

COLUMNS

## Big Brother is alive and well – and he’s now your BFF

July 5, 2012



By [Alexandre Mars](#)

[Sign up now](#)

**Luxury Daily**

One of the things that most surprises me about talking to journalists about mobile and advertising is that the conversation has not changed much since I founded Phonevalley in 2001.

Take privacy. It always comes down to their idea that phones are too personal, and advertising on them – and especially using location of the device to target some form of marketing – is just too scary.

Sharing is not scaring

For the record, I do not think that sharing location in exchange for a benefit such as finding my friends or getting a discount is too “creepy” or privacy-intrusive. Foursquare is now at 15 million users and it is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of location.

A huge chunk of people in the United States would beg to disagree with those journalists. They have quietly been enabling their smartphones to find them and seem quite happy about it.

Location usage has been in stealth mode for some time and has become that much bigger through the integration of applications with the GPS built into smartphones.

We have moved beyond the concept of a physical check-in – though lots of people do use these services and cheerfully tell me they are the mayor of Denny’s or even Tiffany’s – to the widespread adoption of location as its true power: relevance of information delivery.

We are in a true renaissance of creativity fueled by mobile and location data.

To satisfy my journalist friends, I will acknowledge what they are thinking: Yes, it is Big Brother time. But this time around he is not spying on you, he has become your Best Friend Forever (BFF).

From a business perspective, developers are doing things that truly make use of the significant and distinct quality of mobile: location as relevance.

Appsolutely essential

Forget about Temple Run and Words with Friends, let us celebrate the mass-market adoption of location awareness and a bunch of apps that millions of people cannot do without:

1. Weather: Here is the case of media that makes most sense where you are or where you are planning to be. Type in that ZIP code – or share your location – and you get just what you want whenever and wherever. Can you imagine going to a television or a newspaper for this information? That is just silly.
2. Yelp: I not only get reviews for places I want to go to, I can walk out on a street and use the augmented reality function to overlay the review stars onto the world around me. The best coffee? Let us see it through the lens of my phone.
3. Fandango: This app is putting spontaneity back into my movie-going. Yes, I am old enough to remember having to go to a newsstand post brunch to figure out what was playing where – or calling the dumb number and having to listen to the guy with the ironic voice work his way through the entire damn listings of movies to find what I wanted. No more when I enable location here.
4. My City Way: Do not want separate apps for finding restaurants, movies, deals, buses – or even public bathrooms? It all comes together in this one great app tailored for specific cities. One of my ‘appiest moments was when I turned on the “use my location” function in this app.
5. Zillow and Trulia: Yes, it is true that real estate is a sport to New Yorkers and these apps satisfy their inner need to know and, more politely, not ask what everyone paid for their apartments.
6. Craigslist: This is the site that killed newspaper revenue and changed forever the concept of classifieds, but always annoyed me that I had to look through a forest of links to click to my city. Now just turn on location and I can find the deals and services that make sense to me.
7. Facebook: A lot of what we post socially has location relevance but the good thing here is that I have a choice. Facebook politely asks me whether I want to share, whether it is my

location or even where photos I post were taken.

8. Find iPhone: It is the worst scenario of all: lost my phone which is equivalent to my calendar, my music, my contacts, my emails, my photos and worst of all – those apps. (OK, fine, they live in the Cloud but I do not want to download again.) Set up this app and you can ping that lost phone anywhere and have a message appear on the screen about a reward for finding it on the seat of that taxi. It is the app insurance policy for your most favored device.

STILL THINK THIS location stuff is going nowhere? It is hard to describe just how behavior-changing these apps can be.

To my journalist friends: try at least two for a month and then tell me what your creep factor is.

My bet is that, like me, you may find that Big Brother is now welcome next to you at Starbucks, on your commute, when you shop and even in your bed. Hey, where else do you plan your day from?

*Alexandre Mars is New York-based CEO of [Phonevalley](#) and head of mobile for Publicis Groupe. Reach him at [amars@phonevalley.com](mailto:amars@phonevalley.com).*

---

© Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.