

SIGMOD 2009 Best Demonstration Competition

Björn Þór Jónsson
SIGMOD 2009 Demonstrations Chair
School of Computer Science
Reykjavík University
bjorn@ru.is

This report summarizes the best demonstration competition held during SIGMOD 2009. I first outline the evaluation process and then briefly describe the three best demonstrations. My conclusion is that the competition was a success and I hope that future demonstrations chairs will turn it into an established SIGMOD tradition.

1 Submission Process

Initially, 86 demonstrations were submitted. Each demonstration was allowed three pages—two for text and one for illustrations—and an optional three-minute video.

The video submissions were a new feature. A total of 31 demonstrations (36%) were accompanied by a video. Of the 31 accepted demonstrations, 12 were accompanied by a video (39%). The presence of a video was thus clearly not a major factor in the decision. The program committee did express satisfaction with the video submissions, however, and I believe they will push demonstrators to prepare their demonstrations earlier than before.

Each demonstration received three reviews and a discussion phase was used to finalize the decisions. I would like to thank the demonstration program committee members for their respectful, constructive, and timely reviews.

The demonstrations were then assigned to four different groups. The grouping was initially based on demonstration content, but then modified to remove conflicts in the conference program. Each group was assigned to two 90 minute sessions in the program.

2 Best Demonstration Competition

Shortly before the conference, we came upon a report of the SIGMOD 2005 best demonstration competition by Mary Fernández (a short version appeared in [1]), which prompted us to revive this excellent tradition. Mary deserves special praise, not only for writing the report, but also for her extensive help with the current competition.

We formed a set of ad-hoc evaluation committees to evaluate the demonstrations. In the first session of each

group, the demonstrators were each given eight minutes to impress the evaluation committee. In the second session, the top 2–3 demonstrations of the group were given 15–20 minutes to fully convey the details of their work. The best demonstration was allocated a 15 minute presentation slot in the last session.

The trickiest part of the process was the establishment of the ad-hoc evaluation committees. In order to ensure consistency, two people attended every session, myself and Andy “Grand Master Judge” Pavlo, a graduate student from Brown University. Nathan Backman, another Brown graduate student, also helped with the preparations and with time-keeping in the first round.

Some evaluation committee members were recruited via e-mail before the conference, while others were recruited on the fly to fill the vacant spots. Several committee members enjoyed the process so much that they volunteered to attend additional sessions. In the end three people saw all groups but one in the second round, adding extra consistency to the evaluation.

I would like to thank the evaluators, who did an excellent job of understanding and analyzing each demonstration. Aside from Andy and Nathan, they were: Yanif Ahmad, Brian F. Cooper, Mary F. Fernández, Stavros Harizopoulos, Flip Korn, Tova Milo, and Lisa Singh.

3 Evaluation Criteria

Each demonstration was evaluated on five different criteria (see [1] for more details):

- User scenario: The characters.
- Technical problem: The setting.
- Technical solution: The plot.
- Integration: The sub-plots.
- Impact: Resolution and insights.

Furthermore, the committee factored the overall quality of the poster and presentation into the decision.

The evaluation committee observed that the demonstrations ranged from the results of summer internships through products of large scale research projects to extensions or enhancements of industrial products. Clearly, that difference can unfairly sway opinions, and it took significant effort from the ad-hoc committees to understand the true essence of each demonstration, beyond the various levels of refinement of the demonstrated systems.

4 Results

Many of the demonstrations were truly excellent, but in the end the evaluation committee members chose a winner and gave honorable mention to two demonstrations.

Honorable Mention: SchemR

The first honorable mention was given to the demonstration “Exploring Schema Repositories with Schemr” by Kuang Chen and Akshay Kannan, from the University of California, Berkeley, and Jayant Madhavan and Alon Halevy, from Google [2].

This demonstration featured a system that matches database schemas based on both text and schema constructs. The goal was to facilitate low-budget database development, by allowing database developers to browse complete schemas and choose one as a starting point. In addition to the search capabilities, the system had several nice visualizations of schemas that allowed the user to make a well-informed final decision. The system is expected to become part of the OpenII framework.

Honorable Mention: SmartCIS

Honorable mention was also given to the demonstration “SmartCIS: Integrating Digital and Physical Environments” by Mengmeng Liu, Svilen R. Mihaylov, Zhuowei Bao, Marie Jacob, Zachary G. Ives, Boon Thau Loo, and Sudipto Guha, all from the University of Pennsylvania [3].

This demonstration featured a system that integrates live data from many sources, such as environmental sensors, with static data to create a “smart” building that can give guidance to visitors; e.g., point students to a free workstation with the software they need. The goal was to have a cool “gadget” to show to high-school students and other visitors; this system certainly achieves that goal.

Winner: CourseRank

The winner of the competition was the demonstration “CourseRank: A Social System for Course Planning”, by Benjamin Bercovitz, Filip Kaliszan, Georgia Koutrika, Henry Liou, Zahra Mohammadi Zadeh, and Hector Garcia-Molina, all from Stanford University [4].

Their work was motivated by their interest in doing research on social systems. In order to obtain useful results they needed actual data, and they decided that the

best way would be to create their own system. This way, they could experiment with their algorithms on an actual system. The system they designed was a human enriched course catalog for Stanford University (it is also being adopted by other universities), which offers faceted search and social collaboration.

Of course, the key question was: How to get people to use it? Their solution was to add many useful features driven by actual user needs, and advanced algorithms to enrich the experience. The outcome was a very useful social system, used by the vast majority of the Stanford student population, which is also a rich source of research problems and research data.

5 Conclusions

I believe that the best demonstration competition was a success and inspired demonstrators to do their best before and during the conference. It is indeed my hope that future demonstrations chairs will turn it into an established SIGMOD tradition. I expect that in the long run it will help to enhance the SIGMOD demonstrations program.

I believe the evaluation process was fair, although the final decision was certainly difficult. The evaluators all found the evaluation process to be an excellent way to enjoy the SIGMOD conference, and I strongly advise future SIGMOD participants to take part when called upon.

Finally, I would like to thank the entire SIGMOD 2009 organization for the excellent facilities provided for the demonstrations, and for a highly enjoyable conference.

References

- [1] Mary F. Fernández. Tips on giving a good demo. *SIGMOD Record*, 34(4), 2005.
- [2] Kuang Chen, Jayant Madhavan, and Alon Halevy. Exploring schema repositories with Schemr. In *Proceedings of the SIGMOD Conference, Demonstration Program*, Providence, Rhode Island, USA, 2009.
- [3] Mengmeng Liu, Svilen R. Mihaylov, Zhuowei Bao, Marie Jacob, Zachary G. Ives, Boon Thau Loo, and Sudipto Guha. SmartCIS: Integrating digital and physical environments. In *Proceedings of the SIGMOD Conference, Demonstration Program*, Providence, Rhode Island, USA, 2009.
- [4] Benjamin Bercovitz, Filip Kaliszan, Georgia Koutrika, Henry Liou, Zahra Mohammadi Zadeh, and Hector Garcia-Molina. CourseRank: A social system for course planning. In *Proceedings of the SIGMOD Conference, Demonstration Program*, Providence, Rhode Island, USA, 2009.