Explore Now

Explore, Experience, Expand

Summary

Explore Now is about connecting people with experiences. Combing the digital and physical worlds, Explore Now is an online service that facilitates real world experiences in new ways.

The service creates a new market within a billion dollar industry through combining entertainment, shopping and tourism for economic, cultural, and social benefit. Explore Now connects people in the cloud to physical world guides who take them to the places they want, just like a guide for local tourism or a personal shopper would.

> According to World Travel & Tourism Council, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to the world GDP was USD 6,346.1bn (9.1% of GDP) in 2011. Visitor exports generated USD 1,170.6bn (5.3% of total exports) in 2011.

Today we can join a live event through stationary cameras, but what missing is visual control of the surroundings and interactive engagement. While online shopping allows us to navigate through websites, the experience is impersonal.

Explore Now uses live streaming mobile video through an internet service allowing virtual guests to connect to the world through a live personal guide. Guests guide where they go, what to look at, and interactions.

Example pricing model
 A guest signs up for the service for free and is given a range of options for what kind of activity they want to do or where they can visit. They can book experiences in advance, choose something from "available now", or their favorites. If they choose an experience like touring a historic site; they make a financial transaction that unlocks that experience. Payment and shipping information is stored for guest's convenience.

If a guest chooses to go shopping they may pay a nominal fee for the connection and minutes online and a percentage on top of the purchase price. Shop keepers may incur some of that expense depending upon the store. Experiences from the guest side can be from solo to a group.

Guides can use a variety of mobile hardware including: phones, tablets, and in the not so distant future glasses.

The scenarios for Explore Now are endless, this brief highlights shopping titled "Sherpa" and tourism titled "Sightseer" with scenarios described below.

Business objectives

Create a viable start-up business or prototype that is ideal for resale or partnership. First in to this arena sets the stage, and the experience will only get better as technology advances.

Audience

- Consumer: Middle income to upper class
    - Eco travelers
    - Avid shoppers
    - Senior citizens
    - People with little mobility or confined to their homes …
- Businesses/partners
    - Small to large consumer store owners
    - Local tourisms
    - Destinations- zoo, historic sites, walking tours…

Potential partnerships

Private sector: Amazon, Disney, Google, Expedia, Group On, National Geographic, Microsoft, AARP, Rick Steves…

Government/NGO agencies- Smithsonian, World Tourism and Travel Council, UN World Tourism Org, USAID, Office of Science and Technology Policy, EPA, UNESCO

Benefits

- Economic growth- new markets and old
- Opens up markets to millions of people (some currently underserved)
- Sustainability- remote travel is greener than flying there
- Cultural awareness
- New clientele for businesses…

Pilot program

Both the Sherpa and Sightseer are ideal for pilot programs. Initial products include an online customer app and downloadable mobile app for shopkeepers or guides.

Financial features and requirements and Pricing structure- TBD

Current business position

Explore Now is currently Flora* and the idea looking for someone with $ and business know-how to partner with and make this vision a reality.

The product itself will be a combination of custom software development, off the shelf technologies including hardware. The software development will include at minimum, a website service, back end support and downloadable app that includes interfaces for: customers, guides, back end support, and supporting infrastructure. The service is reliant on "partnerships" with local business including tourism, shops, events and shipping/local deliveries. A staff, environment and resources will be necessary to support the development and operation.

There is potential IP within the software that will be developed.

Engagement with people who share similar values and vision is a must.

Explore Now Vision
Meaningful world exploration

Mission
Connecting people with the experiences they want, and making a positive impact on the communities they visit.

Explore Now Services

Sherpa
Sherpa is a personal shopping service that allows customers to experience a store potentially anywhere in the world from the comfort of their couch. It has 2 offerings: **physical stores** (brick and mortar) and **mobile personal shoppers**.

Throughout the shopping experience, customers have access to an overlaid UI with options including: store websites, their shopping cart, inviting others, a map, nearby events, photos, background music, and other options to make the experience more enjoyable. Experiences from the customer side can be from solo to a group.

Physical Stores

Through an online service using videoconferencing clerks guide customers to products within their store. Customers engage with the clerk and choose what they want to look at. Clerks can pick up and show customers items giving them a personal view. Clerks can scan tags to provide customers with details descriptions on their screens.

Scenarios
- Grandma needs to buy the perfect gift for her granddaughters 4th birthday. She chooses a shop she and her granddaughter visited when on a trip together. **Watch the video**
- Ruby wants to get dad something from the pacific northwest and so goes on a virtual tour of the Pike Place Market… Market Tours, to choose her gift.
- Julie wants to put together a gift basket for a client and she contacts the Gourmet Shop who provides a combination of local and foreign delicacies.
- Deb is going to a gala tomorrow and hasn't had time to shop for a dress. During her lunch break, she connects with her favorite department store and describes to the clerk what she's looking for. The clerk then walks her around the store pulling dresses for her to try at home. The dresses will be delivered that day to her home, she can return what she doesn't want at her convenience. …

Mobile Personal Shopper

Partnering with local tourism offices adding personal shoppers to their staff, customers can experience shopping in open markets, bazars, fairs, areas of a city or town, etc. Similar to a store clerk, mobile personal shoppers guide customers to products within a broader setting, stopping at stalls or shops in a within the area they serve. Customers engage with the clerk and choose what they want to look at. Bartering may occur given the context.

Scenario
- Shopping in the grand bazar in Istanbul, the mobile shopper walks through the extensive selection of stores. Guests see the real-time activity of the lively place. Guests or guides negotiates the transaction and ships you your goods.
- Roberta is not very mobile these days but wants to make her favorite tomato sauce with local tomatoes. She connects with the mobile shopper to take her around the farmers market to make purchases for her.
- Shopping Canal Street and China town in New York City….

Sightseer

Sightseer is a guide service that allows travelers to experience familiar and exotic lands from the comfort of their couch.

Sightseer works with local tourisms for personalized travel experiences. Guides bring travelers on journeys with sights and sounds of the local environment.   Travelers choose from a variety of options, for example: Learning about historic sights- Seattle Underground, Chinatown in NYC, Hagia Sophia Istanbul, Tile Museum in Lisbon, Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame Cathedral Paris and the Sightseer takes guests around using video conferencing technologies. Experiences can be from solo to a group.

Travel experiences are captured and archived for future revisiting. Links to photos and events nearby are also captured.

Scenarios
- Grandma who lives in Seattle wants a special date with her Granddaughter Mila who lives in Lisbon. Much of their relationship has been online through tools like Skype or Face Time. Grandma arranges to take Mila to the zoo via Explore Now Sightseer. The guide meets them at the gate and takes them to all their favorite animals. **Watch the video**
- As an anniversary gift for your loved one the Sherpa takes you to the places from your honeymoon, strolling the streets of the Marais in Paris.
- Who's online? Tap into a world of sightseers willing to share the experience…

Here are some other example scenarios beyond Sherpa and Sightseer…
- Mix and mingle- Party goers in NY can be shown all the cool night life and party in Mumbai.
- Cultural exchange through learning about local foods, recipes and rituals
- Special events: openings, weddings…
- Rock concert- access to live stationary cameras or surfing the crowd through guides placed in different locations.
- Classrooms around the world
- Show my city, independent agents can show off where they live.

- Helping others- cook a meal, fix a car, prepare for planting, build a house, triage emergency situation…

1-2-3 Program
Explore Now has an optional charity tax of 1, 2, or 3% to the bill which is donated to local NGO's where the travel took place. Travelers will get to choose from multiple organizations.

Technologies

The technologies being used are available today with many of them being off the shelf. As technologies evolve the experiences will only get better. They include: *(not comprehensive)*

- PC's and mobile devices with videoconferencing capabilities. I.e. – phones, tablets, and soon Google glass and other companies working on glasses tech.
- High speed internet connection through available networks, or in some locations mesh networks
- Desktop video cameras
- Kinnect – for gesturing and or video
- Video motion stabilization software
- Possibly Wikitude augmented reality tech and augmented reality head gear.
- Custom software, a suite of interfaces and aps with backend support. …

Software
Not comprehensive examples

- Front end user experiences for the customer- a website and downloadable app, features tbd. Example interfaces for- travel and shopping options, reservations, checking in, inviting others transactions, shipping status…
- Front end user experience for the Guide or Personal Shopper- a website and downloadable app, features tbd
- Backend Hub UI- everything needed to provide and support traveler and guide experiences, monitoring capability, shipping…
- Backend support- connection protocols, transaction software, databases…
- Infrastructure necessary for making all the connections
- Software design for kinnect that allows the traveler to direct guides on the ground through gestures. Example- the traveler points to a specific image on the screen, the guide see a reticule on their screen of the spot being pointed to. …
- Video stabilization
- …

Real world location based support
Contract with per location

- local tourism
- Shipping
- Hardware and software support
- Infrastructure, networks etc….

Issues
- Time delays
- Unforeseen travel disasters (accidents, theft, kidnapping, …)
- Relies on connectivity
- Propaganda
- Corruption
- Cultural gaps…

Long term implications
- Positive - Better for the environment with less actual travel.
- Negative- effecting local services including Hotels and restaurants. (Work to shift old businesses to new Explore Now options.)…

Current State and Opportunity

Video conferencing is currently being used for connecting people; family, friends and business associates. As video conferencing tech becomes more ubiquitously mobile we will see consumer businesses connecting people to experiences. Similar to how the mobile phone industry became a billion dollar business, so will video conferencing consumer services and applications.

Today the internet connects us to information in the cloud wherever we are. Internet and mobile aps abound. Location based services tie the internet to a place, although is mostly geared toward experiences for a person in a physical location connecting to the cloud ie- where's the nearest ATM, what's on sale here, who of my friends is near me...

While travel apps abound, initial research shows there isn't anything that puts a person or service on the ground representing you remotely. Most travel apps have to do with travel logistics: flight info, weather, directions, ground transportation, translation, currency conversion, etc. or tourism being done by an on the ground traveler: hotels, restaurants,

New Microsoft Study: How Advertisers Can Take Advantage of Future Consumer Trends Today, states: "The first big theme from our journey work maps back to our Enhancing the Real trend and manifests in the journey as *the blurring of the digital with the physical retail environment*. While many retailers still separate brick and mortar from online retail channels, consumers see the two as connected, and they expect to feel that connection throughout their decision journey" and "The second theme maps back to the Value Me trend and is *the increasing need for personalization*."

The Guardian reports, for the first time in history, the number of tourists crossing international borders in a single year reached over one billion in 2012, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). 50% were from Europe and five to six billion people travel in their own country every year. Tourism currently accounts for 9% of world GDP, $1.3tn in exports and 6% of world trade.

Tourism presently accounts for 5% of global emissions – approximately 4% from transportation (40% of those from air travel and 32% from car travel) and almost 1% from the accommodation sector. Demand

for air travel is forecast to double by 2050, and carbon emissions from flights departing the UK are forecast to increase from 33.3 MtCO2 in 2011 to 47 MtCO2 by 2050.

Business Insider- With over 770 million GPS-enabled smartphones, location data has begun to permeate the entire mobile space.

On the Market
Examples

Travel app reviews:
- BestAppSite.com reviews apps, here's their travel synopsis.
- TripHackr.com, best 2013 travel apps
- TheAppTimes.com 5 best travel apps for 2013
- TheTravelersBlog.com 10 Best Travel Apps for 2013
- aWorldtoTravel.com Best Free Mobile Travel Apps 2013

Location based apps
- Trip Wolf- travel guide, recommendations, maps (available offline), Augmented Reality Viewer
- GuidiGO guided tours created by local experts which you can follow at your own pace.
- UNESCO World Heritage app- all the World Heritage sites at home or while on your travels
- Everytrail – trips, trails, photo uploads…
- ShopKick.com a mobile app for a points rewards system.
- Swemos photo albums & travel journals
- Yelp, NearMe, Living Earth HD, Orient, World Atlas HD, UrbanSpoon, Loopt, AroundMe, FourSquare, ShareWithMe, SCVNGR, Brightkite,…

Offline apps:
- TripAdvisor Offline City Guides: Downloadable tours
- MapsWithMe offline maps and navigation
- GuideWithMe- offline travel guides

Related tech
- Wikitude augmented reality tech- software.
- Remote access software: giving a PC in one physical location control of a PC in a different physical location.

In development
- Microvision Nomad http://microvisiontracker.blogspot.com/search?q=nomad
- Microsoft has its own version of glasses a patent pending for "event Augmentation with real-time information" they use a sporting event as an example.
- Google Glass

*Flora Goldthwaite

A little about me…I have 21 years of Microsoft experience, 11 were spent imagining the future. Together with key stakeholders, we created presentations and prototypes that embodied the company's dreams for future technology and computing. I am interested in the social aspects of computing and

technologies, particularly the cross section between the digital and physical worlds and the future of experiences.

Here are related prototype projects I've lead for which there is video:

- A video made in 2000 showing Grandma and granddaughter chatting over videoconferencing.
- Bill Gates at CES 2008 we highlighted the concept of "information anywhere" by creating a phone hardware/software prototype that showcased 2 scenarios: a digital guide for the real world; and accessing our digital history.

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