

WHY LOCATION BASED SERVICES ARE IMPORTANT FOR PLACE BASED SCREENS

Stephen Randall, 4. February 2010



Summary: Location-based services such as Foursquare, Gowalla, Loopt and Yelp are variations on a theme that encourages users to “check-in” to locations, announce their status and location to friends, collect points and/or badges for visits and even win recognition as the mayor of a venue for checking-in most frequently. As the market for these services matures, they will invariably evolve into marketing or loyalty programs and will become an engaging part of the media loop on place-based screens.

Recently, *The Boston Globe* reported on the latest location-based service to turn the heads of media mavens:

“Foursquare, the mobile phone software and accompanying website turn your daily peregrinations into a competition: every time you venture somewhere (your neighborhood Dunkin’ Donuts, or the Boston Garden), you use the Foursquare app or mobile Web site to “check in,” getting credit for being there. The person who has checked in the most at a particular location becomes the mayor — at least until someone else shows up more often and steals the title.” (“The 21st century’s version of ‘Killroy was here,’” *The Boston Globe*, Scott Kirsner, 28. January 2010).

Unless disabled by the user, Foursquare check-ins automatically send a message to the user's "social graph" (the number of friends people have on social networks), and if the user so chooses, updates his Twitter feed as well. The average number of friends, followers or fans on social network sites such as Twitter is 126 (source: *The Guardian*, 29. June 2009). Facebook's social graph is 130 (source: Facebook).

The user experience is fun and engaging, and it's obvious why some enterprising venues have started to reward customers who use these apps to announce their presence to their friends. The merits of displaying location-based services for locations should be apparent – **they are a user-generated marketing tool for the venue**. It is therefore ironic that location-based services are not designed for place-based screens at all, but for web and mobile screens.

The *Globe* article went on to mention a local battle for mayorship of Toscanini's, a well-known café not far from MIT in Cambridge, MA. LocaModa's HQ is five minutes away from Toscanini's (Tosci's to locals). As long-time fans of Tosci's and friends of its larger-than-life owner, Gus, we use the café as a lab to test new place-based social media applications. In November '09, we started testing Foursquare on Tosci's LCD screen, the first time Foursquare was used as a real time interactive DOOH application.

The LocaModa Foursquare app (shown above) dynamically displays a picture of the mayor, the number of check-ins and user tips about the café. The screen also displays real time Twitter messages tagged "Toscanini" and "Tosci."

I have previously written about ensuring place-based screens have a range of miles not feet (i.e. that they connect venues across channels to brand websites and social network fan pages etc). Location-based services are an excellent example of cross channel engagement and are therefore likely to be a mainstay of many place-based networks.