Jack Lau is a “household” name to HKUST students, staff and alumni.

Perception Digital Limited, the company Professor Jack Lau founded in 1999, has in just 10 years grown to be the university’s biggest spin-off company, with a staff of more than 300.

Perception Digital is a pioneer in providing technology solutions in portable flash, portable hard disk, desktop hard disk, car audio and 2.4 GHz digital wireless MP3 systems.

The company offers state-of-the-art solutions and designs to top brand names around the world. Products range from Sports MP4 to Waterproof TV and WiFi-connected photo frames.

From academic to industrialist
Before obtaining his PhD degree from HKUST, Jack gained his bachelor and master’s degrees in Electrical Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley.

He launched his career as an academic when he joined the faculty of HKUST’s Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (presently called Department of Electronic & Computer Engineering). He was also a visiting scholar at Stanford University, in California. Prof Lau’s excellence as a teacher was recognised when he received the School of Engineering Faculty Teaching Appreciation Award in 1995.

Jack helped set up the university’s Consumer Media Laboratory and, with funding from the government’s Industrial Support Fund, has conducted research in home and consumer electronics, while assisting local industries in developing new technologies.

In 1999, Prof Lau demonstrated another side of his talents when he decided to tap the huge market potential of MP3 products and commercialise his product ideas. With the help of two other HKUST professors, he set up a small business in a rented village house in Tai Po Tsai, in Sai Kung. Using their own money, the three academics got down to business with a couple of circuit boards, personal computers and processors.

“It was not a short, straight road,” says Jack, describing Perception Digital’s early days. “We faced many problems. We had to find ways to resolve a raft of issues, such as capital shortfall and research and prototyping bottlenecks. Perseverance is part of being an entrepreneur. Trouble lurks around every corner. The
biggest lesson every entrepreneur must understand is to always expect the unexpected. Be ready for whatever surprises come your way. Don't be discouraged by mistakes. Learn from them and grow.”

Two years later, the company made its first big splash when it put 2,000 MP3 players on the market. That signalled the next big step for Perception Digital.

“HKUST invited us to run our business from the university, saying it would give us the facilities we needed, and so we moved to the HKUST campus,” Jack says.

Do what you like doing

“I know I will not be the biggest, richest and best-known businessman. My goal is just to be as good as I can be. My rewards come when I do just that. If you do what you like to do, you will do it well. Fan the flames of your interest. That’s where the satisfaction comes from. I love music and sports, and I try to integrate technology into lifestyle. The ideas for Fitness MP3 and wireless waterproof TV were conceived this way.”

The spirit of sharing

What put Perception Digital in the spotlight, apart from its novel gadgets, was the launch of an online educational platform, www.pdjiaoyu.com, the first-ever e-learning community tailored for primary and secondary school students in the mainland.

“I never let go of my education dreams,” says Jack. “Our country’s future rests with the next generation. Over the years, I have visited some of the less-developed parts of the mainland and seen how students are struggling with inadequate resources. Also, they are under huge pressure to pass exams and they hardly ever experience the joy of learning. We want to leverage on technological advancements and address these issues through innovation.”

One of the things the Perception Digital education platform does is to encourage original thinking, to practice “thinking out of the box”.

To give talented young mainland people the opportunity to study at HKUST, Jack has set up a scholarship, the Dr. Jack Lau School of Engineering Scholarship for Mainland High School Students.

Jack wants to see regular academic exchanges between Shenzhen and Hong Kong, and is in the process of setting up a series of educational exchange programs.
Taking up the theme “Old Thing, New Inspiration”, the finale of SAMSUNG Joint-U Creative Technology Awards held at Cyberport on February 16 became the show of the nascent talents of our students. Among the four grand awards, HKUST teams triumphed by winning three prizes – “The Most Creative Award”, “The Technical Competency Award” and “The Most Caring Award”.

The ECE students also received eight awards in the 2008-2009 Hong Kong Youth Design Competition on March 18. The awards aim at raising the awareness of elderly care and social responsibility among young people.

The winning teams expressed their sincerest gratitude to the superb coaching of Prof Tim Woo, who is the Visiting Assistant Professor of the Department of Electronic and Computer Engineering. Prof Woo is a loyal alumnus of HKUST. He obtained his Bachelor, Master and PhD degrees all in HKUST.

Ever since Prof Stephen Hawking unveiled the myths of “The Origin of Universe” in the summer of 2006 at HKUST, the opening of the Institute for Advanced Study’s (IAS) Inaugural Symposium marks another major milestone for the advancement of science at the regional and global levels.

The knoll adjacent to the former Phase II is where the up-and-coming IAS building will be located. Set to create a center modelled along the lines of the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton, it is envisaged that the HK-based IAS will become a mecca for great scholars. It will be the intellectual powerhouse not only for fundamental and theoretical work, but also in the areas of applied science and experimental work. It will also be a nexus of young rising stars who will become leaders of their own fields all over the world.
The Bachelor Education Center, founded by four young graduates, three of them HKUST alumni, has grown from strength to strength since the private tutorial chain was established in 2003. The fast-expanding tutorial franchise boasts 14 teaching centers at present, 210 teachers and more than 1,000 students.

“The Bachelor Education Center was founded in the gloom-and-doom days of the SARS outbreak,” Bonnie says. “We too went through a difficult time after graduation. Despite the dark reality, we went ahead with our enterprise, which was a response to a very real education market need.”

Making the most of what we have
Bonnie, Tango and Simpson shared the same hall of residence at university and became close friends. Upon graduation in 2002, Bonnie and Tango began their careers in marketing and finance respectively, while Simpson chose to stay on at HKUST to pursue a master’s degree.

“The starting salary for fresh graduates was not very high at the time,” Tango recalls. “But we made an all-out effort to learn on the job and sharpen our skills. We both had a business plan, and we would work on it in our free time. We used our savings from our first job to raise the necessary capital to start our business.”

Identifying market needs while doing part-time jobs
“It’s common practice for students to take up part-time jobs to make some pocket money, and many students work as private tutors. That’s what we did,” says Simpson.

“We worked as personal tutors when we were in secondary school. We understood that good learning habits must be formed at an early stage. We knew that any future career success must be based on a solid educational foundation.”

“Unfortunately, today’s students are not disciplined and motivated, and they lack learning skills. We realised a lot was lacking in the available private tutorial services for primary and secondary school students. Using our experience as private tutors, we formulated a student training strategy that has proved very effective,” Simpson says.

Adversity as opportunity
“When SARS broke out, schools closed for several months. Meanwhile, because so many hours of schooling were lost to SARS, parents wanted to enroll their children in tutorial classes during the summer vacation,” Bonnie says.

“Competition is fierce in the tutorial business. Having said that, we see competition as a challenge, rather than a threat. We are happy as long as we can make a difference.”

According to Simpson, word of mouth got the business going
“When we opened our first center, in Tseung Kwan O, word got around and students in the neighborhood
Call for Alumni Support on Career Orienteering

In an effort to provide every possible support to our fellow alumni / graduates-to-be in career orienteering, HKUST strives to provide a range of services including job postings, career talks, company visits plus various mentorship and internship programs. Visit [https://career.ust.hk/employer_services.html](https://career.ust.hk/employer_services.html) to know more about the career services offered by our Student Affairs Office.

If you think you may offer assistance to the UST community in one way or another, you are welcome to let us know by filling out the form below.

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☐ Others (Pls specify: ______________________)

Enquiries: Tel: 2358 6158; Fax: 2705 9119
Email: mcmendy@ust.hk

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started to flock to the center. We ended up getting the district’s biggest slice of the tutorial pie,” Simpson says.

**Savvy management**

“The traditional tutorial centers are perceived as a kind of nursery, where the tutors act like babysitters. Our centers stress the calibre of the teachers,” Simpson says.

“All our teachers have at least a bachelor’s degree, and they are carefully screened and given regular training. We maintain a very high standard for our teachers.”

“We also reflect government education policy by offering a variety of courses to satisfy the different needs of students. Class streaming is done according to student aptitude. We strive to nurture the study habit in our students.”

“The idea behind franchising our education center was to attract like-minded people who could use our tutorial model, and on a bigger scale.”

**Three grateful alumni**

“We are grateful to HKUST,” chorus Bonnie, Tango and Simpson. “It was at university that we met and became friends. Trustworthy partners are a gift from heaven.”

“It is interesting that a high percentage of our teachers are HKUST graduates.”

“When we look back, we realise that all that hard work in our university years equipped us for coping with real-life business,” the three alumni said.

Bonnie Mok
2002  BEng in Electronic Engineering
Simpson Ng
2002  BSc in Physics
2003  MSc in Materials Science and Engineering
Tango Ng
2002  BSc in Physics

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