

Market Research Surveys on the Go



By [Gregg Lavin](#) on Thursday, October 14th, 2010

Location-based “check-ins” on mobile devices are among the latest developments engaging an increasingly connected population. Foursquare, Gowalla and Facebook’s recently introduced Places app are just some of the providers in the nascent location-based phenomenon, as mobile users voluntarily tell chosen digital networks exactly where they are, and when, and often why.

Now that the technology exists, it’s content that may make the difference in whether check-ins remain a novelty or segue into a feature as standard as texting.

The most obvious application revolves around social networking, where users let those in their circle know their whereabouts, for purely social reasons or perhaps in a competitive bent to earn a title such as “mayor” of a favorite spot based on frequency of visits, a la Foursquare. Maps are another piece of content that mobile users clearly value when checking in at a given location. And, according to the recent Mobile Audience Insights Report from JIWire, people are showing a willingness to receive ads and mobile coupons based on their immediate geographic locale.

Market research is another natural fit for location-based check-ins. Today, fully half of all quantitative market research is conducted online, and respondents are increasingly likely to be connected through a digital device. Researchers can deliver surveys that are an ideal fit for an individual’s demographic profile and, simultaneously, match their geographic location, identified with precision through the GPS systems that are integrated in smartphones and the like.

Where better to query consumers than at the point of sale? Picture a consumer waiting in line at Starbucks for a daily fix of non-fat, extra-foamy soy latte. Now imagine a consumer products company interested in gathering information about people’s attitudes toward dairy products, or their between-meal eating habits. With the deep profiles already compiled on willing survey participants, market research firms can identify individuals who have already indicated a preference for soymilk, for example, and serve up a survey before the foam is whipped by a barista. There’s a level of immediacy and engagement that surpasses that of the at-home, desktop-bound survey taker, and the resulting insights for the survey sponsor could very well rise to new heights.

With mobile surveys, researchers have a leg up on reaching hard-to-catch consumers, by catching them on the fly. And, by their nature, mobile surveys need to be relatively short and fast. It's a win-win position, for the research firm and for the individual who wants to help shape strategies or directions for favored products and services by sharing their opinions, attitudes and beliefs.

Having a voice is just one reason consumers volunteer to take surveys. Rewards are another very compelling reason, as survey respondents, or panelists, are typically given incentives for their participation. A surfeit of electronically fulfilled reward options are made available, such as Amazon gift cards, airline miles, magazine subscriptions, MP3 downloads, Make-A-Wish donations and countless merchant gift cards representing top brands.

Today, however, the rewards most panelists crave are virtual -- virtual currency for online gaming and social media, that is. With hundreds of millions playing games on Facebook each month, there's a big demand for points to fund the purchase of more tractors at Farmville.

The mobile marketplace should not and cannot be ignored. There's an estimated 60 million smartphone users in the United States right now, with an additional 80 million expected to join in by 2011. That's about 140 million Americans, or half of all mobile subscribers, readily engaging with the mobile web, e-mail, SMS or texting, music, video, Apps, social networking and e-commerce. Whether it's on an iPhone, Droid, Blackberry, iPad or a new tool yet to hit the marketplace, consumers aren't going anywhere without their mobile digital devices -- and they're letting us know just where to find them.

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