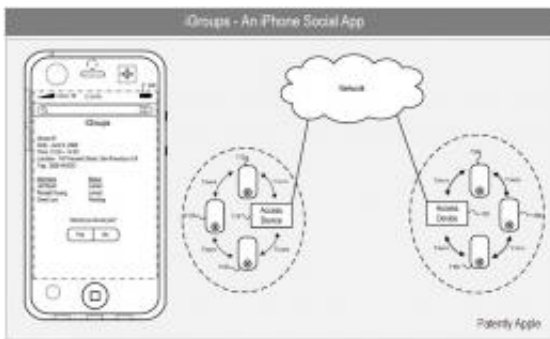


Apple may join the social networking and geolocation craze

March 22 2010, by Lin Edwards



(PhysOrg.com) -- Apple has applied for a patent on its 'iGroups' mobile social networking technology, making it the fourth social patent Apple has announced so far this year, according to Patently Apple, which keeps track of Apple's patent applications.

iGroups is an ad-hoc social networking application for iPhone and other mobiles, which will probably work with MobileMe. It was developed by Apple itself rather than other developers working on the Apple platform, which suggests Apple sees social networking as a core application, joining the browser Safari, and software suites iLife and iWork.

Social networking is revolutionizing the ways in which people communicate with others with shared interests, and many social

networking services offer a number of communications tools such as chat, email, file sharing, and so on. Many wireless devices (such as Bluetooth personal area network) can already operate in ad hoc mode, so devices within range of each other can establish peer-to-peer communication with each other, but they cannot regenerate the network later to allow users to continue exchanging information. The ad hoc networks are also insecure and open to attacks such as snooping.

iGroups allows groups of users in the same geographic location to form an ad-hoc network, which may or may not use another network to access the Internet. Members of the group may be connected by any of 3G, Wi-Fi, or Bluetooth, and can use the network to exchange emails, contacts, and other types of messages with other members. The network is secured, and privacy is ensured, by a cryptographically-encrypted key generation system.

The [patent](#) describes two typical applications Apple sees for its new application. One is a business conference, trade show or meeting, in which participants can use the network to exchange information such as schedules and contacts, while the other is a rock concert or other event, at which the application displays a list of people present and using iGroups, and allows them to establish an ad-hoc network. The patent also allows for a Wi-Fi or other mechanism to try to determine a group member's location without the need for a GPS signal. Other [social networking](#) systems with geolocation already exist, such as Four Square, MyTown and Gowalla, but they require a GPS signal.

Applying for a patent does not necessarily mean there will soon be a product, since [Apple](#) files numerous patents, but it is noteworthy that Apple refused to include Google Latitude on the [iPhone](#), which would have allowed users to broadcast their location to their friends. They will be able to do the same with iGroups.

More information: [www.patentlyapple.com/patently ... -in-development.html](http://www.patentlyapple.com/patently...-in-development.html)

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