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# VANCOUVER MEETS TED

Conference draws some of  
the planet's brightest people  
to the city **NEWS A3**

Bystanders admire Janet Echelman's massive sculpture made of netting, which soars outside the Vancouver Convention Centre, the site of TED2014. NICK PROCAYLO/PNG

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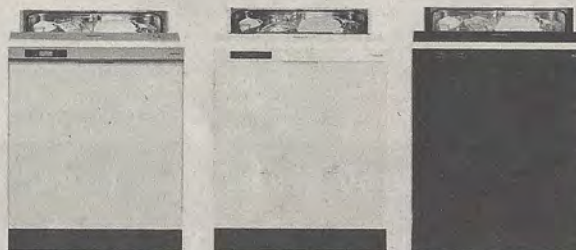
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# It's TED time: Real cool people, but kinda pricey

SAM COOPER  
THE PROVINCE



Do you know TED?

With over one-billion visits online and a groundbreaking trip to Vancouver coming up this week, if the answer is no, it's time for an introduction.

TED — meaning Technology, Entertainment, Design — isn't a person, but an idea.

Or rather a collection of ideas designed to go viral. And the idea has succeeded, phenomenally.

The concept is simple. Gather some of the brightest and most interesting people on the planet and ask them to condense their brilliance — groundbreaking theories, motivational tips, elegant observations, cool new and generally inspirational stuff into speeches no more than 18 minutes long.

There's a lot of brainpower in the room, but the product is more infotainment than lecture, more middlebrow than highbrow.

Past presenters have included a who's who list of world leaders, scientists with pop appeal, intellectual provocateurs and rock stars, including: Bill Clinton, Jane Goodall, Malcolm Gladwell, Richard Dawkins, Bill Gates and Bono.

With the motto, "ideas worth spreading" TED organizers are attempting to "curate" speeches aimed at nothing less than changing how the world works.

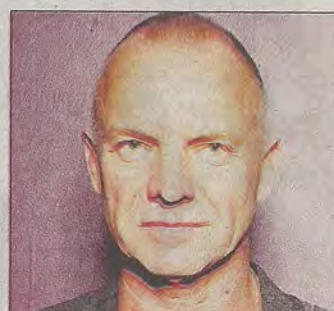
With the rise of social media and TED's bright idea in 2006 of posting talks online, this pop-university has been growing at Facebook speed.

TED talks that gain the widest appeal online do not rely on celebrity. Like Sir Ken Robinson's 2006 talk on how school kills creativity — the most-watched TED talk video ever with 23,510,221 views — they tend to offer inspiration, appeal to the desire to succeed in business and life, or uncover secrets of self-improvement. It's obvious that not just the scientist-and-philosopher crowd is tuning in.

The TED conference grew out of California's innovative Silicon Valley culture, debuting 30 years ago. This year marks the first time the main conference has left California, setting up for at least a two-year run in Vancouver.

Applauding TED's relocation, Mayor Gregor Robertson said hosting is a chance for Vancouver to shine as a "leading-edge city."

Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield (who recently dazzled the social media world with his tweeting and



Journalist Toby Shapshakat, top, is lined up to speak at TED2014 this week at the Vancouver Convention Centre, along with, bottom, from left, Melinda and Bill Gates, Chris Hadfield and Sting. PHOTOS: PNG FILES

guitar playing from space), Bill and Melinda Gates, and Sting are headlining Vancouver's TED2014. The lineup features about 50 speakers covering a variety of themes.

Hadfield launches the first capsule of speakers in a session titled "Lift-off," that also includes model/activist Geena Rocero, and an unnamed "education reformer" who works in developing nations.

Bill and Melinda Gates — who have recently funded high-tech designs for a more pleasurable and disease-resistant condom — co-headline the 'Wish' session with the yoga-practising musician-activist Sting, as well as Zak Ebrahim, a peace activist whose father helped plan the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

David Epstein, a sports science reporter; Chris Kluwe a controversial former NFL punter; cartoonist Randall Munroe; and magician Helder Guimarães lead a roster of speakers from interesting work

backgrounds.

This being an avant-garde crowd (if you're among the few who can afford to attend, don't forget to sport your new Google Glasses) there are also geneticists, theoretical physicists, cyber-security experts, "user experience masters," climate scientists, "techno-illusionists," astronomers, futurists and a "firefly expert."

While speeches will be available for free at "live-streaming" venues in Vancouver, only 1,200 applicants were selected to attend Vancouver's conference, in a custom built theatre. The price per attendee of \$7,500 makes this an elite ticket.

Not everyone is a fan of TED. Some of the world's more prickly intellectuals have criticized TED as a kind of scientific Pablum.

Nassim Taleb, a risk-management engineer, called TED a "monstrosity that turns scientists and thinkers into low-level entertainers, like circus performers."

Benjamin Bratton, a "design and geopolitics" director in California called TED "middlebrow mega-church infotainment."

TED runs March 17 to 21 at the Vancouver Convention Centre, where a massive sculpture that has been suspended outside — with soft netting engineered to change colour through interaction with viewers' cellphones — suggests a peek into the next decade or two is happening inside.

TED talks will be provided for free daily to the public in Vancouver at the "live" web streams at these locations: B.C. Place Stadium at Terry Fox Plaza; Potluck Café Society; Vancouver Public Library downtown branch; UBC Sauder School of Business, Robson Square; Langara College library; Trout Lake Community Centre. A number of public libraries and post-secondary institutions around Metro Vancouver are also live streaming the talks.

## The Top 10 TED talks of all time

(available on the TED website)

**1. Sir Ken Robinson** says schools kill creativity (2006): 23,510,221 views. Considering reasons for the popularity of his talk, British educational adviser Robinson has said: "First, we're all born with deep natural capacities for creativity and systems of mass education tend to suppress them. Second, it is increasingly urgent to cultivate these capacities — for personal, economic and cultural reasons — and to rethink the dominant approaches to education"

**2. Jill Bolte Taylor's** stroke of insight (2008): 14,343,197. Taylor, a brain researcher, studied her own stroke as it happened, and speaks about the capacity for recovery.

**3. Simon Sinek** on how great leaders inspire action (2010): 14,228,854. Sinek, a cultural researcher, speaks about why certain leaders make such an impact on the world. Key quote: "People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it."

**4. Brene Brown** talks about the power of vulnerability (2010): 12,703,623. A social-work researcher, Brown says people can learn to accept imperfections and choose not to feel ashamed.

**5. Amy Cuddy** on how your body language shapes who you are (2012): 12,682,694. Cuddy, a Harvard Business School professor, speaks about "power-posing" and the ways that non-verbal behaviour can be adjusted to make people feel, and thus be, more powerful and successful.

**6. Pranav Mistry** on the thrilling potential of SixthSense (2009): 12,068,105. Mistry demonstrates new wearable technology and software that he says will help bridge the physical and virtual worlds.

**7. Tony Robbins** asks why we do what we do (2006): 10,425,014. Robbins talks about the "core human needs" that drive people, and says that he finds out what motivates individuals, in order to help them improve their lives.

**8. David Gallo's** underwater astonishments (2007): 10,266,221. An ocean explorer, Gallo shows amazing images of deepsea creatures.

**9. Mary Roach** on 10 things you didn't know about orgasm (2009): 9,435,954. In this adult-only talk, 'Bonk' author Roach presents a history of obscure sex science, revealing bizarre, humorous and surprising claims about climax.

**10. Daniel Pink** on the surprising science of motivation (2009): 9,176,053. A business and motivational writer, Pink says that not only are workers motivated by basic needs and rewards or punishments, but by what he calls an intrinsic creative need fulfilled by the "joy of the task."