

Small Data and the User's Lot

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Abstract

Although Open Data is often about Big Data, there is a lot of small data on the web that made properly available can be used to help the user's experience of the web. Especially with some small level of integration in the browser, the user's life on the web can be greatly facilitated. And there is even commercial value for the browser manufacturers!

Small Data

Imagine you stumble upon a web page for an event. You see it is somewhere in London, on 23-24 April 2013, about Open Data on the Web. You want to go! So first step is to add it to your agenda. Open your agenda, Then you Google the address to try and find where it is, and with that information you can look it up with a maps site, to get a feel for where it is. Now you can go to a number of hotel websites, to look up locations and prices of hotels.

Next, how to get there. Which airport is easiest for that location? There are at least 4 that might be contenders. Who flies to those airports? Oh, yes and there is the train too as a possibility.

So you start trawling the web, maybe going to Rome2Rio.com to get advice about the travel possibilities, then a number of airport websites, followed by a number of airline websites and travel websites. Each time over and over again, you type in where you are coming from, where you are going, the dates involved, the class that you want to travel, and so on and so on.

How different it could be...

If the website had included a couple of snippets of RDFa, then the moment you arrived at the website, the browser could immediately have noticed that the page was about an event. It could offer to add the event to your agenda for you automatically. It would have known the exact location of the event, and could have offered to show you a map of the location, using the map service that you have entered in your settings as your preferred mapping service. It could have looked up hotels for you using a number of hotel services, and already have a list ready; it could overlay them over a map.

Since it knows where you are based, it can then offer to look up flights from your preferred airport to the airports with the best connections to the location where you want to go; you no longer need to input all your details over and over again. It can locate car hire deals, or find public transport connections.

Without too much extra work, with the use of some extra services the browser could even locate restaurants and other facilities nearby that friends had recommended, as well as recommend what clothing to take based on typical weather at that time of year.

Advantage

This is only one use case of how small data can be used to ease the life of the user, but there are many more, including online shopping, holiday planning, academic reference tracing. The list is endless.

While the advantages of this approach for the end user is obvious, there is also an advantage for the browser manufacturers: they can become associates of the hotel services and travel services, and take a cut of any sales made using the advice given. This not only gives them motivation from the point of view of pleasing their users, but also improves their bottom line.