



Sampler: A Look at Suburbanite Apps for Travel, Data and Commerce

The apps Downtown Oak Park, HopStop and MetroPulse are reviewed.

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This week: A couple of quick hits on Chicagoland apps, starting with...

Downtown Oak Park: I don't know why more suburbs don't have their own apps. This one, released by Evanston-based SweetPerk, was commissioned by a downtown business group to offer shoppers events listings, attractions, deals and business listings. The good news: It's simple to use and looks great. The bad: The content is underdeveloped. A few days ago, there were no events lists and thus far, only one attraction: The

Frank Llovd Wright Home & Studio.

Given time, though, this could be a killer app. Right now, the architecture is there—but the app needs furniture. PS: SweetPerk also has released Passport for Downtown Evanston, with plans for similar apps for Naperville and Lake Forest.



MetroPulse: For the last month, I've been playing around with this app from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and am fascinated by it. Basically, it lets you compare data sets between communities. Say, for example, you want to find out the percent of arrests made in Deerfield vs. Glenview over time. Consult the app. Or at least that's the theory. I've only been able to get MetroPulse to return usable results a few times. Mostly, I get: "Try a Different Combination. Data are not available..." Frustrating.

HopStop: Chicagoland has a ton of travel-related apps, some of which I'll review in an upcoming column, but lately I've been in love with HopStop. Whether you're in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles - plug in your destination, let the app recognize your current location and it'll tell you how to get there by train, bus, cab or by foot.

How is it different that the pre-loaded map app that comes with your iPhone? HopStop shows you actual departure times for trains and buses, rather than just the length of your trip.

Check it out. It's not infallible, but you get the most help when you're in the same town or suburban cluster.