24 hours to create a program and trio win trip to Google land

Contest at SMU comes up with interactive tourism application

BY THAM YUEN-C

FOR 24 hours, they were holed up in a few lecture theatres with little more than their laptops.

And while they typed in line after line of code, a medical team was on standby with a defibrillator to jump-start a heart if an emergency arose.

The 63 mostly three-member teams were taking part in an “extreme” challenge: to come up with an interactive application that could be used for tourism and hospitality purposes – in 24 hours.

That was the theme of the Code Xtreme Apps computer programming competition held at the Singapore Management University’s (SMU) School of Information Systems last weekend. And after a few judging rounds, a winner was announced yesterday.

A team of two SMU students and an entrepreneur came up with the winning application – a program that allows users to share information on and rank Singapore’s tourist attractions and events.

“We are big users of community-driven websites such as YouTube, so the idea came naturally to us,” said SMU student Muhammad Mohsin, 24, member of the winning team 0x539.

“We think the community as a whole is a better indicator of what’s worth visiting than the typical information websites where all the data come from one source.”

And it was this community element that impressed the judges. “They have built an application that demonstrates how one can inform and share information in a participative manner,” said chairman Robert Chew of the Information Technology Standards Committee that organised the competition.

That they managed to come up with a “relatively complete” application in such a short time was also a deciding factor.

Mr Wang Zhen, a software engineer from Internet search company Google and one of the judges, said: “The kind of productivity they achieved in 24 hours is very impressive.”

It was something that Mr Muhammad and his teammates, SMU student Jonathan Zhan, 26, and entrepreneur Jacqueline Choo, 26, accomplished by sacrificing sleep.

“It was very challenging mentally and physically,” said Mr Muhammad. But all worth it, he added, as the team won an all-expenses-paid trip to Google’s headquarters in Mountain View, California.

The first and second runner-ups won cash prizes.

At yesterday’s award ceremony, guest of honour Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, Second Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, said getting youth trained in computer science and programming was key to the push to become an infocomm hub.

“There is a bright future in computer science, in learning how to programme and how to create new products and services for the brave new world unfolding right in front of us,” said Dr Balakrishnan, who is also the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports.

“I think we are in a good position and it’s there for us to go out and grab it – I hope many of our young people will do so.”

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