

Location-based services showing only the tip of the iceberg

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Isolated applications give no hint of massive legwork and explosive potential

The emergence of location-based services (LBS) on mobile phones is a much more important development than currently seems to be the case, says Wesley Lynch, CEO of [Digital](#), the [e-business](#) strategy, technology and solution provider.

"While novelty applications like Foursquare are the cause of some user excitement, they tend to obscure the explosive potential in this market. We think an explosion is imminent in LBS, with new application areas that we cannot even conceive of yet."

Waiting to see the value

[Lynch](#) says there's no inherent business or personal value in telling your [Facebook](#) friends that you've entered Woolworths in Constantia for the third time this week.

"For now it's just a bit of fun like a Tamagotchi virtual pet, but it's definitely worth watching. There's enough happening under the radar to surmise that real-world value will soon be unlocked by vendors from knowing where their customers are."

It's all coming together

The scene is already being set, he says. For starters, most cellphones have built-in GPS. "That's the first and most critical precondition."

Another key development is the recent patenting of an LBS naming system linking places (e.g. Steers in Newlands, Cape Town) to their geospatial location (latitude and longitude). Registered by South African tech firm [Waytag](#), this innovation and others like it could soon spawn new domain-naming conventions, such as [www.steersnewlandscapetown.place](#). (In this vein, Google has launched Google Places, a free business tagging service on Google Maps.)

But the most important and astounding development of all in the LBS space is the birth of Simple Geo, an LBS service gateway for developers. "With the proven scale and sophistication of data crunching of this service, in time it could conceivably track the location of all Facebook users every five seconds," says Lynch. "That means 500 million latitudes and longitudes every five seconds! The ability to process that kind of data has massive implications for location services."

One of the benefits of such an enormous data model being accessible, LBS developers need not build their own, but simply interact with Simple Geo. "This is the beginning; it will take off from here," says Lynch.

Many high-value examples

Lynch says many LBS applications could conceivably add value to users. "There would be much call for an ATM finder, traffic routing service, service station finder, travel and information service, taxi rank locator, police station finder, Rape Crisis locator and a lot else besides."

Aside from seismic events like Geo Simple, smaller catalytic developments will allow such apps to snowball, he adds. "Already, all digital photos contain metatags, including location. Your [Flickr](#) photos are accessible to any search on that community. Most new cameras let you add a GPS, allowing you to plot your travels without any effort. Content and

hardware is becoming increasingly location-aware, and privacy is less of a consideration every day."

Ubiquity imminent

In short, using the aforementioned LBS gateway and the user's location, any developer will be able to write any one of a million niche apps. Or they will be able to tie commodity apps like restaurant finders into their sites, says Lynch.

"If you want to provide a local bird-watching service for enthusiasts on the iPhone or you're a blogger who wants to give your readers a means to find the closest pizza to them, that is possible. There are some crazy LBS apps out there already and they should become pretty ubiquitous soon."

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