When-to-meet vs Doodle for scheduling tasks

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Scheduling events and appointments for a group is a common task today for groups that range from casual sporting meetups and music jamming sessions to friends finding time to work together on homework. Two common applications that help find times on specific dates that work for many people are Doodle and WhenToMeet.

Doodle

The specification of Doodle is that users are divided into two groups:

1. The organizer, who sets up the poll and creates the list of timeslots that regular users can indicate their availability for, and
2. Regular users, who indicate their availability for each timeslot.

Each user can give their name and indicate their availability for each timeslot with a tick (indicating that they are available for that time slot), a tick in brackets (indicating that they might be available for that time slot), or a cross (indicating that they are not available). They do this by clicking on each timeslot. Each timeslot has a defined beginning and end time, chosen by the organizer.

The organizer can choose whether to make all participant responses public or private (visible only to the organizer). Additionally, the organizer can also choose whether all users have the ability to leave comments.

Regular users do not need a Doodle account to vote on times and can use an URL to access the poll. However, the organizer needs a Doodle account to set up a poll.

Doodle will indicate the number of votes each timeslot has received, so users can quickly see the most popular timeslots.

WhenToMeet

Similarly to Doodle, WhenToMeet requires an organizer in addition to regular users.

All responses are public and users cannot leave comments, unlike Doodle.

WhenToMeet does not offer accounts. Users must write their name along with their responses, but can optionally use a password to prevent other users from editing their

responses. Each poll is accessible only through an URL, although the organizer can use WhenToMeet to send users the URL through email or through Facebook Messenger.

The organizer sets up the list of days and timeslots by selecting specific dates and the earliest and latest times for which they want users to indicate their availability on each day. The earliest and latest times must be an exact hour (e.g. 7am or 9pm, but not 12:30pm). The organizer cannot omit specific timeslots during each day, nor can they use different earliest and latest times on different days.

Users indicate times during which they are available by selecting timeslots in 15-minute intervals. Any timeslot that the user does not select is understood to be a timeslot during which they are not available—there is no equivalent of Doodle's potentially available option.

Unlike Doodle, users can indicate continuous stretches of time during which they are available by clicking and dragging their mouse across multiple timeslots.

Like Doodle, WhenToMeet also offers to convert times between different timezones.

Users see how popular times are during the day as WhenToMeet shades each timeslot with a different shade of green depending on how popular it is—the more popular a timeslot, the darker the shade of green. By mousing over each timeslot, users can also see who marked themselves available and unavailable at each time.

User study

We conducted a within-users study with six participants to evaluate the relative user-friendliness of Doodle and WhenToMeet. We hoped to answer the following questions:

- In what ways does Doodle help a user choose times during which they are available or potentially available?
- In what ways does WhenToMeet help a user choose times during which they are available?
- In what ways does Doodle help a user setting up a poll as organizer?
- In what ways does WhenToMeet help a user setting up a poll as organizer?
- In what ways does Doodle help a user see times that suit the greatest number of people?
- In what ways does WhenToMeet help a user see times that suit the greatest number of people?

Procedure

We created our own versions of Doodle and WhenToMeet.

We approached thirteen undergraduate students at Harvard College and asked them for their familiarity with Doodle and with WhenToMeet on a five-point Likert scale. Of these, eight participants rated their familiarity with Doodle and with WhenToMeet within one point of each other and were invited to use a desktop/laptop web browser to use both Doodle and WhenToMeet with three tasks.

We then asked each user to

- input all times that they are available in both Doodle and WhenToMeet during a two-day period, then
- create a poll as if they were an organizer, and finally
- identify times that suit the greatest number of people.

Half the participants were presented with Doodle first; the other half WhenToMeet first, in order to reduce the effect of learning and experience during the user studies.

Participants were not prompted with a suggested list of timeslots while they were selecting all times that they are available in both Doodle and WhenToMeet during a two-day period or while they were creating a poll as if they were an organizer, unless they expressed difficulty choosing times.

Participants were not given advice on how to use Doodle or WhenToMeet by the study author sitting next to them.

Afterwards, we asked participants

- whether the times they listed themselves as being available were what they had intended to list
- whether the times they chose as organizer were the timeslots they intended to choose
- how easy they felt Doodle and WhenToMeet were to use
- for general comments

Results

Survey question on familiarity with Doodle and WhenToMeet

Participants were first asked how familiar they were with Doodle and WhenToMeet, with five indicating the most fluency, and one indicating minimal exposure.

Participant number	Familiarity with Doodle	Familiarity with WhenToMeet
1	5	5
2	2	3
3	1	4
4	3	3
5	4	3
6	1	1
7	2	2
8	3	1
9	4	4
10	1	1
11	3	5
12	5	3

Participant	Successful as regular user		Successful as organizer		Correct most popular time		Ease of use	
	D	**W**	**D**	**W**	**D**	**W**	**D**	**W**
1	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5	5
2	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	4	5
4	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	5	4
5	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	3	5
6	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	4	5
7	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5	4
9	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	4	5
10	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	3	3

The average response for ease of use for Doodle was 4.1 and for WhenToMeet was 4.5. The standard deviation for ease of use for Doodle was 0.83, and that for WhenToMeet was 0.76.

While almost all participants successfully reported the times they were available as regular users, one participant (#4) was not while using WhenToMeet. Participant #4

reported that she had been careless in wanting to select 3:30pm but selecting 3:45pm instead—selecting an extra 15 minutes on a mis-click.

Discussion

It appears that participants generally found both Doodle and WhenToMeet easy to use, but slightly preferred WhenToMeet. While Doodle was useful for participants to check exact, explicit start and end times for each timeslot, WhenToMeet let participants select times they were available by themselves (without the timeslots offered by the Doodle organizer). Additionally, participants positively noted the ability to click-and-drag in WhenToMeet to select spans of time at once.

Participants noted that care had to be taken not to select times by accident on WhenToMeet, since each 15-minute time slot was smaller than each timeslot in Doodle. Participants thought that it was useful to have the ability to

Some participants said that they would not necessarily use Doodle or WhenToMeet to schedule meetings in the future, preferring not to use a technological approach to finding common times. Instead, they use group-chats and direct messages.

As organizers, the participants appreciated the simplicity of the WhenToMeet interface, as they only needed to choose dates and earliest/latest times, while on Doodle, they had to choose each timeslot manually. The participants also appreciated the ability for the organizer to choose exact start and end times.

Finally, some participants did not like Doodle requiring a sign-up and user account before being able to create polls.

We assume that the student population of Harvard College is reasonably familiar with using electronic devices such as computers and phones.

By not selecting participants whose familiarity with Doodle and WhenToMeet differed by more than one point on a 5-point Likert scale, we hoped to reduce the effects of familiarity with one tool but not with another on impressions of useability and effectiveness.