

Longo creates Block Avenue - A rating site for neighborhoods in USA

September 27, 2012 - Front Section

Block Ave., founded by Tony Longo, is a site using Google Maps that split the entire country into 1.9 billion squares, 300 ft. on each side. Block Ave. will aggregate lifestyle data important to peoples' everyday lives - such as amenities, school systems, grocery stores, even crime rate - and layer that data with a social component of comments and reviews. "Location is a makeup of a bunch of things, not one single thing," said Longo. "[It] varies from person to person."

With these 1.9 billion squares, there is a rounding algorithm (formula process) that takes into account factors considered good, neutral, and bad; the factors are combined to create a grade, A-F, for that neighborhood. The main categories are: crime, transit, amenities, restaurants and pubs, and school systems. All of these factors are given a weighting scale (i.e. hard crimes versus petty theft, great restaurants versus not-so-great restaurants). While census data and rounding algorithms will produce ratings, the biggest part is the social layer.

"Anybody can come on the site and contribute to a data point or even if they want to just write a general block review," said Longo. "Let's say my block was rated a B- or a C, but I think it deserves better. I can go on that site and say, 'No, I've lived here for five years and it's an unbelievable location for [this type of person],' and tell us why. Those contributions are heavily weighted in our system."

Longo admits this weighting system isn't going to be perfect for a long time, and they'll continue to keep improving each week. Knowing that the more people that contribute will help improve the accuracy of ratings makes the site that much more real and personal.

"It's kind of a pay it forward setup. I believe people would be more than happy to contribute because this involves neighborhoods, it's a very personal thing. By putting information we know about our own neighborhoods, we're providing future residents with what they need to know, and we'll have a reference to look at when we're ready to move."

Block Ave. will do more than just change the residential real estate market, it's going to change the commercial market as well. While it may still be too early in the site's career to pinpoint exactly how it will all happen, it is easy to see the potential. Longo explained that after collecting reviews about experiences and locations of sites, the results, negative or positive, always came back to one thing: local businesses.

With that said, the impact in commercial real estate could be revolutionary, according to Longo. "We will be able to forecast trends, [predict] where streets and certain areas are going in terms of the type of people that will be there, and what people want."

The obvious effect this site will have is price for leases, sales, and rentals. The better grade a neighborhood will have, the more desirable a location and therefore a higher price. The lower the grade and reviews, the more negotiating will occur to get prices down.

Another factor that may affect the grades of blocks is construction. While it is a temporary situation, this could also allow room for negotiation of prices. "From an investment standpoint, if you don't mind dealing with [construction and noise] for 'x' amount of time, it may be a benefit. You might be able to rent for a lower price, or purchase something for a lower price knowing that once it's complete, the whole area is going to change."

Longo also sees this helping out residents looking to improve their communities. A city-owned eyesore lot may gain a lot of online attention from the people with the power to clean it. "I want it to be used as a message board and a platform to the city or the area councilmen. If they can see that hundreds and thousands of people complaining publicly about cleaning up areas or doing something with a plot of land, whatever it may be, this will be the resource to show the city how important things are to the community and the people in these neighborhoods."

"In this world, it's power in numbers. It'd be a really awesome thing if this company can get to that level where it can be a collaboration tool to really improve the neighborhood. Not just say what's good and bad or the trends but really improve it."

Improvement will be a recurring term while this site is in its beginning stages. With so much room for growth and potential, Longo sees Block Ave going worldwide in the future. Improving and succeeding will rely a lot on the community and their contributions to local neighborhoods we all call home.

This site, which Longo hopes to have a mobile app. for in the near future, will have a huge effect on the residential and commercial real estate world. The community coming together to give honest reviews will be what makes it the most honest and transparent site of its kind.

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