

# Are You On Facebook? We Are

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## ABSTRACT

Facebook is currently one of the most popular social networking sites. Developed as a Web site which would allow college students to communicate with each other, Facebook has attracted others as well. Various organisations and institutions, including universities and university libraries are reaping the benefits of Facebook as a communication tool. This paper outlines the development of the University of Malaya Library's Facebook page and how it is being used by the librarians to reach out to their users.

## Keywords

Facebook; University of Malaya Library; Dissemination of information; Library marketing; Library and information services; Social media.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook in February 2004 from his dormitory in Harvard University, his intention was to create a Web site which emulates MySpace but designed exclusively for students (Behrens, 2008). What followed on from there was beyond his expectations. With a tagline that states "Giving people the power to share and make the world more open and connected", Facebook has 400 million active users in 2010 (Stross, 2010).



Fig. 1. Facebook's Interface

What was initially created as a communication tool for students has now emerged as a powerful global marketing and communication tool (Fig. 1). It is now used by many individuals as well as non-governmental organisations, businesses and

educational institutions. Amongst the many Facebook pages, we now see academic libraries, library associations and librarians reaching out to their users through their Facebook accounts.

## 2. UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES AND FACEBOOK

Stross (2010) attributed the popularity of Facebook to the network effect. He stated that "businesses, non-profits, government offices and celebrities use Facebook pages to disseminate information, forming an ever-growing simulacrum of the Web within Facebook's walls. Network effects are at work here, too: users attract well-known names, which, in turn draw more users to Facebook". Such is the mechanics of Facebook that it is fast gaining popularity amongst college students and as Mathews (2006) aptly puts it "but, among college students, Facebook is king". With this in mind, academic libraries are now utilising Facebook not only to communicate with their users but to disseminate information to them. Facebook is seen by many librarians as a tool to market their library products and services. The literature provides numerous examples of university libraries well on their way, such as the Georgia Institute of Technology (Mathews, 2006), Franklin D. Schurz Library at Indiana University South Bend (Kwong, 2007), Valdosta State University (Landis, 2007), Duke University Law Library (Behrens, 2008), Mississippi State University Libraries (Powers, Schmidt and Clay, 2008) and Rutgers University Library (Glazer, 2009). Currently, the Facebook's search engine returns more than 500 Facebook pages for the phrase "university library".

## 3. USE OF FACEBOOK IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

By March 2010, in Malaysia alone, Facebook recorded 6.2 million visitors when compared to 4.2 million for MySpace and 2.1 million for Friendster. Facebook is undoubtedly the most visited social networking site in Malaysia (Shahrizan, 2010).

Throughout Malaysia, there are 20 public universities and 391 private institutions of higher education (Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, 2009). However, out of the 20 public universities, only a handful of the libraries within these universities have a Facebook presence. The university libraries that do have a Facebook page are:

- University of Malaya Library with 2,728 fans
- The Official IUM Library with 1,870 users
- Perpustakaan Pusat Perubatan UKM with 557 fans
- Perpustakaan Hamzah Sendut, USM with 94 fans
- Perpustakaan Alam dan Tamadun Melayu 45 fans

The only private university library which has an active Facebook page is the TSDAS Digital Library belonging to the Open University Malaysia with 2,872 fans. Therefore, as far as public universities are concerned, the University of Malaya Library has the most number of fans and may be deemed to be rather successful in their usage of Facebook.

### 3.1. THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA LIBRARY (UML)

The Library of the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur was opened by the then United Kingdom High Commissioner for Malaya, Sir Geofroy Tory K.C.M.G. on 15 December 1959. At that time, it had a collection of 10,000 volumes, 9,000 square feet of space with a seating capacity of 126 and a staff totaling eight. Within a span of fifty years, the Library has expanded into a network comprising of the Main Library, three branch libraries (Za'ba Memorial Library, T.J. Danaraj Medical Library and Tan Sri Professor Ahmad Ibrahim Law Library) and ten special libraries (Malay Studies, Islamic Studies in Kuala Lumpur and in Nilam Puri, Built Environment, Language and Linguistics, Economics and Administration/Business and Accounting, City Campus, Engineering, Education, and Dentistry). The East Asia Studies and Indian Studies libraries now form part of the Za'ba Memorial Library.

With its vision to be a prestigious library at the national and international levels, and its mission to provide comprehensive information sources and quality services and facilities to fulfill research, teaching and learning needs, the Library's work adheres to the Library Quality Management Procedures namely:

- a) UM-PT08-PK01 : Library Collection Development
- b) UM-PT08-PK02 : Library Client Services
- c) UM-PT08-PK03 : Management of Education & Training

In its effort to support the research, teaching and learning needs of the University, UML provides a variety of services which can be viewed at its Web site (<http://www.umlib.um.edu.my>). The main users of the UML are those from the campus community. UML has a stock of 1,327,230 titles with 2,021,437 items in various formats as at 31 December 2009. The number of logins to the Interactive Web Portal was 602,682.

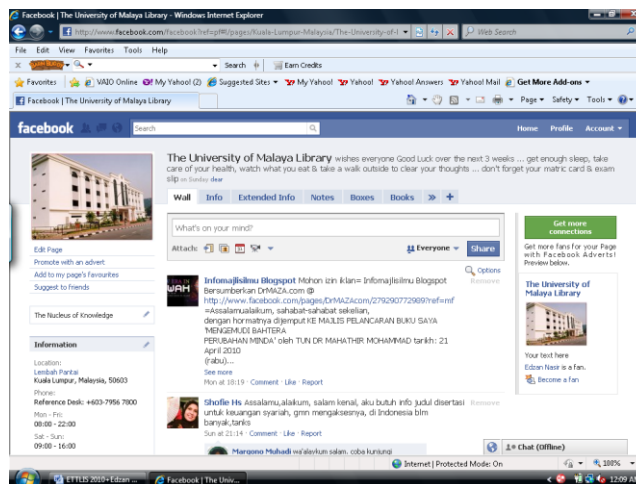
### 4. OUR FACEBOOK

UML signed up for their Facebook page in October 2008. The first posting appeared on 13 October 2008.

The University of Malaya Library Towards an Information Literate Society. International Conference on Libraries, Information & Society 2008, 18-19 November 2008. Hotel Armada, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. Brochure at <http://202.185.96.17/umlibweb/ICoLIS2008-Brochure.pdf> (PDF; 300 KB)  
 13 October 2008 at 00:29 · [Report](#)

**Fig 2: UML's First Posting**

The UML's Facebook (Fig. 3) is maintained by the Deputy Chief Librarian as the primary administrator. He is assisted by six page administrators comprising of the Chief Librarian, two librarians from the Information Systems Division, two librarians from the Client Services Division and one from the Acquisitions Division. These page administrators not only post useful information about various information sources but are also responsible for responding to the many questions posed by their Facebook fans. As of 20 April 2010, UML made 158 postings on its page.



**Fig. 3: UML's Facebook Page**

Initially, the status postings were mostly about useful information sources which the page administrators have come across on the Internet. This was then followed by announcements on events which were organised by UML and well wishes for their fans. More often than not, these postings would be commented upon by the fans or they asked questions about the UML's post. However, we now see fans posting their own announcements on the UML's wall.

Instead of waiting for the users to approach UML with their various queries, UML, through its Facebook, is pushing information to their users who are fans of their Facebook page. The fans are free to post questions and an immediate response is given by any one of the page administrators. Questions pertaining to library policies are answered by the Chief Librarian whilst the other more direct questions are answered by the rest of the team. The nature of these postings allow the users and UML to interact rather freely.

The increase in the number of fans is slower than what we anticipated. Since October 2008, UML only has 2,728 Facebook fans. UML markets its Facebook by creating a link from its Web site at <http://www.umlib.um.edu.my> (Fig. 4). Announcements are also made through the various UML publications such as the UML's guidebook, brochures and other promotional materials. The librarians also promote Facebook through the orientation programme and its various user education sessions. However, UML must step-up its promotional activities in order to increase its fan base.

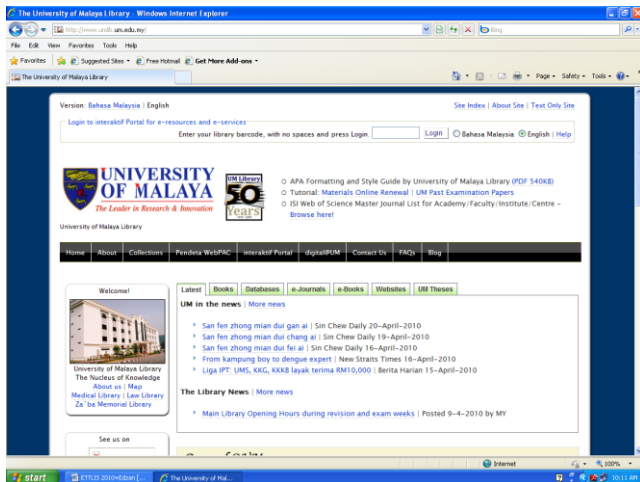


Fig. 4: UML's Web Site

#### 4.1. THE WAY AHEAD

The impact of having a Facebook presence has yet to be measured. Within the literature, there is scanty data on the success or failure rates of Facebook pages. Apart from pushing information to the fans, UML receives both positive and negative feedback about UML's products and services. The plus point here is that feedback is immediate and UML is able to take immediate steps to rectify a problem that has been highlighted by fans.

Since UML has decided to create a Facebook presence, plans should be in place to make it worth their while to maintain the page. There is a need to increase the number of fans and this can be done through various promotional activities. UML need to sustain the current fan base and has to make sure that the information that is being pushed out is relevant to their fans. Facebook itself allows for the development of applications and services such as OPAC searching through Facebook Librarian (Cooper, 2008) as well as accessing UML's news. UML need to look at library applications that have been developed by other university libraries and adopt them accordingly.

Most importantly, the Library has to bear in mind that "students typically turn to Facebook to have fun, not to do research or anything academically related" (Sekyere, 2009). Being a fan of an institution or an organisation may not be what they are looking for. Therefore, UML must be creative in devising ways and means of not only attracting them but also in holding their attention.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

No one can deny the importance of Facebook in today's world. Its emergence has triggered a worldwide craze amongst the younger generation and they in turn educate the older generation. Breeding (2007) sums it up by saying that "in academic libraries, Facebook plays a part in the lives of almost all of our student clientele". Therefore, university libraries and librarians must be able to embrace the technology. Facebook allows for the development of applications which can be used to the librarians' advantage. There is no running away from this phenomenon. Glazer (2009) rightly pointed out that "our work on Facebook opens the door for us to

the conversations, diversions, attitudes, and social habits of one of our critical audiences. To serve this group well, it helps to understand them as best we can".

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#### Author Brief Biography

Dr. Nor Edzan Che Nasir is the Chief Librarian at the University of Malaya Library. Prior to this, she has been with the Masters of Library and Information Science programme from 1999 to 2007 at the faculty of Computer Science & Information Technology, University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.. She was a librarian at the Universiti Sains Malaysia Library from 1983 to 1991 and went on to become a librarian at the University of Malaya Library from 1991 to 1999. She was awarded a B.Sc (Hons) from Universiti Sains Malaysia in 1982 and an M.Sc (Information Studies) from Leeds Metropolitan University in 1995. She holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Information Management (Librarianship) from the University of New South Wales, Australia and obtained her PhD at the University of Malaya in 2007. Her research interests centres on information literacy, library science education, journal publishing and institutional repositories. She has presented and published numerous papers and is currently one of the Executive Editors for the *Malaysian Journal of Library and Information Science*.

