

Adobe and Yahoo! offer voice and location tools

By Mary A. C. Fallon | on March 06, 2008

Adobe Systems and Yahoo!'s Brickyard will offer developers new programming tools and Web services for creating content-driven communications and location services, and start-up company Bug Labs announces a new, easier way to build electronic gadgets for niche and custom uses.

Adobe engineering manager Danielle Deiber invited a packed meeting room of developers at the O'Reilly Etech conference here the opportunity to apply for the pre-release, private beta of Pacifica (pacificibeta@adobe.com), Linux-based tools to create voice plug-ins for Flash widgets and applications. Pacifica is named for a beginner's surfing point along California's shore a few miles south of San Francisco.

During her talk, Deiber illustrated three uses for content-driven voice communications - social networking, context-driven networking, and customer services. She and her colleagues have identified more than 200 uses. Adobe expects to release the tools from beta to developers publicly this summer, she said. By then, she hopes Macintosh and Windows operating system versions will be ready. Adobe plans on offering its Pacifica first as a hosted service, and in 2009 as a software license. Adobe is taking a standards based approach to voiceover IP for Flash ensure applications created are interoperable, she said.

Deiber explained that content-driven communications could be added to social networking applications for asynchronous voice communications to enable a variety of "self expression" applications like online dating and multi-player games. Adding voice to social networking applications will instigate emotions among users, she said, and that emotional involvement should translate into social networking applications attaining more page visits, more time on site (minutes per page), and more "stickiness." More time on site could jack up ad revenues for social networking applications. Deiber's team also envisions new customer service applications for businesses wanting to differentiate themselves by offering more personalization.

Personalization will also play a key role in the next generation of location-aware Web services. Yahoo!'s Brickhouse today sent out 10,000 invitation codes to developers to use its new open source Fire Eagle beta middleware that enables the creation of location-aware services for mobile devices, dashboard widgets and physical appliances. Yahoo! developer Tom Coates said Fire Eagle will enable developers to easily build location-aware services that let users share their location information online while controlling their data and privacy. Fire Eagle will let developers create services that "play well with others, enable hybridization, and decouple the creation and use of data."

For developers that means the current problem of the "get location" information and the "use location" information communicating easily is resolved, he said. Potentially, once a user has identified their location via the Internet the information could make a location-aware service useable by any device anywhere in the world. With location determining so much about ourselves - weather, postal codes, transportation, theater listings, and on and on - location-aware Web services that users still protected their privacy could offer a lot of fun and useful information wherever you are. Location-aware services could also be part of sensors and spimes (objects that represent themselves in space and time.)

For gadget lovers, Bug Labs of New York City and San Francisco demonstrated its new "Lego" approach to building gadgets using a new concept - open source hardware. Bug Labs has created Linux-based, plug-in hardware modules and an Eclipse-based SDK called Dragonfly for building open source gadgets and their applications. All of Bug Labs hardware modules - things like sensors, cameras, motion detectors, and LCD screens, are stamped with Braille so developers can create gadgets for the millions of people in the world who are blind. Bug Labs has done most of the heavy lifting on the software side so developers will have an easier time of building specialized gadgets for currently underserved markets.

"The economics of consumer electronics today is not good. China is driving the margins out of the business and WalMart is setting the prices," said Peter Semmelhack, Bug Labs founder and chief executive officer. "Open source hardware will totally change electronics for the next 10 to 20 years. It will create the long-tail of niche devices and custom gadgets."

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