

Ads, social networking, environmental activism all at once

By Todd Woody, New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO – In a city passionate about the environment and technology, commuters are using their smartphones to check in at a popular social networking service to help keep a critter threatened by climate change from checking out.

“What does it take to help save the endangered pika? About 20 seconds,” read ads from Earthjustice, a nonprofit environmental law firm, that line San Francisco transit stations and feature the cute rabbitlike American pika in its Sierra Nevada mountain redoubt. “Check in now at Foursquare at ‘Earthjustice ad.’ Every time you check in, an Earthjustice donor will donate \$10 to protect endangered species.”

Foursquare, a rapidly growing social network, lets people use their mobile phones to announce their location to friends. When they arrive at a restaurant, bar or another site, they “check in” and can broadcast their whereabouts through other social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.

The Earthjustice campaign appears to be among the first to let people check in at a physical billboard, a tactic that has proved successful for the firm and could be attractive to other advertisers, according to industry analysts and Foursquare executives.

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