

Library books sent to your doorstep

SUN 25/11/12 MS8

IMAGINE having access to eight state libraries - all at your fingertips. It's now possible with u-Pustaka, a government initiative that aims to be more than just an ordinary library by making information and services available anytime, anywhere. The project, spearheaded by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, was launched in March last year and brings together state libraries to create a database of information, resources and discussions, and has the unique feature of delivering books straight to the home. In an interview with theSun, u-Pustaka head Associate Professor Indasah Sidek explains to MICHELLE CHUN what u-Pustaka is all about.

What is u-Pustaka? What is its purpose?

U stands for ubiquitous. u-Pustaka aims to make content and services in both Bahasa Malaysia and English omnipresent - available anytime, anywhere, with broadband access, where there is 'no wrong door' for knowledge access and services. We want to be more than a library, and encourage information literacy through this initiative. u-Pustaka has 10 strategic partners and eight libraries from Sabah, Sarawak and the peninsula.

Why u-Pustaka when we have libraries?

Not all libraries are open around the clock, and many working people may not be able to borrow books as library services may not be available by the time they get off work. Also, some may not be able to get out of their homes to visit libraries, such as those who are bedridden, or some may not be able to get to a library as it is out of their way. Also, some resources may not be available at the library close to you but may be stocked at other consortium libraries. Through u-Pustaka,

people can have access to eight libraries instead of one.

What are some of its features and facilities?

This initiative was launched on March 31 last year, so it is still relatively new. One of its unique features is the professional delivery service that we offer in partnership with Pos Malaysia - we practically get books delivered to your doorstep. We are trying to make u-Pustaka the one stop for everything, for people to find jobs, resources, take part in online learning, share knowledge. We want to cultivate and nurture a knowledge-sharing society.

We have an e-Review section, where the public and libraries involved can review and rate books to make it convenient for members and the public to choose books. We also have e-Resources and Audio Books, which provide online and audio resources accessible to u-Pustaka members.

Can you elaborate on this feature of

delivering books to your doorstep?

What we do is use the National Union Catalogue - so far we have eight state libraries involved and the great thing is that when you search for a book, it searches all eight libraries. So even if you are in Subang Jaya, and the book you need is only available in Pahang, it can be delivered to you. We also make it convenient to return the books; you can drop it off at any of our multipurpose kiosks, book drop stations or arrange for it to be picked up from your home.

Who can borrow books, and how can one go about borrowing a book?

Anyone holding a MyKad or MyKid can become a member and borrow books. Permanent residents can be members but cannot borrow books. One person can borrow up to three books in one month. By logging on to the u-Pustaka portal, you can search for a book and see whether it's available for borrowing or booking. Once you have made your choice, you have two options for delivery: postal or courier service. For the courier service, the cost depends on the weight of the book. If you opt for courier service, you can also ask for it to be picked up from your home and returned on a certain date. We also have this category for 'Online Members', non-Malaysians who can join the u-Pustaka community but cannot borrow books.



U-Pustaka head Assoc Prof Indasah Sidek.

our members. The 'Ask u-Pustaka' option is the Help Desk of the initiative. When a person makes an entry asking for research advice, reference materials or information, the entry is sent to all eight libraries, and the librarians will try to help or make suggestions. We also have a discussion forum for members to engage in discussions on various topics. The 'Chat with Your Expert' provides



How can payment for delivery or fines be made?

As we move towards e-governance, our features are all there. We don't use cash for any transaction – we work through debit cards, MEPS, or a new Touch 'N Go device called the QuikzGo, which is currently only used for u-Pustaka. The QuikzGo device, which can be purchased for RM49, can be connected to a computer or laptop and then the user can swipe the Touch 'N Go card to make payments then and there. That means payment can be made anywhere in the world, and for parents, they can allow their children to use this device to borrow books as it is solely for u-Pustaka at present.



U-Pustaka book drop kiosk.

On the u-Pustaka portal, there are a number of collaboration components for social networking and knowledge exploration. How do these help anyone looking for information?

We have a number of components that help

adults, youth and children to facilitate more interaction. What we want is to nurture the habit of reading and a love for knowledge among Malaysians.

members (webinars (web seminars) featuring experts in specific subjects. u-Pustaka members can log on to listen to the talks in real time from wherever they are, view slides and also interact with the experts.

Since the initiative kicked off, how successful has it been?

So far, we have 180,000 members, which is an extremely good response. Our portal has been visited by Internet users in 74 countries and 424 cities. Since it was launched, there have been 2,914 cases of inter-lending (users borrowing books from any of the eight libraries involved). The portal is also extremely popular as it provides more than just books – other services such as job searches, resources, webinars and forums. We also have dashboards catered to

HOW TO BORROW AND RETURN A BOOK USING U-PUSTAKA

- 1. Sign up for free as a member on the u-Pustaka portal: www.u-library.gov.my**
- 2. Search for a book, or browse through reviews to find a book you like**
- 3. Availability from any of the consortium libraries will be shown - whether you can immediately borrow or book**
- 4. Choose a delivery option: postal (parcel) or courier (weight)**
- 5. Make payment through MEPS or Touch 'N Go**
- 6. To return, you can drop the book off at book drop stations in libraries, multipurpose kiosks or if you opted for courier service, you can choose to have it picked up from your home.**