

Notes on the “Apps” Workshop at the DUG Conference 13th October 2010

Theme – “Apps – Delivering Information To The Mass Audience”

Firstly, it was noted that “delivering information to the mass audience” was not necessarily a correct assumption in that despite the explosion of activity around smartphones and apps over the past few years, the proportion of the general population owning smartphones and regularly using apps is probably still relatively small.

It was suggested that we are still in the very early stages of the development of an “apps market” and that it is likely to be several years before the market matures. At the moment there are probably:

- Far too many apps to usefully discriminate between quality and functionality
- Lots of “one trick pony” apps which are extremely specific and limited in functionality
- Lots of “one hit wonder” apps which seem appealing initially but are very quickly dropped once downloaded.

There was a feeling that over time, the market should focus much more on a relatively small number of high quality apps which deliver significant added value to users.

In terms of the purpose of apps, it was agreed that the main benefits of apps are entirely tied to “location” – in the sense of “where am I and what can I do here, where can I go, what facilities are available to me”.

Example capabilities in this area would include support for decision-making (getting there, parking a car, “where’s the nearest x”, location-specific advertising and similar. This requires up to date, accurate, reliable and high quality information – failure to deliver this will lead to lack of trust and usage. It was noted that most apps disseminate data as opposed to collecting data and there was a general concern about data provision – how is this funded, what are the quality and metadata implications, is web-scraping an acceptable means of data gathering?

There were some concerns about the “Asbo-meter” effect, with a focus on the negative aspects of areas – is there a danger of creating “no go” areas just because someone has built an app which highlights negative aspects of an area?

Regarding app design, participants favoured a “Swiss army knife” approach which combined useful linked functions rather than collections of “single function” apps.

There was a feeling that there was also a significant urban bias in the design of apps – this may be just a function of information versus location.

In conclusion, participants felt that the app market was very new and needs several years of development and maturation. Initiatives which focus on multi-function apps which are very location aware and use high quality, clearly described data are likely to be more popular with consumers than “one hit wonders” or “one trick pony” apps.