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Waiter, There Is a Fly in My Soup (and I Have an iPhone)

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Are online user reviews better when they are written in the heat of the moment or after the writer has returned to the home computer and had some time to cool off? That is the question facing review sites like [Yelp](#) and [Citysearch](#) when they build mobile applications.

Yelp app for the iPhone.

“There’s a trade-off here, and I think the trade-off favors giving users the opportunity to share the experience when they’re feeling it,” said Dinesh Moorjani, head of mobile for Citysearch, which lets users write reviews from its iPhone application.

The site’s users seem to agree. When Citysearch started letting users of its iPhone application write reviews on their mobile phones, it saw an increase in mobile reviews, Mr. Moorjani said.

But how useful is it when a drunk bar patron taps out a nasty review after a late-night argument with the bartender, or a happy customer writes a glowing review of the dry cleaner only to later discover a hole in her dress?

Many people intend to write reviews later but defect, Mr. Moorjani said, and mobile reviews solve that problem. He added that the most valuable reviews in terms of helping people make decisions are those that express the emotions felt in the moment.

“The opportunity to vent immediately is really powerful and actually very relevant,” he said. “When they go home, calm down and write a review, they are not articulating what really happened or the impact it had on their emotions.”

Yelp now also lets people write reviews of local businesses on its iPhone application — but it did not at first.

One of the things Yelp considers when it ranks reviews on a page is how “meaty” they are, Jeremy Stoppelman, Yelp’s chief executive, has said, and Yelp had doubts about how informative a review could be when it was typed on a tiny keyboard.

In a recent version of its iPhone application, though, Yelp tried to capture the best of both worlds by enabling people to draft reviews on their phones, save them and publish them later from a computer.

Yelp is also experimenting with new types of reviews that are specifically tailored to

phones. For example, users can write “quick tips” on the iPhone application — short, 140-character descriptions that immediately publish to the mobile site so that other people searching for places to go on their phones can read them.

The iPhone application also lets people post and respond in Yelp’s forums, so people can ask others for the best place to get a drink near the movie theater while they are standing in the theater lobby and get responses in real time. Yelp users can also see sales and special offers from merchants nearby, using the GPS capabilities of their iPhones.