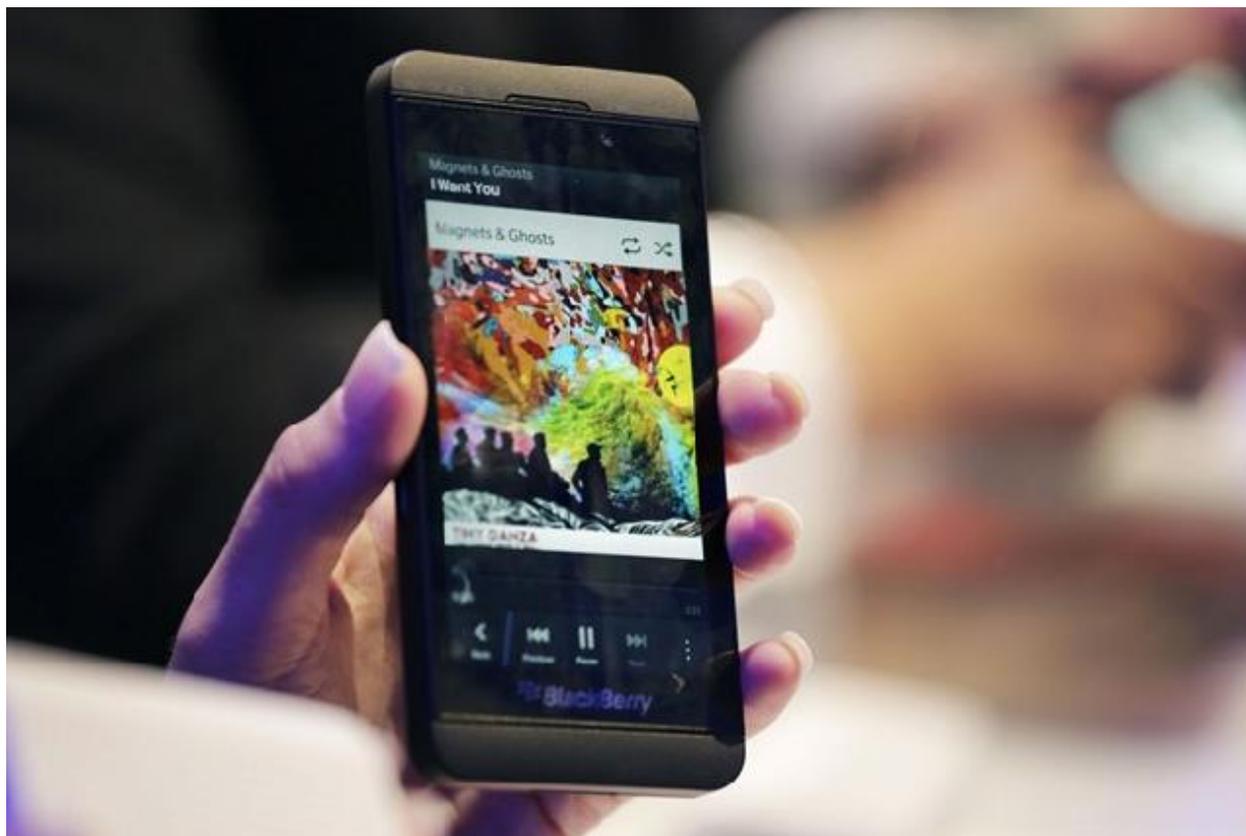


'Open Data' catalogue coming this month

BY CHARLES HAMILTON, THE STARPHOENIX APRIL 5, 2013



The city's "open data" catalogue, to be launched later this month, will make City Hall databases available for use by software developers to create apps for smartphones or mobile devices, according to a report on its way to city council.

Saskatoon is about to crack open its digital vault.

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"Most governments and municipalities are moving down this path to become more open and transparent to what we can share with people," said Kevin Peacock, the city's manager of corporate information services.

The city has already released a wealth of transit data to the public, which has been used to create mobile apps. Last month information about Saskatoon's street network, neighbourhood and city boundaries was released. When the catalogue is launched, Peacock said it could contain information like garbage pickup schedules and the locations of spray parks and paddling pools.

While it may seem benign to some people, the availability of this information is welcome news for many

local software developers who have been calling on the city to make more data publicly available.

"We are growing up as a city," said Chad Jones, CEO of College Mobile, a Saskatoon-based app development company that has already used city information to create a smartphone app for transit routes.

"We are not to the cutting edge yet, but getting up to where we need to be."

The city does not currently create its own apps, and Jones and other developers say they're excited about the possibility of using the information to create apps to help Saskatoon residents with everything from garbage pickup to finding parking spaces.

Dale Zak, another local software developer, got access to city databases on ward boundaries to create an app called "What's My Ward?" It helps residents quickly learn which ward they live in, and can also find a user's location and tell them which ward they're in at any given moment. He also created a civic election app to tell people which polling station to use and who the candidates were during the last civic election.

Zak said he would like the city to go even further and release "real time" data, giving app developers access to things like GPS on transit routes. He'd like the city to follow Regina's lead and start a smartphone app contest for people who want to use the information.

"Now that the data is out there, they really need to encourage people to make use of it," Zak said.

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