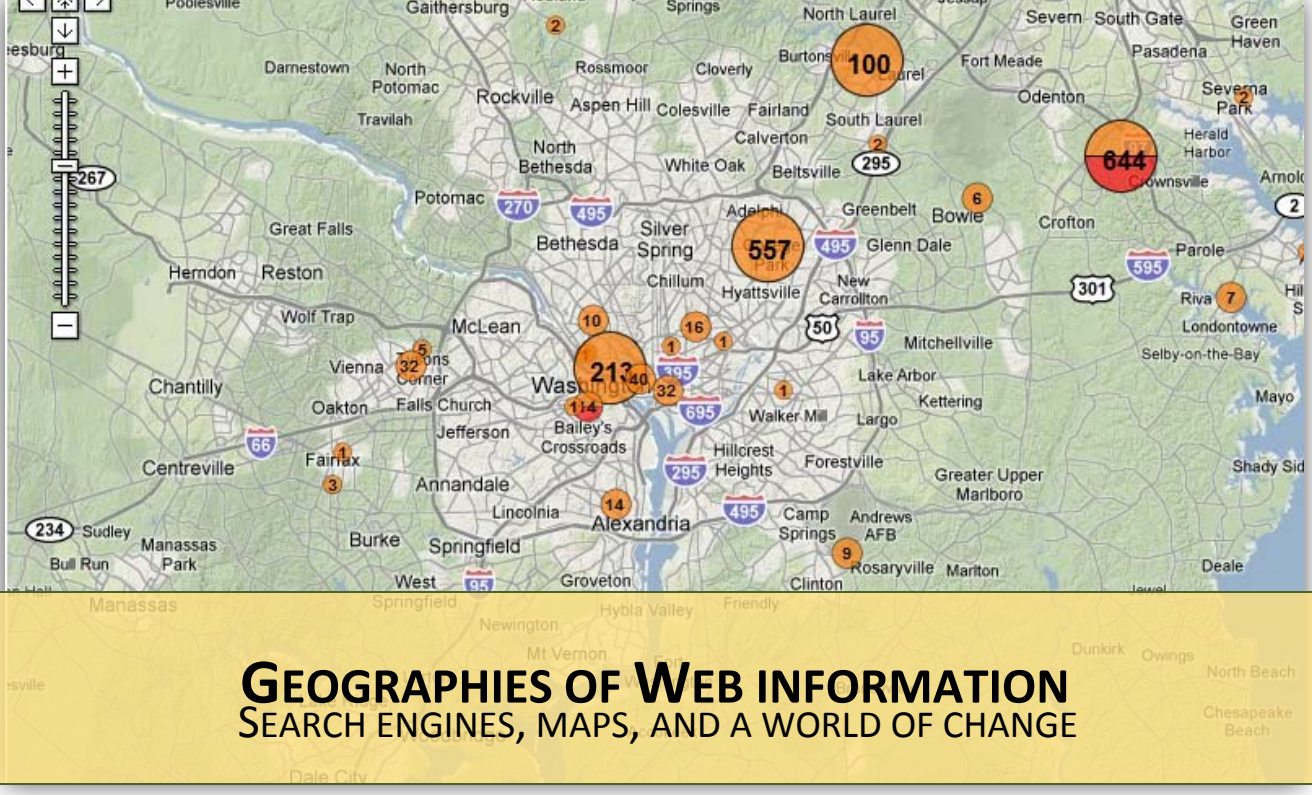

Source: http://flutracker.rhizalabs.com/

GEOGRAPHIES OF WEB INFORMATION

SEARCH ENGINES, MAPS, AND A WORLD OF CHANGE

As the swine flu (H1N1) outbreak escalated, epidemiologists and members of the public alike quickly turned to Google and Google Maps, Facebook and Twitter to report on, to seek information about, and to track this global pandemic. In terms of the centrality of Web information to both popular and academic understanding of a topical event, the swine flu epidemic is (arguably) unprecedented. At their most elaborate, attempts to track the spread of this global virus included elegant map "mash-ups" with hundreds of thousands of data points (above). Meanwhile, others noted the extraordinarily high correlation between incidences of influenza and Web search activity for flu-related keywords. This session is based on the broad premise that the Web represents an under-utilized database of information that is i) vast and ii) updated in real time, which geographers can use (better) to understand the characteristics of and relationships between places as they change through time.

Popular culture. Diffusion of disease. Flows of knowledge and information. New social movements. All phenomena represented on (and in some cases enabled by) digital communication. This session seeks to explore the potentials and pitfalls of using Web data to understand a world in change. The "virtual" worlds of cyberspace are already fundamentally imbricated with the "real" material life of cities whether in terms of digital flows between high-tech service firms, or in terms of the handheld devices and digital representations that mediate everyday experience. Web information is produced and consumed *in* places and *about* places, and works to *constitute* place too. In what ways can geographers use Web data to supplement our understanding of key events, changes and phenomena? What perspectives and insights can geographers bring to the use of Web data?

We welcome papers that present empirical studies and original "mappings" of Web data, as well as critical/exploratory articles on the potential of Internet information within geography.

To participate in this session or for more information

please contact co-organizers Lomme Devriendt, Ghent University (lomme.devriendt@ugent.be)
or Andrew Boulton, University of Kentucky (andrew.boulton@uky.edu) with a suggested topic