

Google DevFest – Saigon, Vietnam



Last Tuesday, Google held its first hackathon, known as the Google DevFest, at the University of Technology. The event in Vietnam was organized by Jason Vu and his company, Webpal. Jason and Google had to deal with many hurdles in organizing this event. This is probably one of the first major IT events in Saigon where the Hochiminh City Computer Association did not play a role in. In all, the DevFest received advise and support from Viettel, VinaCapital, VinaConsulting, and the Saigon Linux Group to help make this event a successful one. Throughout the day, I would estimate that about 180-200 participants came to the event.

So who were the presenters at DevFest 2008? Just read Jason Vu's Webpal Network blog for more information on their backgrounds:

- Webpal Networks Presents Google's 1st Hackathon in Vietnam
[<http://blog.webpalnetworks.com/webpal-networks-presents-google%E2%80%99s-1st-hackathon-in-vietnam/>]

Go to the following links for opinions and reviews of DevFest 2008:

- Four Google engineers and 9-hour seminar in Vietnam
[<http://http://english.vietnamnet.vn/tech/2008/11/812437/>]
- Live from Google DevFest HCMC [<http://huyenchip.com/live-from-google-devfest-hcmc/>]
- Chip Huyen

Though I felt the event was a success, I do have some critiques of the event as well.

1. Lack of promotion of DevFest 2008

The majority of developers in both the Expat and Vietnamese had no idea there was a Google Hackathon taking place in Saigon. Most of the information about DevFest was passed around either through online forums, word of mouth, or meetings such as OpenCoffee. Much of the developer community were clueless to the event. Developers from E-town, the Saigon Hitech Park and Quang Truong Software City were mostly excluded from this event. Google missed a great opportunity to reach this group this time around though they could make up for it in next year's DevFest.

2. No maps or signs of the event

This must have been an oddity. Most of us knew that DevFest would be held at the University of Technology (well I had to since I recommended UT to Jason and Google). I did not know where the university was located. I had to look at the DevFest logo Jason Vu posted on his website to find the address and much to my surprise, the University of Technology was located in District 10, not District 1 as I had assumed. Even if you did have the address, you still had to find the building. No where on Google's DevFest website was the building location mentioned. I had to call Tony [<http://saigonlinux.blogspot.com/>], who was helping Google, to find the building number. I then posted it both on my blog and Twitter account.

Once I got to the university, I was surprised to see that there were no signs leading to building A5 where the DevFest was located. I saw one sign that led to the wrong building. Finally I walked across campus and found the building with the help of one of UT's students. Once there, again there were no signs leading to the auditorium. I had to call Tony to learn the room was located on the second floor. Then the word went out to where the building was actually located.

3. No Vietnamese Translations

This one really surprised me. The speakers only spoke English throughout the event. Jason Vu did a brief translation during the introduction but the rest of the event was in English. Looking at the crowd's faces, you could tell they were probably only grasping maybe 40-50 percent of what the speakers were talking about, if that at all. Only Vietnamese students at RMIT and the international schools would have been able to keep up with the pace of the presentations. The speakers also talked too fast making it harder to comprehend what they were talking about, even for native speakers. As a result, I suspected that around 50 out of 200 participants left within the first hour.

Google should have prepared some Vietnamese translated slides or brought some translators to the event.

4. Presentations too long

My biggest complaint was the lack of breaks through the event. I am used to a short 5 minute break between each presentation and a 10 minute break after the second presentation. For next year, I recommend that couple separate each presentation into 30 or 60 minute blocks and enforce it. Also, sponsors should be limited to 30 minute presentations as well.

The best presentation on Google Maps lasted one hour, it worked out very well. The Google App Engine presentation was good for the first hour but then it went on and on. It lasted a full two hours without a break in between. What started as a great presentation during the first hour turned into just ramblings the second hour since most of us were tired.

5. Lack of audience participation

This was suppose to be a hackathon, right? Unfortunately there was little hacking throughout the 9 hour event. I think many were disappointed about this. Would it had been nice if Google brought a server to the event, gave each participant an account, and let us all hack away throughout the event? I think being able to learn how to use the Google App Engine at the event would have been fun. Time would have flown by.

I think and 30 minute presentation followed by a 30-60 minute hands-on step by step demonstration would have made DevFest 2008 more successful. I definitely recommend Google choose this format next year.

As a participant, if you have nothing to do but listen and observe, what are you going to do? Yep, surf the internet on the Wifi provided free for the participants. Oh, wait a minute, we had bandwidth problems as well.

6. Bad bandwidth

The Google DevFest may be remembered for the bad bandwidth throughout the event. It is not Google's fault though, the blame must go to both Viettel, who donated the 10 Mbit line, and the University of Technology. The UT students learned real quick that there was an available high speed wifi access outside building A5. When I arrived to A5, I was surprised to see many students sitting in the courtyard with their laptops open. I thought they were part of the event.

Nope, they were outside surfing the web and downloading files on the 6 available Google wifi access points. Surprisingly enough, all 6 access points were unsecured. Yep, you read that right. Why did Viettel, who had an administrator at the event to manage the bandwidth, allow this to happen? It is hard to tell. In the end, the bandwidth sucked all day. I gave up using the Wifi after one hour.

Next year, Google should let Tony manage the wifi and bandwidth :-). Of course give me to the fastest access point so I can download, umm, the latest movie from the states...

Overall, I still consider the event a success as mentioned above. Barcamp Saigon is down the road. I think we will experience the same problems DevFest 2008 experienced. If we are lucky, we were learn from DevFest 2008's mistakes to help BarCamp Saigon become a success.

I can't wait until DevFest 2009!!!

Some pictures from DevFest 2008:



(Google DevFest 2008 leading to wrong building)



(One of Google DevFest Speakers in Building A5)



(About 150-180 speakers came throughout the day)



(BarCamp Saigon Air Force)



(I was twittering with my Nokia N800 Internet Tablet)

Tags: BarCamp, barcamp saigon, google, Google DevFest, nokia n800

Posted in IT in Vietnam, Vietnam with 2 Comments →

2 RESPONSES TO “ GOOGLE DEVFEST - SAIGON, VIETNAM ”

1. **# 1 dshupp** Says:
November 9th, 2008 at 3:47 pm

Nice critiques. I hope we do a better job on the organization with barcamp 😊

I'm also really surprised that there was no interactivity or hacking.

2. **# 2 Jason Vu** Says:
November 9th, 2008 at 4:29 pm

Kevin thanks for the write up. Just FYI:

1. Too many registered ones before Developers from E-town, the Saigon Hitech Park and Quang Truong Software City can sign up.

2. Google Team had sent out the map to all registered

3. Should think of translation next time 😊

6. You should thank Viettel on the line, it should be one of the best Internet connection event 😊

Good experience for Barcamp Saigon