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Where 2.0: How Many GPS Sensors Can a Pigeon Carry?

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It's hard to believe I could've lived all these years and not once thought about pigeon athleticism. Until this year's Where 2.0 conference in San Jose, California, I had no idea that a healthy pigeon can carry one-eighth of its body weight comfortably. Nor was I aware of the contributions the pigeons of Southern California are making in the fight against that region's notorious smog. That all changed after Beatriz da Costa recounted her experiences outfitting L.A. birds with GPS devices and sensors that were used to record the levels of two greenhouse gasses, carbon monoxide and nitrous oxide, that the pigeons encountered on their flights through the area. (Read about them at the [Pigeonblog](#), where you can also sign up to do the same with pigeons in your area.)



The show also provided a quick glimpse of Planet 9 Studios' [RayGun](#), a GPS-enabled 3D virtual world that differs from [Second Life](#) and other digital landscapes in that it is modeled after real-world cities. Planet 9 CEO David Colleen's demo of RayGun's virtual San Francisco was thwarted by the conference's choked wireless connection, but even after just a few seconds it was clear that RayGun is unlike anything else on the Web. I'm already thinking about sending my avatar out for a night in North Beach, minus the hangover. Colleen says the company will let people "play with" the service later this year, and will let them start building RayGun apps in 2008.

As eye-catching as Google Earth, Microsoft Virtual Earth, NASA's [World Wind](#), and all the other colorful, pan-able, zoomable globes are, some of the biggest splashes are made by companies with a much narrower focus. One of these is [NearbyNow](#), a service that lets you search the inventories of individual retailers and shopping malls in your area via SMS text message. NearbyNow is currently available in 50 malls in 45 cities in the U.S., and the company plans to expand to 110 by this December (check out NearbyNow's coverage map [here](#)). Simply text the code for the store or mall to the company (using your phone or an in-store kiosk), and it replies with a searchable inventory of the location. Select a product to compare prices and check inventory. NearbyNow also sends alerts to shoppers about sales and special offers. This is the service I'll use the next time I'm looking for a bargain on cell phones.