

SMU students to represent Asia in Facebook 'hackathon'

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Four Singapore Management University (SMU) students will fly to Facebook's Silicon Valley headquarters in California in November to represent Asia in an international "hackathon".

The contest involves teams brainstorming ideas and programming computers to create a working product within a short time span.

"We are all extremely thrilled to be able to check out its headquarters and possibly (Facebook founder) Mark Zuckerberg himself," said team member Alayne Pang, 23.

She and her teammates – Xu Mengxiang, 25; Suresh Subramaniam, 21; and Abhilash Murthy, 22 – edged out 19 other teams from the Asia-Pacific region in a hackathon here last month. They will represent Asia in the finals.

The hackathon saw 20 teams

given 24 hours to come up with a solution to a problem of their choice. The SMU students from the School of Information Systems spent a sleepless night creating a Web application called Graphpaper, which allows users to perform detailed Facebook searches so they can better plan for or enjoy gatherings.

For example, the dashboard enables organisers to determine the favourite music bands among people attending a particular event

and to play that music automatically. Another search lets those attending an event discover which guest they have the most mutual friends with.

The idea was inspired by the students' experiences. Some had friends who were less keen to attend events at which they did not know anyone or where they may not like the music.

Facebook, they believe, has immense potential for data mining. Mr Suresh said the site is "the most popular distraction for people".