

SCOTT KIRSNER

Instant survey firm raises \$750,000

By [Scott Kirsner](#) | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 16, 2012

Excerpts from the Innovation Economy blog.

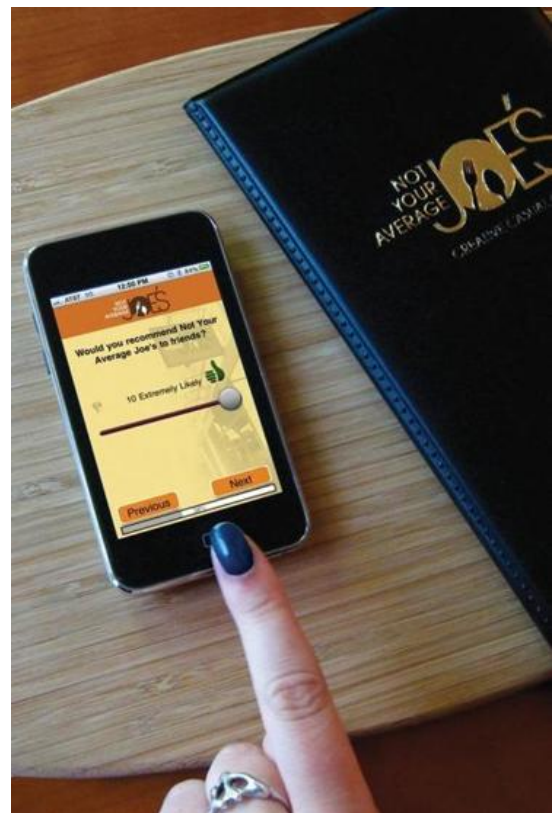
A decade ago, entrepreneur Geoff Palmer and Ken Kimmel, then the chief marketing officer at Dunkin' Donuts, were brainstorming about the potential of the early camera phones that were reaching the market.

“Suddenly you had phones with cameras built in, and we started talking about taking pictures of the doughnut cases in our stores,” Kimmel recalled. “You can tell a lot about how well run the restaurant is if the doughnut case is well-stocked and beautiful.”

The spit-balling didn't go anywhere until 2009, when Palmer and Kimmel decided to start Survey On The Spot, a business that would use mobile phones as data-collection devices.

Their premise was that if businesses asked customers to use their own phones to fill out a survey, the feedback would be fresher and the response rate higher than with traditional, paper-based survey forms.

The Newton company recently raised its first outside funding: \$750,000 from Kepha Partners, a Waltham venture capital firm, Angel Street Capital in Providence, and



Survey On The Spot utilizes cellphones.

Mike Sheehan, chief executive of the Boston ad agency Hill Holliday.

Survey On The Spot offers an iPhone app and mobile-friendly website for collecting information from users. Subscription fees start at \$40 per month for each location.

The company's customer list includes 7-Eleven, 99 Restaurants, Not Your Average Joe's, and Carrabba's Italian Grill. Most use it to gather information from customers, but some use the surveys as part of store inspections or for gathering employee feedback.

"When you're collecting data quickly, as opposed to the next day or two days later, you have the ability to fix problems before they affect more customers," Kimmel said. "Certain kinds of complaints" - like undercooked food - "can automatically go to the manager of the restaurant, and they can deal with that right away."

Survey On The Spot's technology has recently been adopted by veterinary clinics, tire stores, hospitals, and a Whole Foods Market in Scotland.

The new funding "gives us an opportunity to build a team," said Palmer, who was a cofounder of uLocate, a start-up that became Where Inc., which was acquired by PayPal last year. "Up to this point, it has been just the two of us, working with outside contractors."

Events to watch for

Here's my list of 12 of the bigger events in Boston this year, some home-grown, others major national conventions:

■ **Jan. 27: MITX's E-Commerce Summit.** Boston's e-commerce community now has its own one-day gathering. Agenda features speakers from Staples, Wayfair, Gemvara, and Shoebuy.com.

■ **Feb. 18: Venture Capital & Private Equity Conference** at Harvard Business School. What better spot than Mitt Romney's alma mater to chew over trends in the VC and PE industries?

■ **Feb. 22-24: Offshore Wind Power USA.** Regulators and developers gather at the Hynes to talk about wind turbines on the ocean floor.

■ **March 2-3: MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference.** Economists, team owners,