

03/30/2010

Print | E-Mail | Feedback

RELATED SPIEGEL ONLINE LINKS

- Photo Gallery:** New Phone App Scans Barcodes for Consumers
- Undressing with the iPhone:** App 'Censorship' Has German Tabloid Fighting Mad (02/24/2010)
- Downloading Il Duce:** Mussolini iPhone App Stirs Passions in Italy (01/28/2010)
- Green Technology:** Smartphone Apps to Help Households Save Energy (01/05/2010)
- The Apps Boom:** Gold Rush in the Smartphone Software Market (11/02/2009)

RELATED INTERNET LINKS

barcoo SPIEGEL ONLINE is not liable for the content of external web pages.

EUROPEAN PARTNERS

- Presseurop
- A just war - but just what kind? (Presseurop)
- European diplomacy disarmed (Presseurop)

Politiken

OPINION POLL: Danes opposed to euro Rønn Hornbech takes Pind to task

Corriere della Sera

Coalition in Crisis as Paris Refuses to Budge - Italy Calls for Separate Command Unless NATO Takes Over

Eight Italian Seamen on Vessel Seized by Armed Men

GLOBAL PARTNERS

- New York Times
- U.S.-Led Assault Nears Goal in Libya
- News Analysis: A Libyan Fight for Democracy, or a Civil War?
- ABC News
- U.S. Fighter Jet Crashes in Libya; Two Crew Members Recovered
- Watch: Winning! Charlie Sheen's Man-on-Man Kiss

NEWSLETTER

Sign up for Spiegel Online's daily newsletter and get the best of Der Spiegel's and Spiegel Online's international coverage in your In-Box everyday.

FACEBOOK

SPiegel International auf Facebook

40,316 Personen gefällt SPIEGEL International

Susana EJ Damien Jan Graham Firdavs Live Boston Bronwyn Vermelhor

SPiegel ON TWITTER

DemocracyNow Leaked Photos Show US Soldiers Posing w Dead Civilians in #Afghanistan, Reports @SPIEGEL_English

nallways RT @DemocracyNow: Leaked Photos Show US Soldiers Posing w Dead Civilians in #Afghanistan, Reports @SPIEGEL_English

batentejaz RT @DemocracyNow: Leaked Photos Show US Soldiers Posing w Dead Civilians in #Afghanistan, Reports @SPIEGEL_English

Follow SPIEGEL_English on Twitter now:

Follow button

New German Phone App for Consumers

Scan Barcodes, Make the World a Better Place

By Christian Teevs



checkitmobile

No more poring through the small print on the packet. New barcode-scanning software for mobile phones allows consumers to check what's in the food, whether the product harms the environment and even how the firm treats its staff. The German inventors insist that they're not idealistic do-gooders -- they just want to realize their idea, and make money.

When he first came up with the idea, Benjamin Thym came up against a lot of skepticism. Give up his well paid job as a management consultant? Start a company that makes free software for mobile phones, at the ripe old age of 27?

"My family thought I was crazy," He says and grins. That was back in 2007. His mother only really understood what he was up to a year later, when he was able to show her how his original idea worked, using a mobile phone.

In 2007, together with two friends, the Berlin native launched a start up: barcoo. At first everything was self-financed. Later on they also received a grant from European Union business development funds. Their idea was that consumers should be able to find out more about a product and its maker by scanning the item's bar code with their mobile phone.

The results of the scan would show the price, the ingredients and since this week, whether the manufacturers practice corporate social responsibility -- that is, whether they operate with what is known as the triple bottom line where success is not measured just in terms of finances, but also in terms of how employees are treated and what impact the business has on the environment.

The Traffic Light of Social Responsibility

The software can be downloaded free in the Apple store for iPhone applications, from Google's Android market and on the firm's own Web site. Working together with the WeGreen research project, being run by the Berlin School for Economics and Law, Thym's company bundles together information about a company's rankings, company statements and user-generated ratings. Gathering together information from 18 different studies on social responsibility, the products are rated using a simple traffic light system -- green, orange or red.

However the "sustainability traffic light" is not aimed at hurting certain businesses or branding them as irresponsible. Thym says that It is more about encouraging transparency and about gathering as much information as possible. Which is why it does not worry him that the traffic light system often comes up with contradictory values, showing both negative and positive values, for many companies.

The Traffic Light for Healthy Eating

According to barcoo, more than 500,000 people have downloaded the application, not least because of the traffic light system for groceries that is also integrated into the system. On a mobile phone, the application signals information that consumer advocates and doctors have long wanted to see on food packaging: red, green or orange symbols that indicate, among other things, how much fat, sugar and salt content the item has.

Which is why consumer organization Foodwatch welcomes barcoo, just as much it welcome barcoo's competition Codecheck, which has the same function. "It is becoming clear that the traffic light system is a suitable instrument for the labeling of groceries," says Foodwatch spokesperson Martin Rucker. But the software cannot be the ultimate solution. Thym sees it this way too: "The grocery traffic light belongs on the packaging," he says. "But as long as that isn't happening, one can inform oneself using this software."

Consumer Contradiction Makes for a Market Niche

"With many consumers, there's a huge difference between what they want and what they get," Thym says. "According to surveys, 40 percent consider themselves to be critical consumers but only four percent actually practice this when in the stores." This is the contradiction that gave Thym and his business partner, Tarik Tokic, 31, who came from the price comparison Web site woabi, their market niche.

They don't see themselves as do-gooders or idealists. After studying business informatics, Thym worked as a management consultant for Deloitte and then for the Boston Consulting Group subsidiary, Platinion. Did his former jobs give him a guilty conscience and inspire him to bring this sort of well-intentioned software to market? "It really was not like that," says Thym, who is 29 years old now. "I just always wanted to found a start-up."

Thym and Tokic also hope to earn some money with barcoo, through advertising sales and the few cents commission they get for each scanned product that is then ordered through an online shop.

ARTICLE...

Print | E-Mail | Feedback

SOCIAL NETWORKS



KEEP TRACK OF THE NEWS

Stay informed with our free news services:

- All news from SPIEGEL International [Twitter] [RSS]
- All news from Business section [RSS]

© SPIEGEL ONLINE 2010 All Rights Reserved. Reproduction only allowed with the permission of SPIEGELnet GmbH

MORE FROM SPIEGEL INTERNATIONAL

GERMAN POLITICS



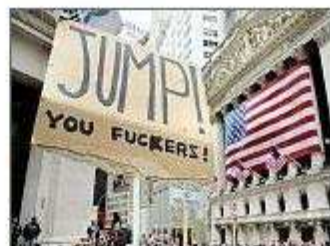
Merkel's New Government: Forging Germany's Future

WORLD WAR II



Truth and Reconciliation: Why the War Still Haunts Europe

ECONOMY



Green Shoots: Europe Climbs Out of Crisis

CLIMATE CHANGE



Global Warming: Curbing Carbon before It's Too Late

FALL OF THE WALL



20 Years Later: Legacy of the Iron Curtain

OVERVIEW INTERNATIONAL

TOP

DIENSTE Schlagzeilen RSS Newsletter Mobil	VIDEO Nachrichten Videos SPIEGEL TV Magazin SPIEGEL TV Programm SPIEGEL Geschichte	MEDIA SPIEGEL QC Mediadaten Selbstbuchungstool weitere Zeitschriften	MAGAZINE DER SPIEGEL Dein SPIEGEL SPIEGEL GESCHICHTE SPIEGEL WISSEN KulturSPIEGEL UniSPIEGEL	SPIEGEL GRUPPE Abo Shop SPIEGEL TV manager magazin Harvard Business Man. buchreport buch aktuell SPIEGEL-Gruppe	WEITERE Hilfe Kontakt Nachdrucke Datenschutz Impressum
--	---	---	---	--	--

TOP



New app to tell shoppers brands' green credentials

A new mobile phone app promises to allow shoppers to make instant decisions on whether or not to buy goods based on the ethical and environmental credentials of the brands that make them

Tweet 46
Share 42
Comments (0)

By GreenWise part of the Guardian Sustainable Business Network
guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 14 December 2010 17.44 GMT



Mobile apps illustration Photograph: Roy Scott/Getty Images/Stock Illustration Source

Free to download, barcoo gives consumers access to a brand's social, ethical and environmental profile by scanning the barcode of the product they are considering buying, according to the German company behind it, checkitmobile GmbH.

How the app works

The app works through the camera on a mobile phone, which scans a product's barcode. It uses a traffic light system to rate corporate social responsibility (CSR) red, amber or green. Shoppers can find out the level of a company's environmental awareness and responsibility, how it treats its staff, as well as how transparently these messages are delivered to the consumer.

barcoo has partnered with German environmental firm WeGreen and said it has accessed CSR information on brands from over 20 international institutions that examine and validate social responsibility claims.

Implications for brands

barcoo founder, Benjamin Thym, said the app had implications for brands because it would give consumers a more detailed picture of their green credentials instantly.

"barcoo has been designed to encourage consumers to look deeper into the sustainability of the products they consume," said Thym. "Companies boast about the positive attributes of their organisation and its products in their marketing material and advertising campaigns which plays a large part in our purchasing decisions.

"Having information to hand that gives a more detailed picture of the brand, including its sustainability and ethics, will not only empower the shopper but will also push manufacturers towards further embracing the growing trend of being more green and ethical."

Additional features

In addition to the manufacturer's ethical profile, barcoo offers a price comparison and provides nutritional information on food products.

Already available in mainland Europe, where it has been installed on over 1.4 million mobile phones to date, barcoo is now being launched onto the UK market.

barcoo is available and accessible for the iPhone, Android devices, Nokia, Samsung and other smartphones.

Printable version Send to a friend Share Clip Contact us Article history

Comments in chronological order (Total 0 comments)

There are no comments yet for this article.

Comments on this page are now closed.

Related information

Guardian Sustainable Business
GSB Editorial Network



New app launches for ethical shoppers
4 Feb 2011
New mobile phone app allows shoppers to get real-time advice on the ethical status of goods and services

16 Nov 2010
Sustainable Luxury: New Opportunities for Growth

18 Feb 2011
Fairtrade gets huge boost from The Co-operative's new ethical plan

28 Jan 2011
H&M creates clothing line made out of left over pieces

24 Jan 2011
Green loyalty card scheme launches



Communicating sustainability with transparency
30 Nov 2010
Jennifer Rice looks at building a sustainable brand strategy

Become a member »

guardianjobs

Find the latest jobs in your sector:

- Arts & heritage
- Charities
- Education
- Environment
- Government
- Graduate
- Health
- Marketing & PR
- Media
- Sales
- Senior executive
- Social care

Browse all jobs

environment Search

VEOLIA ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
Communications Officer (London)
 London | £ dependent on experience + benefits
 VEOLIA ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

guardianprofessional

Guardian Professional Networks are our new community sites, where we bring together advice, best practice and insight from a wide range of professional communities. Click here for details of all our networks. Guardian Professional is a division of Guardian News & Media.

Mobile phone barcode app to help ethical shoppers

Barcoo allows customers to point their phones at a product's barcode and find out the brand's ethical profile

Kate Connolly in Berlin
guardian.co.uk, Thursday 1 April 2010 19:12 BST
Article history

An innovative mobile phone app could create a new generation of ethical shoppers by allowing them to check a company's social responsibility rating and environmental credentials.

Barcoo, developed by a group of young Germans, allows customers to point their phones at the barcode on products in shops and find out information such as how environmentally friendly a company is and even how it treats its staff.

Its makers say the app is intended to motivate the world to shop more ethically and to empower the consumer.

The Barcoo package also includes an extension of the price-comparison service already available on other apps that has sparked a "savvy shopping" trend, whereby the customer can find out how the cost of a product compares with similar items being sold in the same area. Maps are provided to show the alternative locations.

The app also provides the electronic version of grocery "traffic light" signals, which show how healthy a product is, as well as giving dietary and allergy advice.

But the ethical ranking of a company is what has caused Barcoo to catch the attention of consumer watchdogs in particular, who have praised it for encouraging transparency.

Barcoo, a free download, claims to measure corporate social responsibility or the practice of operating with the so-called triple bottom line, where success is measured not just in terms of profits, but also by how a company treats its staff and its level of environmental awareness. The information is gleaned from a range of sources, such as company statements, and recognised social responsibility studies, as well as from user feedback.

A test scan of a 400g bag of nuts and raisins showed that its producer had a red (low) ranking in the sustainability stakes, but a top ranking (green) in terms of its carbon footprint, and a middle ranking (amber) regarding the way it treated its staff.

Its sugar and fat content were shown to be dangerously high.

Benjamin Thym, 29, a business science graduate who created the product with a former schoolfriend, Tarik Tokic, said he hoped Barcoo would contribute to social responsibility and empower consumers.

"Our mission is to give transparency to consumers and to allow them to be critical while they are shopping," he said.

"Just by scanning a product, they get a whole bundle of information.

"With many customers, there's a huge gulf between what they want and what they get, and while most say they are critical consumers very few practise this when in a shop."

The use of apps for mobile phones while shopping has grown in the last couple of years, spreading from the home to the shop the practice of comparing prices via the internet.

Some retail organisations have reacted defensively by looking at the possibility of introducing mobile phone jamming devices in an attempt to quash the practice, which they say arms the consumer with too much information.

But many marketing experts, citing the example of how the music and film industries tried to destroy the downloading market at their peril, have said that retailers should instead find ways to embrace the trend.

Printable version | Send to a friend | Share | Clip | Contact us | Article history

Comments in chronological order (Total 6 comments)

Staff | Contributor

porrig
1 April 2010 8:00PM

Nice idea for an app, but can't see it in the UK iPhone App Store. Do you know if there are plans to release it in the UK and when that might be?

Tweet 2 | Share 137 | Comments (6)

larger | smaller

Environment Ethical and green living

Money Ethical money

Business Consumer spending

Technology Mobile phones - Apps

World news Germany - Europe

More news

Related

4 Feb 2011
New app launches for ethical shoppers

26 Oct 2010
Tesco launches barcode scanner app for online orders

6 Jul 2009
Recession sees shoppers switch from green to budget products

1 Mar 2004
Co-op vows to double fair-trade products

On Environment

Most viewed | Zeitgeist | Latest

Last 24 hours

1. Japan nuclear crisis puts UK public off new power stations
 2. Essex reptiles settle into new Wiltshire home
 3. Shipwreck threatens penguin colony on South Atlantic island
 4. Throwing food away sends world's scarce water gushing down the plughole
 5. Safety breaches reported at UK nuclear reactors
- More most viewed

Bestsellers from the Guardian shop

Classic Alex Book Lights
For controllable flexible lighting, as recommended by opticians.
From: £99.99

Shop more reader offers
See all offers and services from the Guardian

Environment network on Twitter

The Guardian Environment Network brings together the world's best websites focusing on green topics

OurWorld20: Reading guardianeco: Why Fukushima made me stop worrying and love nuclear power <http://bit.ly/f6rlXP> #environmentnetwork about 7 hours, 57 minutes ago

worldresources: Reading @Grist - Sen. Jay Rockefeller: #Climate #science is 'unequivocally true' <http://bit.ly/hhcayR> #environmentnetwork about 5 days, 1 hour ago

worldresources: Reading @ChinaDialogue - Meanwhile in America: US response to China's 12th Five-Year Plan <http://bit.ly/fOV3YM> #environmentnetwork about 5 days, 19 hours ago

More recommended tweets from the Guardian Environment Network

Our selection of best buys

Lender	Initial rate
Royal Bank of Scotland	3.75% More
ING Direct	3.39% More
HSBC	2.29% More

[See more mortgage best buys](#)
[Get a personal quote](#)

Find the cheapest gas & electricity deals

Enter your postcode:

Select your usage:

Low
 Medium
 High

[Calculate](#)

Compare 1,000s of tariff deals from top suppliers

Compare insurance

Travel insurance
Annual travel insurance from £31 and single trip policies from £7 per person. Get a quote online in minutes.

Find local professional advice

Search UK-wide for an independent financial advisor or legal expert in your local area who meets your personal requirements

IFAs for consumers
 IFAs for businesses
 Solicitor

Enter your postcode:

[Search](#)

Latest news on guardian.co.uk

Last updated less than one minute ago

News
US jet crashes in Libya as air strikes continue

Section classified

guardianbookshop

This week's bestsellers

1. **Here on Earth** by Tim Flannery
2. **Cloud Collector's Handbook** by Gavin Pretor-Pinney
3. **Weather Forecasting** by Robin Page
4. **Cloudspotter's Guide** by Gavin Pretor-Pinney
5. **Introduction to Ore-forming Processes** by Laurence Robb

Search the Guardian bookshop [Search](#)

Sponsored feature

JESSOP'S Win a £400 Jessops gift card
Plus, top tips from Guardian camera club

Related information

Business Consumer spending

World news Germany - Europe

Technology Mobile phones - Apps

Environment Ethical and green living

Money Ethical money



RedLaser - consumer app of the week
19 Nov 2010
Scan barcodes in-store to find outlets selling your item for less

30 Dec 2009
Ethical sales triple over decade, says Co-operative Bank

15 Mar 2011
UK's shopping basket updated: apps in, fleeces are out

13 Oct 2006
Ethical food sales to break £2bn barrier

12 Dec 2005
Ethical spending hits all-time high



You ask, they answer: Triodos bank
17 Aug 2009
Post your questions to Triodos on ethical and green banking

Ethical Products: Handy Phone App To Make The Right Choice



Akhila Vijayaraghavan

Akhila is a Justmeans staff writer for CSR and ethical consumption. As an IEMA certified CSR practitioner, she hopes to highlight a new way of doing business. She believes that consumers have the immense power to change 'business as usual' through their choices. She is a Graduate in Molecular Biology from the University of Glasgow, UK and in Environmental Management and Law. In her free-time she i...

[Read More>>](#)

17
Tweet
17
Share



How handy would it be to have an app on your phone to let you know if a product is ethical or not? That's exactly what Germany company, checkitmobile GmbH was thinking when they developed an application called barcoo. It gives consumers access to a brand's social, ethical and environmental profile by scanning the barcode of the product they are buying.

Social responsibility footprint of manufacturer **Coca-Cola**:

- Scores **49%** in the Tomorrow's Value Rating
- Rank **38** in the Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World List
- Scores **66 out of 100** at Climate Counts
- Rank **36 of 500** in the Newsweek Greenranking
- Listed in the "Black Book on Brand Companies"



barcoo works on a traffic light system through the camera on a mobile phone which scans the product's barcode. The system rates ethical products in red, amber or green. Consumers can also find out about CSR activities about the company and how transparent it is. WeGreen, a German environmental firm has partnered with barcoo to give it access to CSR information on brands from over 20 international institutions.

Benjamin Thym, the founder of barcoo was quoted saying, "Barcoo has been designed to encourage consumers to look deeper into the sustainability of the products they consume." Having such information on a handy app will certainly boost ethical consumerism as it rules out the confusing decision making process.

Thym also said that having information at hand about the "sustainability and ethics" of a brand "will not only empower the shopper but will also push manufacturers towards further embracing the growing trend of being more green and ethical."

In addition to the manufacturer's ethical profile, barcoo offers a price comparison and provides nutritional information on food products. barcoo also includes a fish guide whereby consumers can scan a fish product and retrieve guidance from the International Seafood Guide and the WWF on whether the fish is on the endangered species list. It is already available in mainland Europe, where it has been installed on over 1.4 million mobiles phones to date, barcoo is now being launched onto the UK market.

Although preliminary users say that the information is still sketchy because it is still in its early stages, its usability is appealing. barcoo is available and accessible for the iPhone, Android devices, Nokia, Samsung and other smartphones.

Photo: barcoo returns ethical information on thousands of products

Tags: Sustainable Living, Green Living, Living Green, Green Products, Environmental Awareness, Ethical Consumerism, Sustainable Living Tips, Green Living Tips

RELATED STORIES



Green living: Going green this Thanksgiving...

2



Why Do People Enjoy Shopping?...

8



Oil addiction scorecard #3: Sustainable living in home habits...

1



Case Study: Incentive Based Recycling...

Maurice Stanszus 07am January 13
<http://www.wegreen.de>

Comment Cancel 5000