

Opinion: Pokemon Go, Just Stop Already

Colin Wood | July 18, 2016



My grandfather had polio when he was a boy and as a result he lived his life without full use of his left arm and leg. He raised nine kids and I don't think in his entire life he ever complained once about anything.

His wife, my grandma, stayed married to the man for 60 years before he died, and always lived her own life with class, propriety and zeal. She lived through the Great Depression, World War II and the death of her husband, and yet she maintains the disposition and glow of a woman who has her whole life ahead of her.

My other grandfather was a fighter pilot in the South Pacific during World War II. He never talked about it.

My father joined the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War and was deployed to one of the most active regions of the conflict. He never talked about it.

My mother stayed married to my father, a hard man to be in the same room with, let alone be married to, for more than 25 years. She went through worse than Vietnam. And it took longer.

These are the figures from my life I respect most. They're people who showed fortitude in the face of incredible adversity and never expected help from anyone. Everything they gained in their lives they got through hard work, a notion lost in American culture today. I love these people because they're tough. They're resilient. They're examples of what the human spirit is capable of, even when things seem impossible. They make me feel proud to be an American, proud to be human and thrilled to be alive.

When I heard that 5 percent of smartphone users are playing a game called Pokemon Go, my first reaction was disgust. I wondered what these respected figures from my life would say if I approached one of them and talked about a game that I, an adult, was playing where I collect "Pokemon" as I dilly about. I don't play Pokemon Go, but if this interaction happened, I'm fairly certain none of them would even dignify me with a response. Because unlike this game, these people have substance. And they have better things to do.

When people talk about the decline of America and compare these years to the fall of the Roman Empire, they're not talking about the erosion of the land's mountains, plains and monuments. It's American culture that's falling apart. Perhaps it's a favorable alternative that life as an American is so soft and easy that people can [quit their jobs](#) to chase around imaginary cartoon characters on the [freeway](#) and near [cliffs](#), but this luxury comes at the cost of dignity, and life, it turns out.

Didn't any of you learn anything from the Macarena? What in God's name are you doing with your lives? And where is your shame?

The lack of substance I sensed early on has been vindicated through my reporting. In seeing that every third story in my news feed was about this new game, I figured there must at least be something important related to *Government Technology* that our readership should be aware of. But there's not, really. So, dear reader, if you grow weary of my anti-nerd ranting and don't feel inclined to absorb the subtleties of this phenomenon feel free to stop reading here. Your data centers are safe.

Several CIOs contacted by email for this story responded that their organizations were not doing anything to account for the popularity of Pokemon Go with regard to the app's potential risks or opportunities. An early vulnerability of the Android version app that allowed too many permissions has since been [fixed](#), and more than one official contacted for this story reported that such a vulnerability would fall under the umbrella of existing social media and bring-your-own-device (BYOD) policies, anyway. When it comes to security, Pokemon Go is just another app and should be handled accordingly.

The typical way apps are handled, said Steve Nichols, chief technology officer for the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA), is that agencies either run off a blacklist, where apps are explicitly prohibited, or a whitelist, where only pre-screened apps are permitted. Pokemon Go, an app like any other, would fall under the same rules, he said.

"We haven't discussed this internally at all, so it's not really on our radar screen here at GTA," Nichols said. "The concept has been around for a long time — augmented reality. When you think about stuff like Google Glass, that was the whole reason for that. But they never quite took off."

Beyond risk, there are always opportunities. Finding them is a matter of creative thinking. For Pokemon Go, Nichols said he doesn't think government has a play.

"The only government connection is a public safety one," Nichols said in reference to the news stories of people falling off cliffs while playing the game. "One of our agencies,

Georgia Department of Natural Resources, they built an augmented reality app for touring one of their historical parks, so you can walk around with your cell phone and get some information overlays, but obviously that's a location-based thing that only makes sense if you're actually going to that park."

The trouble for government, Nichols said, is that people don't seek it out unless they have to. And when that happens, they typically want to get it over with as quickly as possible.

"There's not much there," Nichols said of the game. "... You're taking advantage of well-known psychological buttons and I think that's what this game does. It's optimally designed to push all of those buttons. It's the phone equivalent of salty chips."

An IT security official from Palm Beach County, Fla., said their organization isn't planning any special measures in response to the popularity of the new app, but that a proactive measure might be to use a mobile device management solution that segregates corporate and personal data.

The county's libraries and parks, however, are promoting Pokemon Go to encourage people to visit the facilities.

"Got Pokemon fever?" the website reads. "Look no further than the Palm Beach County Library System. We're more than just Pokestops and gyms. We've got Pokemon clubs, comics, books and DVDs too!"

It's too early to say for sure, but there's no obvious changes that need to be made to social media protocols, said Heather Shirm, manager of digital marketing and communications for Palm Beach County. These promotions may encourage people to engage with government more, though, she said.

"The benefit is it's going to bring more people to the libraries and the parks and they are encouraging people to share their photos and to let them know what they've found," Shirm said. "It's helping us to not only get more people to the library but to get them to engage with us on social media."

Where those engagements will ultimately lead is questionable. Will Nintendo's game prompt a more civic-minded populace, or will people simply visit the library to catch a Pokemon and then leave?

A July 14 discussion on Twitter led by [Government Social Media](#) experienced a similar dearth of substantive ideas when it came to riding the phenomenon's coattails.

Stephen Tanner, senior marketing coordinator at the City of Plano, Texas, provided an anecdotal observation.

A1: Our folks are utilizing our park systems and trails a lot more w/ [#PokemonGo](#) I'd say that's a plus. [#GSMCHAT](#)

— Stephen Tanner (@stephenmtanner) [July 14, 2016](#)

Tennessee warned people not to play the game while driving.

Wait. Park. Then, [#PokemonGO!](#) Do NOT use mobile app devices while driving.
[#PikachuCanWait](#) [#HelpingYouArrive](#) [@TNHSO](#) pic.twitter.com/6ZpHB1sc4x

— TN Highway Safety (@TNHSO) [July 9, 2016](#)

Minnesota wrote a [blog post](#) full of common sense security suggestions.

Pokemon Go is like salty chips. It's also a bit like that Kardashian family. And kind of like that phonebooth stuffing thing from the '50s. There's something compelling about things that are novel, popular and new, but that doesn't necessarily mean they possess any substance or utility beyond what's immediately apparent.

Public-sector technology officials who want to make the most of the Pokemon Go phenomenon do have one good move: Ignore it.

<http://www.govtech.com/opinion/Pokemon-Go-Just-Stop-Already.html>