

*“The main challenge is finding skilled technologists [who] not only understand the process flow, but are also able to contribute to the enhancement of the client interactions in online and offline operations*

- Professor George Baciu, PolyU



The master's degree in e-commerce, run by the Polytechnic University (PolyU), was launched in 2000. Over the past 17 years, shopping habits have been transformed, with the range of products and services predominantly bought through online channels increasing all the time.

It has often been noted that local consumers have tended to lag behind those in other developed economies in this regard. But Professor George Baciu, of PolyU's department of computing, and the programme leader for the e-commerce programme, believes this no longer holds true.

"Hong Kong consumers are already embracing e-commerce platforms for product purchases, product rankings and customer feedback, as can be seen from the abundance of apps that are developed in Hong Kong," he says.

With electronic payment now so widely used in retail and B2B (business to business) transactions, and with the strong growth of businesses operating primarily in this field, such as Amazon and Alibaba Group Holdings – owner of the *South China Morning Post* – Baciu sees e-commerce already firmly established as a fundamental part of our commercial lives.

However, there are obstacles to be tackled, both for existing businesses looking to develop their e-commerce channels, and for start-ups entering the field.

"The main challenge is finding skilled technologists [who] not only understand the process flow, but are also able to contribute to the enhancement of the client interactions in online and offline operations," he says. "Another challenge is maintaining the robust security protocols that are employed in e-commerce transactions and in the safeguarding of customers' credentials."

Baciu notes that his department's e-commerce programme is the first in Hong Kong that was developed based on a fully-structured curriculum that includes business, accounting, logistics and computing, and tailored towards e-commerce practitioners and middle management working in industry.

Master of Science in E-commerce, PolyU	
Duration	Full-time: one and a half years Part-time: two and a half years
Mode of study	mixed
Cost	HK\$3,600/credit (local students), HK\$4,400/credit (non-local students). 30 credits are required for graduation.
Scholarship	Scholarship schemes are offered for outstanding students from Hong Kong, the mainland and overseas.

Although the programme is open to graduates from bachelor's degree courses, many are employed when they apply. "Many applicants also indicate they are preparing to launch new start-ups," he says. "Some students have already initiated their own start-ups and are actively involved in the development of their own strategic venture."

The levels of technical smarts required by the programme vary from basic programming skills to the ability to design web-based applications, Baciu says. Notwithstanding this, applications are invited from all who are keen to learn and upgrade their knowledge base in these areas.

There are two pathways through the programme. Students can choose to take subjects from either the executive or technical groups of courses, and they will obtain a certificate of recognition from the department after fulfilling the subject requirements. If students wish to gain exposure to both the executive and technical aspects of e-commerce, they can opt to build their own portfolio of subjects within the general requirements.

If they choose the executive option, they need to pick four from a core category of courses which includes information systems and e-commerce strategy, B2B and B2C e-commerce and management, and entrepreneurship. Among the electives open to them is the information systems audit and control course.

For those taking the technical route, the completion of six core courses – with options including big data computing, intelligent information systems, and software testing and quality assurance – is required.

Despite the rapid rate of change in the field of e-commerce, Baciu says it isn't a major problem for the programme to keep pace. With broadband connectivity and access to all the potential sources of technical and management material available, as well as to an excellent electronic library platform, his department is able to constantly update both its knowledge base and its curriculum material, to reflect the latest technological trends.

"For example, we are now in the process of adopting the new fintech and AI/machine learning training platforms and material for our curriculum in e-commerce," he says. "One of our most popular courses is big data analytics, which we had to expand in order to accommodate the demand."

#### The graduate – C.K. Wan, Msc in e-commerce, PolyU

E-commerce manager C.K. Wan built up seven years of work experience between graduating from his bachelor's degree course and enrolling on the MSc in e-commerce programme.

Wan's bachelor's degree was obtained after completing a less technology-based art and design in education course, and his decision to apply for the master's programme was prompted by a career move.

"I got a new job in 2014 as an IT manager, helping the company to start the development of an e-commerce business," Wan says. "At that time I also saw the general trend towards e-commerce, so I was looking for a MSc in e-commerce programme."

His ability to balance the demands of his work with the sort of class schedule and study load required by a MSc programme, was one of the factors he had to weigh up before committing to the course. "I studied in part-time mode in evening classes, outside working hours, so location was a main consideration," he says.

"The PolyU campus is in Hung Hom, which was convenient for me. Also the technical quality of PolyU is famous, and it has a good image with employers."

Wan graduated in 2017 and is happy to have enrolled on PolyU's master's programme.

"I've got the latest knowledge regarding

e-commerce and by studying on this course, I also acquired more insights and analytical skills for e-commerce development," he says.

Wan now has dual career goals: to move to a bigger company and to set up his own online business.

