The setting of PolyU’s Information Technology Services Office (ITS) accessible to visitors does not reveal half the story. There are no giant mainframe computers flashing red and green lights, no lab coated engineers walking about with their clipboards, and most certainly no computer wires running all over the place.

But this department, tucked discreetly in core P of the campus, is the pulse of the entire university. Most students may not deal with this department on a day-to-day basis, and according to Mr Richard Li, who heads ITS, this is the beauty of his work. Mr Li and his staff are there to ensure that the entire technology infrastructure of the University runs smoothly and efficiently. And as long as there are no problems, he is happy to remain behind the scenes.

“Service is our name,” beamed Mr Li, a computer science expert who joined the University five years ago. “We try to bring in the latest in information technology to make the campus more efficient, for students, staff and faculty.”

If you have sent an email to a fellow student, checked your grades or accessed PolyU’s website, you have been in touch with the wonders of ITS. In the new millennium, technology is rapidly changing our lives and the way we live, study and work. Mr Li’s job is to bring the best of what is available in the market to the University.

Mr Richard Li, Director of Information Technology Services, always seeks new initiatives to enhance the IT culture of the University.
“There is no doubt that our entire lifestyle is being reshaped by technology, and it is the same with education,” Mr Li said. “Technology has become an ubiquitous part of our lives, even university operations have changed. Technology is leading the way, our needs have become different, and speed matters a lot these days.”

PolyU has always been a leader among local tertiary institutions in its use of information technology. And the internet has enabled dramatic changes to take place. One of its impacts is changing the university’s computer system from a LAN base to becoming internet-based. This revolutionised the university’s communication systems. “Our faculty can be at work thousands of miles away, anywhere in the world,” Mr Li enthused. “Teaching staff can send correspondences, issue grades, prepare a PowerPoint lecture anywhere, any time.” According to Mr Li, technology has brought the PolyU community closer than ever before.

Convenience aside, one of the benefits of using this internet system is the cost control factor. “We are trying to achieve a totally paperless campus,” Mr Li said. Right now, memos are circulated through emails, conference materials are distributed through the internet system. All teaching staff has e-filing capability, which eliminates the need for bulky filing cabinets to contain their teaching and research materials. “We save work time as well as money, and it’s catching on fast,” Mr Li added. “Our President, Prof. Poon Chung-kwong, was among the first to support our system. He corresponds mostly by email. Nowadays, it’s not unusual for a meeting to take place with everyone clutching their notebook computers!” Currently, about 90 per cent of PolyU’s staff, faculty and students use emails.

Li mused that he cannot imagine going back to the “old days”. “Our University is very committed to using technology,” Mr Li said. “Of course, it’s also a game of money, and we are fortunate to have the resources to back us up.” Several times a year, Mr Li and his associates visit computer and technology trade shows to search for new equipment or systems to incorporate into PolyU’s campus. “We look for proven technology that we can use,” Mr Li said. “We identify our own needs and look at market trends in order to find the right products for us.”

Every year, ITS organises a large-scale event entitled IT Showcase to show off the University’s latest e-learning initiatives as well as applications of information technology in various aspects of its services in an on-campus exhibition and a symposium. With interactive and appealing exhibits and lively demonstrations, the 70 plus exhibition booths set up for IT Showcase 2000 attracted over 10,000 visitors, marking a very encouraging rise from the 7,000 visitors of the first IT Showcase in the previous year.
David Chiu, Senior Computing Officer of ITS, agrees with Mr Li that in many ways PolyU is quite advanced in IT development for education. “This is especially true with e-learning. We are among the first schools in Hong Kong to introduce e-learning platform and still offers the most subjects,” he said. Currently, there are about 2,000 websites for different academic departments where students can click and learn.

The University has adopted WebCT as the common platform for its web-based teaching since a couple of years ago. Yet individual departments will still enjoy the flexibility of using alternative platforms when needs arise.

Mr Chiu oversees many IT projects within the university that result in greater teaching potential. It is of crucial importance to ensure that web-based teaching is used effectively and efficiently in ways that are pedagogically appropriate, and which help students to learn. “We’ve just created an entirely new IT architecture for the School of Design,” he said. “It will provide the School with stronger IT support, such as quicker access to the internet, better facilitation of administrative tasks, and enhance their multimedia teaching tools,” Chiu said. “We have meetings with the staff to find out their needs, then develop IT services suitable for them.”

Regardless of their field of study, Mr Richard Li expressed that most PolyU students are very technology-oriented. “Our students are very familiar with computer systems and their usage,” Mr Li said. PolyU has been an active promoter of e-learning initiatives, and is among the first few universities in Hong Kong to adopt the WebCT e-learning platform. He sees that PolyU’s IT infrastructure, facilities and services are above the average Hong Kong institutions, and not inferior to world class institutions, thanks to the support of senior management and the devotion of ITS colleagues.

“You can’t deny that technology is the way of the future,” Li said. “We must grasp the best of what it has to offer to better ourselves, this is especially important for students at tertiary level because this knowledge will help their future careers.”

It is clear that ITS will continue to maintain a strong IT infrastructure and culture on campus, bringing in appropriate new services and facilities, particularly in the areas of Internet technologies (Internet2), e-business (e-service) and e-learning. All these will help enhance the communication, administration, teaching, learning, and research of the PolyU community.
掌握資訊 與時並進

李景行先生表示：「我們必須掌握它最好的一面，協同自我提升；對專上院校的學生來說尤其重要，因為這種知識對他們未來的事業有莫大的裨益。」