Open Garden plants app for open network

June 5 2012, by Nancy Owano

(Phys.org) -- The Open Garden network app, which was launched in private beta in February, is now available free for download. The San Francisco based startup, founded in 2010, is set to break down the in walls of connectivity -- in seeking out Internet access or making do with spotty connections -- that have become the status quo. The Open Garden team voices a general complaint that Operators behave as if broken networks are a fact of life. “Mobile networks are like closed gardens, separated by walls. If you own a smartphone from Carrier A and find yourself unable to surf the mobile web, you cannot use spectrum owned by Carrier B, or a nearby fixed line broadband connection owned by Carrier C.”

The Open Garden application interconnects devices, whether smartphones, laptops or tablets. to form a wireless peer-to-peer mesh

network for access to the Internet. The team presented their case at the recent TechCrunch Disrupt conference. They answered questions from a conference panel about the capabilities, repercussions from industry, and business model for the startup.

Cofounder and CEO Micha Benoliel told the audience that Open Garden is announcing the new app as “disruptive” because the application makes it so simple for a user to be connected.

The mesh network allows Open Garden-enabled devices to automatically share Internet access and bandwidth. Essentially, you are riding on the Web access of other Open Garden app users, using peer-to-peer connections that form the network.

The technology offers an “automatic path choice.” When the network detects multiple Internet connections, it will select the fastest one available and will switch to another connection if the original slows or goes off line. This is being promoted as a mobile mesh network that can route data “opportunistically” through the right assets at the right time. The advantage is that it can offload traffic from an overburdened access route to one less utilized.

The Open Garden founders built and patented their own discovery mechanisms so devices that run the software can easily detect each other. When asked about the implications of this advancement on battery power, the answer was that most of the power consumption comes from the data transmission. Open Garden instead can help the user save some battery by offloading to WiFi, which uses less power than a 3G or 4G connection.

As the app is freely downloadable, the team was asked how they intended to make any money. The Open Garden team’s answer was by the freemium business model, historically commonplace with Open

Source ventures, where revenues come in from special enterprise-level services for business customers, or sponsorships, or advertising. The team said they aim for a freemium model with extra features like VPN access for business users.

Technology watchers reacting to the debut are supportive but tending to ask the same question: What will carriers do, if not openly revolt? The very idea of a crowdsourcing platform for mobile connectivity may not go down easily with carriers who may think this will hurt their business. The company says it may take time for carriers to accept the app as able to help their business. “The promise of hyperconnectivity will be fulfilled when the walls that separate the carriers’ closed garden finally open for the benefit of the industry and all users.” Benoliel has said that Open Garden already has an agreement with a “forward-looking” European carrier.

Open Garden is available for Android, Windows, and Mac. The team plans for an iOS version in the future.

On Monday, a reviewer said she was able to use Open Garden to surf the Internet on a smart phone using Firefox (Firefox is needed to browse with Open Garden if on an Android device, along with a browser add-on). Video streaming by way of another phone's 4G connection, she said, looked a bit stilted but the quality was not bad.

More information: opengarden.com/