



IT'S HIP TO BE SQUARE

Mappy trails

Foursquare hot spots:

- SoHo – Apple Store (right)
- Harlem – Dinosaur BBQ
- Morningside Heights – Columbia University
- Upper West Side – Whole Foods, Museum of Natural History
- Midtown – Times Square, Penn Station



App bares hot spots

By DON KAPLAN

It is the ultimate trend-spotting tool.

A group of math geniuses has tapped into the power of social networking and apps to map out the hottest spots in town.

"There is so much knowledge built into communities," said Justin Cranshaw, one of the Ph.D. students working on the "Livehood," project, which culls data from the "check-in" app Foursquare and Twitter.

"Our algorithm just automates the extraction of local knowledge."

Cranshaw and fellow computer scientists from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh had been seeking to create a complicated profile of human behavior in cities, but the software they wrote also highlighted the most popular places, as an added bonus.

For example, on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Whole Foods is the most visited spot, followed by the Meatball Shop and Katz's Deli.

Uptown, the George Washington Bridge and Dinosaur BBQ get lots of visits, while in Park Slope, the concert venue Union Hall is tops, followed by Prospect Park and then a Crunch gym.

Other hot spots around town predictably include The Museum of Natural History, Times Square, Penn Station, Chelsea Market and Apple stores as well as Ground Zero.

"People who are unfamiliar with an area can use this tool as a way to understand the city," said Raz Schwartz, another scientist on the project.

"They can learn things based on the depth and knowledge of people that already live there," he said.

Other cities that have been "mapped" by the project include San Francisco and Pittsburgh.

Cranshaw and his fellow researchers discovered that Foursquare was a perfect tool to help them profile behavior as it relates to urban neighborhoods.

The app alerts a user's Twitter and Facebook friends to the merchants, bars, eateries and other services they use, as they use them, through GPS, in exchange for discounts on products and services.

Each of the most popular locations is plotted on a map with virtual colored pushpins.

Places where the pins cluster together are called "livehoods" by the researchers.

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