Fred Cohen & Associates - Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

Twittering away your privacy

Every once in a while, oh heck, every day, we see people in the computing arena fuse together more and more data to "serve" their customers. Customers don't always willingly participate in these activities, but in the case of social networking services, they most certainly do, and on an ever increasing scale. I recently had an opportunity to look at one of these services in a little bit of detail as part of my legal research, and I thought I might share the results, by way of an example.

Your status

Statuses are of the type "array" (in the twitter encoding in XML), that consisting of a series of "status" collections. These "status" sequences look something like this (details changed):

```
<status>
  <created_at>Sat Dec 13 08:13:01 +0000 2008</created_at>
  <id>1052960428</id>
  <text> The user's twitter chatter (their message)</text>
  <source>&lt;a href=&quot;http://twitterhelp.blogspot.com/2008/06/twitter-via-mobile-web-
mtwittercom.html&quot;&gt;mobile web&lt;/a&gt;</source>
  <truncated>false</truncated>
  <in_reply_to_status_id></in_reply_to_status_id>
  <in_reply_to_user_id></in_reply_to_user_id>
  <favorited>false</favorited>
  <in_reply_to_screen_name></in_reply_to_screen_name>
  <user>
   <id>5672102</id>
   <name>Joe Smith</name>
   <screen_name>joesmith23948</screen_name>
   <location>iPhone: 46.244451,-183.128765</location>
   <description>Programmer, engineer, invited speaker, web wizard, podcaster, heart patient, lover </description>
   <profile_image_url>http://s.com/twitter/images/60432158/js_bigshot.jpg</profile_image_url>
   <url>http://jsmith.com</url>
   <protected>false</protected>
   <followers_count>512</followers_count>
  </user>
</status>
```

I have changed all of the content components of this example for obvious reasons, but needless to say, a single twitter message tells us a date, time, identifier, the message, the source, including the type of equipment, serial number or similar data, phone number, and GPS location, links to the remainder of the stream of twitters, name, user ID on several systems, where to find a picture, and the number of folks who follow their twitters. By watching the stream of twitters, we can quite literally follow this individual around their life, from place to place located to within a few feet, timed down to the second, along with gaining details on their claimed activities. And we get links to their blogs and other social network sites, which leads us to more of the train of their lives.