Poynter.
A global leader in journalism

Foursquare, Metro Partnership Shows How Media Can Benefit from Geolocation Apps

By l3ahb3tan • January 27, 2010

As geolocation apps and features continue to be developed, they're bringing a new dimension to the relevancy and immediacy of information. Some news organizations are now beginning to see their potential and act on it.

Earlier this week, Canada's free daily, Metro News, announced a partnership with Foursquare, an application that lets mobile users tell their friends where they are. It also has a built-in gaming feature that lets people earn "badges" for traveling to new places with different people.

Under the partnership, which is just one example of how geolocation features are bringing about new possibilities for media outlets, Metro will add its location-specific editorial content to the Foursquare service.

Those who follow Metro on Foursquare will get alerts when they are near specific locations. So if Metro has reviewed a restaurant that a Metro Foursquare follower is near, the follower will get a tip about the place and a link to the review, a Metro News release said.

On Jan. 10, Foursquare tweeted that Jan. 9 was its biggest day ever and that it had been averaging more than one check-in per second over the past 24 hours.

Foursquare is not the only service of its kind. Google Latitude, Brightkite, Gowalla and Loopt also let users share their whereabouts with friends. Similarly, EveryBlock just launched a notify-your-neighbors feature. And BlockChalk, a geolocated messaging system for neighborhoods, is

now streaming messages (called chalks) on Twitter from the Bay Area and New York City.

The National Weather Service and the U.S. Geological Survey are also taking advantage of geolocation tools. The Weather Service recently launched a tool using Twitter for geolocation-based storm reporting. And the U.S. Geological Survey released its Twitter Earthquake Detector, which is a prototype system being developed by the USGS to track Twitter responses to earthquakes.

Twitter made its geotagging application programming interface (API) available in November. This week, it launched geolocation trending topics as part of its Local Trends feature.

Mark Potts, CEO of GrowthSpur, a company that provides tools and ad networks to local and hyperlocal Web sites, said in a phone interview that he doesn't think geolocation services are the "be all, end all." But, he said, location tagging has great potential for users who want to share information about where they are located.

Potts said they also have potential to generate targeted advertising revenue. For example, he said, a business could use location tagging to reach readers who are walking by and bring them in the store to buy a product or service.

A November 2009 BIA/Kelsey study of 504 adult U.S. mobile phone users showed that 18.5 percent searched the Internet for products or services in their local area. This is up from 15.6 percent in 2008.

There are currently 54.5 million U.S. mobile Internet users who represent 25 percent of online users, according to BIA/Kelsey's February 2009 report, "Going Mobile: The Mobile Local Media Opportunity."

Peter Krasilovsky, vice president and program director of Marketplaces at BIA/Kelsey, said by phone that many people are driven by their passions and what's going on their communities. Giving them what they want, then, is key -- as is understanding that "hyperlocal" isn't always about journalism. Sometimes it's about providing people with directories and events guides in addition to newsier content.

It will be interesting to see just how news organizations take advantage of geolocation features moving forward. The ability to deliver relevant, timely and geocentric data and news to users is

likely to make location-focused apps an ideal fit on hyperlocal sites.