

ITAnalysis – The informed traveller

By Rob Bamforth, Principal Analyst, Quocirca Ltd

A recent event co-hosted by the Mobile Data Association and the Location and Timing Knowledge Transfer Network, looked at new and emerging location based technologies and applications that have the potential to change the way people and professionals plan their journeys and travel.

All those travelling either for business or leisure can get access to masses of data to plan or ease their journeys - from specialised devices to location aware smartphones- yet the question remains, are the information needs of the mobile traveller being met in the most effective way?.

First let's identify the typical 'traveller' who may be using this latest technology to guide their journey, looking at both business and consumer use. The well-equipped business traveller, once termed 'road warrior', carried laptop, mobile phone and maybe a few other tools of their trade. The consumer counterpart might be a technology early adopter, dismissively given the label 'geek' or 'techie', who buys themselves the latest gadgets, much to the amusement of their cooler peers.

As technology has become affordable, easier to use and mainstream, even geek became chic, and now appeals to a wider and older audience, many of whom have 'grown up' with the technology. Service providers have picked up on this with the growth and increasing dependence on online services for everything from electronic airline boarding passes to timetables and notification of delays meaning that all sorts of work roles and all ages and types of consumers need access to IT while on the move.

But are travellers being informed or simply bombarded?

The hierarchy of services delivered to those on the move needs to meet increasingly sophisticated requirements, similar in principle to the famous Maslow pyramid, although in the mobile case stacked by increasing value to the mobile traveller, and therefore revenues to the

service providers, rather than Maslow's range from physiological to self actualisation.

At the foot of the mobile pyramid, there is the basic need to communicate, if only in the time-despised phrase familiar to all rail travellers, "I'm on the train". At a useful level this provides a mechanism for responding to interruptions, problems, or changes in plan.

Next up the hierarchy are those services that help the traveller pass the time, the distractions of entertainment that fill those micro-moments of boredom while waiting for the stage of transport - bus stops, railways stations and airport lounges - or during long and uneventful journeys. Music, games and films have all become popular, at least with the immediate listener, player or viewer in most forms of transport, if not with their fellow travellers.

More useful, and perhaps of sufficient value to be worth paying for is information such as timetables, navigation routes and so on. The problem is that this information exists in abundance, and while much of it is useful and easy to digest while preparing to travel, once en route, it can create more problems.

For example even the ultimate guidance tool for drivers -satellite navigation, delivered by dedicated device or increasingly a feature on a mobile phone - can cause problems as congestion and dependence increases. The herd of drivers used to following instructions from the dashboard head blindly to the next traffic jam, or are all diverted down the same route to avoid one problem, and therefore causing another. On top of that, there are those who become too absorbed taking electronic orders and cause delays dithering at roundabouts or swerving off across motorway lanes as the latest instruction chirps up.

Those who are not simply passengers on a journey controlled by others and external events but want to take a more active approach to managing their route, should not be distracted or

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overloaded with information. They require useful, relevant advice, in a convenient form and this is at the top of the informed traveller's pyramid of needs. To achieve this level of simple sophistication requires many complex threads to be interwoven, such as understanding the device being used and the best way to interact with and display the information being sent. It will also need to take into account the capabilities of the network that device is connected to, and contextual information about the user – where they are, the time and so on.

Mobile devices will often be small and fiddly, the user rushed or in a challenging environment, with limited opportunity for complex interaction. In the face of all this the service provider must aggregate and present multiple types of information in a coherent and simple way. This will include different and diverse information sources since most real journeys will involve multiple modes of transport, as well as forecasting and disruption information from weather, news and traffic monitoring sources.

In theory the technology and individual pieces of data to do this exists, and with sufficient will and developer expertise, the smart tools that will really inform all types of travellers will be developed. The problem, however, is commercial and stems from the integration complexity of deciding how to revenue share between different modes of transport, and different service providers.

With so many different sources of information and components to provide a useful aggregated service, how is everyone – from carriers and hardware companies to service and information providers - going to monetize their offerings? Perhaps the world needs an open information model to complement open source software, open roads, open skies and other 'open' transport infrastructure, such as the railways? Providing the traveller with the all the right information when required is less about the technicalities of location, and more about the market realities of timing.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at

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