Opinions Libres
le blog d'Olivier Ezratty

With the Traveling Geeks in Paris

Dear reader, this is my first post in English. The reason is I participated recently to the Traveling Geeks tour in Paris and the rule of the game is to publish content that can be shared by its participants and within the **Traveling Geeks** web site. So, no other solution than English. Time to get really international!

In this first post, I'll quickly go through the agenda of this tour and then talk a little bit about my fellow international Traveling Geeks bloggers. We've spent four days together, two in a local tour and two at Leweb. That was a good opportunity to get to know high-profile bloggers from other countries, not just the USA, and to share some views on digital innovation as well as on Leweb itself. I enjoyed a lot this experience.

Cross-cultural confrontations are always fruitful, even when things get tough such as during and after the now famous "Scoble incident" (*will come to that later*). I knew things wouldn't be easy. Showing many French startups to US influential bloggers is always risky. Only a few share the basic attributes of major international players: English fluent CEOs, doing good presentations or demos, pitching well with starting from a clear pain point or problem, understanding their competition, using the right tools, etc. This confrontation is quite a good learning for these companies. It's also good to understand the perception issues local startups have with international innovation communities. And we just had bloggers here, and none of the other demanding key players such as business angels and VCs.

The Paris Tour

Traveling in the metro throughout Paris, we met several startups, a mid-size company (**Parrot**) and a large company (**Orange**).

Two startups had the opportunity to pitch the TGs in length: **Pearltrees**, the "web curator" startup that was also very visible in the main session at Leweb, and **Cedexis**, a CDN (content distribution network) optimizing startup seen at the Club Melcion from **Melcion & Chassagne**, a company providing strategic consulting to innovative startups.

About 20 startups presented in "fast track" mode. First, at "**La Cantine**", a hip place where startups and the local digital ecosystem folks meet on a regular basis, where we saw presentations from about 10 **CapDigital** sponsored startups (**CapDigital** is a "digital media cluster" from the Paris region). And second, at the **Paris Development** Incubator at rue des Haies (*below*), with about 10 startups presenting and later, being interviewed in 1/1 by the TG bloggers.

On top of which we had several dinner and parties opportunities.

The Traveling Geeks bloggers

The detailed list is **here** although a couple French invitees didn't show up in the tour.

Many of these bloggers were freelance news writers or writers with a strong journalism or PR background. Their age spanned from 24 to above 50. Represented countries were USA first, Scottland, Belgium, South Africa and France. It seemed it was the first time some French bloggers were part of the tour. Pays d'accueil oblige…

Besides maybe Eliane Fiolet from Ubergizmo, most of these bloggers make a living from other activies than blogging. As freelance journalists, media consultants, PR specialists, events organizers, or more traditional consulting, mostly, on media stuff. Not all of these folks focus on consumer stuff. There were also enterprise focused bloggers.

Despite the branding, we didn't have that many "geeky" discussions beside some competition in DSLRs between the APS-C owners (Eliane, Renee, Beth) and the full frame camera owners (Robert Scoble, Rodrigo, myself). Others were using small digital HD video recorders like the Flip, now a branch of Cisco.

But what was quite funny is the time it took before starting meetings. After the team arrived in a room, it usually took about 15 minutes to set things up and get ready: plug all the hardware, connect to Wifi, connect to Twitter and start posts. Some bloggers could even hit the "Publish" button as the meetings ended! Definitively not my way of running this blog!

So here are my fellow bloggers from the TG tour:

- **Renee Blodgett**, is the cofounder of the Traveling Geeks and has her own media consulting company. She does PR for a dozen technology companies. She also runs two blogs: **We Blog the World** and **Down the Avenue**, focusing on social media trends.

- **Jim "Sky" Schuyler** is the CTO of the Traveling Geeks, meaning he cares about all the IT stuff, publishing blogs, pictures and videos on the various relevant places (the TG site, Flickr, YouTube, etc). He is also invested in promoting free speech and e-education.

- **Robin Wauters**, is a writer at TechCrunch Europe and a conference organizers. He's also the organizer of the monthly Open Coffee in Brussels, so a colleague of my friend Raphaël Labbé, from Ulike.net, who does the same in Paris. Robin is also the managing editor of **Virtualization.com**, an enterprise computing blog.

- **David Spark** looks like a multipurpose journalist (blog, TV, radio, press) and media consultant. For him, every company should be a media and broadcast rich content to address its customer base needs. I like the point. Companies tend to believe that they can base their communication on "buzz marketing" and user generated content. They kind of get lazy in producing content. It's not the right way to proceed. They have to publish more stuff on their web outreach tools. Like me, David publishes reports on his SparkMinute site, such as the latest free report "**Real-Time Search and Discovery of the Social Web**". Davis is quite laser sharp in his comments and always on point. Look for example at his **coverage of Leweb**.

- **Tom Forenski**, from **Silicon Valley Watcher** is more focused on the culture of innovation than on geek matters. I had some interesting discussions with him on the cultural and skills differences between US and France and what French startups need to do to circumvent their initial weaknesses.

- **Frédéric Lardinois**, is a German born writer publishing in **ReadWriteWeb**. He is based in Portland, Oregon. He's focused on social media.

- **Mathew Buckland**, from South-Africa, is a real business man. He runs a sort of private incubator, **20FourLabs** as well as a web development shop, **Creative Spark Interactive**. Oh, and btw, he runs his **own blog**.

- **Beth Blecherman**, from the blog **TechMama** and also does some consulting on blogger outreach. She has a strong enterprise IT background and is now focused on digital consumer life.

- The quiet **Kim-Mai Cutler** writes on **VentureBeat**, a blog covering innovations broadly including investments and VCs. Below, interviewing Kamel Zeroual from Nyoulink / Stribe, two days before he got to win the best startup award from Leweb. Means she's got some good intuitions… :).

- **Ewan Spence** is a Scottish blogger, writer and entrepreneur. He did a presentation on virtual worls and Second Life at Leweb in 2006. He is also involved in a business partnership to launch a handheld computer running Ubuntu, the PsiXpda. So how a kilt-wearing Scottish guy gets through the security of the Paris City Hall when we went to the .paris party there? Hand control…

- **Amanda Coolong**, runs the **TechZulu** blog. Like Scoble, her main media is video interviews. A very energetic woman, she lives in Los Angeles. So she likes to cover digital medias. I expect to see her at the CES like many others from the TG tour.

- **Robert Scoble**, a preeminent blogger focused on the Internet ecosystem. Also, a regular speaker at Leweb. We did see him only half a day during this two days tour of the French ecosystem. He went nuts when learning that some startups in the Paris incubator didn't have a Twitter account, and this drove a **controversy** on the mistakes French entrepreneurs make in their marketing. Seems such bashing of the French or European ecosystems is now inevitable at each and every Leweb, after **Arrington's statements** last year. Despite the rudeness of Scoble's point, he was right in that French startups don't play enough by the international rules of the game. I'd say that the lack of WW ambition in the local ecosystem and our local culture play a key role here. Only with knowing the roots of this situation can we get around it and have startups strive internationally. Below, a quiet Scoble, when using his preferred toy, his Canon 5D Mark II, used for taking pictures as well as movies. We share similar practices: same camera and same habit to do "things well" with digital photography (such as using RAW and Lightroom…).

The French folks from the TG tour were:

- **Eliane Fiolet**, co-author with Hubert Nguyen of **Ubergizmo**, a consumer electronics blog published in six languages and in the top 10 US blogs of that category. She lives in San Francisco and is also a designer. She runs her own design company on top of Ubergizmo. It looks like she was the geekiest person of the tour with Jim "Sky" Schuyler and me. She was a co-organizer of this edition of the TG tour.

- **Phil Jeudy**, from Altaide Valley and based in San Francisco is consulting for startups willing to establish themselves in the Silicon Valley and the organizer of study trips in the Valley for French companies and entrepreneurs. I did get there thanks to him. He was coorganizing this edition of the Traveling Geeks tour. Below, enjoying life with his girlfriend Sasha.

- **Rodrigo Sepulveda-Schulz**, *was* a real blogger and is now more of a Twitterer, and photographer like me. We share the same passion and gear around the Canon EOS 5D II and its wide apperture lenses (like the 70-200mm 2.8 below). He is the cofounder of the video startup **vpod.tv**.

How were these folks picked for the tour? Have no clear idea beyond that it's people who know people who know people who got there and who have some blogging influence. Whatever, I thank Renee, Phil and Eliane for this fruitful opportunity to meet with the geeks and even, with the French startups given I didn't know all of them.

My pictures from the TG days and Leweb 2009 are on **the galeries in this blog** running the custom Photo-Folders plugin.

In my next post, I'll cover the companies we've visited. My Leweb conference coverage will come later. Not real time web indeed… :).

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