

## "Checking In" on Location App Craze at SXSW

March 15, 2010

Starting my final day at SXSW after a night of several big SXSW events. The trend we've noticed throughout the week is that, [just as we stated before](#) [1] (and the New York Times stated [today](#) [2]), location apps are the story of the conference.

Cyrus and I have had different experiences with different SXSW attendees when it comes to location apps. While he has been around a lot of developers and tech-heads who seem well in tune to the privacy ramifications of the location-enabled web, I've been surrounding myself with social media directors who simply *can't get enough* locational data on their friends. It's almost like there are two species of attendee; the developer who knows the ins and outs of the technical side to the program so they think about the privacy impacts and the social media savant who is making a career out of sharing and connecting in as many ways as possible.

People are using location-apps used to determine their plans, for example, to see who is "checked-in" at which panel or venue and which panels are "trending." Essentially, I'm watching people jump on to whatever is the flavor of the minute and using apps to lead the way. Personal privacy and whether or not all their location data is being saved is an afterthought to the standard SXSW junkie; being able to say they're in the middle of all the action is what is driving crowds here.

Last night, I observed two sharp contrasts in crowd activities at two very different events.

At an [event hosted by PBS](#) [3] and friends (including the fine people at [ReadWriteWeb](#) [4] - the crowd was older. It was a concert and the crowd definitely fit my idea of what a typical PBS supporter looks like. Cyrus and I were two of the youngest people in the crowd. Not many mobile devices or iPhones in sight, and certainly not a crowd that was more focused on reporting than simply being and having fun.

On the flip side, social media and tech blog, [Mashable](#) [5], hosted an event that could only be described as "geek frat party". The [Mashable event](#) [6] was sprinkled with various web celebs, mixed with loud music and awash in a crowd that was nearly 90 percent male. Most of the crowd had their heads down staring at their iPhones too busy reporting where they were via twitter to carry on conversation.

The attendees of SXSW are all looking to jump on board with the next big trend. Many developers I spoke to are focusing on taking location-based models popularized by FourSquare and GoWalla and improve on them in more of "gaming" format. With both those apps having "badges" and "passports" that can be earned by doing activities in the offline world, there is a competition and gaming aspect that helps drive their popularity. One developer I spoke to is working on an application that would make a social media version of classic games like tag or hide-and-seek and use location software as the foundation for the program; he was thinking about the privacy issues he'll run into. Others are walking around creating a perfect marketing data set for themselves with every click of a button and check in of an app - and they don't even realize it. What's hot and what's trendy in the now is clouding people from thinking about what happens AFTER the check in, after the tweet, and after the app is turned off.

As I've continued to use these devices, I've actually become increasingly annoyed with the targeted advertisements on the app masked as the "special deal" flag that appears on my screen when I checked in at a particular venue. It's tough to find active users of this app who are seeing through this cloak of behavioral advertising. Most see it as a fun way to get deals on food or drink at real life venues - but I see it as targeted ads tailored to where a user has visited and is likely to go again.

What's amusing is hearing attendees complain about the amount of "junk mail" received in their schwag bags when they picked up their badges, yet not realize that the same concepts behind the mounds and mounds of paper in a canvas bag are the ones used to send targeted advertisements to

a user's iPhone when using a particular app.

I've already deleted Gowalla from my phone. Couldn't handle two location apps and I am looking forward to making a big production out of deleting my Foursquare account and trying to investigate the data retention practices of my soon-to-be defunct account.

- [SXSW](#)
- [SXSW](#)
- [SXSWi](#)
- 
- [privacy](#)
- [pbs](#)
- [foursquare](#)
- [iphone applications](#)
- [locational data](#)
- [mashable](#)
- [data](#)

Copyright © 2013 by Center for Democracy & Technology. CDT can be freely copied and used as long as you make no substantive changes and clearly give us credit. [Details](#).

**Source URL:** <https://www.cdt.org/blogs/adam-rosenberg/checking-location-app-craze-sxsw>

#### Links:

- [1] <http://www.cdt.org/blogs/adam-rosenberg/lifeblood-sxsw>
- [2] <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/15/technology/15locate.html?ref=technology>
- [3] <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=324728630747>
- [4] <http://www.readwriteweb.com>
- [5] <http://www.mashable.com>
- [6] <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=276489013406>