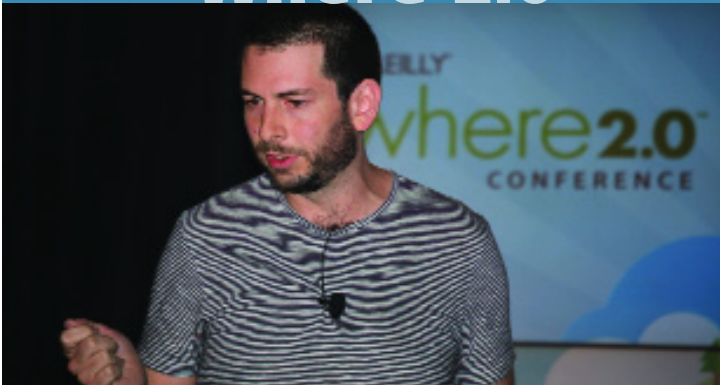


report Where 2.0



A presentation from Blaise Aguera y Arcas, Bing, really showed that Microsoft has big plans for location.

Image: © copyright Andy Coote.

IN SILICON VALLEY-SPEAK “going south” is what we might refer to as “belly up”. Conversely, our users have moved “north” of 1 million, means they now have over a million users. Where 2.0 moved geographically about two miles north this year to Santa Clara but the evidence is that it moved a “long way north” in terms of investment.

Significant announcements at the conference included the sale of Where, a start-up little more than two years old specialising in indoor positioning, to eBay for a rumoured \$150m and \$25m first round investment

of Factual, who has experience with start-ups in both UK and US markets, put it in a nutshell: “in UK, investment is run by bankers who are only willing to give you money when you don’t need it (after the proposition is proven), whereas silicon valley investors are usually successful entrepreneurs looking for the next big opportunity.”

After four years of attending the conference, I think I’ve finally got my head round one thing. It is about B2C and C2C applications, whereas the vast majority of mainstream GIS conferences are focused on B2B applications. This is of course a gross oversimplification - there are obvious crossovers. Google Enterprise is taking technology designed for B2C into B2B with Google Earth touted as the corporate geodata repository and ESRI’s recent positioning of ArcGIS online as a consumer tool.

That’s enough philosophy. Let’s now look at the content. In this first part of the story, I’ll take a look at the first couple of days of the conference and focus on what some of the biggest players in the B2C location space are up to. In the second part, next month, I will look at some of the applications and new players.

Inflow of serious money as B2C location goes mainstream

Austerity was kicked off the agenda at Where 2.0 this year, with investment in location moving well “north”! In part one of his report, **Andy Coote** focuses on what the players in the B2C location space are up to.

secured by Factual, a location data aggregator with customers including Newsweek and Facebook. My maths on the investments covered in presentations suggests that over \$200m of new investment has been secured over the last six months alone and the acquisitions in the same period have probably been worth double that. The scramble to invest in location seems to be based on the recognition (or hope!) that knowing about proximity, whether of consumers to businesses, or consumer to consumer, is going to be a significant contributor to driving next generation commerce.

This influx of money is particularly mind-blowing arriving in San Francisco from a stagnant economy with a focus on cuts and austerity. One of the biggest contrasts is in the attitude to investment. **Tyler Bell**, the product director

Ignite – “enlighten us, but make it quick” This is the curtain-raiser to the main conference, a series of five minute presentations on a wide variety of themes. **Raj Singh** from the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) did a good job of explaining one of the emerging problems of the B2C world, lots of APIs not much connectivity. He made a play for linked data as part of the solution whilst implicitly criticising OGC for failing to engage the “app hacker” community.

However, Ignite is really about the “off the wall” presentations. This year there was one outright winner for me, **Espen Systad**, the CEO of Norwegian social LBS, Origo. It’s impossible to sum up his presentation but one of his slides seems to show the struggle of journalists to find anything to write about in Norway and how location can help. Yes, the middle image (see picture, left) is a genuine underwear product you can buy through the website: Utube clip

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5XmDrUoisho>

Foursquare The main conference kicked off with **Dennis Crowley** in conversation with **Robert Scobel** on the “Future of Location”. Dennis, building his third successful business whilst still in his twenties, is the brains behind Foursquare, possibly the fastest growing location-based social networking business on the planet. Foursquare describe their proposition as “check-in, find your friends, unlock your city”. The idea of being “Mayor” of your local Starbucks was something I could never see catching on but they have grown from zero to



Espen Systad, Origo, was an outright winner at the conference. One of his slides (left) seems to show the struggle of Norwegian journalists to find a good story!

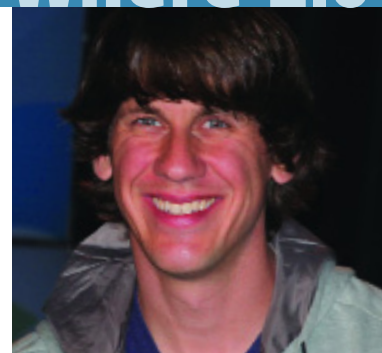
8.5m users worldwide and over 10,000 developers using their API in just over two years. These volumes have allowed them to develop symbiotic relationships with Facebook and Twitter, so for instance, if I check-in on Foursquare, my friends are alerted to my location on Facebook. They have also won straight commercial deals with blue chip retailers such as Gap and Vodafone in the UK. Furthermore, Marks and Spencer recently ran a fundraiser to coincide with the London Marathon by which, for every check-in on Foursquare at a store, they donated £1 to the Breakthrough breast cancer charity.

He was the first of many to talk about serendipity – defined according to the Oxford English dictionary as “the phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things by accident”. One example of “serendipitous” functionality, now being developed in Foursquare, is being presented on arrival in a new city with advice on places to go and things to do, deduced from your behaviour in your home city. Dennis also sees potential in “future behaviour” – using the app to tell your friends “I’m going to be in Denver next weekend”. On the basis of the theory that, with so many users there must be something in it, I guess I’m going to have to try it out.

Ushahidi Another plenary presentation of note on the first day was **Peter Meier** who is involved with developing Ushahidi, the open source GIS platform, which now has a cloud hosted version called Crowdmap. Ushahidi is probably best known for its use in humanitarian relief in Haiti and more recently in Japan. These are obviously efforts to be unambiguously applauded. However, in the latter part of his presentation, he talked about its use for activism and in particular how they plan to incorporate a “danger compass” – developed to allow demonstrators in the London student riots avoid the police. To me, this risks alienating a large body of people who would otherwise be nothing but supportive.

Google Earth Builder The other major announcement in this session, by **Marissa Meyer**, was Google Earth builder, Google’s mapping platform in the cloud, part of their drive to “productise” their entire geo platform. This product will allow customers to upload their own vector data in standard formats like shape and MapInfo tab as well as raster data, including arranging “sidecar” files (of metadata). The management functions include storage (presumably in Google’s own proprietary non-relational structure), processing (including handling projections) and styling (symbolisation and dynamic rendering). The final element of the workflow is publishing where WMS will be supported as well as Earth and Map APIs. An interesting feature is that you can mash-up Google’s public content with organisational content. The product will be available in Q3 this year. Commercials were unsurprisingly not discussed but will obviously be priced to attempt a rapid “landgrab” from traditional GIS suppliers in their corporate and government heartland.

When you add this to **Jack Dangermond’s** comments in a later plenary about ESRI having “jumped in last year



Above: Where 2.0 heavyweights, Marissa Meyer, Google, and Dennis Crowley, Foursquare.

Images:

© copyright Andy Coote

in a major way to the cloud” it really looks like game on for control of the geo-cloud over the next year.

Facebook Places I never did figure the difference between keynotes and plenary presentations but **Justin Shaffer**, Places and Events product manager at Facebook, presented a keynote “Extending the Graph with Location and Time”. For the uninitiated “the Graph” in Facebook-speak is the core of the system, providing a uniform representation of, for example, people, photos, events and pages and the connections between them (e.g., friend relationships, shared content, and photo tags). Much of what they are doing around location borrows from others. What makes it interesting is how quickly than can build “capital” using their enormous user community. They believe check-in is less about where you are but more about who you are with – so it’s the intersection of people, place and time that is of most interest. However, they are offering merchants a platform for deals based on where Facebook users are currently located and are building up a geospatial database of socially-interesting places. Presumably this means they may never be interested in data for Scunthorpe. Their approach is proclaimed to crowd sourcing-led, however, it is interesting that, although not mentioned in their presentation, they are working with outfits like Factual (see later) who are very much about creating definitive data.

Bing Microsoft has big plans for location too. **Blaise Agueray Arcas**, one of the least pretentious and deeply thoughtful of all the presenters, talked about the Read/Write World. What they are developing is a hugely ambitious attempt to integrate together vector map tiles, nadir aerial imagery, birdseye (oblique aerial images), streetside (Bing’s street level imagery) backpack cams, user panoramas, flickr photos, indoor videos, 3D models, DSM/DTMs and 3D city (CAD) models on a global scale into a single database. Their vision also includes single renderers for all platforms based on HTML5 and CSS 3.0. Don’t bet against them pulling this off; their pockets are deep and they are desperate to close the gap on Google. They appear to see location as one niche in which they can achieve competitive advantage by technological leadership and emphasising quality, completeness and currency. Their increasingly close relationship with ESRI and Navteq may also be significant.

• *The second part of Andy Coote’s report follows in the next issue of GiSPro.*



... it really looks like game on for control of the geo-cloud over the next year.

