

Toi Yeu Moi Truong.com

Ever since Al Gore hit us with his seminal documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, the environment has never been far from our minds. A new project is helping to bring home the issue in Vietnam.

Words by **Will Peach**.

AMERICAN NHAN NGUYEN IS SICK OF trash. Every time he gazes out of the window of his District 4 apartment he sees the sight of a littered canal.

"It saddens me to see Vietnamese people treating their environment like this," he says.

This is his inspiration for the project *Toi Yeu Moi Truong.com* (TYMT), a non-profit organization dedicated to raising environmental awareness and education inside Vietnam. The project, set to launch alongside RMIT University's Earth Day event on Apr. 17, marks a renewed enthusiasm for all things green, striving to foster collaboration among business, educational and governmental institutions.

But for self-confessed 'environmental proponent' Nguyen, the website, designed free of charge by MM Soft, is more than just a sounding board for impassioned eco-warriors. It is also, the commerce professor suggests, "set to run as a business project for the education of my students at RMIT".

◦ The Strategy

The project's main goal is to keep the environment clean and combat pollution. The website provides materials to help with this. Articles, lesson plans for teachers and activities designed to promote awareness will all feature come launch day.

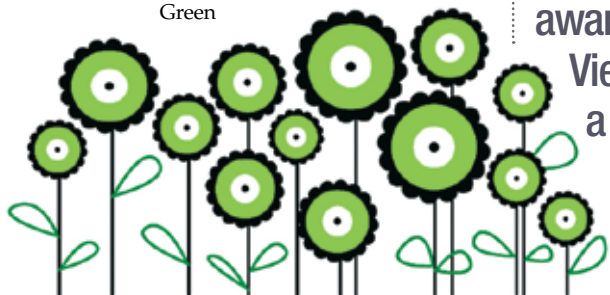
"Right now there are students working on translating and preparing materials for the launch," says Nguyen. "I have a dedicated team of about eight people, all working hard on the details."

One of the students, 20-year-old Tran Minh Nhat, is building up the management team that will run the website after its introduction.

"This is such an exciting experience," says Nhat, "and I really believe we can contribute our environment."

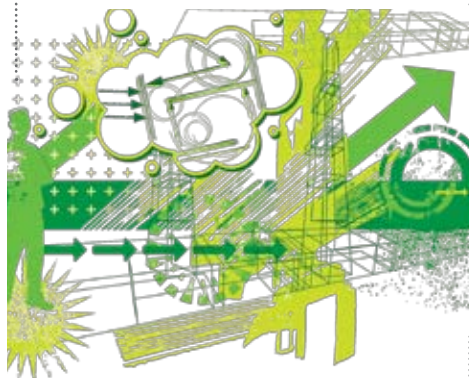
Environmental awareness in Vietnam has had a flaky history. Unlike western nations that have been running tireless 'keep tidy' and 'look after the planet' campaigns for generations, Vietnam has been largely distracted. Steve Mueller, head of

Green



Energy, thinks the reason lies in economics.

"Vietnamese people care more about what they can get today rather than tomorrow," he argues.



Mueller decided to get involved with TYMT around Tet. His own organisation focuses on poverty reduction by farming a second-generation biofuel crop.

◦ Taking Ownership

With their role in preparing the lesson plans, translating articles and writing guides, RMIT students are firmly spearheading the project.

Preparing the content has also paved the way for developing a strong sense of what to do next. Future TYMT managing assistant, Bui Thi Hong Dung, pays testament to this.

"Since getting involved in the TYMT project," she says, "I have had the chance to explore more about the environment and learn from other countries about what they have been doing to help the environment."

But why choose to educate via a website? For the students, it seems, a website is crucial for reaching the younger generation. According to Nhat this is because almost all students and young people are using the internet every day, especially in big cities. "We think the message will become clearer".

It is young people that TYMT primarily

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hopes to attract and the website's ease-of-use and design should go a long way towards driving young surfers to the page. The Earth Day event at RMIT should have the same effect.

◦ Earth Day

Designed to combat what Nguyen and others agree is "Vietnam's general lack of personal responsibility toward environmental issues", the Earth Day event aims to raise consciousness by inviting guests to a full day of activities at RMIT.

Beginning at 5pm the event is divided into two parts. The first is dedicated to giving a platform to green organizations to exhibit environmentally-friendly products in booths, and the second will showcase musical performances, environmental activities and games.

As far as endorsing TYMT, co-organiser and RMIT student Le Thi Huong Giang is delighted.

"I believe that the presence of TYMT will contribute a lot in bringing environmental information and improving environmental awareness for Vietnamese people," she says.

But if both TYMT and Earth Day are to be successful, they remain largely dependent on the public. Nguyen says the project has given him a lot of optimism and has restored his faith in people.

"I used to think Vietnam was all about money," he says. "But when I started doing it and talking about it I was presently surprised."

To get involved or receive more information about TYMT visit the website after Apr. 17 at www.toiyemotruong.com or email nhannnguyen@gmail.com. To find out more about Earth Day visit www.rmit.edu.vn. 