Using an app to plot environmental improvements

Dr George Roussos writes about how his team has developed an app about green initiatives in Bloomsbury

The latest smartphone technology is ideally suited to showing how local businesses are taking steps to improve the environment on our doorstep. Birkbeck was approached to undertake this exciting project by inmidtown – a Business Improvement District representing the interests of businesses in Holborn, Bloomsbury and St Giles. I led a team of staff and students from the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems, and we have now been working on the map-based app for the past year. There are more developments planned for 2013.

We worked with inmidtown to help realise its objectives to raise awareness of environmental initiatives, enhance the commercial viability of the area, and further strengthen the area’s academic reputation.

“The app is designed to show businesses how they are improving the environment on our doorstep. It will also help people in the area understand the green initiatives that are taking place.”

Mitch Steprans, Business Manager at inmidtown, says: “We’re so pleased to have worked with Birkbeck on this project and to have had the expert input of George on developing this app. There are multiple pioneering initiatives taking place across our district that we want people to be aware of and the app will be a great resource for spreading the message of sustainability in an area that might otherwise be seen as highly polluted and carbon heavy.”

The Birkbeck team will now continue the collaboration with inmidtown by adding new features to the app, such as real-time pollution information. Patterns in vehicle and pedestrian traffic will also be identified and this data will inform sustainability initiatives that improve the environment, and ultimately, the well-being of the population in the district.

Dr George Roussos is a Reader in Pervasive Computing at Birkbeck.

You can download the inmidtown eco-app from: http://ow.ly/ftUTb

Image: iStockphoto

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We worked with inmidtown to help realise its objectives to raise awareness of environmental initiatives, enhance the commercial viability of the area, and further strengthen the area’s academic reputation. Members of inmidtown have a large and diverse green portfolio, ranging from strong environmental policies and certifications to sustainable architecture. Some projects, such as zero-to-landfill policies and bee-keeping, which are shown on the app, are provided to businesses by inmidtown. Inmidtown has been awarded two Environmental Excellence awards from Camden Council.

I utilised the team’s experience with Participatory Cyber-physical Computing to help develop the app. Such systems link the virtual and physical world by enabling the integration of a user’s actions and movements. Smartphones have become the main means to facilitate such participation in the production and consumption of local data and are the ideal vehicle for the delivery of these services.

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