

NYTimes unveils “beta620” - Experimental Projects page

August 8 2011, by Bob Yirka

The New York Times (online version) has unveiled a website it has apparently been working on for quite some time; an experimental projects page, called [Beta620](#), designed to allow users/customers to test-drive apps that the paper is considering adding to its main page. The purpose of the apps are to assist visitors to the nytimes site in finding articles in different ways.

In its initial unveiling, the site has seven projects under consideration that visitors can try out : The Buzz, Times Companion, TimesInstant, Smart Search Bar, Crossword Puzzle, Longitude and Community Hub.

Most of them do what they sound like; The Buzz for instance displays a menu with three categories: *Technology*, *Politics* and *Art*. Clicking on one brings up a nytimes page with articles about just that topic, with numbers for *Shares*, *Likes*, *Comments* and [Tweets](#) floating over the top of each article (HTML 5 required).

The Smart Search Bar (very clumsily) allows for typing in criteria to search for; same with the TimesInstant bar, which is very Google looking and returns article titles as you type.

The Times Companion might be the best of the bunch, it utilizes embedded hyperlinks in articles that can be clicked to find more information about certain keywords. For example, in an article about Syria, there might be a link called the Baath Party, which when clicked would display a popup giving background information on that topic at

the bottom of the page. Very handy. The only problem might be users that have become desensitized to such embedded links, since they usually lead to popup ads.

Longitude is rather unique in that it graphically maps news items geographically; if an article is about the San Diego Zoo, for example, it will appear on a map hovering over San Diego.

The Crossword Puzzle is just an updated (HTML5) version of its older product.

And finally, the Community Hub allows users (subscribers) to access comments, ratings and recommendations by other users, all with a neat dashboard.

The timing of the release of Beta620 (the 620 comes from the street address of the Times in New York City) is interesting; Google, which has had a similar apps page called [Google Labs](#), very recently announced it will be phasing it out saying that it needs to focus more on core apps. That may or may not be relevant to the Times, as their new Beta620 site is mainly a vehicle to help the company find out if users might be interested in apps before they go live on their main site. To that end, there is also a place on the beta site where users can submit suggestions of their own.

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