

Melbourne 'Hacktivists' Build Technology to Empower Local Food Producers in a Weekend

Melbourne volunteer programmers and designers join 5,000 participants in global Random Hacks of Kindness "hackathon" on June 1-2



At the Random Hacks of Kindness (RHOK) weekend on 1-2 June, Melbourne volunteer technologists joined a global community of 'hacktivists' to solve real-world problems with practical technology solutions.

6 June 2013 – Melbourne farmers, food producers and the consumers and businesses who want to buy from them have a new technology solution to make that easier, thanks to the Random Hacks of Kindness "hackathon" which happened over the weekend of 1-2 June.

Melbourne was one of more than 40 cities around the world to participate in Random Hacks of Kindness (RHOK) – a two-day, global effort focused on developing practical technology solutions for natural disasters and similar community challenges. Melbourne volunteer programmers and designers gathered at Swinburne University to collaborate on a variety of technology solutions aimed at solving local problems posed by community experts. Solutions developed over the weekend include:

- A game designed to engage teenagers to prepare for the threat of bushfires;
- A platform which allows fire fighters to co-ordinate and plan their response to bushfires through the use of smart devices (who knew they still use paper maps?), and
- A 'social giving' website that incents Melbourne businesses, charities and individuals to support each other.

Melbourne judges selected Open Food Network as the winning hack of the weekend. The software will help farmers distribute their produce more efficiently to consumers, and in the process cut down emissions from transport and provide more value for money to people wanting to buy direct from growers. A feature to help people share food transport was created over the weekend and is now ready for use by Eaterprises, a local social enterprise focused on transforming the way food is distributed and exchanged. The open source software will be made accessible through the not for profit Open Food Web Foundation.

“As a not-for profit foundation working on how software solutions can help transform food, we were excited to throw a gnarly problem at RHoK volunteers,” said Serenity Hill from Open Food Web Foundation. “We were really happy with the product at the end of the weekend, we learned a lot from the process and the prize for the team at the end was not too bad either!”

Founded in 2009 by Google, NASA, the World Bank, Yahoo! and Microsoft in response to natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and the Boxing Day tsunami, RHoK has since been embraced by volunteer techies and community experts around the world – with each city defining and addressing local issues for that community twice a year. Melbourne RHoK participants included a diverse cross section of the hacktivist community, ranging from high school students to seasoned development staff from Melbourne businesses such as DiUS Computing, Infosys, MYOB, and realestate.com.au.

“Melbourne has one of the most vibrant RHoK communities in the world,” said RHoK Melbourne chairperson Simone Esler. “There are a lot of local and global hackathons around today, but too often they lose momentum after the hackathon weekend. During this event, we have seen a project created from scratch that is now ready for use by a not for profit group at the end of the weekend. This has been a fantastic outcome, but sometimes hackathons are only the beginning. RHoK Melbourne is unique in sustaining certain projects between events -- we call these our RHoK ‘n RHoll projects.”

Two Melbourne RHoK ‘n RHoll projects begun at earlier RHoK weekends are now being finalised:

- **Resilience**, which got its start in the June 2012 RHoK, is a mobile application for iPhone and Android that makes it easy for community members to report, find, and together resolve non-life-threatening issues following a natural disaster;
- The **Realtime Bushfire Information Dashboard** was incubated at the December 2012 RHoK in response to a request from the Warrandyte Community Association and will be ready for use by the Warrandyte Community during the next fire season. Residents in that high risk bushfire area will get access to real-time information in a single web portal. The portal

combines official sources (such as fire alerts) as well as crowd-sourced information from the community via Twitter in order to help residents make potentially lifesaving decisions.

Volunteer programmers, designers and project managers, as well as local government agencies, businesses or community organisations who are interested in becoming involved with RHoK are invited to visit www.rhokmelbourne.org for more information and to follow the group's tweets at [#RHoKmelb](https://twitter.com/RHoKmelb).

Quotes:

- "RHoK Melbourne is a great example of how ICT is transforming the way we work, communicate, collaborate and connect with our communities and each other and we are excited to support it," said **Suzanne Campbell**, CEO of the [Australian Information Industry Association](#). "It is fantastic to see this program driving innovation to create stronger and more cohesive communities and we are very pleased to endorse this event."
- "We chose to join RHoK because we wanted to give back to the communities in which we live," said **Daryl Wilding-McBride**, Chief Technology Officer, [DiUS Computing](#). "Unexpectedly, we have also found value in the RHoK community itself. We have found opportunities to connect with like-minded people with varied skills and from diverse organisations. Sometimes those organisations are competitors in the commercial world, but with RHoK we are brought together to solve common problems."
- "Infosys has been participating in RHoK Melbourne since its inception," said **Jackie Korhonen**, Australia & New Zealand Country Head for [Infosys](#), a global company with Australian headquarters in Melbourne. "I salute all the people who work so hard throughout the week, and still find the time to donate their time and technology talents to build real solutions that can save lives in our community."
- "We were really excited to sponsor the Random Hacks of Kindness hackathon. It's a great cause to support as Melbourne has a thriving community of programmers, designers and techies," said **Keran McKenzie**, Developer Evangelist at [MYOB](#). "It was great to nurture and collaborate with them to see the innovations, and what practical technology solutions we all came up with to help solve some real world-problems."

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[Watch a video from the weekend](#)