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local

Even the subway's on Facebook

Online community unites straphangers

by michael rundle / metro new york
AUG 28, 2007

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BROOKLYN. Being poked on the subway is annoying. On Facebook it's a compliment. A new application on the site hopes to bridge that divide.

Subway Status allows riders to post updates, meet their neighbors and read service announcements pulled from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Web site. Users can check for delays, complain about local transit issues — such as the campaign for an F train express — and keep track of weekend changes, all without leaving their social network.

"The interesting thing about the subway experience is that everyone has it, but no one shares it," said Amos Bloomberg (no relation to the Mayor), who designed the application. "There's currently no forum for this discussion, and it certainly doesn't happen on the train itself. I'm trying to explore that issue."

Subway Status took only three days to design and since its launch on Aug. 19 has attracted more than 2,100 users.

"It's been rising very quickly," Bloomberg said. "But this is not one of those Facebook applications that will have 6 million users at the end of the week. That's not the point. Not everyone wants to know the people they ride the F train with."

Future upgrades — such as the ability to send text message updates and upload video — are coming soon, Bloomberg said.

"I see it like those 'multi-user dungeons' from the early days of computers," he said. "The idea is that you are exploring a system with lots of rooms and different people. There are tribes of people on each train, and I want them to organize themselves into little pockets."

Bloomberg hopes his application will be a force for good.

"I don't claim to be an advocate for change in the MTA; that's not my purpose," he said. "But the response to this application leads one to think maybe the MTA should be doing some of this itself."

MTA spokesman Jeremy Soffin said it wasn't surprising New Yorkers were forming online communities based on their subway experiences.

"I think it's great that New Yorkers take such a personal interest in the transit system," he said. "But www.mta.info is still the best source for real-time alerts."

Developments

In other digital-transit news, the MTA confirmed yesterday that they are in preliminary talks with Google to develop an online transit guide.

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