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WHEN 'NOW' JUST ISN'T SOON ENOUGH

Using camera phones to put mobile Net users in touch with the information they want, easily and instantly

How many links are you prepared to click to find the content you want? Research shows that, with every click, a typical content provider loses an astonishing 50% of users. What is more, even this high proportion rises in the case of content that is slow to load. Today, around six out of every ten pages on web portals take over half a minute to download (that's how long it would take a typical reader to reach the end of the next paragraph in this backgrounder) and, for open web content, the time to load a page can be even longer. It's perhaps not surprising that the 'three second' generation is singularly impatient with such speeds.

While these figures are gloomy enough, the picture is still worse for mobile Internet. If half a minute has you tapping your fingers with impatience in the comfort of an office or living room, imagine how much longer it would feel loitering outside a restaurant for a review to download before deciding to take a table.

Nokia is working on solutions to these problems that will help mobile users get the results they want from the Internet easily and quickly. With 'Point&Find', people will be able to access information and services from the Internet, simply by pointing a Nokia camera phone at an object.

A new kind of 'click'

With 'Point&Find', the camera phone recognises images and uses a combination of these and GPS (global positioning satellite data) to link the user directly to pre-defined content or services on the web. The result is immediate access to the information required. Point the camera phone at a poster for a new movie to watch the trailer, buy tickets, find screening times or read reviews, or point the phone at a famous landmark to be put in touch with historical and architectural details or tourist information. The solution is able to distinguish objects – indoors and outdoors and even when they are very small or are moved from an original location – without the need for barcodes, RFID (radio-frequency identification) or other physical identifiers.

A content provider's dream

The benefits offered to content providers and developers by Point&Find are great, because they capitalise on the immediacy of the situation. Bored on a train, a traveller sees a photo of a beautiful island in an advertising poster. Later, once home, the image is already forgotten. But 'Point&Find' can instantly link our traveller – and potential visitor – with information about the destination, from tourist notes to special offers on flights, accommodation and excursions.

New services from existing technologies

While Point&Find promises to revolutionise the way in which content is delivered to mobile Internet users, it does this by combining exciting new technologies with tried and trusted devices. The service uses specially designed systems architecture, Artificial Intelligence elements, positioning technology and image processing. But it can do this on existing camera phones, without needing hardware upgrades, and does not require costly infrastructure modifications.

The way forward for location-based services

'Point&Find' was initially developed by a Silicon-Valley start-up technology company called PIXTO, which was acquired by Nokia early in 2007 and integrated into Nokia Research Center (for more about NRC, see below). For providers of content and services across the Internet, the promise of the service lies as much in its speed of delivery as in its utter simplicity. While capturing the image of an object is something every camera phone user knows how to do, 'Point&Find' is able to use this image to take people instantly to the content they want, with one – or maybe zero – further clicks. The days of patient waiting for information are over and, instead, the race is on to see whose information makes it onto users' screens first.

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