

Case Study

MP Finder

MP Finder is an iPhone application that is deceptively complicated under the hood because of the data that is required to turn any latitude and longitude into a constituency. Although there are several third party web services that have api access for searching by postcode, we needed to create something unique, an app that as soon as you launched it, would find out where you are and then tell you your constituency and MP without having to enter a postcode or rely on someone else's data.

The app was inspired by the Open Data initiative from Ordnance Survey, which has made available for the first time, free data about constituency boundaries. That was the good news. The problem was that the data was released as a shapefile for GIS professionals and that's useless for an iPhone.

Enter the Mindsizzlers and an innovative approach to solving this perplexing data conundrum.

- 1) We used a virtual GIS workstation to wrangle the data from a proprietary ESRI shapefile format into an open source KML format that we could deploy on one of our own cloud based web servers.
- 2) We wrote a highly optimised web service that could answer the question, what polygon is this latitude/longitude contained within? This enabled us to convert the co-ordinate into a constituency.
- 3) We wrangled the parliamentary data about constituencies, members of parliament and other open sourced data so that our web service could return data about the MP given just a latitude/longitude.

On the iPhone, we used a neat map clustering technique we built on another project so that the map doesn't get swamped with zillions of markers, but instead shows rather neat pie charts where the colours in the pie represent the political parties in that area.

Add in some asynchronous image fetching (for fluid UI updates) and within a short space of time we have a nice little application that does what it says on the tin – find your mp!



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