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UTP offers bespoke solutions for industry

IT'S not often that one comes across an institution of higher learning as laser-focused on capitalising on its technological expertise and cutting-edge solutions to address customer needs and concerns as Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP).



UTP takes an active approach to seeking and developing business opportunities.

For UTP, which is celebrating its silver jubilee this year, the fruits of research and innovation have to extend beyond labs and publications and should instead be used to tackle industry pain points – whether in terms of achieving operational excellence, gaining a competitive edge or positioning for the future.

The university takes an active approach to seeking and developing business opportunities and that zeal and fervour is especially palpable when speaking with Research, Innovation and Commercialisation deputy vice chancellor Prof Dr Mohd Shahir Liew.

Under his leadership and supported by a lean business development team, UTP has, for the past four years, positioned itself as the model solutions provider for industry.

“We typically seek out prospective clients – sharing with them our observations of their issues and problems and what we feel they should be addressing. We give best-value advice without promising everything under the sun. What’s different about us is that we work on the concept of partnership – we take risks, we journey together with the client and share the positive outcomes.

“What’s more, at UTP, we don’t necessarily look at opportunities from a profit standpoint but rather, a cost recovery standpoint. So long as the job covers the cost, I am happy because after all a university’s priority is the pursuit of knowledge,” he says.



UTP inked a partnership deal with TH to jointly develop the world’s first Haj e-

Learning system platform.

The success of this active approach is best illustrated in the partnership deal UTP inked earlier this year with Lembaga Tabung Haji (TH) to jointly develop the world’s first Haj e-Learning system platform to help prospective pilgrims learn and broaden their knowledge on Haj more effectively and easily, anytime and anywhere.

The solutions would increase TH’s operational efficiency as well as raise their competitive advantage and profile.

Solutions for society

UTP's ability to come up with bespoke solutions for its customers is the result of the foundation laid in the last two decades. From 2019, UTP reinforced its ethos of research for solutions in society by organising research activities along with global megatrends and set about building a culture of relevant, market-centred research activities. The goal was, and now more than ever, remains commercialisation of research.

UTP's research, innovation and commercialisation activities are centred on two focus areas – smart communities and energy sustainability – and are driven by six primary research institutes.

It is through these institutes, namely the Institute of Self Sustainable Building, Institute of Transport Infrastructure, Institute of Health and Analytics, Institute of Autonomous System, Institute of Contaminant Management and Institute of Hydrocarbon Recovery, that UTP has amassed a considerable repository of solutions centred on digitalisation and the use of Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) technologies to address industry needs.

Shahir and his team also have Petronas to thank for its business centred approach especially with regards to future positioning and gaining a competitive edge.

Another competitive advantage is UTP's ability to harness digitalisation solutions to offer a suite of cost optimisation solutions, which are particularly sought-after in this post-pandemic business environment. It was through these solutions that UTP was able to increase its revenues in 2020 and 2021, despite a softer market.



Shahir has 23 years of industry experience, predominantly as a consulting engineer

in the US, Asia and Malaysia.

In Shahir, who assumed his current role in 2017, UTP has another weapon in its arsenal. With 23 years of industry experience, predominantly as a consulting engineer in the United States, Asia and Malaysia, Shahir is employing the lessons and insight gained over the years to drive, encourage and support the team of researchers.

He adopts a hands-on approach to inculcate business acumen among the researchers, exposing faculty members to the business world and having them engage and interact with clients to understand regulations and legal issues.

UTP's business-focused approach and accent on being a partner of choice for industry has made an impact on the bottom line. From total revenues of RM20mil in 2017, in 2021, UTP research and consulting activities alone netted RM24mil in revenue.

In 2022, revenue figures have already exceeded the projections set for 2025. UTP also has a handful of faculty members who bring in seven-figure revenues annually in consulting services.

In the years leading up to 2025, Shahir and his team will continue to focus on digitalisation and IR4.0 technologies, including data analytics, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and the Internet of Things. Mobility technology, driven by concerns of food security, will be another focus area.

The task at hand, therefore, is to further strengthen the team and capitalise on the opportunities, because the future, as Shahir says, is bright.