Wheels for the MIND

AUC

The iPad COMETH

iMacs everywhere

Create World
2009 wrap

iMacs: Unis' new lab standard
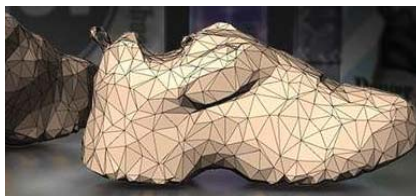
WIN AN IPOD NANO

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AUTUMN 2010

PRODUCT ROUND-UP
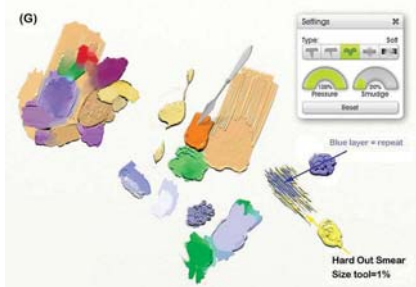
Natural-media art all the Rage

Natural-media digital painting and drawing has come a long way, as the latest updates to Ambient Design's ArtRage Studio app and Studio Pro apps handily demonstrate. Offering a minimalist interface, layers support, and a massive palette of tools – including drawing standbys and watercolour, gloop, sticker spray, auto-smoothing inking pens, and support for Photoshop filters and brushes – ArtRage is about the closest you'll get to actually painting on your screen. And a lot less messy.

$US40 ($A48) or $US80 ($A96) for the Pro version from **www.artrage.com**.

Music Record-ing within Reason

Propellerhead Software's dynamic duo – Reason 4 and the new Record – provide a dizzying array of audio effects to help musicians both amateur and professional. Reason 4 expands its rack-based production metaphor with a new sequencer, groove tool, arpeggiator and "a synth to end all synths". Record handles the recording side, with unlimited audio tracks, a range of effects and mixing gear, and "a hands-on approach to capturing performances".

$US299 ($A359) for Record, $US449 ($A539) for both (online).
Contact **www.musiclink.com.au** or learn more at **www.propellerheads.se**.

Say it with style

If words are your business, TypeStyler is an essential tool. Start with the words you want to say, then use TypeStyler to twist them, stretch them, bug them out in a whole range of 3D styles, overlay textures and colours onto them, and more. If you can write it, TypeStyler can make it look any way you want it to.

TypeStyler costs $US179.95 as a download from **www.typestyler.com**.

Strata into 3D

If you do lots of graphics and animation work, you've probably struggled with how to get 3D manipulable objects into your creations. Here's just about the easiest way you're ever going to find to make it happen: use Strata Foto to print out a grid, sit your object in the middle of it, then take a dozen or more shots of the object from every angle. Using the grid as a guide, the program crunches the object into a fully realised 3D model in AutoDesk or 3D Max formats, et voilá! You have yourself a model.

$US485 ($A575). Contact XClusive Software on 1300 137 140 or **www.xclusive.com.au**, or learn more at **www.strata.com**.

Once more, with clicking

If you're a serious typist, you may well appreciate the disadvantages of Apple's latest keyboard designs, which eschew tactile feedback for thin-and-mushy design. Matias offers a robust alternative with its TactilePro 3 keyboard, a wired USB keyboard that channels Apple's long-gone Extended keyboards and uses Alps mechanical keyswitches for unsurpassed responsiveness. They're loud, but many feel they provide an unrivalled typing experience. They also provide 3 USB 2.0 ports, 15 function keys, and dedicated navigation keys.

$199 from **www.buymac.com.au**.

Write to the top

It was only a matter of time before multi-touch came to the time-honoured touch tablet category, and Wacom was a natural to make it happen. By all accounts, the new Bamboo Fun tablet brings the two together with style: use your pen and your fingers to control a range of applications, use the four customisable buttons to do whatever you want them to do, and use the 1024 levels of pen sensitivity to create beautiful art and interact with a whole range of programs.

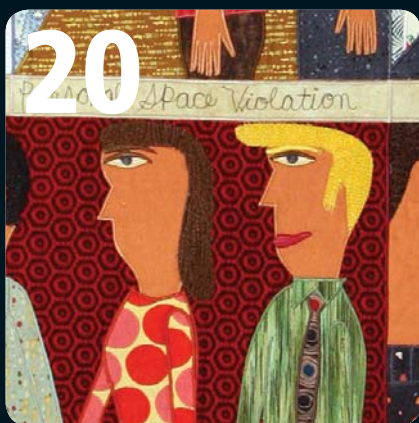From $99, depending on size and configuration, at **www.buywacom.com.au**.

CONTENTS

AUC MEMBER UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA:

- Australian Catholic University
- Australian National University
- AUT University
- Central Queensland University
- Charles Sturt University
- Curtin University of Technology
- Deakin University
- Edith Cowan University
- Flinders University of SA
- Griffith University
- James Cook University
- La Trobe University
- Macquarie University
- Monash University
- Murdoch University
- Queensland University of Technology

- RMIT University
- Southern Cross University
- Swinburne University of Technology
- University of Adelaide
- University of Auckland
- University of Melbourne
- University of Newcastle
- University of New England
- University of New South Wales
- University of Queensland
- University of Otago
- University of South Australia
- University of Southern Queensland
- University of Sydney
- University of Tasmania
- University of Technology, Sydney

- University of Western Australia
- University of Western Sydney
- University of Wollongong
- Victoria University

NEW ZEALAND (Affiliate Members)
- University of Canterbury
- Massey University
- Victoria University of Wellington
- Waikato University

AFFILIATED UNIVERSITIES
- Australian Defence Force Academy
- University of Canberra
- SAE Byron Bay
- Bond University
- Dr Mahalingam College of Engineering & Technology, India

EDITORIAL

Welcome to 2010! We certainly have a fantastic year ahead with lots of exciting developments. But let us first take a quick look back over 2009.

We saw a year of wonderful achievements from staff and students from our member universities. Some of the highlights for me were the stories of Zac Cohan and Nik Youdale, and Renate Pronk (all from the Winter edition); Paul Bourke and Nic Circosta (both from the Summer edition); and Mathieu Tozer, Ashley Buckle/Steve Androulakis, and Matthew Tonkin (all from Autumn edition). These stories were not only about the successes we've seen from these remarkable people, but also of the breadth and depth of diversity that they bring to the AUC community as a whole.

Well done to all of you and every contributor for making 2009 a great year.

Looking to 2010, most significantly we see the launch of Apple's iPad. This product has been the subject of wild rumour and speculation and, by the time you read this article, it will have been released in the US to many eager punters. Hailed by Apple as a "magical and revolutionary product at an unbelievable price", the iPod is stirring the emotions and creativity of developers, content providers and end users all over the world. Naturally, we will be watching (and reporting) with eagle eyes to see how the iPad will weave its magic throughout Australia and what impact it will have in the education sector.

In this issue, the theme of most prominence is computer labs and how they're influencing the way in which institutions provide computing resources. The University of Queensland are moving full steam ahead with the introduction of over 1400 Macintosh computers across their 15 libraries. QUT's Creative Industries Faculty is providing 27-inch iMacs as a transition from their previous Windows lab, and all this seems to indicate students are making more demands on university provided computing resources.

All this and a whole lot more is in store for this edition. As always, I'd be delighted to receive your feedback and suggestions for future issues – but for now, enjoy!

David Yammouni
Editor, Wheels for the Mind
dyammouni@swin.edu.au

AUC Update

Game on: Learn to build your own

Anybody interested in developing games for Mac OS X or iPhone will want to sit in on the AUC's upcoming Unity Workshop. Designed to introduce the fundamentals of game design, with hands-on components that use the Unity game engine to educate participants in topics including physics, 3D graphics, animation, and audio. Unity users will develop on the Mac OS X platform, but can deploy their applications to OS X, Windows, iPhone, and Nintendo Wii with ease.

Workshops run in Melbourne (18-20 May) and Brisbane (27-29 May) and the AUC is offering subsidised places, including accommodation for out-of-state attendees. See **www.auc.edu.au/Unity+Workshop** for details.

Unity Workshop
Learn how to make great games
for Mac OS X & iPhone

Calling all student developers

If you have a talent for Mac OS X or iPhone development, the AUC wants you. Applications for the AUC's Annual Student Developer Scholarships are being accepted until 31 March.

The three, each valued at nearly $10,000 over a two-year period, are intended for student developers with a strong academic record, demonstrated programming experience, and an innovative project idea that doesn't reinvent the wheel. Equipment, mentoring, and conference attendance are all part of the awards.

For more information, see **www.auc.edu.au/Student+Developer+Scholarships**.

Putting the wraps on Macworld 2010

The AUC supported a number of attendees to attend this year's Macworld 2010 Conference & Expo, and many are podcasting some of their experiences. Drop by **betweenthebuttons.net/home/** to share their experiences and contribute your own thoughts.
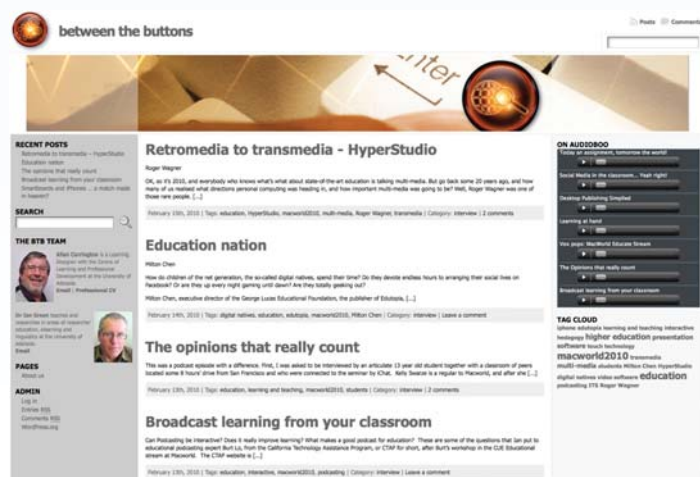
AUC: now tweeting

It has taken over the world of social media over the last year, and we'd like to think we've helped just that little bit. Follow @appleunicons or visit **www.twitter.com/appleunicons** to keep up to date with all the latest at the AUC.

WWDC scholarships now open

Applications are now open for the AUC's annual scholarships for attendance at Apple's World Wide Developers Conference (WWDC), Apple's major developer event. Dates for the event had not yet been confirmed by press time, but it will be in June.

This year, each AUC member university has been allocated one scholarship for attendance to 2010. Eligibility is restricted to one full-time staff member or student of an Australian AUC member university who has a background in programming. IT managers, with responsibility for Macintosh deployment on their campus, are also eligible.

Scholarships will receive a WWDC e-ticket as well as a subsidy to support return airfares to San Francisco and twin-share accommodation for the conference's duration.

Staff interested in the allocated scholarship should contact their local AUCDF Co-ordinator for the local closing date, while staff and students interested in the competitive scholarships must apply by completing an application form through the AUC web site.

See **www.auc.edu.au/WWDC+Scholarships** for more details.

iPod touch kits for your classroom

As you'll read in this issue, Apple's iPod touch is gaining currency as a teaching tool across a wide variety of disciplines.

If you'd like to get in on the action, the AUC is now offering two iPod touch kits to be used for classroom and development purposes. Each kit consists of twenty 32GB iPod touches, USB power adapters, and USB cables, and is available on loan to AUC member universities.

See **www.auc.edu.au/Seeding+Equipment** for more information.

Something interesting happening within your university's teaching environment? We want to hear about it! Drop us a line at Dyammouni@swin.edu.au and we'll include the most interesting tidbits in the next issue.

The AUC crosses the Tasman

The AUC has welcomed four new members to its ranks, further expanding its reach across Australia and extending to three of New Zealand's most prestigious higher-education institutions.

The four new members include:

- Australian Catholic University (**www.acu.edu.au**), which operates from six campuses in Queensland, NSW, ACT and Victoria
- Auckland University of Technology (**www.aut.ac.nz**), with 24,000 students across campuses in Auckland, Manukau and North Shore
- University of Auckland (**www.auckland.ac.nz**), with 38,500 students across a main Auckland campus and four specialist campuses
- University of Otago (**www.otago.ac.nz**), with 18,000 students in its South Island campus at Dunedin

We welcome the staff and students of our newest members and encourage them to participate in all the AUC events and activities that are available to them (see **www.auc.edu.au/Benefits+of+the+AUC**). Overleaf, we've spoken with representatives of the new universities to find out what they're hoping to get out of their newest affiliation.

AUC supports staff technical training

Staff of AUC member universities are reminded that the AUC has negotiated significant discounts off a range of Mac OS X, XSan, and Final Cut related training courses now being offered through training providers Dimension Data Learning Solutions (DDLS) and Key Options Technology.

AUC members are eligible for discounts of 35 percent off DDLS courses – including Mac OS X Support Essentials, Server Essentials, Directory Services, Deployment, and Advanced Administration – and 25 percent off Key Options courses including XSan Administration, Final Cut Server Overview, and Final Cut Server Administration.

Not only do these courses offer better skills and expanded career opportunities, but they pave the way towards certification under Apple's Certified Support Professional (ACSP), Certified Technical Coordinator (ACTC), and Apple Certified System Administrator (ACSA) certifications.

In addition, the AUC will subsidise up to four staff attendees per member university. Subsidies provide an additional discount of 35 percent (for DDLS courses) or 25 percent (for Key Options courses) off the course RRP, accommodation throughout the course's duration, and airfare for those who need to travel to attend the courses. Subsidised attendees who sit and pass the certification exam, within three months of taking the course, are eligible for AUC reimbursement of the exam fee.

Contact your university's AUC representative or AUDF co-ordinator for more details, or see **www.auc.edu.au/Technical+Training**.

X World 2010: Call for papers

The 2010 iteration of the popular X World conference will run from 7-9 July and be held at the University of Technology Sydney.

This year, the conference will be a three-day event featuring keynote presentations, hands-on workshops, lecture presentations and social events. With up to 200 attendees, X World will be the largest single training event the AUC undertakes this year.

The AUC is now inviting submissions from staff and students of member universities who would be interested in presenting during the conference. We are, in particular, looking for presenters in a wide variety of technical fields associated with the installation, configuration and ongoing administration of OS X based desktop, portable, and mobile devices.

Specific topics of interest include cloud computing and ubiquitous access; iTunes U; Mac OS X 10.6 Snow Leopard and collaboration tools and iPhone/iPad usage, integration, and application development.

Other areas of interest might range from Apple Remote Desktop and Mac OS X security to virtual machines, disk imaging, network management, Novell/AD/LDAP integration, Exchange integration, help desk management, and more.

Speakers will be subsidised with return economy airfares to Sydney, transfers and accommodation; free registration to X World 2010 and a special presenters dinner.

Nominations are due by 23 April and should be sent to Andrew Jeffrey (ajeffrey@auc.edu.au) along with your contact details; a description of your experience and your role at your university and a one or two-paragraph outline of your presentation or workshop.

Registrations for X World will open in May 2010.

AUC WELCOMES FOUR NEW MEMBERS

It's always good to welcome new members to the AUC, and recent months have seen a veritable flood of new members – four of them, to be exact, within a short space of time.

The new members – including Australian Catholic University, the University of Auckland, the University of Otago, and AUT University (a.k.a. Auckland University of Technology) – bring the total number of AUC members to 36, with four affiliate members in New Zealand and five other affiliated universities across Australia and in India.

New member universities represent a total student body of around 97,500, spread across 15 campuses from Ballarat to Manukau, Strathfield to Dunedin, and Canberra to Auckland. All now have access to the AUC's busy calendar of conferences and training events, scholarship programs, loan equipment, and more.

The decision to join the AUC reflects a trend towards embracing Macs at AUT University, says Dr Stanley Frielick, director of learning and teaching at AUT, who is getting up to speed with his new appointment as AUC delegate for the university. Frielick was working at AUC member the University of Auckland a decade ago: "I always found it very useful to get the Wheels for the Mind magazine and the information about WWDC and other programs," he recalls. "I think it's a positive move to be bringing us in."

During his three years at AUT, Frielick has joined the ranks of those engaged in heavy Mac evangelising, and has watched the university grow to have over 1000 Macs.

"When I was working in the Faculty of Health, we started shifting a lot of our teaching staff onto the dual-boot Mac mini platform as a replacement for the PC," he recalls. "The TCO is much lower, you get much better value for your leasing, and it enhances value because people realise they can do things like make podcasts quite easily. It just lowers the barriers to participation by helping staff who couldn't get into these things more easily."

AUT is exploring a broad range of opportunities available through the AUC, ranging from increased collaboration with other university members to opportunities to support unique programs such as AUT's Te Ara Poutama (Maori studies) initiative (www.apple.com/au/education/profiles/autuniversity/). Mobile devices, for example, are high on the list of priorities for exploration, as is greater involvement in AUC scholarships, development courses, and more.

Perhaps most important, Frielick adds, is the AUC's ability to unify students and staff with common computing interests. "Previously our Mac community has been dispersed in little pockets around the university," he explains. "Participation in the AUC is going to be a galvanising factor in bringing people together, and getting much better leverage out of our investment in the Mac platform."

Equally excited about joining the AUC is James Harper, associate director for infrastructure within the Faculty of Science at the University of Auckland. As the person responsible for managing servers, computer labs, web sites and more at the university, Harper has also seen Macs increase their footprint in the university.

In that environment, Macs – nearly 300 in the labs alone, or one-fifth the total lab population – have been set up to triple-boot between Mac OS X, Windows and Linux. This has provided a one-stop shop for any computing requirement its students and staff are likely to need. Harper also notes the benefits of the Macs' design, from their built-in Webcams to their overall design.

"Having those Webcams built in has been very useful, as opposed to having to plug in a Webcam where you send out 30 and 20 come back."

Of the AUC, Harper – a recent attendee at X World and CreateWorld conferences – is eager to explore the possibilities offered through scholarship programs, and is particularly excited about AUC's training roster.

"Apple training has always been difficult to come by in an affordable sense anywhere in New Zealand," he explains, "so access to affordable training is going to be one of the most oversubscribed things. The biggest challenge for us is to make sure we come up with internal processes to get the best out of it. We're incredibly excited about the opportunities, and I expect they will lead to good things."

Visit the AUC's newest members at:
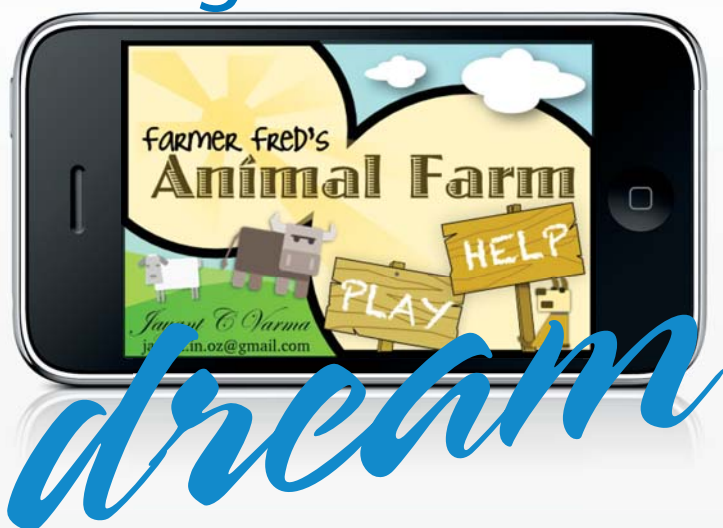
www.acu.edu.au
www.aut.ac.nz
www.auckland.ac.nz
www.otago.ac.nz
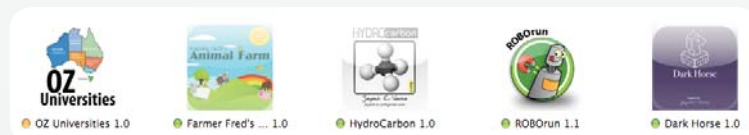
UNIVERSITY OF
OTAGO
www.otago.ac.nz

Living the iPhone
dream

Jayant Varma has never been one to be afraid of rolling up his sleeves.

A business analyst (information and systems) at Townsville's James Cook University, Jayant has kept himself busy since arriving at the university in 2005 to do his Master of Business Administration degree. University lecturing, his current pursuit of a Grad Dip in Tertiary Education and a planned PhD in immersive virtual environments have kept him busy ever since.

Despite his full schedule, however, Jayant has still found time over the past year to pursue another of his many interests: developing applications for the iPhone. With five completed apps already in the App Store, he is already living a dream that so many others have yet to realise.

iPhone development had been an interest for Jayant for some time, but it was only after he attended the AUC's iPhone SDK training course last October that he began gaining the practical skills to turn that interest into something more concrete.

Building on his twelve years of development experience, Jayant was able to start learning Objective C and coding his first applications. "It was a steep learning curve, but a learning curve that I really enjoyed," he recalls.

Jayant's first application was a reaction-time tester, which he wrote as a proof of concept and eventually turned into the game Robo Run. "I put it up for $US0.99 [$A1.19] and on the first day I had three sales, and that was very impressive," he recalls.

First-time jitters gone, Jayant set about writing his second iPhone game – Dark Horse, a chess-inspired puzzle free game that reaped more than 1000 downloads in its first week on the App Store. His third game, Hydro Carbon, is a retelling of the 1990 Thalion Software game Atomix, while his fourth game, Farmer Fred's Animal Farm tasks children with looking after a variety of farm animals.

All have posted strong numbers since their release during January and February, with Farmer Fred's Animal Farm getting more than 5800 downloads in its first two weeks of release. Robo Run has moved over 3600 copies, and Hydro Carbon and Dark Horse over 1000 each. A fifth application, OZ Universities, contains reference information about Australian unis.

From his early beginnings, Jayant has not only improved his skills substantially, but has learned
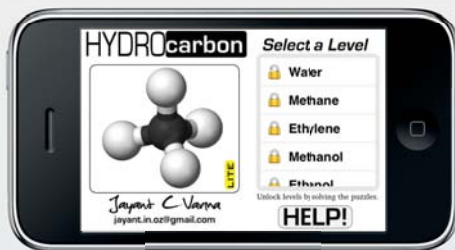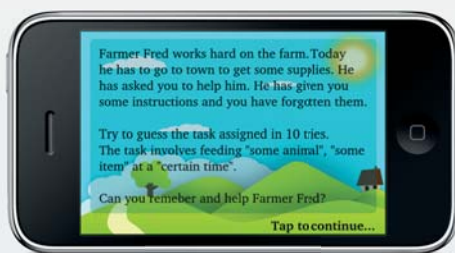
how to juggle his development with his myriad other commitments. Three to four hours of development per day, over a period of a few weeks, is enough to get an app to a usable state, he says – but notes that graphics and music consume more than their fair share of the time.

"You can't do a game with mediocre graphics," he points out, "and music is another thing: you can't just put in any loops." He's more than happy to hear from aspiring musicians who might be interested in a collaboration to put their music into one of his games.

Jayant is particularly excited about Apple's new iPad, which has debuted to mixed reviews but offers what he believes is an excellent feature set for immersive and other applications. He's already been toying with iPad development using the new SDK 3.2, and likes what he has seen so far.

The iPad "will be a big hit," he explains. "Even just the Contacts application looks really, really slick; when other products are announced, it will be a big hit. I'm trying to create an app which takes into account the new UI rules and other features."

Even with the iPad still waiting in the wings, however, Jayant has lots more ideas for iPhone development projects, and envisions committing more and more of his time to enterprise app development.

"I'm looking at this as a major interest," he says. "Applications that used to be Visual C or BASIC based, are not going to dominate any more: its all going to be Web or client-based, and iPhones and iPads are the way of the future. Putting games on the App Store is good for profile building, but the real opportunity is in customised enterprise applications. I'm looking at this as a commercial endeavour, and it all started with the AUC course that I did."

EXPLORING NEW USES FOR ITUNES U

Medical students at the University of Sydney now have a new way to avoid going to lectures – but that doesn't mean many are doing that. Yet with the ability to shift videos from a library of around 400 recorded lectures onto their iPods and iPhones, they're benefiting from the fruits of a massive digitisation effort that has provided an important new tool for studying.

The videos, which have been recorded and archived over the course of the past few years, have been available since last year through a private, access-controlled site that has been set up underneath the iTunes U banner on Apple's iTunes Store.

Students can only access lectures appropriate to their year, and since they come through iTunes they can be easily downloaded for consumption and review on the road. That's an improvement over a second, Flash-based interface that had previously allowed for viewing of the videos over the school intranet.

"Medical students are often quite busy, and can't always attend certain lectures," says Daniel Burn, IT development manager within the Sydney Medical School. "They like having the lectures online so they can revise them when exam time comes up. We had the content organised before this, so converting them and adding podcast wrappers to feed iTunes U wasn't that hard."

The school's 1000 students are currently downloading up to 1500 lecture videos per week through iTunes U, confirming its growing role as a private learning tool to complement its already growing role as a way for universities to share their knowledge with the world.

Continuing interest in iTunes U is encouraging a growing number of Australian universities to make the jump onto the site. Most recently, Perth's Curtin University of Technology made the jump with a site that offers a broad range of content – but that content doesn't, for now, include the more than 40,000 course-related videos the university already has in its archives.

Those videos are already available to students through an internal online system, says Rick Barrett, director of Curtin's Digital Media Unit, adding that their shift to iTunes U would raise intellectual property issues that have yet to be worked through.

Instead, Curtin has shaped its iTunes U site as "something completely different," Barrett explains. "We're looking at a range of other material that showcases what, as a university, we're on about. We have a range of programs across Asia, so we're looking at iTunes U as being one of the ways where people from those countries can see a bit more what Curtin is about."

Curtin's iTunes U content is organised into seven categories: Ideas & Discussions, which incorporates public lectures and podcasts from Curtin's on-campus radio station Curtin FM; Culture at Curtin; Curtin Student Media; All About Us, which includes Indigenous Curtin – reflecting the university's 500-strong population of Aboriginal Australians; Studying At Curtin; University for Secondary School; and Curtin iPortfolio Showcases highlighting a range of student work.

University for Secondary School is using iTunes U as a way for the university to reach out to high-school students, and features a range of purpose-designed content as well as Q&A sessions from interactive learning sessions that also include live streaming video feeds.

"We want to develop an interaction between the university and secondary schools," Barrett says. "We ask Curtin experts to prepare a special lecture aimed at a curriculum area for students in years 10 through 12. This year, we're going to
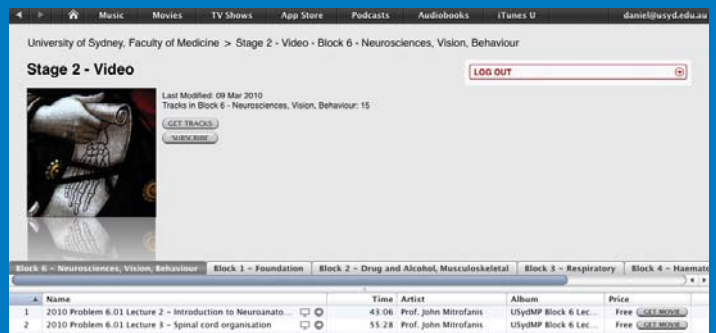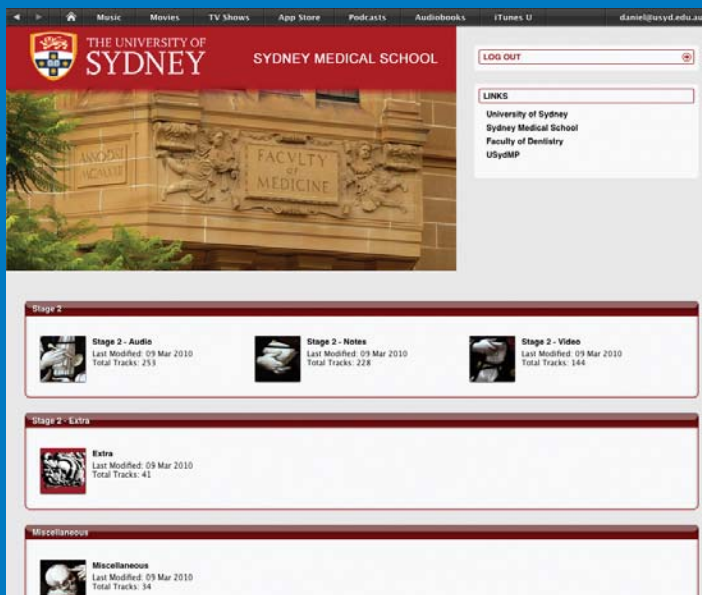
be cranking up the program, particularly in science and technology."

The other uses Curtin is exploring reinforce its iTunes U site as a way of communicating much more than just marketing content. For example, providing radio-station access to iTunes U will give the university a way to capture otherwise-ephemeral content that regularly includes interviews with politicians, business experts, and others. The site will also provide a conduit for increasing final-year short films that have previously only been shown once, at a red-carpet affair in Perth; distributing them on iTunes U will give them a whole new lease on life.

Finally, Curtin's iPortfolio plans will allow students to showcase their collective university output through a widely available channel. This isn't just limited to artistic output, however: Barrett envisions the site as a way of recording reflections on community activities, volunteer work, and other aspects of university life through photographs, video and audio clips, and more.

"The approach we've taken is to think about the user," he explains. "Visitors aren't necessarily going to be interested in seeing the latest corporate video on Curtin, but I think they will be interested in something

that's a bit different, and showcases the fantastic creative work we're doing."

The experience of more-established iTunes U participants will no doubt guide the strategies of newer entrants, who are continuing to explore options for their own sites. The Apple University Consortium is getting set to launch an iTunes U site later this year, while the University of Queensland has just flipped the switch on its presence.

U of Q also eschewed a straight dump of recorded lectures, focusing instead on building a content environment that would make it easy for groups across the university to get involved in iTunes U. Back-end scripts allow users to upload a video in any format; the video is then watermarked, a U of Q introduction and out-tro added to its beginning and end, and converted to iPod format for distribution.

The university's site currently features a large number of primarily marketing-oriented videos, but that will quickly change as academics are encouraged to contribute content and the team develops new content of its own.

Simon Collyer, head of the project office for U of Q's IT Services, sees the iTunes U site evolving through four primary phases. The first, adding enough content to kick

off the site, has just concluded. The second will involve getting marketing staff to more formally document some of the well-known research that U of Q is known for – such as its work on the 'scramjet' propulsion system and the research of Nobel laureate Professor Ian Frazer. Later phases include getting academics to publish their own content and, eventually, getting students to do the same.

U of Q could also start up a private-label site, like that at Sydney Medical School, to provide a new channel for students to access relevant content. IT staff have already tested ways to automatically allow lecturers to generate iTunes U content based on material they have already created using the university's Blackboard learning management system.

However the site evolves, user-generated content will be a major part of it. "When we spoke to a lot of other universities at the start of the project, they said the biggest problem they were facing was the amount of work it took to do the file processing and how that affected site freshness," says Collyer. "We really need to start recording some of the great stuff happening around the uni. We're hoping that within a couple of years we can get it so that every academic is savvy enough to create their own media files."

Apple Update

All the latest from Cupertino

It's thin, it's powerful, it's iPad

The hype had hit fever pitch by the time Steve Jobs took to the stage at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts on January 28, and the launch didn't disappoint. The iPad, the latest major addition to Apple's hardware lineup, made its auspicious debut in a flurry of Keynote slides and hands-on demonstrations that set the blogosphere alight for weeks afterwards.

Aesthetically, the iPad resembles the screen half of a MacBook, but is a bit smaller: its 9.7 inch multi-touch capable touchscreen incorporates a 1024x768 resolution display and a computing subsystem that runs all of the more than 140,000 available iPhone applications, either at normal resolution in letterboxed mode or in a special pixel-doubling mode that fills the entire screen.

The iPad is more than just an oversized iPhone, however: a dozen new applications, such as Brushes and iBooks, provide hands-on painting and image creation, as well as standards-based e-book reading capabilities that will be tied to a new iBookStore section in Apple's iTunes Store. Although plans for the Australian e-book service are still yet to be clarified, distribution agreements with major US publishers offer a glimpse of things to come: customers will be able to buy and download books online in the same way they now buy songs and movies, then read them on the iPad's screen.

Add-ons for the iPad expand its functionality in other interesting ways. New versions of Pages, Numbers, and Keynote will bring Apple's desktop productivity suite to the iPad, with promised seamless file replication allowing the iPad to double as a mobile productivity tool whose high-resolution screen promises excellent readability.

There's also an optional keyboard-and-dock cradle that sits the iPad in portrait orientation, allowing it to be used as a sort of portable office with normal-sized keyboard to replace its built-in touchscreen keyboard. Paired with iPad-optimised versions of Pages, Numbers, and Keynote, the iPad has been designed to serve as a portable office as well as a media viewer, e-book reader, and more.

Also important to the iPad is the A4 processor at its heart. Designed by Apple, the A4 system-on-a-chip runs at 1GHz and has been optimised to minimise power consumption, with battery life rated at approximately 10 hours.

The iPad comes in two versions. One will incorporate just Wi-Fi, while the other will add 3G connectivity to allow for full-featured Web browsing, app and book buying, and other applications anywhere within 3G network coverage. The iPad will ship in 16GB, 32GB, and 64GB flavours with US pricing ranging from $US499 ($A599) to $US829 ($A995) depending on configuration. Australian pricing will be announced when the devices are launched here in late April.

Learn more from **www.apple.com.au/ipad**. We at Wheels will be tracking the iPad's adoption amongst member universities with great interest – so if you are planning or executing an iPad pilot program or more, why not let us know about it?

A wider Aperture

Long-awaited by professional and prosumer photographers alike, the latest version of Apple's Aperture photo editing and management software was released in early February to much excitement.

Aperture 3 is the first update to Aperture since version 2.1 was launched in early 2008, meeting and surpassing the functionality of iPhoto '09's Places and Faces features while adding a host of other features.

Among those features are a broad range of new tools. For example, Brushes allows painting image effects onto your photos; choose from 15 Quick Brushes for tasks like dodge, burn, polarise and blur, then quickly apply the effects using automatic edge detection. There are also dozens of Adjustment Presets that apply a specific style or look to the entire image with just a click.

New slideshow capabilities simplify the merging of photos, audio, text, and HD video, with six Apple designed themes and the ability to make your own as well. Built-in GPS capabilities automatically match photos with their locations based on data recorded in GPS-enabled cameras, standalone GPS tracking devices, or iPhone photos. And sharing features such as prints, hardcover books or Facebook and Flickr publishing is possible with a single click.

Aperture 3 costs $249 or $119 for existing Aperture users. **www.apple.com.au/aperture**
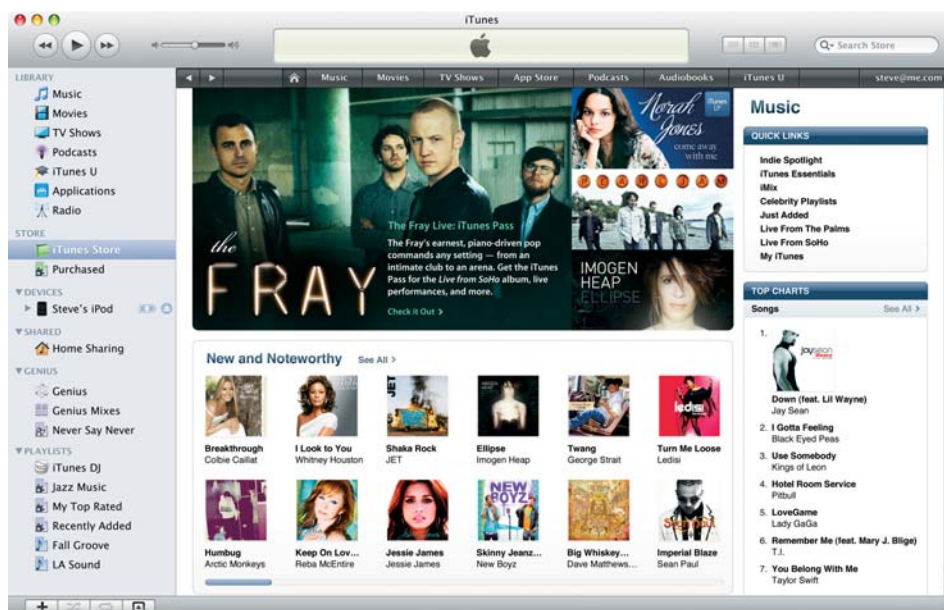
13 billion served, and counting

Apple recently celebrated two major milestones, with its App Store passing the 3 billion downloads mark and its iTunes Store noting the download of its 10 billionth song.

The milestones reflect the rapidly-growing success of both download channels, with the App Store passing the mark after just 18 months and selling its latest billion apps in just the three months since it crossed the 2 billion mark on 29 September.

The iTunes mark took a bit longer, having been established in April 2003 and taking just under 7 years to sell its 10 billionth song. That song, Jonny Cash's 'Guess Things Happen That Way', was purchased by Louie Sulcer of Woodstock, Georgia and netted him a $US10,000 ($A12,000) iTunes gift card.

Don't forget Apple's education pricing

Apple Australia offers educational pricing for university students on all its iMacs and MacBooks. For example, Mac mini and MacBook drop by $70; Mac Mini with Snow Leopard Server by $100; iMac by $50; MacBook Pro and MacBook Air by $150; and Mac Pro by $300.

Discounts are available to university and TAFE students, teachers, administrators, and staff members as well as parents of current, accepted or applied university students. There's a limit of one discounted desktop and/or notebook per academic year. See **store.apple.com/au/browse/home/education_routing** for details.

THAT BRAND-NEW LAB SMELL

BY CARRIE CLARKE

You may have arrived back at uni this year to find a computer lab full of brand new computers. Great! There is something pretty special about a whole room full of brand new 27" iMacs.

But have you ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes?

You may have seen the IT people running around at times or caught a glimpse of a computer in some sort of maintenance mode. There's probably a whole team of people who look after the computer labs at your university – and they would have been really busy leading up to the start of semester one. Here's a glimpse at what they were up to.

At the beginning, there is normally a lot of consultation between the teaching and IT staff – where they figure out what the lab is going to be used for. From here, they can begin to work out the best setup with the funds available. This is very important, especially for school based labs where requirements can be very specialised.

Space. If a lab is going to be renovated or built from scratch, often the teaching and IT staff work together with designers to determine the best seating and furniture arrangements, taking into account the style of teaching, size of classes, accessibility, computer security, etc. Once this is established, there are all the little details to consider – like heaps of power points and network ports.

Then, of course, there are the computers themselves. They have to be specced to suit the software being taught – not just this semester, but for the next few years. No detail can be overlooked. Is the mouse cable long enough to reach from the USB port to the desk space? Even when looped through a security lock? For both left-handed and right-

handed people? Is there even a cable on the mouse? (wireless mice are not really a good idea in labs for obvious reasons).

Image. Next comes development, often called building an image or SOE (Standard Operating Environment). Basically, this is getting the operating system, and all of the software, installed and working the way it needs to be working. This reasonably complex process starts off with consultation between the academic, teaching and IT staff, who figure out what software is needed and purchase the right licenses (which is a whole world of its own).

The IT staff will then build up the image on a test computer. This is an exact replica of a lab computer, usually kept on a test bench with other models from other labs. Often a base image is used, which contains all the standard software and settings required by the university; specialised software is then installed on top. Of course, security is very important in student labs, so special attention is paid to this (you may have noticed that lab computers are often set up so that when you reboot the computer, the next student has a clean environment no matter how much messing around you did).

Complex images can bring about software compatibilities and strange little quirks can arise, so lots and lots of testing is done. Then teaching staff come in and set up the software preferences and operating system environment to suit their classes. Then there is more testing. The aim is to have everything perfect, so that nothing will need to be changed until the next semester when this whole process happens again.

Deployment. Once the image is ready... It's time to get that SOE on to every computer in the lab and to figure out the best way to do

this. There are many different methods, and depending on which one is chosen, this also affects the SOE building stage. In the past, the most efficient way was to send out the whole image from a server to all of the computers in the lab simultaneously. Images can be really big (especially if they contain software like Final Cut Pro) – so this can take several hours. The disadvantage of this is that if changes are required, a new image needs to be deployed and the lab has to be shut down for a while. However, these days more lab managers are using more flexible options based on making "packages" containing individual applications and settings. These packages can be sent out through the network as small layers on top of the base SOE image installed on the lab computers. When dealing with many different computer labs all with different sets of software installed, this can be quite effective.

The real test. It's impossible to test everything that every student is going to do over the course of the semester. So strange little quirks can arise that need to be fixed across the lab. Sometimes a new teacher has just started and wasn't involved in the consultation phase but would really like a certain thing changed. So inevitably, some images need to be revisited during semester. Also: computers can and do break. Students have a lot going on, so often will just move from a broken computer to a working one without reporting it to anyone. Proactive maintenance is really important – whether it's checking logs on a server or sending out someone to test each computer on a regular basis.

The big picture. Most universities have heaps of computer labs and sometimes there are quite tight maintenance timeframes. This means that IT teams need to streamline all of these processes so they can efficiently tackle the unique demands of each lab. Another important part is the strategic planning, like working out how often to buy new computers (to even out the budgets and workloads for each year) and planning what happens to the old equipment.

So, whether it is a big lab or small, Mac or PC, complex or simple – it's probably been keeping somebody in IT busy over the summer.
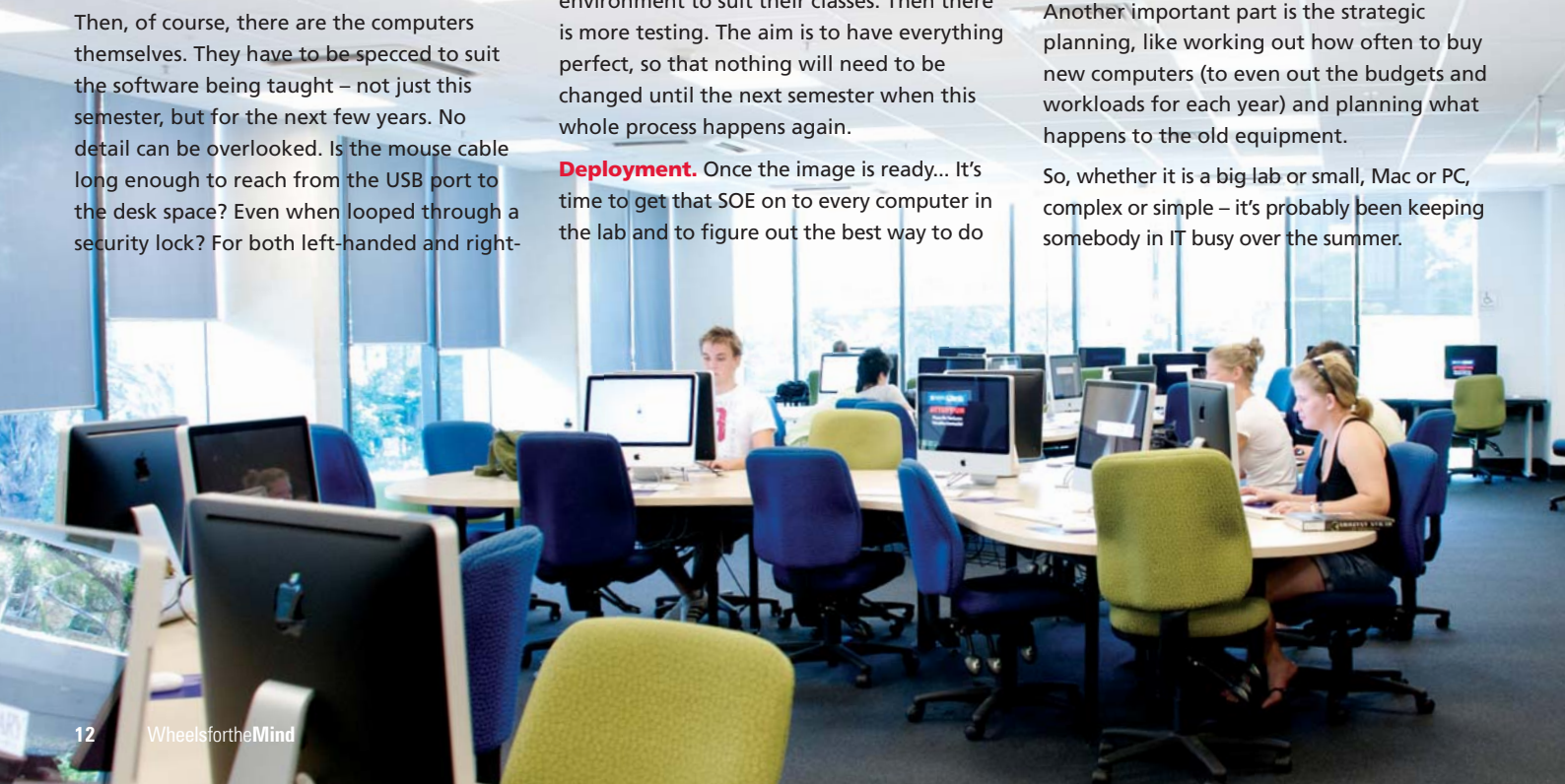
Designers' Paradise

Students enrolling for Queensland University of Technology's latest graphic design offerings are not only getting the chance to experience brand-new courses – they're doing so using a brand-new laboratory full of 27-inch iMacs.

The facility came about as academics specced out requirements for the new graphic design stream, looking for fast and efficient systems that would support the efforts of the newest students in QUT's Creative Industries Faculty. Macs' reputation as a favoured platform for graphic design students often makes them the first choice when new creative arts courses are on offer, and this reputation led lecturers to approach IT staff with a request to transition from the 18 installed Windows systems to a lab comprised completely of iMacs.

"Previously, the faculty had focused more on animation and commercial design," explains faculty IT manager Mitch Haggman. "With the new graphic design stream, however, Macs were a preference with the academics, since they were all academics. I decided to do some shuffling of the budget to turn this into a marquee space."

Eighteen of Apple's new 27-inch iMacs were sourced and configured, providing a massive workspace for students who are now capable of viewing two full-sized A4 pages, side by side, with room to spare. The new machines added to the existing base of around 100 Macs, and have been configured with design applications including Adobe Creative Suite, Final Cut Pro, and more.

Given the new course's focus on areas such as typography – and its use of applications like Adobe Illustrator and Font–Labs, a large and detailed viewing area was a must, says Manuela Taboada, one of the lecturers whose students will be making use of the new facility.

"The size of the iMac's screen is perfect," she explains. "It will be great for students to work with type design, photography, collages and more on such a big screen. And because the screens are so large, we can easily have several students working together on group projects."

Another feature of the lab are light boxes for image scanning, and a pair of mounted digital cameras that let students take photos of line drawings, then convert them to vector graphics, combine them and animate them as part of their projects.

The Macs, along with the other systems throughout the faculty, are centrally managed using DeployStudio, which Haggman says made it "pretty easy" for the technical staff to get the new lab up and running.

Not only have the iMacs proved to be much-welcome eye candy, but their up-to-date technical nature has resonated well with academics that used to have issues with Leopard and its small incompatibilities with Adobe Creative Suite 3.

"Those issues – with things like embedding videos into PowerPoint presentations, and niggly things like that – have just vanished with Snow Leopard," says Haggman. "Things like binding students into the university's directory system get easier and easier with every revision of the operating system. I've got a very large amount of impressed academics now."

Teaching the iPod culture

Much has been made of the potential for computers to revolutionise classroom teaching, but making it happen has always had its own complexities – cost and technical literacy among them.

For new students at La Trobe University's Faculty of Education, however, a far-reaching pilot program is exploring the potential for iPod touches, rather than notebooks, to aid teachers through their learning and into their academic careers.

The program came about as the brainchild of Dr Howard Nicholas, a senior lecturer in Language Education within La Trobe's Faculty of Education. Dr Nicholas, along with colleague Dr Wan Ng and program co-ordinator Dr Caroline Walta, saw the potential of the iPod touch to deliver many of the benefits of full laptops, without the complexity those devices introduce.

"We thought it would be an interesting way of bringing some Web 2.0 technologies into pre-service teacher education," Nicholas explains, "and to integrate them into the curriculum so our students graduate being already familiar with this type of mobile technology."

At the beginning of this academic year, nearly 90 new students in the university's one-year Graduate Diploma in Education program received individual iPod touches for their use over the course of the year. The devices were handed out during an introductory orientation in Shepparton, Victoria, but remain with the students throughout the course of the year.

By having mobile companions that fit into the students' pockets and (through Apple's new headphones) can record audio, Nicholas says the students have a way not only to explore the use of new iPhone and iPod-based learning resources, but can document their work using notes and audio recordings.

"We want them not to feel isolated when they're in a [remote] placement," he explains. "Wireless connectivity and microphones give them a way of capturing their experiences with other people in different places, and reflecting on those experiences while they're still close to them."

Just how the trainee teachers end up using their iPods will be the subject of great interest for project co-ordinators. The project team has enlisted the support of Carlton, Victoria-based reseller Connecting Point, which has helped with the customisation of a Web interface that works with Podcast Producer 2 to facilitate the creation and sharing of podcasts from the devices.

Apart from the project's content-creation goals, the project team is also working with Mikee Elliott, who heads La Trobe's efforts to capitalise upon the Lectopia lecture capture system (recently assimilated into the next-generation EchoSystem). The potential use of the iPod touches to access Lectopia is being explored, as are ways in which teacher-trainees' assessment work can be archived and preserved for the long term.

Early response from the students has been strong, Nicholas says, and the iPod touches will remain in heavy use throughout the year. By year's end, the pilot project team will have enough in-the-field experience to be able to make some authoritative judgments about the viability of the program in the long term.

"We're looking to create interactivity rather than just broadcast," he explains. "The whole goal is to make it normal to engage with ICT as part of learning and teaching, not just as a technical skill but as a way of opening up ideas and exploring experiences other than your own. We want people to leave the course feeling this is a technology they can comfortably make use of – and that they have learned through being able to share their own experiences."

UQ libraries go 100% Mac

While many organisations are still experimenting with a lab or two full of Macs, the University of Queensland has dived into the Mac world – sort of – with a project that has converted the entire installed base of computers, across 15 libraries, to be 100% Mac.

The idea came after several years in which library staff had gradually shifted towards the iMac and MacBook as preferred computing platforms. In 2008, the library recognised their growing popularity by replacing all of the more than 400 staff computers with Macs.

"A lot of it was to do with the design, and the ease with which it would sit on the desktop," explains Keith Webster, university librarian and director of learning services at U of Q. "We were seeing a lot of opportunities through the Mac software to do things more seamlessly. And many of us had already moved to MacBooks and recognised that we were being much more productive, and we were keen to offer that experience to others."

Offer that experience they did. Over the summer break, university technical staff worked furiously to order, configure, install, and test over 1200 iMacs and nearly 200 assorted Macs – including Mac minis and MacBook airs – across the university's various libraries. While iMacs adorn every

desktop, the MacBook airs are offered in some meeting rooms while Mac minis power express searching stations that require students to stand in front of a small, purpose-built platform for which the Mac mini is perfectly sized.

The rollout was fast and frantic, Webster recalls, with trucks literally backing up to the library and computer boxes being unloaded, then carried straight into the facility to be set up. He believes the sheer number of Macs makes U of Q the first university library to commit completely to Macs.

The libraries' Mac epiphany has not totally completed, however: to ensure a smooth transition for students and staff, the systems in their initial configuration are actually using Boot camp to boot straight into the university's Windows standard operating environment (SOE). This approach simplifies management by university IT staff, and gives students access to Microsoft Office and other familiar applications.

With the rollout just weeks old, library staff are helping the university community become familiar with the new machines. Webster reports a "very positive" response from students in terms of the look and feel of the machines, with the Windows SOE providing seamless access to printers and other university resources.

The machines have also proved durable, catering to heavy usage throughout most of the library's more than 16 opening hours every day. "We knew from our own experience that we were buying robust and reliable machines," says Webster.

While time pressures forced the library to stick with the standard Windows environment at first, Macs will play a larger role in the future. Later in the year, the library will explore the best way to provide dual-boot capabilities so those students desiring the Mac OS X interface, can have it.

Even though they're running Windows for now, Webster says the Macs have more than proved themselves by fulfilling the design and usability aesthetic for which they have become known amongst library staff.

"We are here to support teaching and learning at the university," he explains, "and part of that is positioning around our UQ Advantage philosophy. This is built around the opportunity to experience a very high-quality learning environment, whether it's through the learning spaces we offer, or the interaction with staff and students. Growing use of Macs reinforced our commitment to providing a high-quality environment, and the opportunity to move completely to Macs aligned with that goal very elegantly."

Create World 2009

The theme for the fourth CreateWorld conference (**www.auc.edu.au/Create+World+2009**) was mobility: "Mobile Me – Creativity on the Go". The gig once again met its goal of bringing the latest in the use of technology in the Creative Arts disciplines to both general and academic staff of AUC member universities.

The ambitious program included a balanced and nutritious diet of keynotes, papers, topical panels and – being creative artists, of course – performances. Once again, the organisers pulled off a successful event that had all the hallmarks of being a performance itself: great venue, snappy and exciting pace, and something lingering in the back of the grey matter afterwards. Scholars and geeks (and the frightening hybrid 'geek-ademics') walked away with plenty to think about.

The keynotes were many and varied. The engaging Andrew Scott from QUT, who brought his experience as an industrial designer to an analysis of the complex world of iPod design, raised concepts ranging from user perception to ecological issues. Beaming in from New York, renowned composer Prof Bill Duckworth and his partner in crime Nora Farrell spoke of their installation 'Sonic Babylon'. Illustrating that creative arts often needs to be a collaborative process, computer Scientist Dr Daniel Woo of UNSW spoke of his experiences working with creative teams.

Taking the audience back to the mobile theme that Scott set, an iPhone developer took the stage and spoke about the development cycle. No newbie to education, John Burns of iKonstrukt kept his talk within educational parameters. He was, after all, a teacher in a past life.

In a bold move, the conference organisers asked industry folks along. Jean-Pierre Chabrol is head of multimedia at the National Gallery of Victoria. His overview of some of the projects underway at the NGV fired a number of the audience up when they could see the potential for collaboration. The NGV are up to some very cool stuff indeed. In a hybrid panel/keynote session, a wonderfully skeptical Justin Macdonnell spoke of issues that the dependence upon IT brings to bear. As the past GM of various opera companies, he is well suited to his current role as director of the Anzarts Institute. That perspective was very much appreciated by many audience members as it took us out of our insular higher education space.

Keynotes were balanced by more group oriented sessions with the panels. An iTunes U panel shared the experience of long time iTunes U sites, Swinburne and UNSW, and was chaired by Prof Phil Long of UQ. A virtual world panel was led by Dr Allan Ellis of Southern Cross and had practitioners in disciplines ranging from law to Education. A science visualisation panel, chaired by UQ's Aaron Tan, included world famous photographer Steve Parish.

If all of this was not entertaining enough, performances were held. This included a one man show from UQ's Dr Robert Davidson who will be known to many as the bass player and one of the composers of 'Topology' – one Australia's leading new music groups. Many await the video podcast to relive the gig.

There's not enough space here to cover all of the papers that were delivered, but it's fair to say that there was a strong bias towards

music this year. For example, Luke Toop from Adelaide performed his magic with Quartz Composer. And WAAPA's 'Decibel' advanced well past the avant-garde in musical terms by having the computer improvise a score that they then played to in real time. Andrew Sorenson topped the performance off by discussing computational art and giving examples.

Another continuing activity was that of a 'podcast team' running madly about the venue to build upon the knowledge and buzz of the various sessions (**betweenthebuttons.net/createworld/**). Prof Kate Foy (USQ) and Dr Ian Green and Allan Carrington of Adelaide Uni all drew out themes and issues raised by presenters in interviews – with not only the presenters, but with willing audience members. If it is any indication of the ongoing popularity of these podcasts, thousands of downloads from around the world were triggered by the 2008 site (**createworld2008.edublogs.org**). The 2009 event supplemented podcasting with a busy Twitter feed (**twitter.com/CreateWorld09**). Here's hoping the conference continues to not only talk about technologies, but to utilise them in the most appropriate way possible.

Socially, the conference continued to please. A funky dinner on the rooftop on the Rydges Hotel was only the icing on the cake. More than one attendee went away with new contacts and friendships, thus opening up institutional collaborations and building a community of practice, a learning community, and other buzzword compliant networks. Given the conference's continuing success, keep your calendars open for the 2010 event in early December.

A performance in its own right.

Nora & Bill in live feed from
New York City
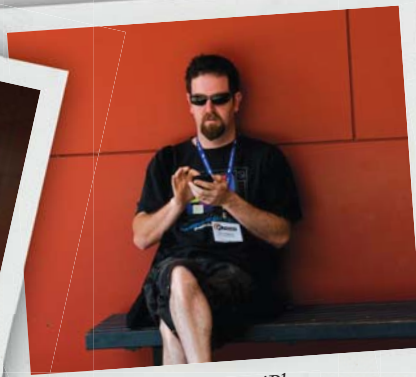
Tim Landauer and trusty iPhone

Alan Cody and Phred Petersen

Sonic Babylon Griffith sound garden

The presenter's view

Monday night dinner

Steve Miller

Justin Macdonnell, Kate Foy,
and Paul Turnbull

Luke Toop, video DJ

Putting Windows in its place

A major effort to improve authentication of staff Macs has paved the way for a complete reworking of James Cook University's desktop environment, with more than one-third of the uni's Macs running a Virtual Box and Windows-based standard operating environment (SOE) that's managed centrally by campus IT staff.

The radical change came as JCU staff began looking for ways to improve authentication of Mac users to the university's Active Directory (AD) environment, which maintains detailed access control information about users and networked resources. Many Mac users were struggling to access this information, which was crucial for authentication to a growing number of .NET based applications being rolled out across the university.

After ensuring all Macs were using the 10.4 'Tiger' version of Mac OS X or newer, in which AD support is more seamless, technical staff were able to improve management of the Mac-based users through consistent AD policies. Those Mac users were also able to continue printing to the university's Fuji Xerox printers, which were in the process of being outsourced and were therefore to be managed as part of the AD tree.

Having conquered one challenge, however, the IT team began tackling others. High on the hit list was figuring out a better way to deal with the multiplicity of desktop platforms being used across the university.

"We had managed to get our Macs into the current infrastructure as Macs, but then we started to look at what other things we could do," says Julie Land, manager for IT services and support within JCU's Information Technology and Resources (ITR) division. "With Intel-based Macs,

and utilising our university-wide Altiris desktop management platform, we realised we were in a position where we could push our Windows managed operating environment onto those Macs using virtual machines."

VirtualBox, a free virtual machine platform from Sun Microsystems (now owned by Oracle), was chosen as the Mac-based VM engine, and ITR staff began rolling out the Windows SOE to what would eventually be more than 1000 Macs across the university – equivalent to nearly one-third of JCU's 3500 staff computers.

This was a major improvement in desktop management, since in the past each user had taken his or her own approach to virtualisation and run their own virtual desktops as they desired. That left ITR with no idea exactly what VM engine was being used, or how each user's Windows instance was configured – creating a support nightmare.

"Before, someone would load Parallels and load up their version of Windows, we were neve in control of that OS," Land explains. "We didn't know whether the Windows system had been security patched, and how vulnerable it was making our network."

With VirtualBox as a common target on each Mac and the Symantec-owned Altiris desktop management system able to remotely roll out, configure and update the virtual machines, the ITR team has managed to improve the overall management of its desktop machines. Windows VMs can be remotely rolled out to desktops, with applications added and monitored on an ongoing basis and licensing compliance far simpler to track.

"Now, when a Mac user wants to use a Windows application, they can launch VirtualBox and have the same managed desktop environment that their fellow worker, sitting next to them, has on their Windows PC," Land explains. "From a support perspective, if someone calls the helpdesk and says 'I'm on a Mac with Windows', they know exactly what that means."

Staff Macs aren't the only ones making the move: university executives are switching to the Mac in droves, having seen the ease with which they can be integrated into the university network. Yet even with so many systems in place, the introduction of a pair of Mac OS X Server-equipped Mac Minis has helped keep bandwidth consumption to a minimum: operating system updates are downloaded to the servers, then installed locally on each of the systems.

Despite the big Mac push, a few conventional PCs remain: systems for graphics-intensive applications such as AutoCAD, .NET based administrative applications, and other applications can still be found throughout the university. But other courses are making the wholesale move to the Mac, with Land estimating the Windows VMs are in use about 40 percent of the time. Some employees even buy Macs for the sole purpose of running Windows, just because they like the Apple hardware so much.

"Now we know what virtual environments are out there, and their criticality status," Land says. "That has reduced the TCO considerably across the fleet; simplifies things for the user because they're using a consistent environment; and simplifies things from a support and compliance perspective."

AUC General Meeting

By David Yammouni

Photos courtesy of Chris Howard

From 17 to 19 February, the AUC held its General Meeting (GM) at the Marriott Resort, Gold Coast. The GM is traditionally held around this time each year and kicks off the planning process for the year ahead.

This year's GM was well attended, with delegates from nearly all the Australian university members. We were also joined by New Zealand representatives from RED (Renaissance Education Division) and the University of Auckland, now making us the Australasian Apple University Consortium . We welcome our new NZ members (Otago University, Auckland University of Technology and the University of Auckland) as well as the Australian Catholic University, and look forward to a long and fruitful relationship.

The first meeting to take place was the AUC Executive Committee, which was held on Wednesday, 17 February. This meeting was held for the executive to discuss events that had occurred from the previous year's AGM as well as planning for this year leading up to the AGM in 2010. Many aspects of the AUC's governance and function were discussed, as well as financial predictions for rebates from Apple sales. Also on the agenda were discussions regarding our new New Zealand members and how they will influence and enrich the future of the AUC.

The GM was held on Thursday, 18 February. The GM is where all the member university delegates gather to hear of the recent past and future plans for the AUC. This is a very important meeting for the AUC, as it provides a forum where delegates can raise

issues relating to their institution (from an AUC perspective) and provide input towards the shaping of the future of the AUC. There was discussion regarding representation of the AUC on university campuses, the top five issues relating to Apple and member universities, the yearly budget, and reports from the Executive members.

At 5.30 p.m., Stephen Atherton (from Apple Australia) delivered an entertaining and thought provoking update about ways in which Apple is engaging in the future of educational content production and delivery. In particular, Steve highlighted the creative ways in which iTunes U has been used by universities and educational institutions both within Australia and around the world. The evening concluded with a wonderful dinner held at the Benihana teppanyaki restaurant, where delegates relaxed and mingled and partook of some excellent cuisine (delivered in a most unusual and entertaining way!).

The AUCDF meeting was held on the Friday and this concluded the three-day event. The AUCDF's meeting focused on areas concerning local coordination of events, programs for the year ahead (Student Developer Scholarships, WWDC, /dev/world/2010 and Grants Programs), Developer Program review and planning and developing ways in which AUCDF offerings can be communicated to students.

The AUC General Meeting proved to be a very productive and positive event, and we all look forward to the year ahead.
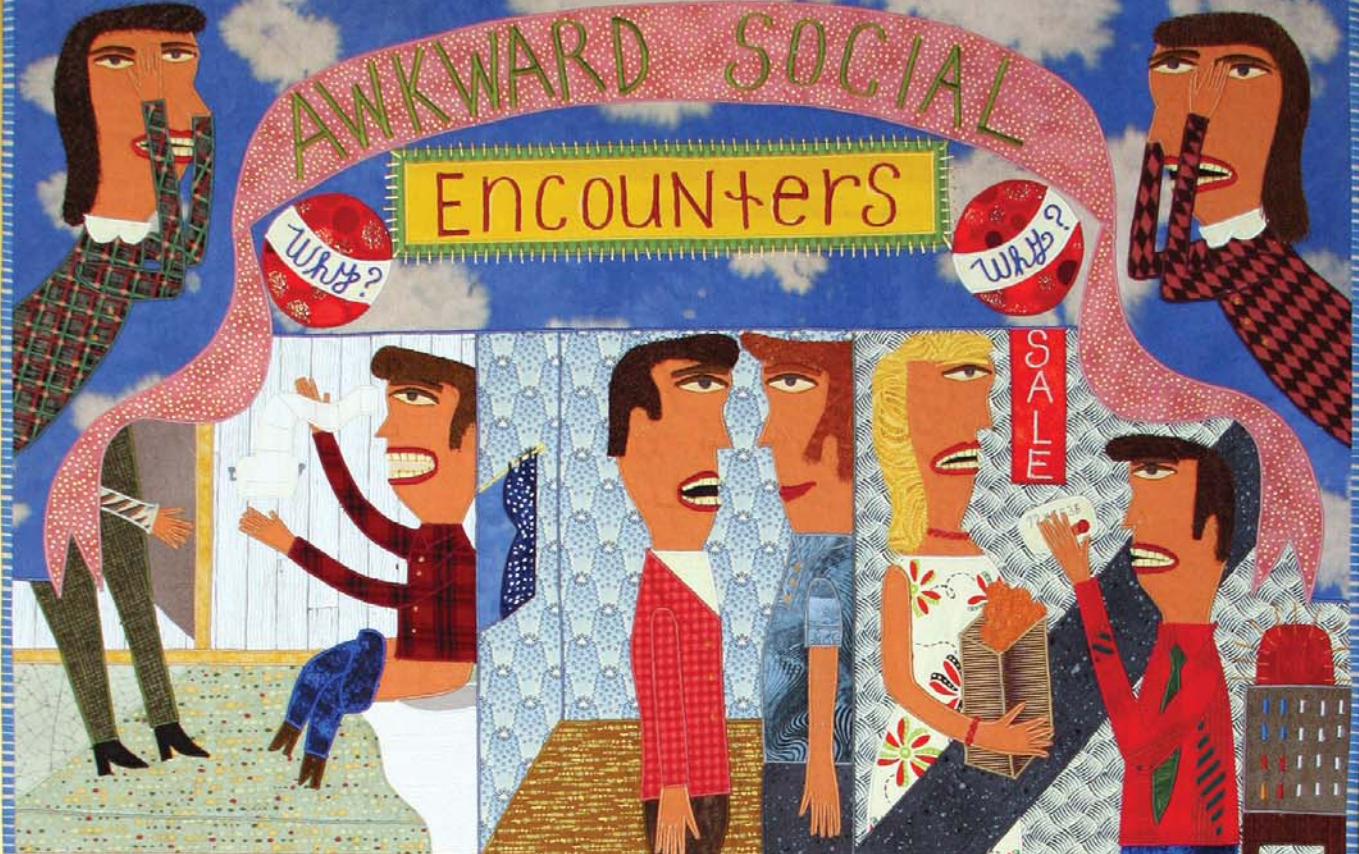
Antisocial Networking

By Mark McMahon

Someone wants to be your friend – but what are the consequences?

Once upon a time there was a clever way of communicating with people. You'd sit down with a pen and a piece of paper and you'd write them a letter. Sure, it was messy, time consuming and exceedingly 'analogue', but the tactile experience of putting pen to paper actually seemed to mean something in those days.

It wasn't the only way of communicating, either. If you wanted to make sure your message landed quickly, you could send a telegraph. You could even speak to someone on the phone (if you wanted that 'synchronous' chat experience).

The online world has brought a plethora of choices so that even e-mail seems as archaic as carving letters onto stone tablets. We're all connected now, but is that a good thing?

I'm a Linked-In Live Yahoo with a gamut of gesticulations – pinging, waving, tagging, buzzing, I've done them all. What I haven't done yet, though, is come to terms with the multi-headed beast that is social networking

When you wrote a letter it went to one destination. Even when you write an e-mail it gets sent to a strict group of to's, cc's, and bcc's. These days your life is there for everyone to see – and my current 'status' is neurotic.

I suffer from a debilitating syndrome called Social Networking Anxiety Disorder. Don't look it up yet – it's too new to be classified – but it's a real and enervating condition that has me in paroxysms of indecision whenever I try to engage in online communication.

It started with my Blog. I'd write a paragraph, delete, rewrite, delete, all the time wondering who was going to read this and whether it made an impact. Currently my blog lies bereft and neglected like a half-deflated pool toy in winter.

Never mind, blogs were so 2008 anyway. Facebook was the next obvious step. Forget publishing; Web 2.0 is all about 'community'. Except… do I really want to be part of this community?

I can handle having my ex students as friends. I can handle having my work colleagues as friends. I can handle having my actual friends as friends… but that does not mean I would invite them all to the same party.

The problem is that there is more than one 'Me'. While in my first life I can happily compartmentalise, when I get on to Facebook those boundaries blur in strange and disturbing ways. It's not that I have anything to hide – my life isn't that interesting. It's simply that no, I don't want to build a farm next to yours and I can live quite happily without joining your 'Citizens for a Fatuous Cause' group.

If only there was a category of associate called 'awkward casual acquaintance'. I could lump every discomforting friend request there.

Twitter has it right. You do not have friends on Twitter, just 'followers'. That appeals to the narcissist in me. Forget meaningful communication and bring on self-involved 140 character monologues.

Not that Twitter is perfect either. Micro-blogging just ups the ante as far as online anxiety goes. Now every post has to be a perfectly crafted haiku that encapsulates a solution to the human condition.

Or I could just tweet about what I have for breakfast. I did that once and got a reply suggesting I switch to yoghurt and muesli and go for a 12km run. That's the problem when most of your followers are either 'life' coaches or webcam girls.

Nevertheless, of all of the tools around, Twitter appeals the most, quite simply because it is the least social of them all. I can collect followers like a ship collects barnacles. They are the patina and parasites that amass during my voyage on the heaving ocean of the Internet.

Other than scraping them off every so often they do no harm. I can ignore them or cultivate them, and can take comfort in the fact that most have probably already forgotten who I am.
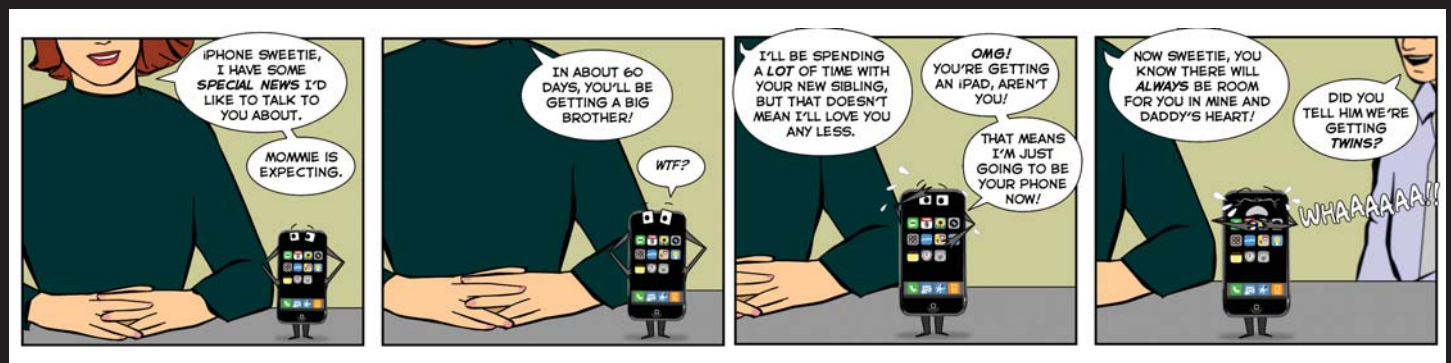
I am one of a million voices shouting into the Twitterverse and no one is listening. If they are, they are polite enough not to comment on my status or nag me to play Mafia Wars.

I'm all for the meaningless accumulation of followers, so add me now: Mark_Mc. Just don't expect me to reply to you any time soon.

CrossWORD Competition

WIN AN IPOD NANO

For your chance to win an iPod nano, complete the above crossword (you'll find the answers throughout the articles) and take the letters from the blue boxes then re-arrange them to form a word or phrase. Send this to: crossword@auc.edu.au

Competition closes at 5pm on Friday, 14th May 2010.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Grischa Meyer of Monash University for winning an iPod nano by correctly completing last issue's crossword to reveal the answer:

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