



ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

MATT SHEEHAN CONCLUDES HIS TWO-PART EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF MOBILE DEVICES ON POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING BY REVIEWING SOME OF THE OPEN SOURCE MOBILE GIS OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND HOW EXISTING SYSTEMS CAN BE DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED



Fig.2: Accessing basemaps and Shapefiles on an offline smartphone

Open Source mobile GIS options are also available. Openlayers, OpenScales and GeoServer are excellent examples. And, of course, offline mobile use maybe required in areas where Wi-Fi is not available. We can now store basemap tiles, routes and field data on the devices itself, as shown in Fig.2.

From clunk to click

Existing, let's call them legacy political software systems, are slow and clunky. Mapping capabilities are limited. As already mentioned, decisions are still often made with the help of spreadsheets. Field workers rely on printed sheets, phones and notepads for organisation and data gathering. In short, current software applications used for political campaigns are inadequate.

Current systems can be dramatically improved. Centralising data and extending, maybe rewriting, existing software applications to allow easier management, querying and visualisation of this data will be crucial. Mobile applications in politics will provide both access to the data while in the field (no more pens, papers and printed maps), and the ability to edit and add new data. Mobiles provide up to date information dynamically. Maybe, querying by voter attributes using a fixed distance from your current location. Canvassing could then be planned around these dynamic queries



Organizing for America (OAF), the political arm of the Democratic National Committee, launched an upgrade of its iPhone and iPad app in time for last November's contentious mid-term elections. Intended for field workers, the tool streamlines canvassing and the organising of door-to-door campaign visits

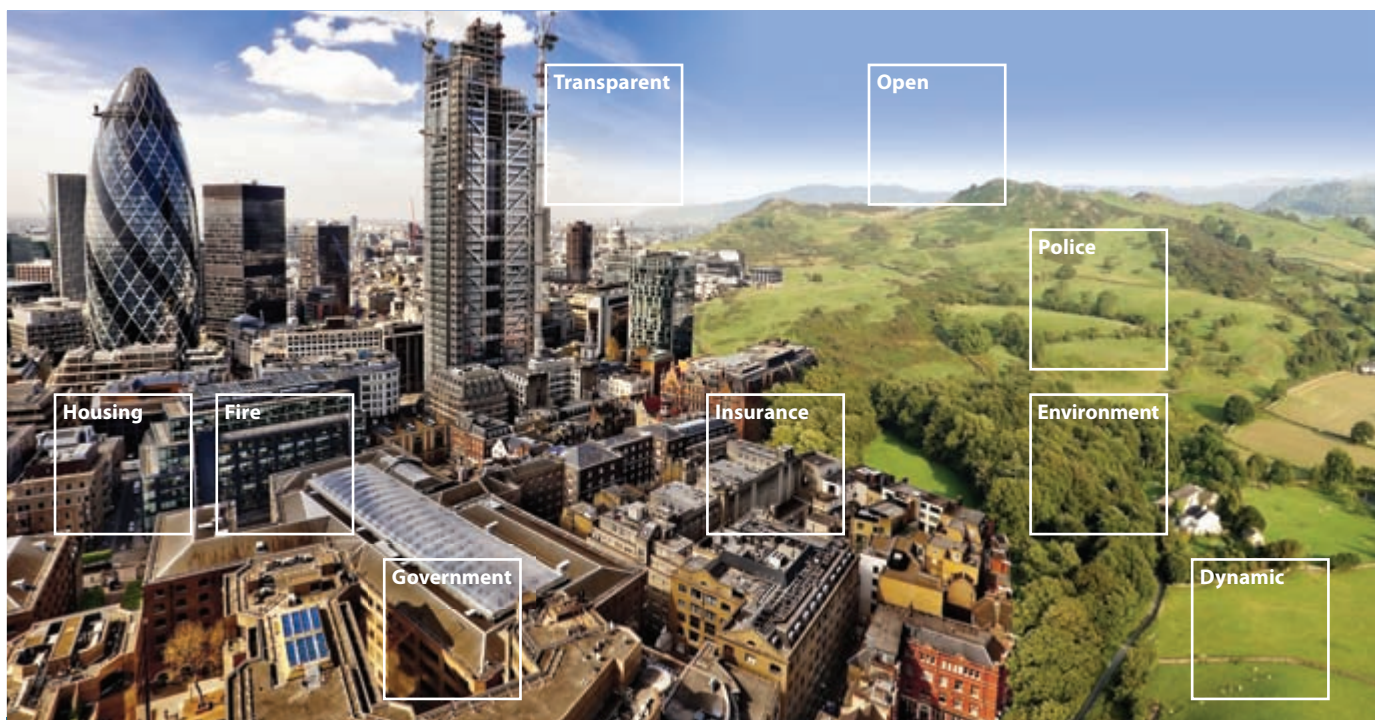
Development frameworks

So how would you build such a system? There are a number of proprietary and open source content management and constituent relationship management solutions. Joomla and CivicCRM are two excellent open source options. These can serve as the central system. PC-based work can utilise the modules available in these types of frameworks. The key mobile and mapping portions of this picture will need custom development. These would be integrated into the central system. So whether it be leveraging the power of MapQuest or a full GIS, these could be integrated into the PC-based system, and custom-built for mobiles.



To help citizens understand the process for last December's parliamentary elections in Egypt, Bright Creations in partnership with Etisalat Egypt launched Sawtak, a mobile application with mapping functionality for iPhone and Android Smartphones. It was, critically, also available as a WAP site for more basic handsets

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