TRAVEL INFORMATION
making it more mobile

For travellers, finding the location of a restaurant or hotel, a museum or art gallery in a strange city may soon be as easy as reaching for their mobile phones...

A winning team of La Trobe University Computer Science and Computer Engineering students, as part of their Software Engineering Project, have helped Lonely Planet – one of the world’s largest publishers of travel guides – add mapping features to existing digital travel information. The company eventually plans to make this available globally over mobile phones.

The software has been designed to use satellite-based Global Positioning System tracking technology to send the co-ordinates of the traveller’s location to a server which then searches for information, say on all hotels within a certain area, and locates the relevant maps. This information, which includes prices and other features of nearby hotels, is sent to the mobile phone, complete with directions by either text or maps.

The system can deal with areas up to three kilometres from the location of the mobile phone user. It features a screen menu with buttons such as ‘where am I’, ‘places to stay’, ‘places to see’, eat, shop, and ‘entertainment’.

The team of seven students – Peter George, Leonardo Di Clemente, Orcun Mayuk, Olga Diaz Gutierrez, Darshanand Hurkoo, Pamela Lee and Viet Dung Nguyen – won an award for best Software Engineering Project at a joint university – industry award ceremony held at the University’s late last year.

David Finlay, said the La Trobe Software Engineering Project provides valuable industry contact for students. ‘The students have the opportunity to work on real problems to provide adequate and “in time” solutions for those problems.’

He said the project also encourages knowledge-sharing between the University and industry. ‘Industry benefits by increasing its awareness of student skills, and we gain insights into new technological developments in industry.’

Software Engineering Project coordinator, Mr Torab Torabi, said the business requirement for the winning project was developed in consultation with Dr Ron Gallagher, Research and Development Manager for Lonely Planet.

Dr Gallagher said: ‘The students have tackled many of the questions, beyond requirement expectation, including how much the service would cost to the mobile user.’

Lonely Planet, from its new base in Footscray, is moving its traditional text guide books to new digital technology: the web, handheld devices and mobile phones.

The company says the first of these products have been exported to Europe – travellers there can already access travel information via their mobile phones – satisfying consumer demand and producing a new range of export products with a world-wide market.

The second winning team of students – Lee Baker, Myles Carrucan, Aaron Fuller, Timothy Gregson, Warren Bailey and Mun Lee – developed an Online Data Backup System, in collaboration with a firm, Info-In, located on the University’s Research and Development Park at Bundoora.

The company operates a secure online backup service from two Class A data centre locations in Melbourne and Auckland, for software and hardware manufacturers, retail outlets, disaster recovery consultants and education providers. The students worked on a new version of the service, to improve the system’s user friendliness, management, distribution, compression and data encryption.

Mr Marcel Lenhoff, the CEO of Inof-In Pty Ltd, said: ‘I suggested to students that they should think outside the nine dots. I can say that they have achieved this.’ He said Info-In is continuing to work with the Department of Computer Science and Computer Engineering on the full development of the project.

Two students will be awarded an ‘Agenda for New Manufacturing Scholarship’ which provides a stipend to help develop these projects further this year. Valued at $15,000, the scholarship has been sponsored by the Victorian Department of Innovation, Industry & Regional Development, Lonely Planet, and La Trobe University.