

News

No iPhones, yet duo create winning app

Their engineering app gives bite-sized information on iconic buildings around the world

REPORT: GERALDINE YEO
geryeo@sph.com.sg

THEY have no professional background in engineering. Nor do they own iPhones.

But that did not stop Methodist Girls' School (MGS) students Rachel Tan Yi and Gauri Ashok Salunkhe, both 14, from creating an award-winning iPhone application on engineering.

They won the iAuthor Contest earlier this month. Twenty-one teams from six secondary schools took part in the contest between Aug 10 and 28.

Participants were told to create an iPhone application that showcased the importance of engineering.

Rachel and Gauri's winning application, called "Engineering Marvels", provides bite-sized information on Singapore buildings such as Marina Bay Sands and the Marina Barrage, as well as Dubai's Palm Jumeirah.

"We were so amazed at how these buildings were built, so we gathered some information to let people know more about the buildings and who their designers were," Gauri said.

The contest, jointly organised by mobile application developer Omnitoons, the Institution of Engineers Singapore and Science Centre Singapore, was held in conjunction with National Engineers Day.

Using an Omnitoons-developed online platform called Kragein, participants could upload information and pictures for the application without using any programming language.

They were first introduced to the program

by a trainer from Omnitoons, who went to the various schools to familiarise them with it.

The trainer, Ms Shivaranjani Subramaniam, 24, said one of the first things she taught the students was how to use the iPhone.

"Many of the students did not own an iPhone so they were unfamiliar with the interface and how applications work," she said.

But the students caught on fast and started creating their own applications.

Ms Shivaranjani said: "We did not want the students to get bogged down by any sort of programming language. Kragein allows users to upload written content and pictures easily."

It's as easy as uploading pictures to Facebook, she added.

Top three prizes

MGS bagged the top three prizes.

Rachel and Gauri, who are also part of the school's infocomm club, won \$500 worth of book vouchers and an iPod Touch.

Said Rachel: "We did our research mainly through the Internet but wrote our own text and took our own pictures."

While Rachel was in charge of the writing, Gauri took pictures and designed the icons using a program called ArtRage.

It was their keen interest in engineering that helped them get a headstart.

Both girls said they enjoy watching Discovery Channel's Build It Bigger, which features futuristic engineering projects around the world.

Besides providing information on engineering projects that have been completed, the application also features a section on future marvels.



TNP PICTURE: JACINDA YEO

BEST APP: Methodist Girls' School students Gauri Ashok Salunkhe (left) and Rachel Tan Yi with their app, which came up tops in the inaugural iAuthor Contest.

Here, the girls let their imaginations run wild. For instance, they came up with a suggestion to build an eco-city in the sky.

"A city can be built in the sky when the world faces a shortage of land," said Rachel.

She added that the buildings of the city could be made with special materials that deflected harmful UV rays.

No expertise needed

Omnitoons CEO Karen New said: "(The contest) was to give Singapore students a chance to develop their own apps without needing expertise."

The inaugural competition may be ex-

panded to include primary and tertiary students next year.

Associate Professor Goh Wang Ling of the Nanyang Technological University's School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering was one of the five judges for the competition.

Said Professor Goh: "(The girls) had come up with the concept, carried out research, produced some nice graphics and built an app with a lot of information about engineering, engineering feats and the future of engineering."

Omnitoons is working with the girls to refine the application, which will be available on the iTunes store by December.