

Report - Slashroots Developers' Conference and Codesprint

The Slashroots (**./roots**) Developers' Conference and Codesprint was hosted by the Centre of Excellence, Mona School of Business, UWI, on Feb 24th / 25th, 2011. The Conference was organized and executed by the Slashroots community, a newly formed organization of young developers and technology enthusiasts, working in partnership with MSB. The primary purpose of the event was to provide visibility for the OpenData initiative by exposing the newly-developed Web services API for Agriculture data to the local developer community, and validate the effectiveness and robustness of the API. The **./roots** event also provided an opportunity to explore the premise that OpenData can lead to increased innovation.

The Conference featured a wide range of presentations from a panel of local and international speakers, all broadly under the theme of **Open Innovation – create.share.apply**. Notable speakers included:

- **Skye Bender-deMoll**, Data Visualization Expert
 - **Keynote:** Getting from "Public" to "Open" Data: lessons learned scraping and structuring corporate subsidiary data for api.corpwatch.org
- **John Wonderlich**, Policy Director, Sunlight Foundation - a non-profit, organization that uses the power of the Internet to catalyze greater government openness and transparency
 - **Keynote:** Open Data Initiatives, Aspirations and Limitations.
- **Felipe Otamendi** – Principal Game developer for Trojan Chicken Game Studio, Uruguay
 - Python gaming software design/development Workshop for OLPC
- **Angel Goñi Oramas**, Founder and former leader of Nova Cuban GNU/Linux Distribution.
- **Allan Pierra Fuentes**, Head of the Operating System and Open Source Technologies Department and Cuban Government's Assessor in Free and Open Source Software migration
 - Cuban Experiences in Open Source Adoption
- **Professor Haniph Latchman**, Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, at the University of Florida, Gainesville
 - **Innovation Case Study:** Building security-hardened, lightweight but scalable and highly available communications appliances with Asterisk, FreeSwitch and Kamailio using the Alpine Linux platform
- **Ross Sheil**, Jamaica Observer
 - Transforming Business Process through Technology: The Observer and Social Media
- **Dr. Maurice McNaughton**, Director Of Center Of Excellence, Mona School of Business, UWI Mona
 - From Users to Creators--Institutional Approaches to Technology Adoption
- **David Bain**, Open Source Enthusiast / UWI Lecturer / CEO Alteroo
 - How to contribute to open source: from download to contribution
- Panel Discussion on Building Innovative Capacity
 - * **Kenrie Hylton**, Director at NCU
 - * **Dr Arnett Campbell**, Director At Utech
 - * **Dr Daniel Coore**, Department of Computing UWI
 - * **Dr. Sameer Verma**, San Francisco State Univ
 - * **Marc Gayle**, **Technology** Entrepreneur/Founder of Compversions

However the highlight of the conference was undoubtedly the staging of a 24-hr Developer competition, where 13 teams of software developers competed to determine which could develop the most innovative value-added application in the Agriculture Domain. The teams were required to develop their applications using an **Open Data API** (Application Programming Interface) which was released for the 1st time, at the conference and provided access to Agricultural Production & Pricing Data provided through RADA and the Ministry of Agriculture. The Agriculture API was the result of an ongoing Research project being conducted by the MSB Centre of Excellence in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and funded by the International Development Research Centre (**IDRC**).



A panel of judges used the following criteria to evaluate the applications built by the teams:

- Usefulness (Who will use application? Potential Impact)
- Usability (User Interface, Responsiveness, Look & Feel)
- Technical Considerations (Degree of use of the API, Data Visualization, Extensibility of Code)
- Coolness factor (Multiple API usage, Technologies)

There were impressive efforts by several teams over the course of the 24-hr competition period. Some of the highlights included:

Team / Institution	Developers	Description of the Application	Target Users
YamZilla / Private	Paul Allen and Jermaine Byfield	The application's goal is to connect markets with farmers. It is mainly geared at supermarkets or mass market customers who are looking for providers. They would visit the website and search for ""Carrots"" and the application would attempt to find, rank and display the best farmers to provide carrots. The ranking metrics are based on location, price and supply status for products in the farmer's region.	supermarkets or mass market customers who are looking for providers.
The A-TEAM / Trinidad (UWI)	Yudhistre Jonas, Craig Ramlal, Gyasi Ambrose	<p>The application was designed as a complete platform that incorporates both web and mobile technologies. This was done to maximize the reach of the data and also to increase data usability.</p> <p>The WEB module of the application consists of a webpage frontend where we have developed a FLASH based application that assists with aggregation and visualization of the data provided by the API. The main feature of this module is to assist farmers seeking financial assistance such as micro-finance loans. The application can also be used by the very same financial institutions to better assess the suitability of the applicant's claim.</p> <p>The MOBILE module (Android and basic Blackberry JAVA) of the application consists of mobile applications and mobile web technologies to deliver data accessed from the API. This module was</p>	Farmers and Financial Institutions

		designed to enable access to specific data that would be most useful to mobile users. This data includes geographic location of crops, farmers, and prices. The mobile module therefore leverages portability with data accessibility.	
Sapna / UTECH	Tennison Dougherty, Dean Jones, Julian Jarrett	The application is a Decision Support System that facilitates loan providers in making decisions on the loan amount that a farmer qualifies for based on: (1) the crops that he intends to plant, (2) the location and size of his farm, (3) the term over which he will plant them, (4) and the historical performance of such crops in similar locations over a similar periods.	The application is targeted at banks and other loan agencies as well as farmers who need guidance.
UWI team	Aston Hamilton, Jonathon Smith, Stuart South	A game that provides a fun and exciting environment for teaching young students about Agriculture in Jamaica.	Primary School Children aged 7-12
NCU1 / NCU	Shawn, Derron, Nicolas	It's a 2 part application. One is a mobile phone for which farmers can use to see the trends of crops. The trend utilizes past data of quantity, prices and location to give a predicted outcome. Farmers can also select a specific crop to view the feasibility of planting it. Part 2 is data visualization for the Agriculture data.	Farmers

The judges were particularly impressed with the technical scope and completeness of the application built by the **A-team** from Trinidad, UWI. However in the final analysis, the **Yamzilla** team was given the edge, due to the usefulness, usability and immediate applicability of their solution. The winning team was awarded Android phones courtesy of LIME and became the 1st holders of the **./roots** Developers trophy awarded by Grace-Kennedy.



The **./roots** Competition demonstrated an important principle of the **OpenData** philosophy, that data becomes far more valuable with use. It also demonstrated the potential to stimulate the local software developer community to contemplate innovations in agriculture, thereby engaging a wider constituency of interests in agriculture that can accelerate the rate of ICT innovation in the sector.

The following links contain photo images and video archives from the **./roots** Conference as well as articles and features in the local and regional media that reflect the considerable visibility generated by this event, which has helped to heighten the awareness and interest in the OpenData philosophy.

Photo archives: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/varunbaker/sets/72157626035269339>

Presentation videos: <http://vimeo.com/channels/186421>

Media article: <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20110421/business/business7.html>

Media Interview: http://www.youtube.com/user/MonaSchoolOfBusiness#p/a/u/0/SB_zcgMZeio