

# Go check-in somewhere else

If you are on Twitter or Facebook, you will have seen many of your “friends” tell you that they are at Starbucks or at the airport. Some of them are “mayors” and some have “badges.” It’s all about the Foursquare check-in. Many nonprofit marketing consultants, and more for-profit marketing consultants, are advising that organizations/companies should get on Foursquare (or other location-based services). The idea is to have people in the vicinity know you are there—offer those people special deals or more information just for checking-in.

But. There is a problem: only four percent of adults online “check-in” or use geo-location services, according to research from Pew.

To me, the rush to embrace check-ins and geo-location has more to do with the fact that marketers have lots of friends using Foursquare, and less to do with reality. To suggest to nonprofits that they must be on location-based services is based on what exactly? It is based on the desire to be cutting-edge, to suggest something “ahead of the curve.” What it is not is practical. Nonprofits have many many other communications and marketing challenges to fix, other than having people check-in.

In my opinion, the check-in is really great for retail and restaurants/bars, especially if you are promoting a special or a sale or trying to build interest. But, just realize that there is an element of unfairness to those patrons who don’t have smart phones, or don’t do check-ins (apparently 96% of the population).

Perhaps people are not so eager to share their locations. It does seem big-brother to me. And this is what the article Tag-Along Marketing in the New York Times talks about.

Will check-ins take off in the future? It's questionable. And you should not base marketing advice on something that is still in the works.