



Wed Why check-ins and like buttons will change the local landscape

May 12
2010

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Map pins and Yellow Pages aren't as fascinating as valuable connections.

by Tyler Bell | @twbell | comments: 7

Notable advancements in the geo sector -- GIS, GPS, slippy maps -- punctuate an otherwise steady equilibrium; progress in the geo world is subtle, and tends to sneak up on us without our at first knowing its significance. I think we've just passed one of these stealth milestones whose importance will be realized only after the amplitude of the ripple effect shakes the local landscape. I'm talking about the humble check-in and the like button.

On first blush the idea of a "check in" is unworthy of note -- broadcasting publicly that you are at a particular venue is neither technologically sophisticated nor particularly novel. However, the driving impulse here is what's interesting: the check-in is much more about *who* you are than *where* you are. The passion driving the uptake of Foursquare, Gowalla, and their ilk is sociological rather than geographical.

People check-in to venues for the same reasons they consciously display swooshes on shirts, Coach emblems on handbags, and glowing apples (or penguins for the more enlightened) on computing devices: these emblems communicate a facet of one's identity to the world in a facile, shared language. Checking into "Zeitgeist" in San Francisco tells the world you have roguish good looks (surely), plus a penchant for beer, outdoor smoking, and tamales. Checking into "Costco" tells the world that you own a car, and have an apartment or house in which to store large bulk items; checking into "SFO Long Term Parking" tells the world that [you check-in too much](#), and should maybe ease-off a bit.

What logo or symbol can say so much, with such brevity, about an individual? The venue makes the man.

The magic here is the expression of affinity with a business, which is where the idea of the "like" has similar power in the local space (here I use "like" as any systemic convenience to express affinity, not exclusively Facebook's). In many ways liking a local business has significant advantages over a check-in: you do not have to be on-site, you like only once in perpetuity, and your affinity for the business is not measured by the number of times you visit. Check-ins, however, measure on-site presence, a hugely important metric for any business that values feet-through-the-door.

Thus the check-in holds the most potential for point-of-sale, in-the-moment marketing ("I see you are next door; come try a free latte at our place instead"), while Likes may offer greater potential for geo-relevant demographic targeting ("Here are deals for restaurants, similar to the ones you like, in areas where you are commercially active"). Likes and check-ins are really two sides of the same coin, but unfortunately share the same curse: there is no way to realize this user-to-business affinity and the value it represents uniformly across platforms.

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