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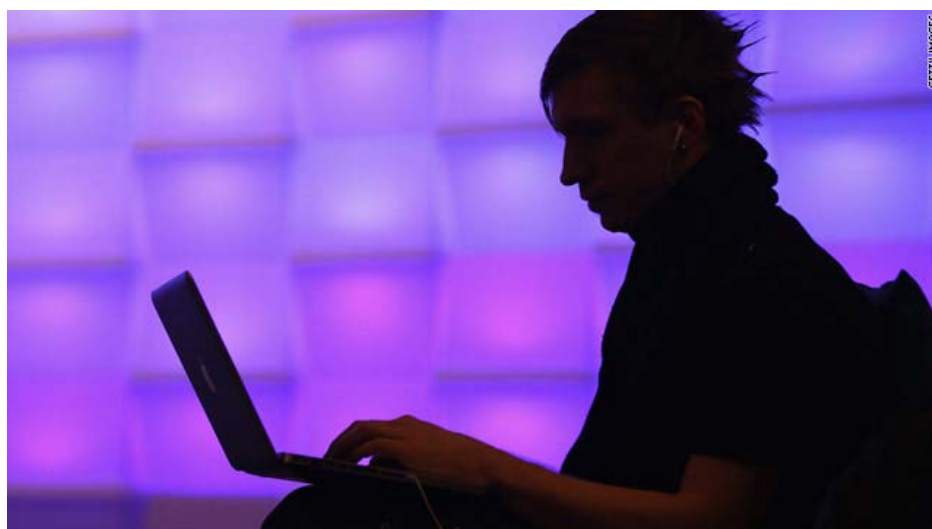


Hackers gather around the globe to fight climate change

By **Alden Mahler Levine**, CNN
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Hackers are often portrayed as anarchists or criminals, but many hacker gatherings seek to be a force for good.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Random Hacks of Kindness tries to leverage Internet data to address world problems.

Google, Microsoft, Yahoo!, NASA and the World Bank collaborated on project

World Bank founded Random Hacks of Kindness; gatherings are held all over world

Goal is to finish the weekend with some concrete prototypes

(CNN) -- When you hear the word hacker, you probably don't picture someone dedicated to solving the problems of global development.

But this weekend, self-proclaimed hackers around the world will gather at "hackathon" events to tackle disaster-risk management and climate change. The occasion is the semiannual Random Hacks of Kindness global conference, which seeks to leverage Internet data to address world problems.

Gatherings will be held in cities around the globe, from Atlanta to California's Silicon Valley and from Basel, Switzerland, to Bogota, Colombia. The conference is the result of a 2009 collaboration by Google, Microsoft, Yahoo!, NASA and the World Bank, which founded Random Hacks of Kindness. (Both the organization and the events it organizes are known as RHoK.)

The group solicits "problem definitions" from organizations in the field of disaster preparedness, relief and climate change and puts them before "tech-savvy do-gooders," according to Elizabeth Sabet from SecondMuse, RHoK's global operational lead.

It's this synthesis between subject-matter experts and computer hackers that makes RHoK effective, its leaders said.

"Technical solutions created only by technical people are often too



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cumbersome for the field," said Philadelphia organizer Mike Brennan. "Solutions created by field experts alone often lack the technical and scientific basis for an effective solution. RHoK is looking to address these weaknesses directly."

Sabet is also quick to point out that "hacking" doesn't always mean what some people might think.



Hackers at a Random Hacks of Kindness gathering in December 2010 in Chicago.

"RHoK celebrates hacking in its most positive context -- using minimal resources and maximum brainpower to create outside-the-box solutions -- 'hacks' -- in response to interesting problems," she said. "The intent is to finish the weekend with some concrete prototypes and demo applications that can go on to be put to use by the experts and (nongovernmental organizations) who proposed the problems."

If previous years are any indication, these hackers will walk away with real results.

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The 2009 RHoK event generated I'mOK, an SMS service used by people in Haiti and Chile to inform families of their status via mobile messaging after the earthquakes in those countries. The World Bank is piloting a program generated at the 2010 RHoK to visualize landslide risk. These are just two of many examples.

RHoK serves as a global umbrella organization and provides resources, but volunteer groups on the ground in each city put together the individual events. Willow Brugh is one such volunteer, hard at work preparing the RHoK this weekend in Seattle.

She said she's still enthused about last year's event in which she was part of a team that designed a tool enabling disaster victims to report their losses more easily and ask for help. By the end of the weekend, her team had functioning prototypes of an iPhone app, an Android app and a Web portal. Now local governments across the country are picking up their program.

"That's a success, when the thing you've built continues to be used and worked on, and makes it out to the public," Brugh said. "It was awesome."

In Melbourne, Australia, RHoK has been driven by issues close to home.

"Many of our friends and families have been personally impacted by the bush fires and floods in Victoria, and we know people who experienced the tsunami and the Christchurch (New Zealand) earthquake," Melbourne organizer Jane Treadwell said. "No community is perfectly safe from these threats, and through RHoK we can all make a contribution to preventing, helping and alleviating stress and suffering."

In Bangalore, India, Praveen Selvasekaran has been working with "a volunteer army of 10 members" to put together an event for an expected 200 hackers. The Bangalore event will follow the common RHoK format, he said, but each hackathon is far from identical.

"What really makes every RHoK unique is the ability to solve local problems," he said. "Sometimes two different RHoK locations may take a completely different approach to the same problem."

That diversity of outcomes is exactly what makes RHoK appealing to its sponsors, according to Nicholas Skyland of NASA's Open Government Initiative.

"Innovation is always a numbers game: The more you do it, the better

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your chances are of being successful," he said. The process of innovation is itself much of the reward, Skytland said.

"RHoK breaks down barriers that prevent innovation and challenge the way business has always been done, by taking advantage of many of the possibilities created by working in a networked digital world. A successful weekend for us is one in which hundreds, if not thousands, of developers from around the world gather to invent technology that didn't exist 24 hours ago."

Gather they will, from Nairobi, Kenya, to Buenos Aires, Argentina, and everywhere in between. RHoK organizer Heather Leson has been putting together Toronto's second RHoK and is expecting 90 hackers to attend.

"The most exciting thing is to watch brains collide," she said. "People come from all walks of life. We have emergency managers, accountants, health care professionals, journalists, open data and open source developers, UX/UI, trainers, and many more. It is a diverse group of people lending their time, energy and knowledge in inspiring ways."

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barry1817

nice to hear that there are people claiming that computer usage is creating a lot of carbon footprints, so as these people gather, sitting on their computers they should be taxed and regulated for too much carbon emissions. And then we can stop others from using computers so much, because of the ca...

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Kennywest1

How impressive - the biggest gathering of screen-staring, far removed, gullible, brainwashed, unsophisticated and frankly stupid sheeple yet to gather on the Internet - god help us.

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privatouring

You all have to understand that all the polar bears and the humanity of it all....and the women and minorities....and the people of colour.....and the transgendered. These are the real victims. Racism is the cause of climate change and the scourge of simultaneous global warming and cooling. ... [more](#)

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awillingham

Minimal resources of logic combined with the Maximum Brainpower of Propagandists... But hey... protesting against volcanoes and the changing of the seasons to lessen the impact of Climate Change seems like such a good investment of Hacker Energy...The climate changes around here every few months, an... [more](#)

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webright

Beam me up Scotty! This planet has been overtaken by idiots with computers and their fat little leader they call Algore!

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ohnooooo

Well if they still believe in man made climate change (remember global warming) they can't be all that smart. Sounds to me like they are liberal hacks, not hackers.

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HansJurgen

This is again some stupid moronic people who are using their computers to cause even more greenhouse emissions. Didn't they read that the increased use of the internet is causing so much greenhouse emissions that it's adding to and equal to the greenhouse emissions of countries like Italy? Just some... [more](#)

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mannysaurus

NASA google the world bank? jajajajaja wow these people might as well hand their laptops to the pentagon in person..

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realright

All this would be well and good if anthropogenic climate change actually existed. Truth is, it doesn't. We are seeing the same climatic cycles that have existed for thousands of years. Nothing man, pro or con, can do is going to influence that one little bit!

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GDINY2

" using minimal resources and maximum brainpower to create outside-the-box solution."So, I guess that rules out the hackers are actually prying themselves away from their computer and doing something other than disrupting networks. Some problems can't be point-and-clicked away. At least Al Gore mo... [more](#)

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inv3nt0r

Climate change? The best way we can fight it is with some sort of Wall Street derivatives trading scheme. Throw in a tax paid directly to the UN, and a little corporate welfare subsidies paid to GE and Al Gore. Once they have more of our money the temperature will stabilize. Please begin robbing me ... [more](#)

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RodneyQueen

When these Morons figure out how to manufacture a computer without petroleum then I'll be more apt to listen to their spew.

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KoolAidDem

Without fossil fuels, nukes or hydro, hackers would have to get a life.

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jayshelley

The Jewish studios minimize the role of Chris Hughes in the film, The Social Media, and exaggerate the contribution of players Zuckerberg and Moskovitz.

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RodneyQueen

Hey look more Hypocrites. Don't these idiots know that ALL computer contain substances known to "Harm the Environment"?

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jayshelley

Great article.

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KoolAidDem

Ever see the manufacturing processes for computers?

It's highly toxic and very bad for the planet.

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HeatherGirl

Just as long as they also keep hacking in to find the climate change scientist email exchanges and maybe some info on exactly how they "tweak" the climate data. Let's see, if you were getting millions of dollars a year in climate change funding, if your house payment, car payment and childrens colleg... [more](#)

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KoolAidDem

Ever see a solar/wind powered Internet Data Center? Me neither.

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KoolAidDem

How about one in the Pacific NW that is powered by hydro?

No climate change there. Screw the fish! I want my LAN party!

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ChrisFreely

Nobody saw a coal powered one either before the Internet was invented. Closed minded people rarely think of new solutions for future society.

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MSARIFUDIN

Computer viruses, whatever its name will never be lost. In line with the existence of 'good and bad'. More great ways to prevent viruses, the more severe virus is also strength, like

a human conscience, could honestly can not. There's one right there. There is no black and white, there is left is right... [more](#)

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Eeon

How about they write a simulator to replace our failing government. No Republicans, no more Democrats. Just a single computer program that you input the variables into and out comes the perfect solution!! lol

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Tracey1212

That would cause gnashing of teeth and wringing of hands. The sim would deport illegal aliens in the next 30 seconds since their cost to Americans is in the many billions per year. Thugs at Burger King, Denny's and McDonalds who

attack patrons would be shot on sight by little old ladies trying to ... [more](#)

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Tracey1212

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