



Wednesday, 6 December 2017, Business News Western Australia

**BN**  
TECHNOLOGY

# Hackathons make the magic happen

Beyond their obvious value to the startup and tech sectors, hackathons are increasingly being used by big business to drive innovation.



**SOLUTIONS:** Fiona Stanley Hospital recently hosted healthcare professionals, researchers, programmers and aspiring entrepreneurs at a hackathon-type event. Photo: Attila Csaszar



**Sam Birmingham**  
sam.birmingham@me.com

**T**HE sun is shining, summer has arrived and many people are just weeks away from downing tools and enjoying some holiday time with family and friends.

For those of us in startup land, however, there's the not-so-small matter of hackathon season to navigate first.

To many, 'hacking' evokes thoughts of hooded programmers tucked away in dark rooms, breaking down firewalls, trying to get their hands on and manipulate our precious data.

Contrary to that stereotype, what we are talking about here is a group of people coming together, sharing their ideas and trying to develop potential businesses over the course of the weekend.

As someone who was involved in bringing the first event to Perth back in 2012, I reckon **Startup Weekend** is the original hackathon.

Touted as 'the ideal environment for startup magic to happen', what began as a one-off in Boulder, Colorado, has scaled to more than 1,000 cities, with dozens of events taking place each weekend globally.

Perth's 11th Startup Weekend was held at Spacecubed last month, where almost 100 'hackers, hustlers and hipsters' combined to form 11 teams which, from the Friday evening until Sunday night, pivoted and prototyped, validated business models and ultimately pitched their startups, all in 54 crazy hours.

## It shouldn't work, but it does

Once you realise that the output from a Startup Weekend is upskilled entrepreneurs and the project is simply a vehicle for learning, the fear of failure and 'what if someone steals my idea?' quickly slips away. Similarly, the post-hackathon challenge of maintaining a team of strangers and trying to revisit that intense level of activity when they have day jobs to get back to suddenly doesn't matter.

That is not to say real businesses aren't launched from hackathons. One of my favourites, **Simply Wall Street**, started at a Perth Startup Weekend with a charismatic pitch from the startup's costumed founder, Al Bentley.

He has since gone on to raise more than \$2 million in funding and has served tens of thousands of customers worldwide, helping them to make better-informed investment decisions by turning complicated data into simple visuals.

Other successes have come from themed hackathons, typically targeted at an industry segment.

**'Unearthed'** was established in Perth to drive innovation in the resources sector. Since the first event took place with Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Gold Fields in 2014, the resources-specific program has expanded to a dozen events each year across three continents and now includes an accelerator, where standout projects can be further developed with funding and support from industry partners.

It's not just industry that can benefit from these partnerships and programs. Even government institutions can throw off the shackles and embrace new, creative, outside-the-box approaches to deal with internal challenges.

Western Australia's largest healthcare institution, **Fiona Stanley Hospital**, did that in late November, with healthcare professionals, researchers,

programmers and aspiring entrepreneurs invited to co-develop creative solutions to public health challenges.

Separately, **Spacecubed** recently partnered with **All Saints College**, tailoring the hackathon format for teenagers and giving them a chance to 'hack the school' – imagining, through the eyes of today's students, what a school of the future could look like, and what we need to do to get there.

And then we have 'Ministry of Data', where government agencies essentially reverse-pitch their validated, internal problem and then invite developers, startups and data aficionados to deliver a product with the agency as a ready-made customer.

## Hacking in the C-suite

With executives and government leaders trumpeting their commitment to a culture of innovation while juggling business-as-usual operations in a challenging economic climate, it



“ Get out of the silos, be transparent about your challenges, share your data and problems, invite people to join you and make a difference together.

can be hard to move a leadership team from talk to action.

Whether internal (for staff only) or opening up your data and problems to external third parties, hosting a hackathon might seem like a good place to start (and it could be). A few words of advice before you plough straight in, however.

**• Authenticity**

Be clear about what you want to get out of it. Hackathons are a great place to identify talent and, if things go well, start solving problems that have been sitting in the too-hard basket for too long. But if it's all about you and your issues, then you won't get the right people in the room in the first place, nor will their creative juices really be allowed to flow.

Motivations need to be aligned.

**• Partner**

Share, collaborate; it might be uncomfortable, but I encourage everyone to default to openness. Get out of the silos, be transparent about your challenges, share your data and problems, invite people to join you and make a difference together.

You have to give a little to get a little.

**• What comes next?**

It is my favourite question of entrepreneurs and business alike. If you are going to take the plunge and run one of these events, the last thing you want is to get to the end and have everyone scratching their heads, asking 'What comes next?'

Have a strategy. Be willing to double down on your little wins. So, what comes next?

### Bridgestone tech to measure wear

JAPANESE tyre maker Bridgestone opened a \$10 million facility in Port Hedland recently that will apply remote sensing and big data to detect wear on the mining fleets and conveyors of its Pilbara customers.

The opening of the facility, which is located in Hedland's Wedgefield industrial area, comes a month after Bridgestone announced its local industrial tyre and engineering arms would be integrated into a mining solutions division from next year.

The Port Hedland facility will also monitor and maintain conveyor belts using remote sensing technology.

Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres chief operating officer Andrew Andreou told *Business News* the facility had been built so the company could get closer to its customer base, which was currently serviced out of Perth.

The facility's customers would largely be resources focused, including the iron ore majors, he said.

Similar to technological applications in other parts of the resources industry, such as infrared or sound-based monitoring of equipment for performance or maintenance issues, Bridgestone would seek to bring a high-tech flavour to its offering.

The company uses its own software systems to allow real-time, accessible tracking of equipment in the field.

Tracking devices, which can be remotely managed, are placed inside the wheels to measure heat and pressure.

A truck with wheels experiencing high wear could be diverted onto a shorter route or simply carry reduced loads for a period, saving the need for it to be taken out of service.

-Matt McKenzie

**MORE ONLINE:**  
businessnews.com.au/  
search/site/Bridgestone

### ECU secures state innovation grant

EDITH Cowan University is the first beneficiary of the state government's much-touted innovation strategy, with \$800,000 earmarked for a cyber security hub at Joondalup.

The grant is from the government's \$16.7 million new industries fund, which was formally launched last week.

The state government will contribute \$600,000 so ECU can employ a business development manager to facilitate growth of small and emerging cyber-security businesses.

An additional \$200,000 has been allocated to support development of the cyber security industry.

Premier Mark McGowan said the new industries fund would support new and emerging businesses, and help create a more diversified economy.

"It's vital that WA is an active player in the innovation economy, and that as a government we ensure new industries have every opportunity to thrive and grow," Mr McGowan said in a statement.

ECU vice-chancellor Steve Chapman acknowledged the support of the premier and Innovation Minister Dave Kelly.

ECU is one of 25 industry, research and government partners in the recently launched Cyber Security Cooperative Research Centre, which is due to get \$50 million of federal government money over the next seven years.

The new industries fund is essentially a cut-down version of the \$20 million innovation fund launched by the Barnett government last year.

It includes \$4.5 million allocated to regional areas, \$2 million for grants and government programs, and \$950,000 for science industry fellowships.



App/Tech Business



ALTERNATIVE DATA: Ovass founders Ravi Nichani (left) and Dave Newman.



[www.ovass.com](http://www.ovass.com)

Ovass has built the next generation of geospatial analytics. With its patent pending technology, Ovass turns millions of satellite and aerial images into highly valuable information that can be used to drive better business and policy decisions.

The Ovass platform uses artificial intelligence to abstract the hidden information contained within each satellite image on a global scale. For example, it could be used to determine how many customers visited a specific retail location.

Founded by Dave Newman and Ravi Nichani.

"By 2020 it's estimated there will be enough 'earth observation' satellites (1,700 satellites) looking back down at us to give a real time view of earth. We saw this as a massive opportunity to provide transparency to what's happening on the ground on a global scale," Mr Newman said.

The business is currently in the process of raising \$1 million via a seed round.

The geospatial analytics market is expected to be worth \$US73.91 billion by 2021.

**BNiQ SEARCHENGINE** Ovass launched in November 2017 | [businessnews.com.au/Company/Ovass](http://businessnews.com.au/Company/Ovass)  
...your key to WA business

If you want your new app or tech start-up profiled here, email: [taylor.neale@businessnews.com.au](mailto:taylor.neale@businessnews.com.au)