

Code writers along for the ride for Google's next 'wave'

August 12 2009, By Mike Swift

By Sunday morning, the Silicon Valley Google Technology User Group's "campout" made part of the Googleplex in Mountain View look a bit like a college dorm after a couple of all-nighters.

There were empty bottles, half-eaten sandwiches, whiteboards clogged with midnight brainstorming ideas, and the occasional sleeping body facedown on a couch. People climbed from tents they had pitched on Google's verdant lawn, laptops slung over their shoulders after a few hours' sleep, ready to write more code. An empty kayak bobbed in a nearby fountain, and a few weary dogs plopped down between tables where developers tapped away at their keyboards.

Projected above it all, a clock counted down the dwindling hours, minutes and seconds the developers had to complete their projects.

The Sunday morning tableau was not quite typical for the sleek Googleplex. The weekend campout session gave [Silicon Valley software developers](#) who are not [Google](#) employees an early crack at writing applications for several new Google technologies, including "Google Wave," which the Internet search giant hopes will revolutionize how people communicate on the Web by meshing elements of e-mail, instant messaging and social media.

For developers, the "hackathon" was a chance to use Google Wave and to start writing potentially profitable applications long before its public release.

"It's so new," said Christie English, a graduate student at the University of California-Davis. "The field is wide open."

Kevin Nilson, one of the leaders of the Silicon Valley Google Technology User Group, said the event was also a great social and professional networking opportunity -- maybe you would meet the angel investor who helps you found your next company, have a chance to share your resume with a Googler, or perhaps share code with somebody even more special.

"I've made friends at these events that I'll have for the rest of my life," Nilson said. "We haven't had anyone get married yet, but "..."

Among those writing code Sunday morning at Google was Shideh Ghajar, a former director of Information Technology at Yahoo.

"In a short time, you can learn so much. These people here, they are geniuses," said Ghajar, who seemed wide-awake despite getting just five hours of sleep during the course of the weekend as she worked on a Wave application.

"This gets the juices flowing," she said. In Silicon Valley, she added, "networking is the most important thing right now, whether you have a job or not."

More than 100 programmers arrived at the Googleplex on Friday and began throwing around more than 50 ideas for software applications to run on Wave or Android, Google's operating system for mobile devices. Working into the night -- for some right into Saturday -- they broke into teams and began writing code.

For Google, which provided all the free pizza, coffee and Chinese takeout an insomniac code monkey could consume in 48 hours, the

campout was a chance to have fresh eyes critique its technology, while tapping into new applications that could boost the attractiveness of Wave.

"We definitely care about the developer community building better apps," said Jason Cooper, a Googler whose department is the middleman between Google's software engineers and outside developers.

[Google Wave](#) will allow people to share documents, video, text and software in real time -- not sequentially like e-mails, but instantly -- so that what you do appears simultaneously on the screens of everyone linked in a selected group, or "wave."

Among the applications developers worked this weekend were ways for people to find shared rides to work in real-time, to instantly poll a large group about an idea, and even to improve the use of language on the Web.

That last application was the goal of Tim Inman of Fremont, Calif., and his brother Jesse Inman of Southern California, who were typing away laptop-to-laptop like Elton John across a keyboard from Billy Joel.

Reasoning that people need to use language more effectively in a world increasingly channeled through the Internet, the Brothers Inman were developing an application to apply linguistic metrics -- wordiness, the use of jargon, whether a writer used big words or small, focused ones.

In the wee hours of Sunday, they had run Charles Dickens through it (wordy), the rapper Kanye West (lots of jargon, self-obsessed), and President Barack Obama's inauguration address (too many unnecessary superlatives).

"Our main goal," Tim Inman said, "is to help people to have a wider

reach."

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