

JURY'S SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD



JAMSHED AVARI

Jamshed Avari won the PoleStar Award for 2011 for his article, 'You're Being Tracked!', which appeared in CHIP, dated April 2011.

Jamshed Avari has served as an Assistant Editor and Deputy Editor of CHIP magazine since May 2007. He writes lead feature articles, reviews a wide range of hardware and software products and regularly analyzes the technology industry, its current affairs and upcoming technology developments in India. He also plays an important role in strategic planning, editorial marketing and industry relationship for the magazine. Prior to that, while completing a post-graduate diploma in New Media and Journalism, he was a part-time writer and reviewer for CHIP and a few other publications and websites. He also has a bachelor's degree in Mass Media (Advertising).

“You’re Being Tracked!”

Jamshed Avari

April 2011



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YOU'RE BEING TRACKED!



Offers screaming at you to "check in" are everywhere, and all your friends are posting about the cool new restaurant they've just discovered. What's the meaning of all of it, and is it really a good idea to broadcast so much information?

BY JAMSHED AVARI

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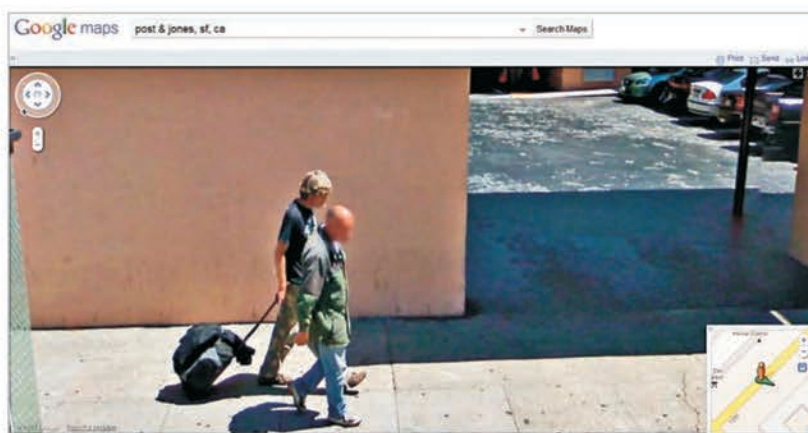
GPS started out as a military tool, then made its way into cars, and then became a killer feature on portable devices such as smartphones. Companies started seeing profits in adding point-to-point directions, voice callouts, and landmarks. Then came the places of interest: cafes, restaurants, essential services, and the like. Innovative services sprang up, turning these vast databases of places and things into guides, recommendation resources, and even games. Most recently, social networks have started competing for your precise location information, tempting you to check in or tag things and places for your friends to see. We're already hooked to the Web and to our social networks, and now location awareness is adding a whole new dimension to both, bringing them closer and making them more personal than ever.

Location information is worth billions of dollars, and every single company is betting on it. According to Google, over 150 million people now use Google Maps on their mobile phones, which is 40 percent of the service's total users. From established giants Google and

Facebook to newer names such as Foursquare, attention is shifting from the desktop to the mobile phone. Using phones and locations, companies can engage individuals on scales and at depths that were simply unimaginable before. A lot of creative thinking is going into location-aware advertising, marketing and even entertainment. People are gravitating towards these new applications not only because they're much more engaging, but also because they just make it so much faster and easier to find places that will help you get things done. Who wouldn't check in with a free application that constantly tracked sales and promotions going on nearby? Who wouldn't like live traffic updates that tell you how long it's going to take to get somewhere, in any city anywhere in the world? Which businessperson wouldn't create a listing with Google if they knew it would place them front and center in search results for people in the area? Which tourist would think it not worth it to install an app on their phone that could not only help them plan their trip better, but also provide the best tips that previous travelers have posted?

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Privacy: Google Earth has started obscuring the faces of people its cameras pick up, but is that enough?

"GEOSOCIAL" NETWORKS AND NEW FUNDAMENTALS

Google, Facebook, Foursquare, Twitter and every other big name you can think of, are vying for your loyalty when it comes to location check-ins. The systems usually rely on you using your smartphone to confirm where you are and what you're doing. The services then publish this information for all your friends to see and comment on. In the moment, it's a fun way to stay in touch with friends and share experiences right as they are happening. Later on, location tags help you recollect your activities, organize photos, and classify friends and contacts.

Location might have been just another option on top of regular social networking updates if the existing giants had caught on first, but as usual, newcomers to the scene created the kind of applications that got people really interested. Foursquare, the most widely known and used social networks primarily designed around general location tagging, created an environment almost like a game, in which users could compete to be the most active in a certain area or at a particular establishment, and earn trophies by checking in to specific places a number of times. There are other incentives to keep checking in wherever you go, such as reading other peoples' comments about a place, discovering deals or recommendations, and even meeting new people who enjoy the place or a particular feature of it. You can create to-do lists and receive reminders when you're near the places where they need to be done. Gowalla, a similar service that didn't become as popular, has branched out into

creating resources for travelers, with users creating and suggesting points of interest and optimal routes for tourist trips.

Facebook is trying to get in on the check-in action, but sadly arrived on the scene a bit too late and is yet to demonstrate anything unique enough to attract users en masse. Twitter, on the other hand, not only lets you tag your posts with geolocation tags, but also lets application developers use this information freely. Twitterrific was one of the first clients to allow users to search solely on the basis of proximity, with the radius starting at 1km. It's a powerful way to discover people close by. Those concerned about their privacy can choose to disallow pinpoint accurate location tags. Google is widely rumored to be working on its own next-generation social network, in which proximity and geotags will play an important role. The company has already experimented with Latitude, Maps, Hotpot, and its Local tools for businesses. Recent statements indicate that Google is also actively researching ways to help people find places inside large buildings and campuses where GPS signals are typically poor.

EMPOWERING BUSINESSES AND CONSUMERS

Location-aware devices, services and apps help businesses attract new users, and build loyalty with or offer new services to existing users. Location-aware apps such as Layar and Localscope pick up listings from sources as diverse as Google Maps and Twitter. Tourists and business travelers in new cities obviously benefit by being able to discover restaurants

INDUSTRY VOICE



CHRISTEN KROGH
CDO,
Opera Software

People are developing mobile sites that aren't just the same thing for a smaller screen. They're using the tilt sensors, accelerometers, and GPS functions that are unique to mobile phones. Where do you see this going?

This is getting popular, the mobile deliverables like the geolocation standard. I think that says, geolocation can be determined on the PC, you can determine location from the Wi-Fi connection and get a map of your surroundings, and now people are realizing that it's different on the mobile phone; that the mobile phone is a personal device; I carry it close to my body and I don't lend it out to people. It's personal and it knows where I am, so I can use services which know where I am and that's OK. I'd be more concerned using that on a PC, especially an office PC. I think we will see the advent of a much more social and personal web services on mobile devices than we find on the PC. We're on to something really important but we don't know yet how it's going to pan out. I think yes, you'll see applications that are aware of whether they are on a phone or a desktop; you'll see ones which aren't aware and you'll also see separate applications for mobiles and desktops, the whole breadth of options.

How are people taking advantage of smartphones, on which GPS can be taken for granted and other sensors are becoming widespread?

Exactly, you have now the voice APIs, and organizations like the W3C are still looking at that, and now what will the API be for this kind of platform capability? How do we expose it through the web page and web standards? It's work in progress really, so we're taking one thing after another. Geolocation is OK, but now we're discussing how other things are going to be exposed. You'll find that Opera is one of the most active companies in the world in the standardization organizations, we have lots of people in the various committees for web standards.



Ups and downs: Foursquare is now running a number of promotions with local partners. Other websites aren't so enthusiastic about sharing location details.

and laundry services, for example, but even long-time residents of an area who pass by places every day, might stop and try them out if they discover them to be interesting or convenient.

Café Coffee Day became the first Indian brand to partner with Foursquare in February, with a scheme that encourages users to check in each time they visit an outlet. Users get a 15 percent discount for checking in at least thrice, while "mayors", the most loyal, get a free coffee and a 20 percent discount every third time they visit. Café Coffee Day is encouraging its customers to be more loyal and visit repeatedly in order to receive discounts. Faaso's, a smaller Pune-based fast food chain, is offering similar freebies. How else can businesses create buzz? By offering

special deals that unlock only if a certain number of people check in each day, by offering discounts to a limited number of check-ins per day, by encouraging groups of friends to check in en masse, and, of course, by encouraging people vie to become a place's mayor. The competitive angle alone will attract repeat business!

Location is also going to impact advertising in a major way. Imagine receiving SMS alerts for sales, special menus, or spot discounts when you walk within a few meters of a shop, restaurant or cinema. Various schemes are being tested (both opt-in and otherwise) that would allow businesses to target customers within geographically defined boundaries. By cross-referencing existing databases (which already segregate

people by age, income, taste, and shopping history), a super-specific group of high-value individuals can be targeted, that too within specified timeframes.

Other slightly related business applications are people tracking and theft recovery. With GPS becoming popular and even embedded cellular Internet connections flourishing, ordinary people now have access to GPS tracking devices much the same as the ones that criminals are fitted with. Wary parents can keep track of their children, and businesses can track sensitive parcels unobtrusively, at low cost, and quite possibly without even the tracked subject's knowledge. Similarly, it isn't just car manufacturers who can offer theft recovery services now. For example, Apple's 'Find my iPhone'

INDUSTRY VOICE

What kind of audience is there for location-based apps and services in India?

This segment is growing day by day with better handsets popping up in the market with GPS

and social capabilities. I see users in the age group of 22 to 40 majorly being a part of this audience, considering the fact that they are at the start of their careers and are excited with the possibilities. Additionally, there is the high income segment which can afford unlimited data, and an iPad or a tablet.

What value does location awareness add to your products?

Today a lot of apps have a social gaming component to increase user engagement, in which rewards are given out to the user. It's as simple as acknowledging your location, also known as a "check-in", with virtual rewards like a picture or a badge for the user's profile. This certainly increases the users' connect with that application and surely adds value.



PUSHKAR CHITALE
Sr Manager - Developer Community, Mauj

How is location-based technology changing the way mobile apps and value-added services are developed? Who are the primary users?

It enables them to find out their location, points of interest, and their friends' locations, and share such updates with their community of friends. Airtel has a buddy finder service which works without a data plan by simply dialing a USSD string (*321*88#), which has around 110 million users. I don't think there's a fixed segment of users for this, but yes, we can bracket them as smartphone users with data plans and GPS capabilities.

What potential do you see in this space? What plans do you have to tap it?

I see tremendous potential in this space and am sure there will be a whole lot of new apps and games based on location based services making the user more and more part of the experience. We are closely following the developments in this area and will be cautious in selecting apps and games which we promote through Mobango, considering that there will be an excess of them in the coming years, and quality should win over quantity.

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service is free to all its customers. Users who register their products can trace the whereabouts of their missing hardware, cause messages to flash on screen and alarms to beep, and in the worst case, even remotely wipe the device's memory to prevent sensitive data from leaking.

THE DARK SIDE

In the early days of Foursquare, a social experiment called Please Rob Me exposed ways in which users' checkins could be used against them. Luckily there was no malicious intent, and the message certainly came through.

The most obvious downside of wantonly sharing updates about your exact location is that you expose yourself to unwanted attention. In most cases, the general public has no business knowing exactly where you are and what you're eating. Stories of people fending off stalkers and crazed exes are far too numerous to simply brush off. It's also just as dangerous to advertise where you aren't—criminals will happily follow your moves to identify times when your house is empty and waiting to be burgled. It would be easy to establish patterns of your movements and thus

target either you or your property when it's most vulnerable. Many people are already inadvertently sharing much more on Facebook and other services than they ever intended to, making it difficult to estimate the actual risks of using location-specific services. Adding specific location information to that mix creates even more scope for confusion and abuse. As with anything else, users are cautioned to check all their security and privacy settings thoroughly, and stay aware of common bugs, weaknesses, scams, and fraud techniques. 

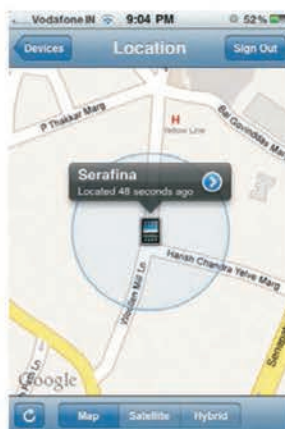
- Jamshed Avari

THE BEST LOCATION-AWARE APPS



ZOMATO

Discover restaurants nearby and get recommendations based on your tastes.



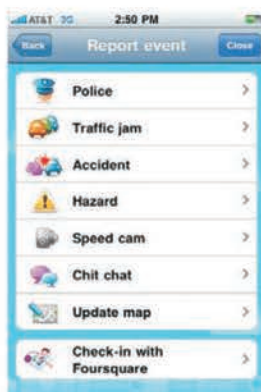
FIND MY IPHONE

Track down your missing iOS device and disable it if it falls into the wrong hands.



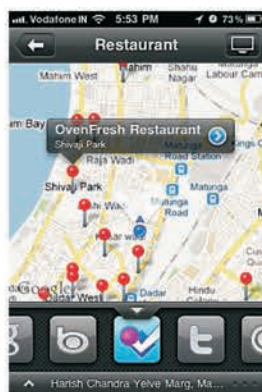
FOODSPOTTING

A visual guide to food, this one can suggest places nearby to find your favorite dishes.



WAZE

Users contribute live updates about traffic snarls as they encounter them.



LOCALSCOPE

This app harnesses search and social services to find you useful places nearby.



RUNKEEPER

Track your every movement, and calculate your progress over time.