Geo-history, and an Age Gap

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A short while ago, I was in the Picasso museum in Barcelona, which, while it was a delightful experience, was ever-so-slightly marred by the fact that we had not ordered enough tour headsets for our group. To rectify this, we would have to go back down to the reception, wait in line for an indefinite amount of time, possibly to be told that there weren't any left. So, we decided to continue along without them, using art and history sites, mainly to find out about the individual pieces in the Las Meñiñas collection and more about Picasso's time in Barcelona. It was fascinating and we learnt so much, but I did wonder why in this day and age, I couldn't just download an app on my phone to help me out a bit, without me having to collate all the information myself on the go.

A week later, I met Peter and Mike. They're on the Falmouth Launchpad programme and are creating an app called *Now and Then*, which does exactly what I needed in Barcelona and possibly a bit more.

Peter Kaela was doing a maths degree, competently but unsure where he would go after it was finished, when he discovered Falmouth Launchpad. He was interested in business and was really interested in getting a masters degree, while starting a business and getting paid for it tax-free. He felt like the Launchpad programme sounded almost too good to be true but he knew it would work out for him once he had come to Cornwall for an interview and chatted to the people behind the scenes.

Mike Robinson is retired – many times over. He describes himself as a serial entrepreneur, and seems unable to sit still. He seems to love working and moving and just doing things. Mike came to Falmouth after being told by his wife that this previous job took him away too often at the weekends and the Launchpad programme seemed a good way for him to create something that was really needed.

Peter and Mike

With their age gap and seemingly very different life experiences, they might sound like a mismatched couple, but chatting to Peter and Mike, it's easy to see why this a partnership that works – and well.

Both of them are willing to learn from each other, and both of them see the potential of what could be a global app.

Now and Then will be geo-locating, and will alert users to walks, attractions and events in the area they're in at the time. It will provide offers and incentives to visit museums and other areas of interest, with ready-made content in the form of audio tours, pictures and video to guide users through the places they're touring.

It's also not just attractions within buildings that Peter and Michael want to promote, but also walks within local areas, with archive content that you otherwise wouldn't have access to. Mike says there's a plan to release that content to the public rather than have it stored away in an unseen or untouched archive.

Now and Then will not generate its own content, rather, it sees itself as more of a collator of existing content, which is already readily available at attractions but occasionally inaccessible due to faulty equipment or not enough of it.

Peter says he expects the app to be beneficial in more ways than one – and hopes for it to one day replace the walking headset tour that is so often the mainstay of the attraction. This, Mike says, will be easy and accessible but also with more content that the user has control over. It will also – in the long run – save the attraction money.

Headsets need maintenance and charging up and they cost money to replace. An app on the other hand, is infinitely cheaper to maintain once it's been developed and more accessible to a growing part of the community.

Peter says: "The content and media can also be easily updated as things change, and will benefit the area that is being promoted."

"There are lots of people interested in history in the world," says Mike, "Every town you go to has a history archive, with audio, video and pictures. But, in order to get to this, you have to go into the archive, and there's quite a bit of it. Volunteers have to trawl through all of this content when a tour needs to be created, which can be a slow process and a changing one. This could be easily solved by the relevant content being uploaded to *Now and Then* and used as a walking tour around the attraction."

He believes the app will be infinitely more convenient to the user, making it a better experience that is likely to mean increased visits.

The first possible tour the app has uploaded is a walk around the graveyard where Isambard Kingdom Brunel was buried, among other people of note. The Falmouth Historic Society, and other stakeholders, created an historic walk around the graveyard, using people dressed in period costumes, telling the stories of the remarkable people buried in the graveyard. This will all be recorded by the team and then all the media uploaded and written up for download on *Now and Then*.

Based on what you've said you like, routes in your area will be recommended to you, and also based on your location. Peter explains that the other good thing about the geo-location is you wouldn't be able to do a tour of a Cornish musem, while sitting in Yorkshire. This, Michael and Peter hope will increase footfall to attraction area and therefore also revenue to those attractions.

Another useful feature of *Now and Then* will be that the tours can be downloaded ahead of time and used without data, which means that there's no question of being caught out by dodgy broadband or mobile signal, if you're slightly organised ahead of time.

The content will cost a nominal fee, if the content creator wants to charge for it, so there is minimal disruption and expense to the end user.

On research, the creators found that it's families who need things to do at weekends, and this app is hoping to be the saviour of boredom. After downloading the app, depending on your location, the app will buzz you with information on tours, walks or offers close to you, to help you decided how to spend your time.

And finally, within the app, there'll be a scrap-book feature, which would help people remember their experiences, which they'll also be able to share on social media with friends and family.

The challenge for the team now, is the work that needs to be done to get the app up and running. There are quite a few relationships to be created as well as databases to ensure the content is available once beta testing is ready to start. They've got to do all of this, while working towards their master's degrees, which they'll graduate from next May.

After the incubation period, *Now and Then* will go into the acceleration phase with hopefully a host of attractions, walks and deals under its belt, ready to deliver to the public. I, for one, wish they'd hurry up, so I can go back to the Picasso museum with an easier walk around.

By Feyaza Khan

Launchpad

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