



LOCATION-BASED FACT SHEET

What are location-based sites?

Location-based, or geolocation, sites are social media platforms that allow users to check in at various locations around the world. These services use Global Positioning System, or GPS, technology from users' mobile devices. There are various location-based sites available and many social media platforms allow for location data to be made available, particularly when using a mobile device. There are many functions that can be found on most, if not all, of these platforms.

Friends and Fans — Most location-based platforms allow users to establish a network of friends and share information with that network. These sites typically allow users to see who else is at a given location so they can meet up with friends or create new connections. Users are able to set privacy settings for their activity.

Rewards — Many location-based platforms offer point systems and badges for achieving certain levels of participation. In addition, many businesses and organizations offer rewards to individuals who check in at their location.

Photos and Comments — The location-based experience is enhanced by allowing users to supplement their check-in with photographs and comments that can be shared with friends and others who check in at that location. For example, people can leave recommendations for certain menu items or take pictures of an event being held at a particular venue.

Using location-based tools as an agency

Many businesses and organizations are realizing the potential of location-based platforms. Law enforcement agencies can take advantage of this technology in some innovative ways.

Event Promotion — Add your event as a venue on one or more location-based platforms. During the event, people can receive information when they check in and you will be able to see the comments and pictures people post about your event.

Crime Prevention — Law enforcement agencies can partner with businesses throughout their jurisdiction to provide helpful, timely, and informative crime prevention tips. For example, after an increase in vehicle break-ins at a local mall, you may choose to partner with stores in that area, so when an individual checks in at one of those locations they will receive a message such as "PD Tip: Don't let anything ruin your shopping trip. Remember to lock your vehicle and stow all valuables out of sight."

Using location-based tools as an officer

Law enforcement agencies may also choose to allow individual officers to use location-based networks on a professional level to enhance community policing efforts. Officers can check in at locations around their jurisdiction and leave comments with crime prevention tips or information that relates to his or her daily job activities. This not only allows the community to see that officers are in their area but also humanizes the officer and gives a unique insight into their day-to-day operations.

While this can be an innovative community policing tool, it is important that departments have guidelines in place to protect officers and to educate them on responsible use of location-based tools.

Law enforcement officers must also understand the role location-based information can play in investigations. It is important to know the capabilities of different platforms and how investigators can get access to that information.

Protecting your community

As with all social networks and online platforms, it is important that law enforcement personnel understand how location-based sites work so they can adequately inform and protect their community. If not used responsibly, location-based sites can increase the potential for stalking, abduction, and robbery. It is important that you educate your community on these dangers and how to responsibly use location-based sites and other social media platforms.

Twenty-eight percent of all U.S. adults use mobile or social location-based services of some kind. (Kathryn Zickuhr and Aaron Smith, "28% of American adults use mobile and social location-based services," Pew Internet and American Life Project, September 6, 2011.)

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