

March 27, 2013 | By Tiffany Fox

## Calit2 Border App Wins Third Place at Mobile World Congress

A team of students from the University of California, San Diego recently took home third place at the 2013 Mobile World Congress (MWC) after pitching their “Best Time to Cross the Border” app to a panel of judges from technology powerhouses such as Facebook and China Mobile.



*Tarfah Alrashed, Rodrigo Rallo and Matthew Davis took third prize in the Mobile World Congress' University Challenge for the app they developed, which helps commuters avoid long wait times.*

The team of students, Matthew Davis, Tarfah Alrashed and Rodrigo Rallo, competed with researchers at 40 universities around the world in the University Mobile Challenge. The top prize was ultimately awarded to the creators of an app called “Flowbit” out of the University of California, Berkeley, which allows water providers to remotely control water supplies in the developing world. Teams from the University of Waterloo and Harvard University took second and fourth place, respectively.

Leading the UCSD team was Davis, an undergraduate in Computer Science and Engineering who works in the Mobile Applications Group at the UC San Diego division of the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology (Calit2). Davis and his two teammates were responsible for conveying the app’s business model and its innovative utility. They spent two days (and some late nights) prior to the final competition polishing their five-minute presentation in a ‘boot camp’ sponsored by the Applied Innovation Institute, which runs the competition.

Aside from their app’s practical applications, Davis said the judges valued the UCSD app because “it’s a social, noble thing to do and they respected it because it wasn’t only based on making money.”

The app, which is available for [iPhone](#) and [Android](#), uses real-time, crowdsourced information about border wait times to help other border crossers decide the best time to cross into Mexico or Canada by car or truck, thereby reducing the some \$17 billion in annual losses and 250,000

tons of carbon emissions that result from lengthy border waits. It now has about 30,000 users and is now the 11th most popular travel app among iPhone users in Mexico and Canada. Los Angeles Times reporter Robin Abcarian wrote about the app yesterday in her "[Perspective](#)" column.

Mobile Applications Group Director and Calit2 Principal Development Engineer Ganz Chockalingam noted that the judges also appreciated how well the UCSD app can be adapted to other contexts.

"The same app can be modified to measure wait times at any entity," he added. "Because we provide historical charts about wait trends, employers could, for example, use precise quantitative measures to schedule their staff based on peak hours to better plan and prepare and avoid making their customers have to wait for service."

Chockalingam noted that the group plans to eventually incorporate an automatic timestamp feature to the app, as well as a forum for "creating a community of waiters." They also foresee combining the app with something akin to Foursquare or Google Maps to show wait times for restaurants and other attractions.

"If I know that visiting the Eiffel Tower on a Tuesday morning means avoiding a 45-minute wait, that information is very valuable to me," he said.

The 2013 MWC took place from Feb. 25-28 in Barcelona, Spain and drew 72,000 attendees from 200 countries. The conference also features the world's largest mobile industry exhibition.

Although the UCSD team didn't take home the top prize, Davis said they were happy to have beat out other teams from top-rated institutions like Harvard, Oxford University and the National University of Singapore.

"I'm not disappointed at all," he added. "I think we did our presentation perfectly, and even though we didn't win, we learned a lot, made a lot of friends and did the absolute best we could do."

Next up for the UCSD team: Presenting at the upcoming DEMO conference in San Francisco. Their third-place win entitles them to a 90-second pitch before investors at the DEMO Student Alpha Pitches session, with the potential to win one of 10 full scholarships.

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