

Questions on the Go: Asking Questions on Mechanical Turk from your iPhone

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Introduction:

Mobile phones have become a lot easier to use to find information on the Internet in recent years. However, they are still not as quick or as easy to be thorough as searching with a desktop computer. My experiment aims to understand how well Mechanical Turk users can do the research so a mobile user can avoid searching with a small screen.

Objectives:

- Build an iPhone app that can query Mechanical Turk
- Design a HIT that gets Turkers to answer the question well

Architecture:

- iPhone app collects questions and presents results
- Ruby server generates HITs
- Images are uploaded to and served off of Amazon S3
- MTurk asks Turkers to answer the question

Results:

- Asking a quick question from an iPhone is pretty convenient, but it's hard to get Turkers to give great answers.
- It takes a long time to get results back from MTurk, even when paying a higher price per HIT for easier work than other HITs.
- Amazon's API is not designed to be quickly grasped or implemented, and documentation for the Ruby library is hard to find, though powerful when mastered.
- Accessing web services like AWS on the iPhone is harder than it looks - going through an intermediate server helps.

