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UpMyStreet Conversations: Mapping Cyber to Space

Tom Coates, Matt Webb & Stefan Magdalinski

April 22 - 25 2003

Westin Hotel, Santa Clara, CA



UpMyStreet Conversations

[CONTACT US - UPMYSTREET SOLUTIONS](#)

[Information](#) [Find My Nearest...™](#) [Classifieds](#) [Conversations](#)

Conversations near to [Go](#)

Conversations
Meet people living in your area and discuss local issues

[Your tracked conversations](#) | [Start new conversations](#)

You are logged in as [Top Cat](#) ([logout](#))

You are in Cambridge, CB4.

Show me conversations posted to in the last...[24 hours](#) [1 week](#) [1 month](#) [3 months](#) [1 year](#)

Conversations near to Cambridge
[Moving to Cambs - ideas for ways to meet people?](#)
Last post: April 21, 2003,
Posted by: [upwards & onwards](#)
[Moving to Cambridge... can you help?](#)
Last post: April 12, 2003,
Posted by: [yoyo](#)
[Indie Social Life in Cambridge](#)
Last post: April 22, 2003,
Posted by: [mange](#)
[Best restaurants in Ely](#) (4)
Last post: April 13, 2003,

Moving to Cambs - ideas for ways to meet people?
This conversation is in **CB1 1XX** (?) You can [track this conversation](#) (?)
Help keep this site useful, informative and fun - if this thread is inappropriate, [let us know](#)
Moving from S.London to Cambridge to start a new job from mid June. 27 year old woman - keen on socialising etc. Do you know of any good places to go and ways to make new friends? Cheers for your info.
[LizEdwards](#), April 1, 2003, 4:13 pm from [Cambridge CB1](#) (less than 200 yards from this conversation)
Welcome to Cambridge! It's a great place to live. I've been here for almost a year now and have no plans to leave. Although I do need to try and find a decent job. There are lots of great pubs in Cam, especially in the summer with bear gardens :)
apple of theaters.
close in London.

Man shot on Randolph Ave
This conversation is in **W9 1XX** (?) You can [track this conversation](#) (?)
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I've just had a visit from the police about 10:30, in the section of the road because it's right near where the victim was shot or someone he knew. How
[JenR](#), April 13, 2003, 12:03 pm from
I walked along Randolph Avenue and the avenues were cordoned off and the police said 'Someone has been shot'. Did the police indicate where this was a random incident this morning - though I noticed the station. The cigarette hanging from the victim's mouth.

BOOK CLUB
This conversation is in **N16 7XX** (?) You can [track this conversation](#) (?)
Help keep this site useful, informative and fun - if this thread is inappropriate, [let us know](#)
Hi.
Used to be in a really good bookclub that fell to pieces - those involved were scattered across London, which meant that invariably one would spend a Sunday afternoon each month traipsing across over to x only to find that three others from the group had bothered to brave the elements. But when we were together in force it was great fun, so I wanted to know if anyone wanted to kick one off in Stokie...could have it every four weeks in a pub on Church Street(?). All welcome - my nickname was Low Brow - but they still had me reading Hesse! ANYone fancy giving it a go?
[leo_beattie](#), December 5, 2002, 11:36 am from [Hackney N16](#) (less than 200 yards from this conversation)
I do as long as it wasn't all Dostoevsky and Dante (especially after a hard day at work) Never actually been to one before but would be keen to try it out.
[Olyvia](#), December 5, 2002, 5:31 pm from [Hackney N16](#) (1 mile from this conversation)



**“What happens
when you tie web
social software to
precise physical
locations?”**



I. Some background on UpMyStreet:

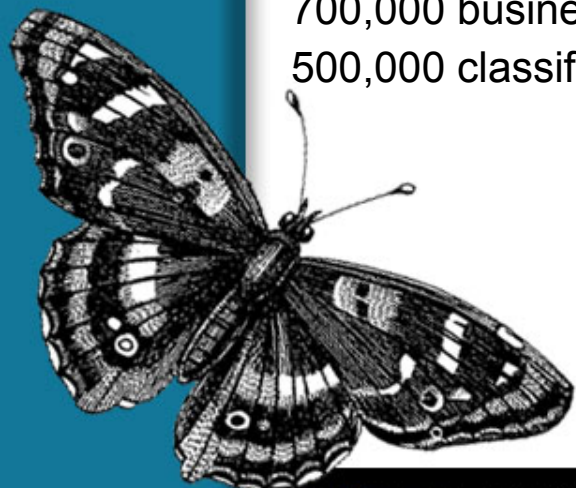
UpMyStreet is a UK-based local information publisher.

Information on
1.7 million different
postcodes

500 different statistics

700,000 business listings

500,000 classified ads



The real-life guide
to your neighbourhood

[About UpMyStreet](#) | [Contact us](#)

Enter your postcode or town
eg: n8 7rs or York

Conversations
UpMyStreet Conversations is a new kind of online forum that allows you to talk to people in your area - and around the country. Discuss local issues, from crime rates to catchment areas - or join a local mothers' group, or cricket team.

Politics
Who represents you? Find out who they are and how to contact them.

Find My Nearest...™
Our comprehensive local directory of shops and services near you.

Childcare
A daily updated list of registered childcare, from birth to aged 12.

 **Solutions** For information on our [Public Sector and Corporate Solutions](#) click hereThe information here comes from several sources and is not infallible. Make sure you read our [Terms of use](#) and [Privacy policy](#) before using the site.

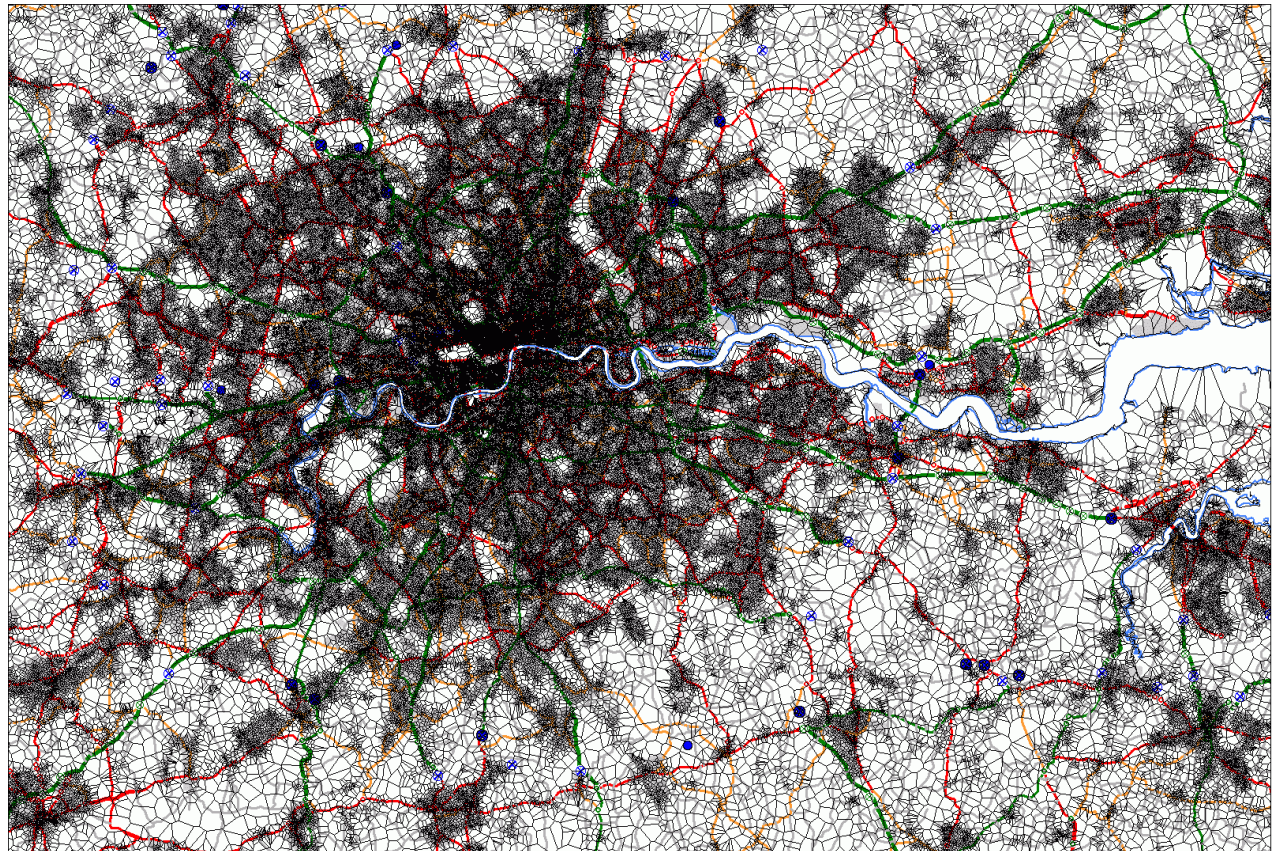
How do we geocode?

UK postcodes:

- WC1A 1UP (for example)
- There are 1.7 million postcodes in the UK
- On average a postcode covers *14 houses*
- They refer to only one area (street names don't - there's more than one "Oxford St" in the UK)
- They are small enough to group similar neighbours, large enough to be anonymous.
- Meaningful structure: **WCIA** contains **WC1A 1** contains **WC1A 1UP** (and people know this)
- Everyone knows their postcode (and we support 70,000 placenames in case they don't)



Postcode density around London



Postcode density close up...



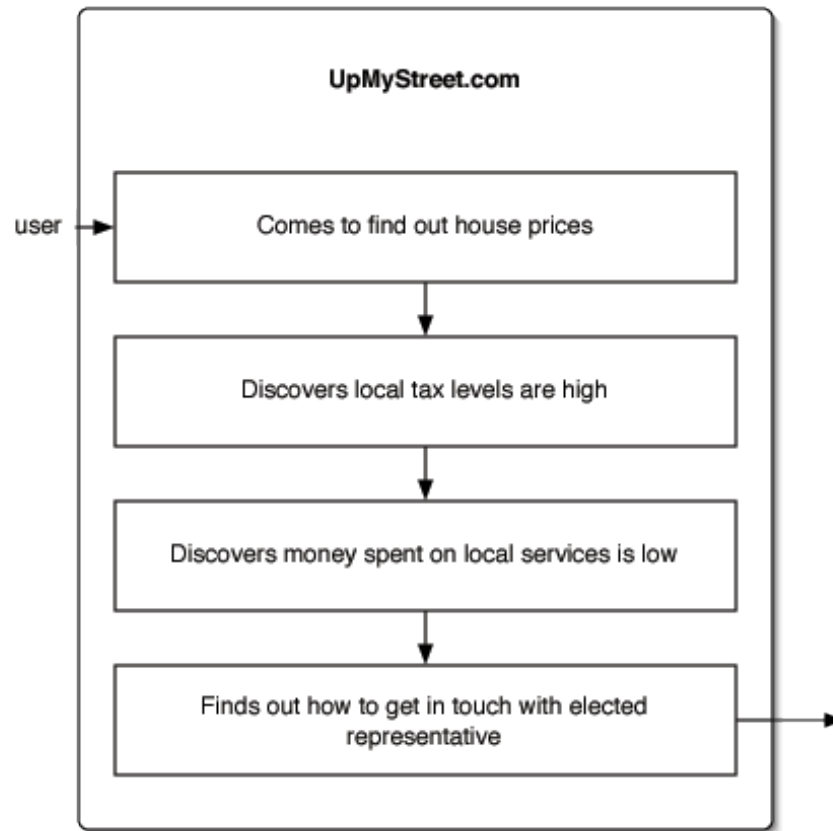
Aside: not the same as ZIP codes

- There are only 33,000 5-digit ZIP codes in the US
- On average a ZIP code contains 8,600 people
- The higher resolution ZIP codes aren't well known to the general public yet



UpMyStreet Ethos

Civic engagement starts locally...



A local site for local people?

ACORN profile

[About the data](#)

This description is intended to illustrate likely consumer preferences and behaviour and does not describe a specific locality or its residents. Please note, it may not always be entirely accurate for your postcode. You should not base important decision-making on the ACORN classification alone.

Type 22: Academic Centres, Students and Young Professionals (0.6 per cent of the population live in this ACORN Type)

Likely characteristics

These are predominantly student areas. In addition to students, there are people who work in higher education and young professionals. They are cosmopolitan areas located near universities. ACORN Type 22 neighbourhoods are found all over Britain, but the highest concentration is in Oxford.

Heavy ITV viewing	Low	Ownership of stocks and shares	Low
Microwave purchases	Low	Buying home with a mortgage	Medium
2+ Car Ownership	Low	Population Aged 0-14	Low

[Full profile](#)

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How do we get them talking to each other?



II. UpMyStreet Conversations

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[Information](#) [Find My Nearest...™](#) [Classifieds](#) [Conversations](#)

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[JenR](#), April 13, 2003, 12:03 pm from [W9 1XX](#) (less than 200 yards from this conversation)

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[leo_beattie](#), December 5, 2002, 11:36 am from [Hackney N16](#) (less than 200 yards from this conversation)

I do as long as it wasn't all Dostoevsky and Dante (especially after a hard day at work) Never actually been to one before but would be keen to try it out.

[Olyds](#), December 5, 2002, 5:31 pm from [Hackney N16](#) (1 mile from this conversation)



What is Conversations?

- Geocoded Message board
- Every threaded conversation has a specific geographical location.
- Designed to help you “meet you neighbours and discuss local issues”.



Walkthrough (1)

1) You locate yourself by typing in a postcode

Information	Find My Nearest...™	Classifieds	Conversations
Conversations near to W9 2EG Go			



Walkthrough (2)

2) when you start a conversation in that postcode it's like putting a flag in the ground.

You are logged in as [Top Cat](#) ([logout](#)) [Start new conversation](#)

Start a new conversation

Advertising goods or services on UpMyStreet Conversations is not permitted.

Subject:

Postcode: (?)

Message:



Walkthrough (3)

3) people in neighbouring areas see their nearest conversations

You are logged in as [Top Cat](#) ([logout](#)) [Start new conversation](#)

You are in Westminster, W9

Show me conversations posted to in the last: [24 hours](#) / [week](#) / [fortnight](#) / [month](#) / [year](#) (?)

Conversations near to W9	Distance
Private Spanish Tutors (2 replies) Last post: April 14, 2003, 12:30 pm Posted by: JoHill	< 200 yards
My new Conversation... Last post: April 24, 2003, 6:28 am Posted by: Top Cat	< 200 yards
Where to buy a protective glass top for a desk? (1 reply) Last post: April 10, 2003, 12:09 pm Posted by: annad	< 200 yards
Spotted any celebrities in Maida Vale? (7 replies) Last post: April 16, 2003, 10:03 pm Posted by: Max Christian	< 200 yards



What kinds of Conversations are people having?

- Organising real-world social events
- Information Gathering about other areas
- Organising and debating local politics
- Debating national interests with their local communities.



Why now?

- The online discussion of real-world stuff is not new... There are loads of implementations of discussion that serve these purposes...
- The concept of location-aware content or geocoded content isn't new either, although it is coming into its own now...
- But in order to pull those two things together, you need UBIQUITY...



III. So what happens to...

- Privacy?
- Time?
- Moderation?



Privacy 1 - peoples' locations

If privacy wasn't an issue we'd display where people live exactly. It would give other people on the board useful information which they could use to put your comments in perspective. But it would also reveal where you lived.

Information about Max Christian

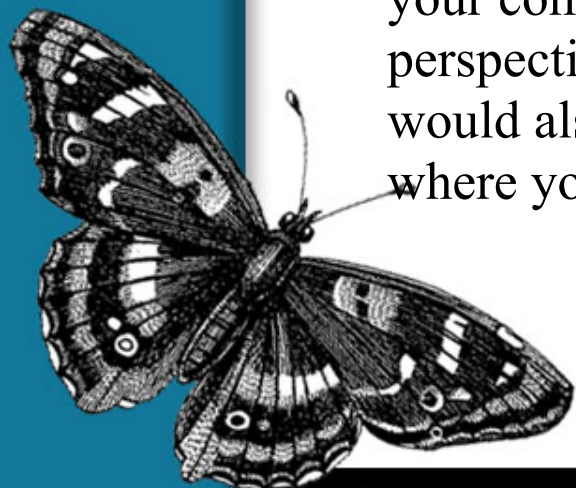
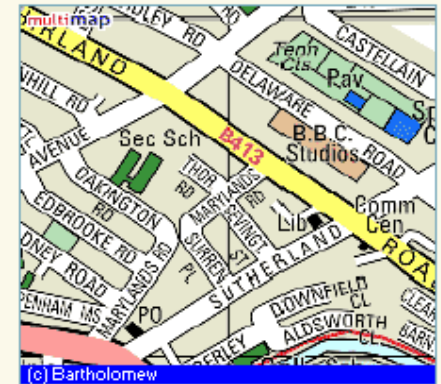
E-mail : upmystreet@maxuk.net

Location : [Westminster NW8](#) (see map)

User since : March 17, 2003

Send a private message to this user: (?)

You have private messaging turned off.



Fix: We drew the focus out to a larger, named district.

Privacy 2 - proximity to conversations

Hi there. Can anyone recommend a good carpenter in the Kentish Town area. I've ripped out my kitchen and the person supposed to come in and fit the new one has blown me out. Thanks.

[Benj](#), March 25, 2003, 4:31 pm from [Camden NWS](#) (less than 200 yards from this conversation)

Users get a lot of value in knowing how close other users are to conversations and make judgments based upon locality. But what happens if the board says you're 0 yards from a postcode?

Fix: We instituted a level of obfuscation for those who are 'less than 200 yards' away.



Privacy 3 - location of conversations

It's important that users understand that each conversation has a specific location. But if you're encouraging people to talk about their home postcode, they can inadvertently reveal their location when they post...

Loving home wanted for Border Collie

This conversation is in **NR32 4XX** (?) You can [track this conversation](#) (?)

Help keep this site useful, informative and fun - if this thread is inappropriate, [let us know](#)

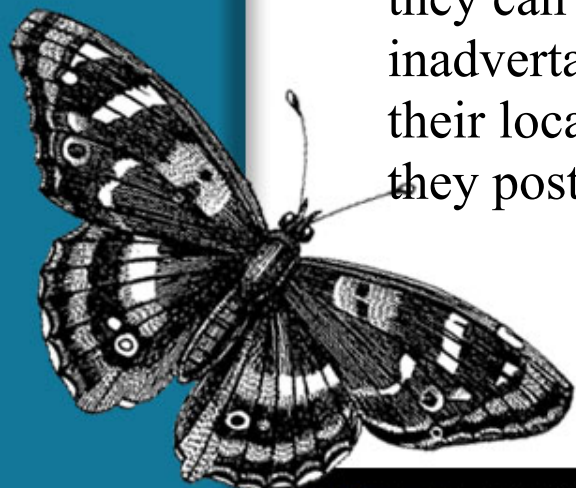
We have a 31/2 year old Border Collie we need to rehome as we are relocating and moving in to rented accommodation soon.

He has been brought up with 2 children from birth and loves being around kids. He is full of energy and never stops and is very obedient.

If any one can offer him a good home with a good sized garden, where he can get a lot of attention and fuss, we would like to here from you.

[mf2003](#), March 2, 2003, 12:57 pm from [WaveneyNR32](#) (less than 200 yards from this conversation)

Fix: To gesture to the tight granularity, we had to just conceal the last two postcode characters.



Geocoding and Privacy...

All sites that geocode user-generated content have to think long and hard about how to protect their users from real-world abuse...



Time (& Space) 1

The Axis of “Then” & “Now”

NewFindMy SpaceNotifyTools

» You are not logged in. [Login](#) or [register](#)

	Topic	Topic Starter	Replies	Views	Rating	Last Post
	Infopop Moving To New Office This Weekend	Ted O'Neill	10	864		March 25, 2003 12:24 PM by April Graves
	UBB.classic version 6.5.0 released.					
	Inner Circle Affiliate Program Launched					
	Infopop Quoted in Customer Service Newsletter					
	Some Product Offering Changes					
	UBB.threads version 6.2.1 released					
	UBB.classic 6.4.0.1 released					
	Infopop Forums Adopt New UI					
	Discuss Behind the Scenes					
	UBB.classic 6.4 released to the Member Area					

MetaFilter
the Plastic.com it's okay to like

Thursday, April 24, 20038:35 AM PST

[Home](#)[Archives](#)[MetaTalk](#)[Login](#)[About](#)[New User](#)[Search](#)[Donate](#)

17147 members

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» collapse

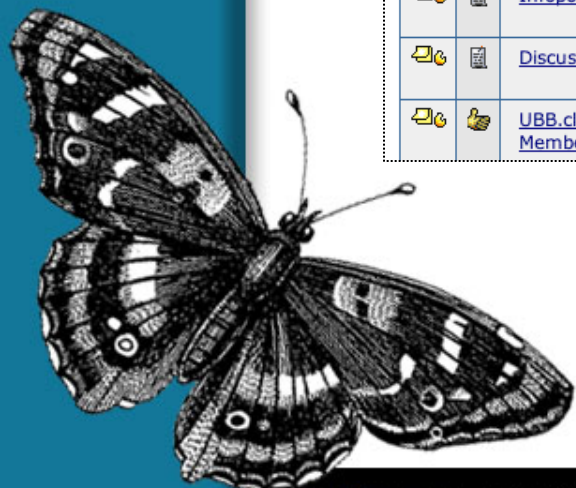
MetaFilter is a community of users that find and discuss things on the web. The topics run the gamut, and tend to run intelligent and civil. If it's your first time here, hang out, and get a feel for the place.

MeFi: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#) years ago.

April 24

Dog Survives Car Crash, Gunshot, Freezer... My dog, on the other hand, wets herself when I raise my voice.
posted by [vito90](#) at 7:35 AM PST - [7 comments](#)

Library of Congress celebrates its 202nd birthday . Today, the Library of Congress celebrates its 202nd birthday. On April 24, 1800, President John Adams approved the appropriation of \$5,000 for the purchase of "such books as may be necessary for the use of congress."
The books, the first purchased for the Library of Congress, were ordered from London and arrived in 1801. The collection of 740 volumes and three maps was stored in the U.S. Capitol, the Library's first home. President Thomas Jefferson approved the first legislation defining the role and functions of the new institution on January 26, 1802.
Check out, **Jefferson's Legacy: A Brief History of the Library of Congress** and **a Concordance of Images** for more.
posted by [Blake](#) at 6:16 AM PST - [9 comments](#)



Time (& Space) 2

The Axis of “There” & “Here”

- UpMyStreet Conversations
fundamental principle: Show me X
nearest posts to Y location...

Conversations near to W9 2EG

[Spotted any celebrities in Maida Vale?](#) (7 replies)

Last post: April 16, 2003, 10:03 pm

Posted by: [Max Christian](#)

[Private Spanish Tutors](#) (2 replies)

Last post: April 14, 2003, 12:30 pm

Posted by: [JoHill](#)

[Man shot on Randolph Ave](#) (5 replies)

Last post: April 16, 2003, 7:09 pm

Posted by: [Jen R](#)

[gardeners](#) (5 replies)

Last post: April 15, 2003, 2:56 pm

Posted by: [RobinV](#)

[Can anyone recommend a GP in W2?](#) (1 reply)

Last post: April 15, 2003, 3:19 pm

Posted by: [korin](#)

Distance

< 200 yards

< 200 yards

700 yards

800 yards

1 mile

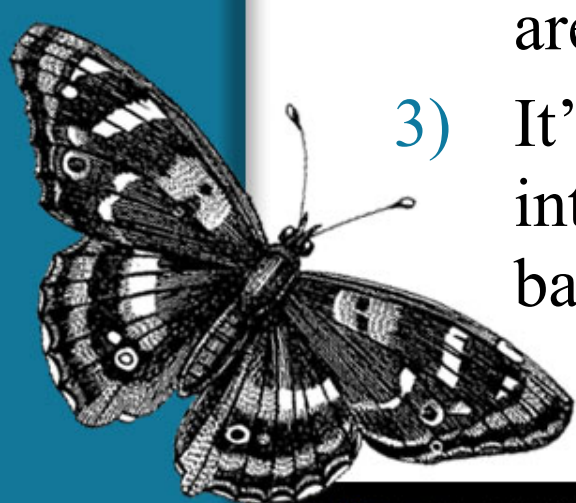


Time (and Space) 3

What happens when you lose time

But if you lose time as a primary axis you lose some really valuable things...

- 1) Users aren't directed to new threads and don't know when threads they're interested in have been updated.
- 2) The unpopular threads don't vanish - users are surrounded by the “wall of boringness”
- 3) It's easy to lose threads that are active and interesting just because people have posted bad threads near to you.



Time (and Space) 4

Ways of compensating...

- 1) **Thread-tracking:**
“subscribing to Conversations” - a useful list of threads organised by last-updated. Threads are not lost, people can see when things change.
- 2) **Flagging number and time of replies:**
Trying to draw people’s attention to when threads have been updated.
- 3) **E-mail alerts:**
By default people are informed by e-mail (aggregated once a day) if their conversations have been updated.

We built in things to mitigate these effects of time no longer being the primary axis, but we still needed to reintroduce some aspect of temporal organisation...



Time (and Space) 5

Reintroducing time

“Show me X nearest conversations to Y location **last updated within time T**”

This principle is integrated into the board as this piece of navigation:

Show me conversations posted to in the last: [24 hours](#) / [week](#) / [fortnight](#) / [month](#) / [year](#) (?)

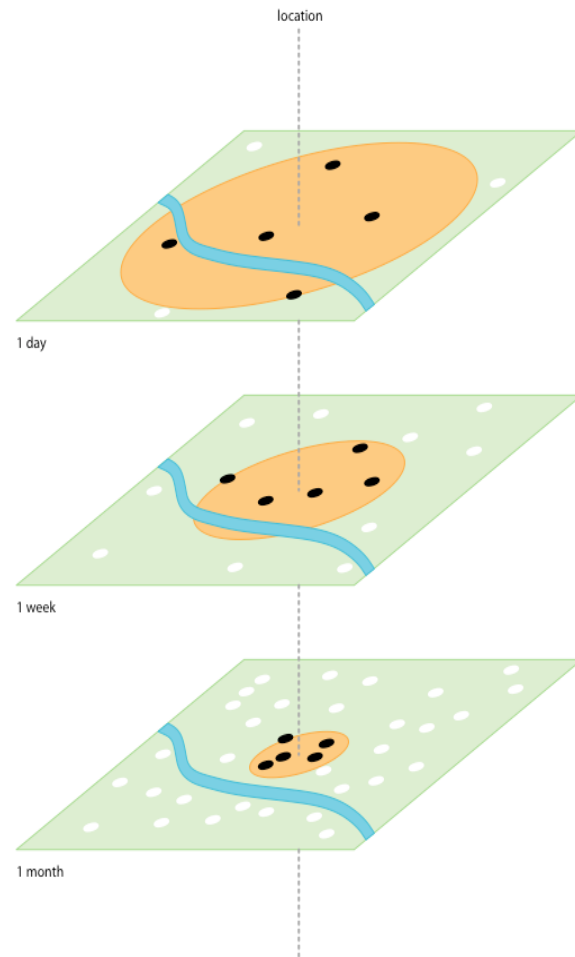
This reintroduces time - but as a filter. People can choose to track updated conversations by switching to shorter time-frames and find lost conversations by extending to longer. They can also choose their own levels of thread ‘freshness’.



Time (and Space) 6

The Axis of “Here” & “Now”

- Two extremes of the axis:
 - Very RECENT over a large area.
 - Very LOCAL over a longer period of time.



Geocoding and Time...

If you remove time as a primary axis by which to structure any online community, you have to find ways to compensate. Be warned, these may have side effects!



Moderation 1 - Local problems

- 1) There's no default view which a moderator can share with all the site's users - this makes it hard to prioritise problems on the board.
- 2) The message board is potentially vast - a large volume of posts country-wide still wouldn't overwhelm a local community's discussions.
- 3) Different standards for appropriate behaviour will emerge in different geographical areas (an interest-centered site is more likely to attract similar attitudes).
- 4) A loud troublemaker in a small area can completely pollute that area's perception of the board as a whole.



Moderation 2 - Local solutions

- 1) In order to be able to find the problems, we have to partially rely on local people to tell us about them. Alerts process - “Help keep this site useful, informative and fun - if this thread is inappropriate, let us know”
- 2) To help people set their own local standards of behaviour and governance we have developed a system of distributed moderation. The core of this is a process of “Find My Nearest Moderator”.

Local problems have local solutions



Geocoding and Moderation...

The moderation problems that emerge when you make a community operate on a local level can really only be solved by devolving moderation down to the local level as well...



IV. So... what's next?

- What else can be done with this kind of message-board...
 - Mother & Baby
 - Political Activism
 - Networks of fans



How could we extend this kind of model into other areas?

Local calendars that show upcoming events collaboratively edited and tailored to your area

Helping to bridge online / offline groups

Providing spaces for geocoded forums to collide different levels of space or geo / interest



A final word (from Stef)...

“The future of projects on the internet (and geocoded projects are the first good example) is to be enmeshed with the real world not parallel to it.”

And we'll end with a quick reminder of the conditions that allow sites like this to start to emerge now:

Models exist for discussion about the real-world..
We have experience and models for geocoding..

AND NOW...

We have enough people online to make combining those things practical.



Lame ending...

SO GET BUILDING!



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<http://forums.upmystreet.com/>

tom@plasticbag.org
matt@interconnected.org
stefan@upmystreet.com

