

Location Awhere

Location Matters

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Placecast Match API

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Ask a geo nerd, or Angelina Jolie, about where they are and they may geekily come back with the Latitude and Longitude of the location, but for the rest of us it's a more imprecise description... "uh at the Mickey D's next to the Exxon". To McDonalds corporate that may be store #1245, to on campus students it may be the 'ickdonalds by the dorms' to area residents it may be the McDonalds by the university and to Google Maps it may be the business at 4151 North Central Expressway. All the same friggin place.

Now in the olden days when you just bought a printed foldable map this didn't really matter much, but nowadays in the modern inter networked world of digital maps and folks creating a dizzying array of new services helping connect people with locations, it matters more. Now within a single stand alone application like say a TomTom navigation device there is probably not much thought put into what you name a place, but in the web2.0 world where interoperability and information sharing reign, everyone needs to know what location everyone else is talking about when someone is talking about the business at 4151 North Central Expressway.

So rather than just getting everyone to try to agree on a standard, which could take years and years and would probably be a lot like herding cats, Placecast has announced today that it has developed a technological solution to the whole problem and they're opening it up for free use.

The product is called the [Placecast Match API](#). . . . and it's described as "a [Rosetta Stone](#) for location data". For those that need a refresh on their ancient Egyptian artifacts, this basically just means that they will provide a way to translate between the different "languages" that different services use to describe locations for the purposes of enabling interoperability between those services.

There is a great [article on Tech Crunch](#) that demonstrates how this problem manifested itself in the hot area of mobile social networking and the battle of the check-ins where folks may want to check in somewhere on a number of different services without having to fire up each service independently and do it manually. Given the viral and social nature of services like Foursquare and Gowalla, I guess it's not surprising that this is where we'd first see the need for better interoperability between services.

One area where this is particularly interesting is around the area of location based advertising. One of the things that needs to happen to help ramp up growth in this area is more scale in order to make hyper local and location oriented advertising finally get on the radar screen of folks that control advertising dollars. It's not that there are not a lot of consumers using these types of services today, there are... but usage is spread around among a lot of player. Consumers may look up directions via Google Maps, Yahoo Maps or Mapquest, others may rely on their Garmin or TomTom devices, while urbanites without cars may just be checking in with FourSquare, Goawalla or Loopt or using one of a hundreds of local discovery services like UrbanSpoon, Yelp, Where, Geodellic, etc.

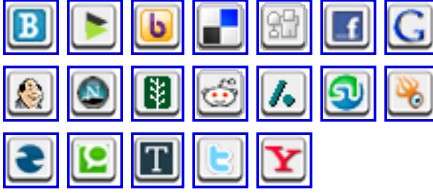
The amount of traffic to any one hyper local area on any one of these systems is likely not significant enough to create a media buy, but centrally tether them all together with a common reference point and pretty soon you have what begins to look like the beginnings of a network... a point of interest advertising network.

Putting banners in apps and on wap pages is one approach to the location based advertising opportunity, but there certainly seems to be just as much opportunity if not more around "listings ads" connecting mobile users with the businesses they're looking for from mobile search and discovery services and then capturing, sharing and aggregating the related check ins at scale across the ecosystem.

I am not saying that this is the Placecast end game, but something like the Match API and other similar offerings by competitors certainly seem like it could help spawn competitors to what folks like CitySearch are doing with [CityGrid](#) around the creation of ad networks tied to places.

What will be interesting is to see how publisher view participating in such a system and the more thorough socialization of content from their system... when the depth, richness and accuracy of that content may be a significant source of unique competitive advantage.

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