspective, leadership and management skills to ensure their job readiness when they enter the working world," he says.

So, just like how the business environment has changed over the years, the notion that business studies graduates only have a shallow level of wide ranging knowledge also needs to change because clearly these students graduate with a head start towards becoming future business leaders. ■

A world class study environment is offered at SEGi University



Overcoming the TECHNOLOGICAL barrier

Despite having access to the latest teaching technology many Malaysian teachers lack the necessary skills to use them effectively

| Text by **FAISAL SHAH** | faisalshah@hckmedia.com

Efforts to improve the teaching experience in Malaysian classrooms via the use of digital technology are not new. The Ministry of Education (MOE) blueprint for education transformation promotes the utilisation of ICT but the reality is that adoption rates in education are very poor. Numerous studies point towards a lack of digital fluency amongst teachers as the main obstacle, because if they're unsure about how to use the technology they're likely to forego it entirely.

If it's so difficult to implement though, why is the MOE even bothering with promoting ICT use in classrooms? Well, aside from increasing efficiency by helping to manage administrative and routine tasks, the 4th Industrial Revolution, a term used by many to describe how 50% of jobs created in the future involves computerization, means that students must be comfortable with technology from a young age in order to grasp the intricacies of managing and incorporating it in their daily working lives.

Ignoring the use of technology in education could also result in teachers not having the necessary time to focus on higher order learning objectives instead – such as “blended learning” and “flipped classroom” approaches require ICT knowledge to implement effectively.

It therefore stands to reason that a lack of adequate and effective training for teachers in ICT is holding them back. To ensure this barrier is overcome, they must thus be trained well and continuously to fully utilize the tools they have access to.

How can this be achieved? It begins with effective training on the various established systems (Learner Response Systems, Learning

Design Tools, Learning Management Systems, Flipped Video Authoring tools) and emerging technologies (Augmented Reality, Analytics, Collaborative BYOD systems, Internet of Things) with a focus on “what and how” as well as “why and when”.

The former is for them to understand not just how to use it but also ensure they are passionate about its implementation, while the rationale and the theoretical underpinnings have to be understood too. Teachers must also understand when to integrate ICT seamlessly into their curriculum which is the key to ensuring that utilisation is sustainable and becomes long term and wide-scale – the very thing that the MOE wants.

The Advanced Global Institute of Learning Excellence (AGILE) conducts more than 50 unique training programmes every year, with a significant portion focused on the effectiveness and sustainable utilisation of such technologies. In March and April for example, workshops will be held on using “Gamification Technology”, “Google Collaborative Tools for Education” and “Authoring iBooks”.

AGILE has also conducted customised programmes at various Institutions in Malaysia on



PHOTO BY MUHAMMAD HAZIM

Agile vice-president Ridwan Othman believes that training teachers to use ICT is vital to getting them to use it

blended learning, location based learning using augmented reality and many other topics. In each of these workshops, teachers are guided on how to apply the lessons in their day-to-day classrooms. With the correct blend of training and implementation, AGILE believes that the targets set by the MOE are achievable and the future of Malaysian classrooms will be a digital one. ■



Upcoming Programmes (Technology, Pedagogy Leadership & Professional Growth)

*HRDF CLAIMABLE

6 March & 15 June	15 March	17 March & 14 April	29 March
Effective Blended Learning with Engaging Activities	Introduction to Course Manager and iBooks Author	Google for Education Fundamentals - Part 1 & 2	NLP : “Communicate and Influence with Lasting Impact”
4 April	7 April & 5 May	11 April	12 April
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	G Suite: Admin Fundamentals - Part 1 & 2	Design Thinking for Educators / Corporate	Using Technology to Engage & Gamify Learning Experiences
27 April	27 & 28 April	31 May	July / August
Creation of Rubric and Assessment for Learning	Restorative Approaches 1 & 2	Intrinsic Motivation: How to Create a Conducive and Positive Learning Environment	Education & Corporate Leadership

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COVER STORY

Thursday, March 16 is likely to be just another working week day for the majority of Malaysians. But for the 434,535 students who registered to take the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examinations in 2016 it will be a day of reckoning. That's when their results will be announced. Most would have a rough idea of how they performed because you know how much or how little effort you put into preparing for the examinations but there is always an element of surprise involved and the grading curve could move depending on how all the students performed as a whole.

Still, regardless of what their SPM results may be, most have spent the last five months pondering what study course to undertake after SPM. Even the most lackadaisical student would have scoured the internet for some information while those who really have no idea would have at least consulted with their friends on what to study and where to go. At the very least, they'll want to be in the same higher education institution as their school friends because of the familiarity it brings but is that the wisest choice?

So, assuming you have a child who is chewing his nails while waiting for the results announcement, here is a guide to a few pre-university courses and how they compare with each other.

A-Levels

The A-levels probably set the standard by which other pre-university qualifications are judged. Its near global acceptance as a form of assessment means students can virtually gain entry into any university, if they do well at A-Levels. It also means students have a wide range of study options to pursue after their A-levels though obviously specialised courses like engineering, medicine and accounting would require the study of prerequisite subjects.

Due to its popularity, a number of colleges offer the course in Malaysia so options in terms of where to study are plentiful. Course fees vary depending on where you send your child but expect to pay a minimum of about RM20,000 to about RM50,000 for fees throughout the 15-18 month duration of the course. The minimum number of required subjects is very low at just three with a maximum of five, which will be a welcome relief for students who found it hard to juggle the sheer number of exams they had to take in SPM.

Because they are taking so few subjects, students taking A-levels are expected to get a deep understanding of what they study, so analytical skills and having an inquisitive mind as well as excellent research and study skills are vital to obtaining good results. There are lots of resources available to them from past year exam papers to even tuition classes so excelling is a case of putting in the required hours.

The course isn't for everyone though. Because assessment is based on 100% external examinations students who dislike the pressure of sitting for exams but prefer classroom interaction and coursework and have poor research and analytical abilities will struggle to perform well. Because students are required to take so few subjects, strong grades in one won't be able to boost the overall result either so this also makes subject selection critical. Parents should therefore work together with their child to ensure they choose A-level subjects that best play to their strengths and interests.

As one of the more challenging pre-university courses around, entry requirements are generally higher. Most colleges expect a minimum of five SPM credits but many more established institutions where demand for places is high require obtaining an A in subjects like Mathematics, English and the science subjects if a student intends to study them for A-levels. Still, as a means to get into university, A-levels are probably the most widely recognised of any post SPM course and due to our affinity for universities in the United Kingdom, it's likely to remain that way for some time to come.

PROS: Wide acceptance, benchmark for scholarship awards, in-depth knowledge of subjects

CONS: 100% exam based, offers theoretical as opposed to practical knowledge, tough to excel

International Baccalaureate (IB)

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is a pre-university programme from Geneva, Switzerland open to students who have sat for their SPM or O-Level exams. The course duration runs for approximately 24 months and is widely seen as being academically challenging and demanding, requiring students to take a wide range of subjects across various disciplines.

Basically, students need to choose six subjects to study spread out over six different groups that range from language and literature, language acquisition, mathematics and the arts. Then it gets more complicated.

Studying PATHWAYS

Further education options for students who just completed their SPM can be a minefield to navigate

| Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com

Pros

Cons

Of the six subjects taken, three have to be taken at Higher Level (HL) that requires 240 hours of studying time while the other three can be taken at Standard Level (SL) with 150 hours of course time. Additionally, students also have to complete three core component IB courses called Theory of Knowledge (TOK), Extended Essay and Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) which add points to their final grade.

Unlike the A-levels a mixture of internal and external assessment is used to award students their final grade with a maximum of seven points awarded per subject. Therefore IB students who score the maximum points would be awarded 45 points. Because it's geared up to promote critical and independent thinking, many view IB students as being more well-rounded than those who do A-Levels and as it's an accepted qualification for university entry in over 100 countries, they're virtually on par in terms of prestige.

Be prepared to pay though your nose if your child wants to take IB. The number of colleges offering the course is small and due to the long

two-year study period, fees alone average over RM100,000. It's also classified as a challenging course so students without the prerequisite SPM grades will probably need to sit for an entrance exam.

PROS: Wide acceptance, coursework and exam assessment, promotes critical thinking

CONS: Pricey fees, takes two years to complete, students have to take many subjects

Australian Matriculation

Australian matriculation courses are gaining popularity amongst Malaysian students and parents because most offer a shorter route to getting into university. Those with excellent SPM trial

results can even start their course in January before the final results are out and assuming they do well, these students could already be in university pursuing their degree studies just 15 months after they sat for SPM. That's an amazing savings in time and because the course duration is short, fees tend to be lower too. Expect to pay between RM15,000 to RM30,000 with a bit of variation between science and humanities subjects.

Australian matriculation is a blanket term as there are actually several different pre-university courses from the country. The most popular is South Australian Matriculation (SAM) but there is also Australian Matriculation (AUSMAT), New South Wales High School Certificate and soon, the Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE). All courses can be taken after SPM and offer entry into university upon their completion with students taking five subjects but assessment methods vary. SAM for instance uses 70% coursework and just 30% exam based grading while AUSMAT is closer to a 50:50 split.

Because the time frame is short and a lot of the final grade is coursework dependent, students will have to work consistently throughout the duration of the course as quizzes, essays, assignments, lab reports (for science subjects) and tests will be conducted frequently. So those who prefer to slack off during the year and cram for final exams will be in big trouble. On top of that, the final matriculation score, called the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a compilation of the four best subjects plus 50% of the weakest subject, so it's important that students maintain high scores throughout the duration of the course.

Most universities overseas and in Malaysia accept Australian matriculation as a form of university entry but it's also true that they tend to give higher weightage to those who achieve similarly excellent results in the A-levels. Of course obtaining a high ATAR score will negate any such issues but students with borderline results could find themselves squeezed out of their university

or degree course of choice. Still, due to the affordable fee structure and shorter study time, this course of study is and will remain popular with Malaysian looking to take the shortest possible route to a university degree.

PROS: Shorter course period, affordable course fees, accepted in Malaysia and overseas

CONS: Requires consistent work, short preparation time, tougher to enter highly competitive universities

Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM)

That old notion about STPM being the toughest pre-university course to excel in doesn't really apply anymore. It used to be your final grade was dependent on how you performed in one big final exam but since 2012, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has introduced a modular system where the course is divided into three terms spread out over 18 months.

Each term will have a final exam with marks scored counted towards a cumulative final grade. Just like in American education systems, the highest subject grade point (SGP) a student can receive is 4.0 with the average taking into account all the subjects. Centralised exams at the end of each term account for only 60%-80% of the final grade as the STPM now includes 20%-40% of course work assessment in the form of projects, field studies and practical work.

Because it's a government school based course, there are no fees for the courses. One only needs to pay the exam fees and about RM90 for each subject taken. Of course if your child requires tuition in any subjects that adds on to the cost but in the overall scheme of things, this is the cheapest pre-university qualification a Malaysian can obtain. Many may also find it surprising that STPM is also widely accepted in most countries as students need to sit for a Malaysian University English Test (MUET) to show they have acceptable proficiency in the language.

Of course if the intention is to attend Malaysian public universities to obtain a degree, then a good STPM SGP score will also gain your child entry into the course of his choice but for high demand courses like medicine and dentistry he will have to compete against Matrikulasi and Asasi students. Getting a place in a Malaysian secondary school to take STPM is also tough as spaces are very limited and competition is keen. Getting a credit for *Bahasa Malaysia* is compulsory and the nominal criteria for science subjects are a maximum of 18 points so good SPM results are a pre requisite.

Do however note that because STPM only starts in May after the SPM results have been announced and the academic year in Malaysian public universities usually start in September, it takes nearly three years for a student to enter university after they have sat for their SPM exams. Most will use this time to gain some valuable working experience but if you're in a rush to get your child a degree, this isn't the best option to take.

PROS: Very cheap, can be used for university entry in Malaysia or overseas

CONS: Long lead time before university entry, requires Bahasa proficiency, limited availability

The vocational route

Most parents won't even consider vocational courses due to their own preconceived notions about it being for students who failed in school but the fact remains that there are a vast number of students who just don't excel in a traditional classroom environment. So instead of forcing them to sign up for expensive pre-university courses and then ending up with poor results, it may be prudent to see if vocational training is the way to go.

There are literally hundreds of different vocational courses available and all of them will ensure students are given the knowledge they require to become skilled workers upon graduation. Even better, a number of industries have such a shortage of workers that companies offer internships with the promise of a guaranteed job upon graduation to the best students, which is certainly more reassurance than most university graduates have.

Just because it isn't a traditional study route though, it doesn't mean that vocational students don't need to study. If anything, a lot of self-discipline and motivation is required to ensure that they take their training seriously and have the correct attitude that will gain them employment. Some private vocational schools are also pricey these days due to the high cost of parts and materials required during the course but the advantage is that students should be able to join the job market just two or three years after taking their SPM exams. And yes, these students can also study for a degree upon graduation with many courses offering exemptions from certain modules in a related field. ■

PROS: Quickest route to the job market, cheaper and easier than most pre-university courses

CONS: Parents need to be convinced, social stigma, less likely to be promoted to managerial posts

CAMPUS LIFE

Putting PEOPLE in places

TAJ International College doesn't have prestigious degree courses to offer students but it does make sure its graduates are ready to compete in the job market immediately

Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com

Parents only want the best for their children but sometimes that blinds them from seeing obvious weaknesses their child may have. For instance, it takes a natural affinity for the subject, memory power and strong language skills to be a lawyer while those undertaking a medical degree have to excel in all their science subjects. Therefore, it stands to reason that such professions are suitable for a few bright students while everyone else has to study something else.

Something else can sometimes mean taking up a vocational course, which for many Malaysian parents is often viewed as a fall back for failed students. You aren't smart enough to do a pre-university course and study for a degree so try and get a vocational qualification instead so you have something to show for the years spent in school. It's hard to blame them for holding on to such views as not enough is done to promote the virtue of obtaining qualifications that are specific to certain vocations but those views are as outdated as 2G mobile phones.

Statistically speaking, it makes sense for a student with borderline passes in SPM to attend a college that specializes in teaching vocational education. Rather than doing a basic humanities degree that they may not be interested in and then graduating with mediocre results, obtaining skills that are specific to high demand industries would mean the availability of jobs upon graduation and because they spent less time in college, they would be earning an income at an earlier age too.

Where might a student go to obtain vocational education? If he were in Ipoh then TAJ International College (TIC) should be his first port of call. Established in 1996, TIC's vision is to offer holistic educational services through efficient and dynamic management processes in developing excellent graduates. They hope to achieve this by concentrating on the development of human capital through complete education, professional training and development, E-Learning and ICT related solutions and education consulting.

It sounds grandiose but what it means is that TIC is dedicated to providing the country with a skilled workforce in specific areas ready to contribute to these industries the moment they graduate. What industry specific areas you ask?

According to Azad Jasmi, executive director at TIC, the college currently offers eight diploma and two certificate courses.

"We offer diplomas in areas such as beauty management, automotive management, early childhood



FROM TOP: The TIC campus in Ipoh boasts of modern facilities to cater to all student needs

School-like setting means there are also a lot of sporting facilities for the students to enjoy

Students at TIC come from a variety of backgrounds but all are here for a chance at a brighter future



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Success in motorsports is shared by everyone at TIC

For 2016 championship TIC students were a part of every team

The TIC branding message is ubiquitous in Ipoh

Aside from study facilities there are also breakout areas designed to encourage discussion among students

management and more traditional areas such as accounting, HR, business, IT and education. Our courses really focus on offering TVET (Technical Vocational Education and Training) related programmes as Malaysia is aiming to have at least 60% of its workers classified as skilled labour. Therefore we've developed our course content in line with the national Economic Transformational Programme (ETP) framework that lists 12 main economic activities for the future," he said.

To ensure that the programmes offered remain relevant, TIC develops its course content with input from industry experts to ensure that their students get industry-driven education and are ready to contribute upon graduating. The benefit of such an approach is proven by the impressive employability track record of their graduates. About 80% obtain jobs immediately upon completion of their studies while of the remainder, 15% go on to further their studies in other colleges with the final 5% venturing out on their own and starting a business.

"TIC isn't a big college but we focus on very specific niches. Students studying beauty, automotive and early childhood benefit from what we call our Learning Factories, which is where we have set up actual businesses to give them exposure to the working environment they will encounter in the future. Therefore, we have our very own spas, workshops and early childhood centres that cater to the needs of our students and also take on the role of a real business by selling to the general public.

"For us, these business entities are incubators for our students to learn on the job skills and later they can even work for us or open up their own businesses using our established brands. Our early childhood centre business for instance is called Kids Campus and TIC is one of eight educational providers selected by the Malaysian government to participate in the effort to ensure that workers in the early childhood education sector all have professional qualifications equivalent to those in

TIC helps ensure that students who weren't top scorers in school are given the best opportunity to obtain jobs to help Malaysia meet its target of having at least 60% of the workforce classified as skilled

developed countries by the year 2020" says Azad.

There are currently four Kids Campus outlets in Ipoh with more to come as TIC only started the business in late 2016. Automotive Management students meanwhile get lots of practical knowledge working at service centres belonging to large automotive brands like Honda, Nissan, Naza and Proton. There is also an arrangement with UMW Toyota under their Toyota Technical Education Programme (TTEP) where the company will interview and administer written tests for students while they are still in the second year of their studies. Those who make the cut are offered positions even before graduation, which means they can start their career immediately.

It's not all about just studying and getting practical knowledge though. A pet project for TIC is the TAJ International College Rally Team that competes in the Malaysian Rally Championship (MRC). Azad is an experienced driver and seasoned campaigner, which makes him a natural fit for driver duties but his students also gain a lot of knowledge from the endeavour.

"Although they don't build the actual rally car our students are heavily involved in the preparation of the car and travel with the team to events to act as mechanics and service crew in the heat of competition. In 2016, we had a deal with the or-

ganisers of MRC whereby each team would take on about two of our students as service crew, which worked out beautifully because the teams were able to increase their manpower for a low price and our students gained invaluable knowledge in the heat of competition," Azad added.

As one would expect, the profile of students attending TIC isn't of people with multiple distinctions and scholarship offers but that is by design. The entry requirements for most of their diploma courses for instance is three credits at SPM/SPMV level or certificates from Giat Mara or other skills training courses. Those without the necessary academic track record can still be considered if they have the necessary work experience and have attended courses recognised by the Ministry of Education.

Education for working adults is also prioritised and TIC now has Open Distance Learning (ODL) courses where students can obtain their diplomas while holding a fulltime job. Most of the work is performed online or on a project basis and though some classroom hours are required it could be a commitment of as low as just one or two sessions per month at the campus in Ipoh. Add to that the competitive pricing of the courses and learning centres in Sungai Petani and soon Sarawak as well, and TIC looks set to help deliver the skilled workforce Malaysia so desperately needs to obtain developed nation status.

Says Azad, "Ultimately, we are all about ensuring that people who aren't necessarily top scorers in school are given the best chance to obtain jobs that will help boost the development of the country. Yes, it may not be as prestigious as seeing your child becoming a doctor or lawyer but by the time those people are ready to enter the working world our students would have had several years of working experience and are already further along in their chosen careers."

CAREER ADVICE



The ART of attraction

Drawing the eye of consumers so they end up buying something is a specialised art form

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

PHOTO BY ANWAR FAIZ

Hailing from a middle class family from a small town in Bahau, Negeri Sembilan, Shawn Ng has become a success by persevering through hard work and making the most of the opportunities presented to set up BrandCare, a company that specialises in packaging design and brand consultation for the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) market.

His desire to be someone of worth and to do something significant made him enrol in a Diploma in Graphic Designs course without any knowledge and skills in arts and design. Ng however graduated as one of the top students in his class and was picked by Ogilvy & Mather International Advertising (OM) to start his career as a junior artist. In this interview, Ng talks about his challenging journey on how he began his career at Ogilvy & Mather, why he founded BrandCare and the importance of packaging.

Top Class: How did you start in your career?

Ng: Initially, the beginning of my career was an uphill battle as my biggest weakness is poor proficiency of the English language. During my time at OM as a junior artist back in 1991, I was alienated by my colleagues as they all spoke English very well. So I would be left out on getting any opportunities to participate in internal training courses, seminars and meetings. Therefore I had to constantly prove my worth to my superiors through my work and performance. Fortunately, they were impressed with my work ethic and I was promoted every year during my seven years with OM.

Then I decided to move to a British-Malaysian design house as a creative head for the next three years where I mostly worked with corporate clients. It was then that I felt there was space for a packaging design business in Malaysia as most brands were then using international agencies. This insight inspired me to venture into this niche business and that is how I founded BrandCare, with the objective to provide consultation services and to design packaging for every brand that needs it.

Describe the nature of your work and how did you get involved in the design and advertising industry?

When I moved from OM I ended up working on packaging design and realised there was an opportunity for a Malaysian agency in the industry because the big international agencies did not have enough talent and know-how in packaging design and its processes. This is why I decided to venture into the niche.

I started BrandCare in 2000 with the objective to offer my services to as many brands as possible. To-date, we've have worked with more than 2,000 brands in the region and our work can be seen in all major supermarkets and pharmacy stores.

Since founding BrandCare 17 years ago, what is a typical day at work like for you?

Over the years, I have developed a passion and interest in packaging design and branding so you can usually find me visiting many traders and supermarkets to keep myself up-to-date and to observe packaging trends for every product and brand in terms of strategy and brand communication.

So other than getting the day-to-day work done, I always look forward to 'visiting the shops' whenever I get the opportunity.

Being in the industry for so many years, what changes have you seen and what has been their impact?

People have become more brand conscious when comes to buying preferences. Indeed, we're putting the brand ahead of the product now. In terms of manufacturing and innovation, some products have been evolved to meet consumer preferences in terms of convenience, which has been vital to their success. Our lifestyle is also changing rapidly, mostly due to advancements in technology. However, regardless of these changes, branding is still an important factor for brand owners and consumers.

How important is branding and packaging to the FMCG sector?

Branding and packaging are important as FMCG is a highly competitive environment and everything is about speed and results. Categories such as household, personal care, food and beverage, snack and confectionery, health care, baby care and beauty are congested with many players which lead to them observing each other very closely.

These brands do not own any physical store but focus on advertising themselves on the shelves of supermarkets, convenience marts and pharmacies. Hence, branding & packaging are essential and critical to their success. It's important that the packaging design must be able to reach out to the consumers' emotions and interest. The choice of colour, graphics, images, shape, text, content, product formulation and quality, and pricing play are all taken into consideration.

As for branding, it's a continuous process as even very successful brands cannot afford to stop. It is because of branding activities that brands stay competitive and successful. Constant awareness, creating attention and generating share of voice

are all part of branding process and companies are now appreciating how important they are.

How do you keep yourself motivated to be continuously be creative in this line of work?

What keeps me motivated is that I find my job exciting and fulfilling. It is always a stimulating experience whenever I meet different brand owners and learn about their challenges, strategies, failures and success. At the same time, I keep myself up-to-date with trends in the industry.

What has been the proudest moment of your career?

The proudest moments occur when you're given recognition by brand owners, industry players, manufacturers and the media. Many of my original clients are still with BrandCare and over the years we've built strong relationships.

On a personal level, I have also been invited to Germany and China to be a speaker and share my experience and insights. Local colleges like The One Academy and First City University College have also frequently request that I speak with their design students, which I am happy to do.

What advice would you give students who want a career in the design and advertising industry?

Be prepared to work long hours, accept criticism and be able to think on your feet. This industry is not about being glamorous or to show off as what you see is the result of many hours of intense work.

It takes more than good designing skills too as being successful requires a commercial mind and the will to take action. Remember, commercial art is meant for sales, repeat sales and growth. It needs a lot of endurance, patience and hard work to conceive and once you understand the rules of the game, you will certainly play it well. ■

Commercial art and branding is meant to create sales, repeat sales and growth for the company

— Shawn Ng, founder of BrandCare Sdn Bhd

CAREER ADVICE

Computers are his BUSINESS

Despite his strong drive to succeed IT entrepreneur Alex Lam became successful almost by accident

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

Alex Lam has always had an entrepreneurial spirit. He started selling personalised Dymo tape to his classmates when he was 10 and hasn't looked back since. It is due to this mind-set and the growing demand for web hosting services that he took up the offer to provide services that also led him to set up his company, Integricity.

Top Class: Could you share your career journey, how you founded Integricity and what is the company all about?

Lam: In 1996, I started a company that dealt with setting up dial-up modems to connect to the Internet and selling computers. When I went to further my studies, I picked a business qualification while also learning the necessary IT skills on the side. Upon completing my degree, I worked with lelong.com.my for a year, before deciding to take the risk to start Integricity.

I started it as I wanted to enable companies to do e-commerce, but in 2000, it was hard to get people to use their credit cards online and merchants were not keen on selling through those channels. However, while building the shopping cart, I was received requests for web hosting which we were able to do. So I decided to offer the service, as we already had the servers and it would fill my rice bowl while developing the shopping cart. One client led to ten, which led to one hundred and soon after, the focus shifted to taking web hosting seriously as a viable business. I would deem myself as an accidental entrepreneur because of this.

What made you get into the IT industry to offer web hosting and other IT services?

Moving from web hosting to offering IT outsourcing was quite natural, as we ran the servers for our clients and they started asking if we would also consider providing support for their office infrastructure. We decided it was a good extension, and after accidentally hiring more engineers, we had a team of on-site and remote support engineers. One of my partners who was tasked to look after the IT outsource division had inspiration to increase the ratio of computers managed by each engineer and started sourcing for an enterprise tool that would help us out.

We settled on buying one tool and when the local representative came to demo it, we already knew more about it than him, so we complained to the principal who later asked us to resell the tool for them. We were hesitant at first as it really wasn't our core competency, but after some coercion and help from the principal, we closed a few government deals and that started us off on yet another accidental journey of distributing enterprise tools and services. This has now become the largest revenue earning division for Integricity Technology.

How would you describe the work that you do and what does it entail?

I would say that I have undertaken almost every role in the organisation from the finance director to the plumber to the server administrator. Today, we are a lot more streamlined where I will look after the overall strategy of the company and the departments. I still do get involved in making financial, marketing, HR and operational decisions though because I don't think you can let those departments go. At the same time, I enjoy evaluating opportunities and piecing that against the resources and capabilities we have to make something happen.

What is a working day in the life of Alex Lam like?

I am a morning person as I will be up between 5.30 and 6.30am as I would try to get an hour of work done before the rest of my household wakes up, as I value the serenity in the early hours in the morning. At Integricity, it is our culture to start the day with C-A-M which means; check your Google Calendar, followed by Asana for tasks and finally, Mail.

Once that is done, I will normally head into conference calls or meetings. There are quite a number of work-in-progress catch up sessions to make sure various teams are aligned. This pattern will be on repeat for five days a week and then I pause for the weekend and the cycle begins again. However, I do enjoy what I am doing so I don't find it repetitive and boring.

What drives you to do what you do every day?

It puts a smile on my face when I know that our solutions are making a difference in the operations of various companies and they become more operationally efficient. This means they can perform well, earn a good income and in turn they can take care of their staff. In my own little way, it's about making Malaysia better.

What are some of the challenges in your line of work?

Our biggest challenge is making sure processes are adhered to and ensuring we continuously deliver a high level of service to all clients. A lot of this has to do with hiring the right people and making sure they work the same way with a culture of excellence at the heart of everything. This does not come as second nature for everyone, which is why standard operating procedures are so important to us.

Could you share what has been your biggest accomplishment thus far?

Besides keeping the company going since 2000 and having a positive financial track record, I think we have scaled up at a decent yet not overly rapid pace and we have been able to retain and nurture our staff. Attracting great talent is a challenge and setting them on a path that gives their own family stability is another. We truly want to be known as an employer with a big heart for the entire Integricity family.

What are your goals for the future?

In seven years, when I hit the age of 45, I would like to have Integricity Technology function independently without much involvement from me. The company should have a strong presence in the two foreign countries we are now in — Vietnam and New Zealand. We should also be expanding into two or three more countries by then too.

Did you graduate with an IT degree and if yes how different has the industry been compared to what you learned in university?

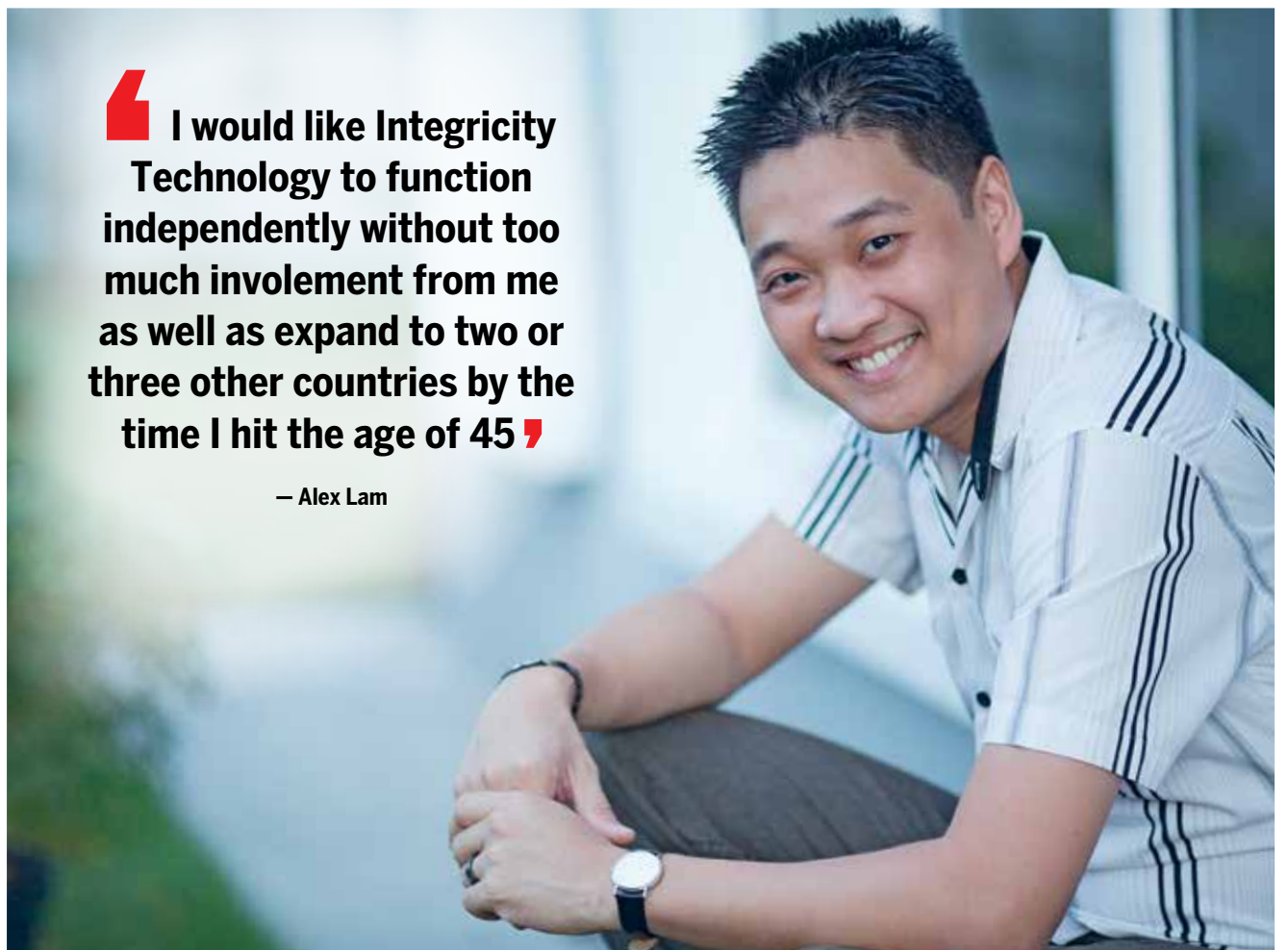
I didn't graduate with an IT degree but I did many IT electives. I learnt programming and some e-commerce while I was at Monash University. While it is not directly relevant to me in what I do today, it laid the foundations for systematic and logical thinking. I personally feel degrees should prepare a person for work, but not necessarily provide the substance for sustenance in the real world. Train up students to be adaptable, continuously learn and communicate well, then you can be pretty certain they will do well.

What advice would you offer someone considering a career in this industry?

Regardless of what career you choose, make sure you have the passion for it, or else, you will quickly lose interest and drive. This will spiral into weekly Monday blues which is not healthy for your life. Find an organisation that values your talent and appreciates the team. Contribute towards it and continuously learn both technical and soft skills. People are not born to be managers, so we have to keep investing in learning courses and mentors to bring us higher. 📦

“ I would like Integricity Technology to function independently without too much involvement from me as well as expand to two or three other countries by the time I hit the age of 45 ”

— Alex Lam



CAREERS UNUSUAL

The DANCING queen

Passion and talent are just some of the prerequisites to becoming a professional dancer

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

While most of us view dancing as bopping in a club, artistic dance is an art form where people use their bodies to express different ideas and emotions through the use of movements. Professional dancers have to work hard to stay fit as it's a physically demanding art form but it's also a very competitive profession with only a small percentage of dancers able to find a steady flow of paying jobs, which coincidentally requires them to walk through the gauntlet of attending auditions.

For Maybelline Wong, dancing has always been something instinctive instead of something she had to learn as she attempted to break into the dance scene from a very young age. She definitely has passion for it but little did she know that her passion would pave the way for her to be a professional dancer. In an interview with *Top Class* Wong shares about her experience as a professional dancer, her struggles along the way and her future goals.

Top Class: When did you find your passion for dance and how did you get your first break to jumpstart your career?

Wong: I found my love for dance at the age of 13 when I started dancing in church and from then, I knew dance would be a big part of my life. What jump started my career was a stint as a member of Mizz Nina's dance crew. It was where I was groomed into the dancer that I am today. After my time with them ended, I continued to dance with other dancers, went for classes, taught classes and basically did anything dance related to make sure I was noticed. From there, people started hiring me for choreography work, projects and campaigns. Currently, I am heading the dance faculty at the School of Music Malaysia, which is conceptualised and owned by Sheikh Haikel and Joe Flizzow.

How would you describe what you do and what does your work entail?

I'm a dancer, first and foremost! Other than dancing, my job also requires me to choreograph for classes or performances, teach, attend rehearsals, and perform. I am also the go to person for talents and shows where I provide clients with entertainment services. Besides that, I do hosting jobs on the side.

What do you like about what you do for a living and what keeps you motivated to keep on doing what you do?

I love what I do because I love connecting myself with other dancers, music and movements when I dance. At the same time, I enjoy connecting with my students when I teach. I am very much a people person. What keeps me motivated is the fact that I am able to do what I love every day and be a source of positive energy for people around me, which is such a blessing because I love sharing my passion.

Describe a day in the life of Maybelline Wong

It varies depending on the project I'm involved in at that point as there really isn't any proper schedule and structure in my line of work. However, if I do not have a busy morning, I would start off the day with either a workout session or attend a yoga class before dealing with work enquiries and paperwork. After lunch, I would continue with work or start planning out new choreography or projects.

Days when I have rehearsals in the morning or afternoon, I will just have to work around it to ensure things get done. My nights are usually occupied with teaching classes and sometimes late night rehearsals. At the end of the day, in this line of work, I just have to prioritise what I need to do and take it from there.

What did you study before deciding to become a professional dancer and did it help your career?

I graduated with a Public Relations and Communication degree. I wouldn't say it's vital but it helped me present myself as an artiste and service provider. The communication skills that I picked up have also helped me communicate better when I am teaching a class because now I know how to command the attention of my students.

What are some of the challenges that you face as a dancer? Are there also misconceptions about what you do?

There are many kinds of challenges that I face as a dancer. One of them is physical limitation especially when it comes to dealing with injuries and the wear and tear on my joints. I also face creative blocks that can be really frustrating but that is true of any creative art form. Another challenge is that since I do not have a proper work structure, I have to learn how to manage my time efficiently. Also, it's true that many think dance is just fun and games. However, in order to stay relevant in this industry, dancers have to stay true to themselves through a lot hard work and commitment.

What has been your proudest moment as a professional dancer?

In my journey, I have hit many milestones that are important to my career but the most up-to-date accomplishment would be having a dance cardio workshop with Adidas at Chin Woo Stadium in December 2016. Aside from the brand believing in me as a dancer and influencer, I was happy to have my Octopussy Dance Crew (ODC) crewmates there to support me and lead the crowd.

I was thankful that my students, Team Mayhem, were there rooting for me too and giving such great energy. Good vibes were bouncing back and forth from the stage to the audience and I was just beyond contented to be able to be in that position.

What are your goals for the future?

My dream is to be able to personally grow and to nurture and guide other dancers. I hope to reach a wider audience exposing them to more teachers and dance styles and want to organise more workshops and to connect with more dancers not just locally but also internationally. Another goal of mine is to pave the way for the next generation of dancers via ODC and Team Mayhem to do better than me. The end goal is for dance to make a difference in people's lives.

What advice would you offer someone considering this as a career?

Take classes, learn from other dancers, dance with people and never stop learning. Listen to music, react to what you like and build a deeper connection to it. Music will always be your teacher. At the same time, it's important to be nice to people and have a good working attitude which will help carry you in your career. Lastly, treat your body well. Do workouts or stretches that can help strengthen your body and sustain your muscles if you want a long run as a dancer.

What else would you like people to know about your job/career?

There are far more aspects to dance or a dance career than what people see or think. Dance is not only a physical thing. We're both athletes and artistes and we could also become a brand and business. It takes harmony in mind, body and soul to do what we do. It's not an easy journey to get there but it is such a fulfilling one. ■



PHOTO BY ANWAR FAZ