Making online world safer

Fed up of fake Facebook postings, bogus Twitter tweets and blogs that aim to dupe netizens, university student Zhang Lizi went on a mission.

The 23-year-old final year student began researching how he could develop a computer software algorithm to study online exchanges between netizens. His aim was to find out if online content was trustworthy, for example, tweets exchanged between two users.

What was said, if the exchange had a discussion thread, what words were used – all these help to determine if a tweet can be trusted or not. The algorithm will also look at how fast each user replied to the other, and how often, Mr Zhang explained.

He said his findings can help to distinguish genuine online users from the fakes and save an unsuspecting user from handing over personal data or even cash.

Mr Zhang’s research caught the eye of the Singapore Computer Society, which named him IT Youth 2012 at its annual IT Leader Awards last week. The IT Youth award recognises those 25 and younger for their ongoing commitment and support for IT.

Mr Zhang is the first person from China to win an award from the society. Foreigners are eligible, the society said.

Here on a student visa, Mr Zhang plans to continue his research after completing a bachelor’s degree in computer engineering at the Nanyang Technological University.

He shares the IT Youth award with Nicolas Ooi, 21, who has just completed his studies at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Mr Ooi took part last year in Appventure Challenge, a competition to design mobile applications, and developed an Android game, BeAMinister, which won the Most Innovative Prize Government Data Award.

Using public government data, gamers play cabinet ministers and solve problems for their country and fellow citizens.

The other winners are:

- IT Leader of the Year: Wu Choy Peng, chief information officer of Neptune Orient Lines.
- Hall of Fame: Lim Swee Cheang, chief executive officer of the Institute of Systems Science, National University of Singapore.
- Young Professional of the Year: Kelly Choo, a co-founder of Brandology, who shares the title with Joel Lau, chief executive officer of JustCommodity Software Solutions.

By Hellen Tan