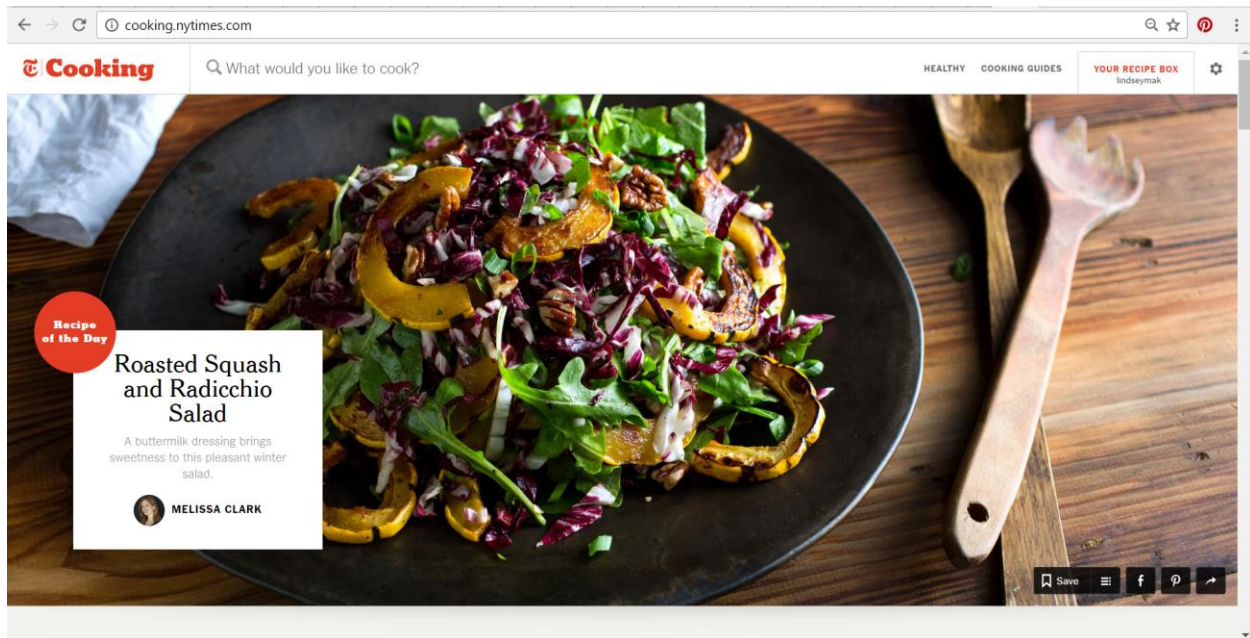## NYT Cooking Website

NYT Cooking is a New York Times (NYT) affiliated website through which users can browse, search, and save recipes developed by the NYT Food writers. The desktop site is aesthetically pleasing. It is easy to read, contains vibrant photos, and immediately conveys the content of the site is dedicated to food and recipes. However, the target audience and specific use case(s) are unclear. The site has two access points: direct access from a browser search or from the link featured on NYT Food Section. The latter access point implies the primary function of NYT Cooking is recipe search:
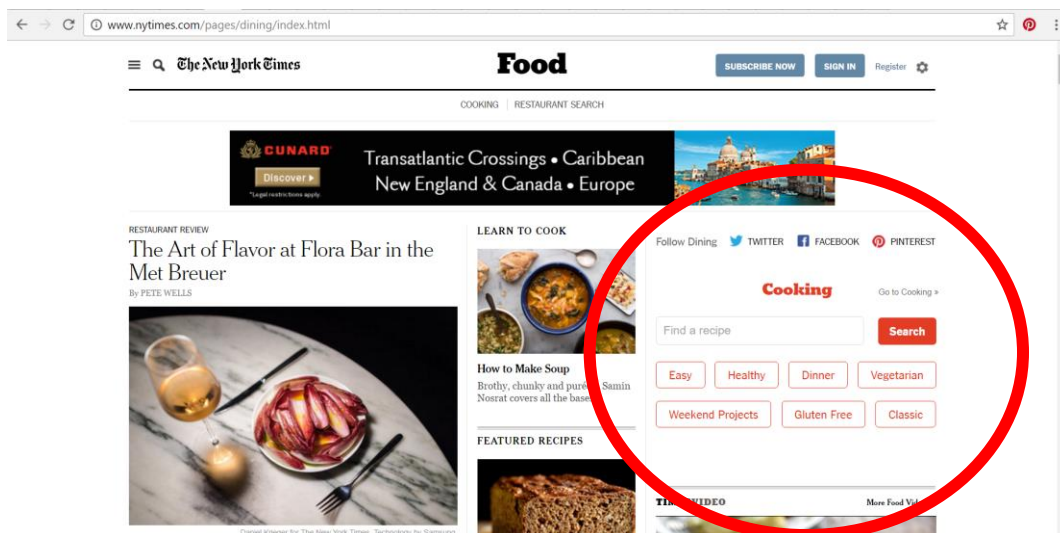
However, the NYT Cooking home page better supports, and even encourages, browsing rather than searching. Specifically, a search bar is present but overwhelmed by the "recipe of the day":
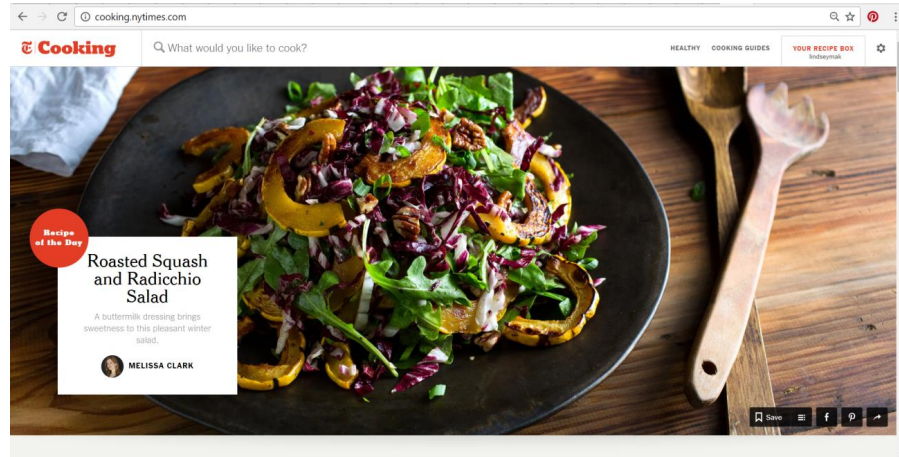
and the types of things that can/should be searched is unclear. This page also features lists of themed recipes collections and an expandable grid of the most recently posted recipes. Finally, at the bottom of the page are suggested search keywords.
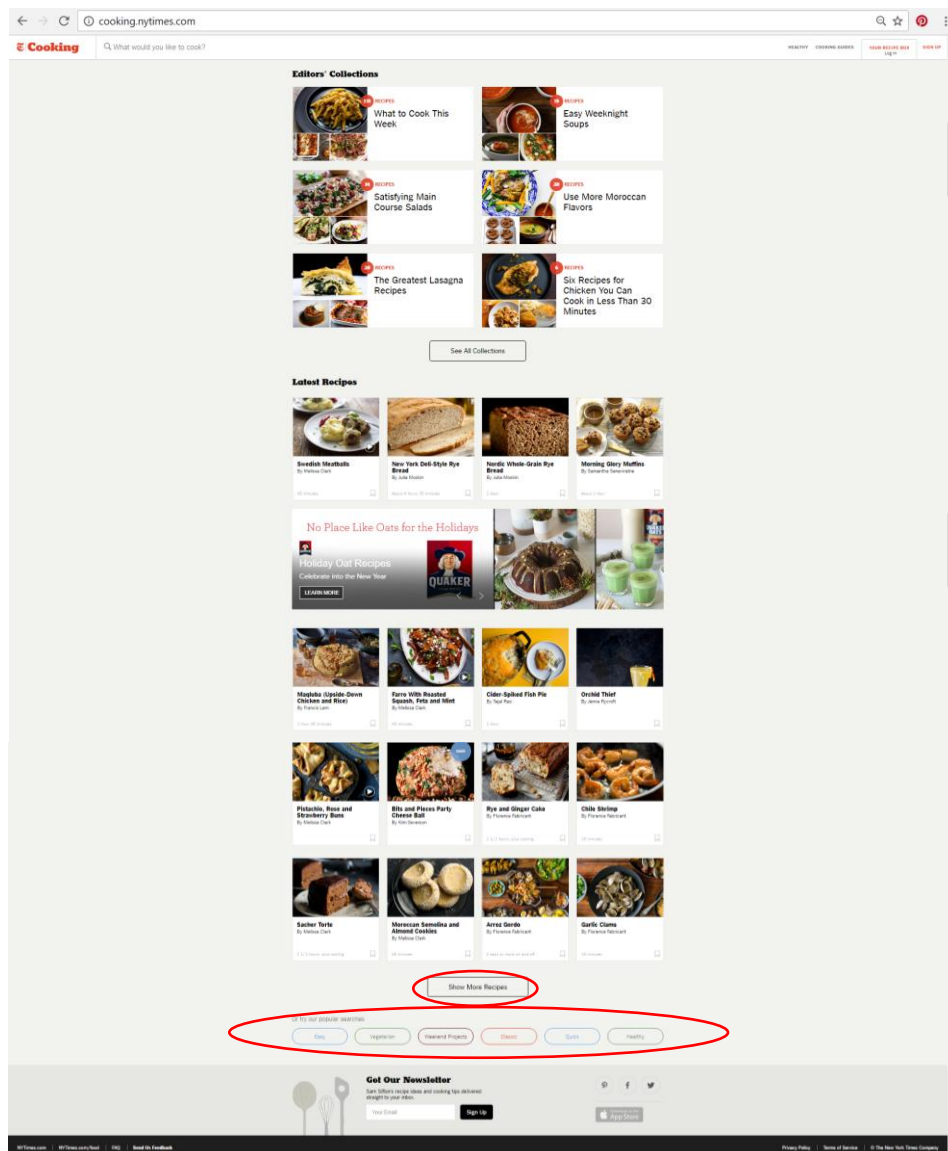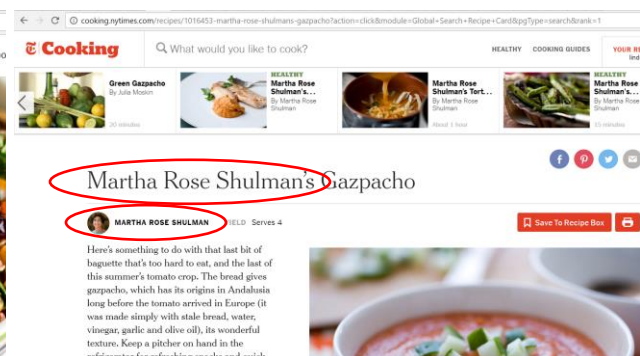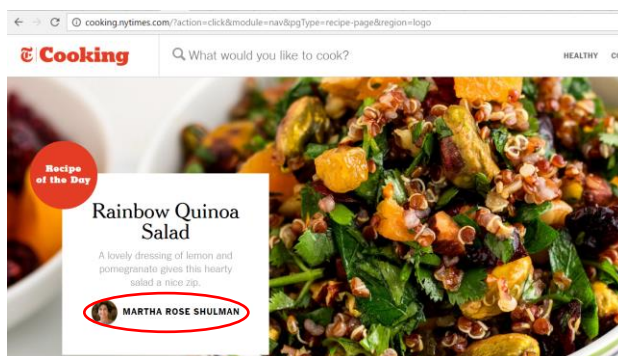
CS 247 – PS1 Critiques
Lindsey Kostas
1/13/17

This structure is great for the user who wishes to leisurely peruse the site's many recipes. However say its 5pm and a person visits the site to quickly find a chicken recipe they can make in the oven in under 30 minutes for dinner. He/she does not want, or have the time, to browse through recipes but it is unclear how to perform their desired filter search. Thus, it appears the site assumes their users are foodies and/or those who like to browse and bookmark recipes for future use.

While inconsistent with its advertisement on the NYT Food page, this is consistent with users' ability to create an account through which they can save and organize recipes in their "recipe box".
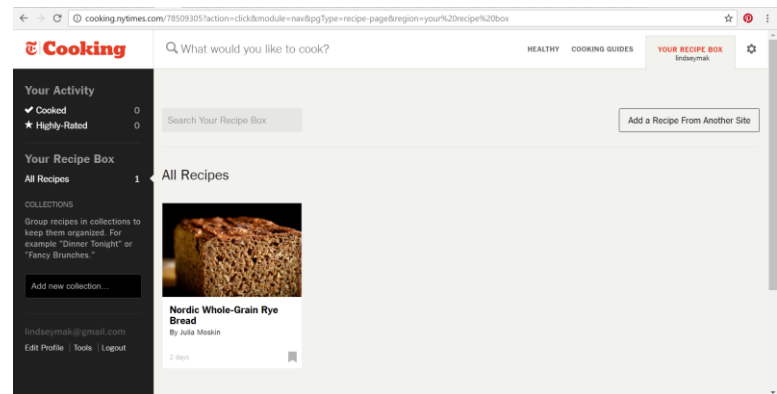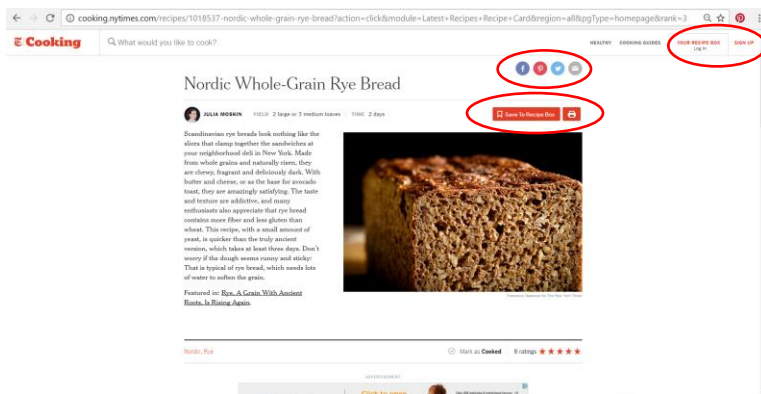
This appears to be the key functionality for user retention; however, the incentives to create an account may not be high enough. User's without accounts have access to the entire site's content and the site allows users to save, share, and organize recipes via Pinterest, Facebook, and Twitter. An account simply allows users to rate and comment on recipes. Thus, there is little to no motivation for most people to take the extra step to create an account.

If people do not create accounts, continued usage of the site is only obtained by providing superior and/or unique content. The NYT Cooking content is produced by a curated group of top-notch recipe authors and editors. The site clearly values the identity of their content creators given the prominence of the author's name on a given recipe and author/editor profiles which list recipes they recommend or have authored:

That said, author specific functionality is underdeveloped given their apparent importance. For instance, author specific content is not featured on the home page and author page interactions are limited to browsing by most recent recipe. Further users cannot easily follow or connect with their favorite authors. This last point seems like a feature which is consistent with the assumptions made by the designers and could be included to both increase account creation and user retention.

meetchewthere Mobile App
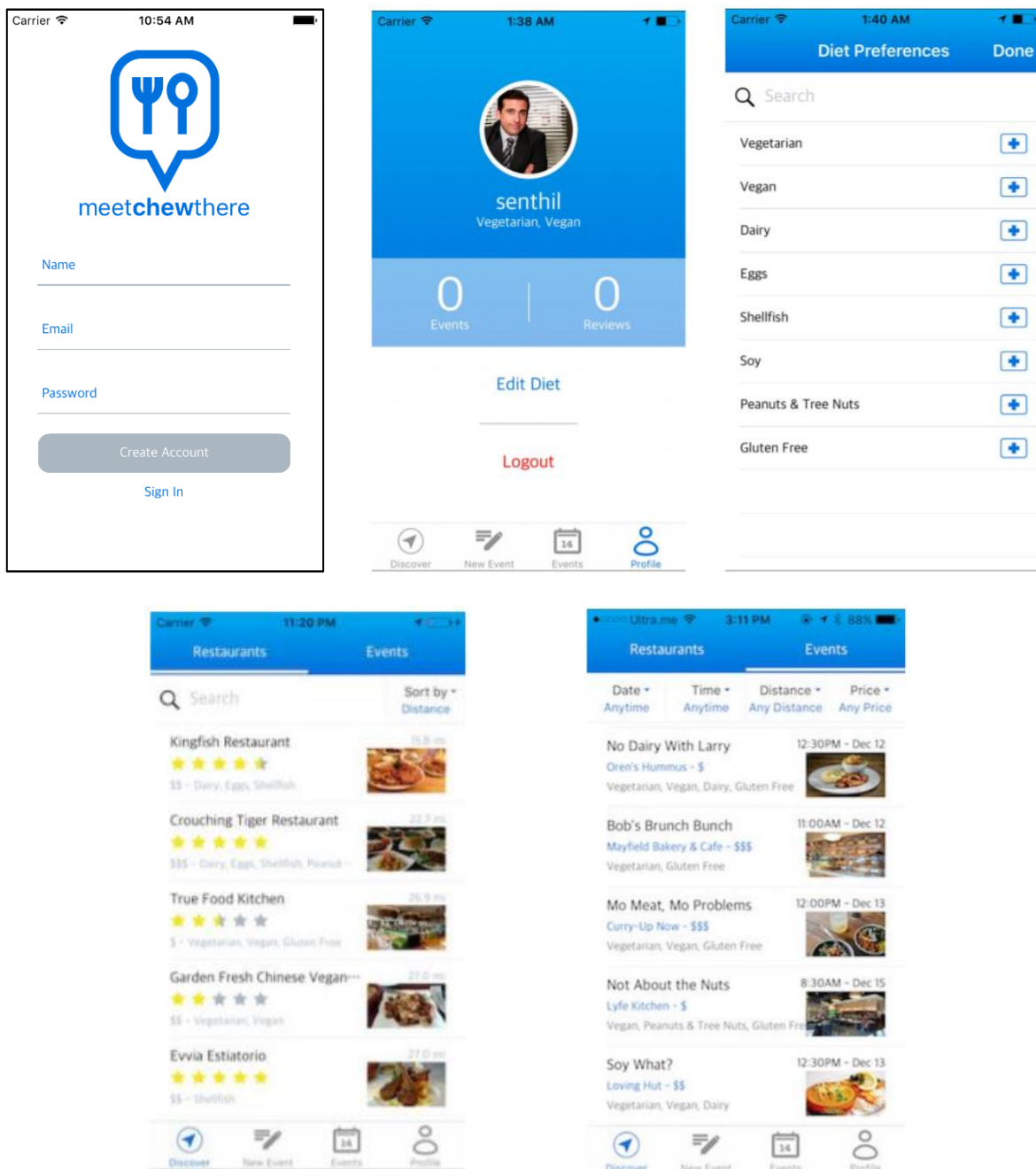
meetchewthere is a mobile app that is designed to make social eating and safe eating synonymous for people with dietary restrictions by providing a restriction specific restaurant search tool and an event management interface through which users can find, attend, and create food centered events at local restriction friendly restaurants.

Upon logging into the app, the user is directed to a restaurant search home screen.
Thus, the interface assumes the user wants to eat out and their current struggle to do so is solved by providing them with diet friendly places at which to eat. The app goes to great lengths to engender user trust in the restaurant selection by handpicking the listed restaurants and providing ratings and reviews from other users with the specific restriction.
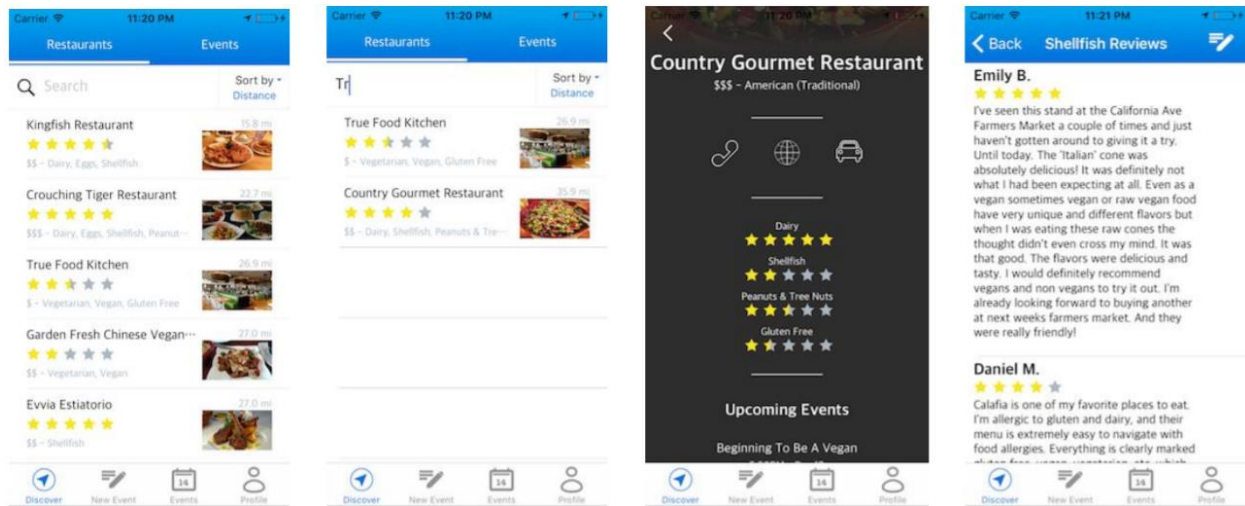
However, in the spectrum of people with dietary restrictions, which ranges from those with acute life-threatening food allergies to those with milder reactions to those who restrict their diet for personal reasons, the supposed need/desire to eat out may not always be valid. Specifically, those individuals with life-threatening conditions may not want to eat out under any circumstances. So, the app ultimately targets users who would in fact eat out under safe circumstances.

This "less-restricted" target user challenges the app's assumption that users want to attend and create events. The event oriented nature of the app was created to serve the need/desire of many of our interviewees to meet others who understood their situation and to be able to share a meal without questions or funny faces from their companions. The app prominently features a restriction specific event search as the secondary tab on the home page:
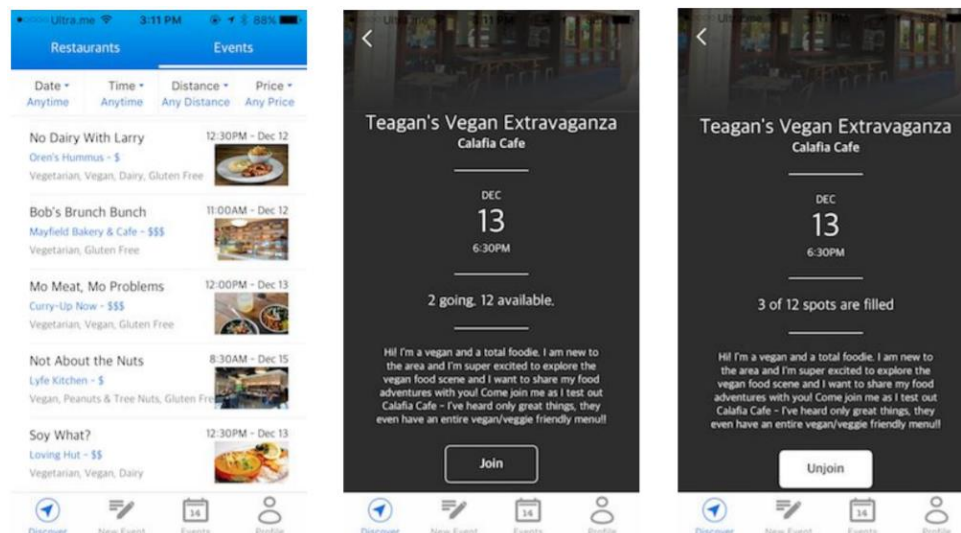
As well as an events management console and supports an event creation functionality:
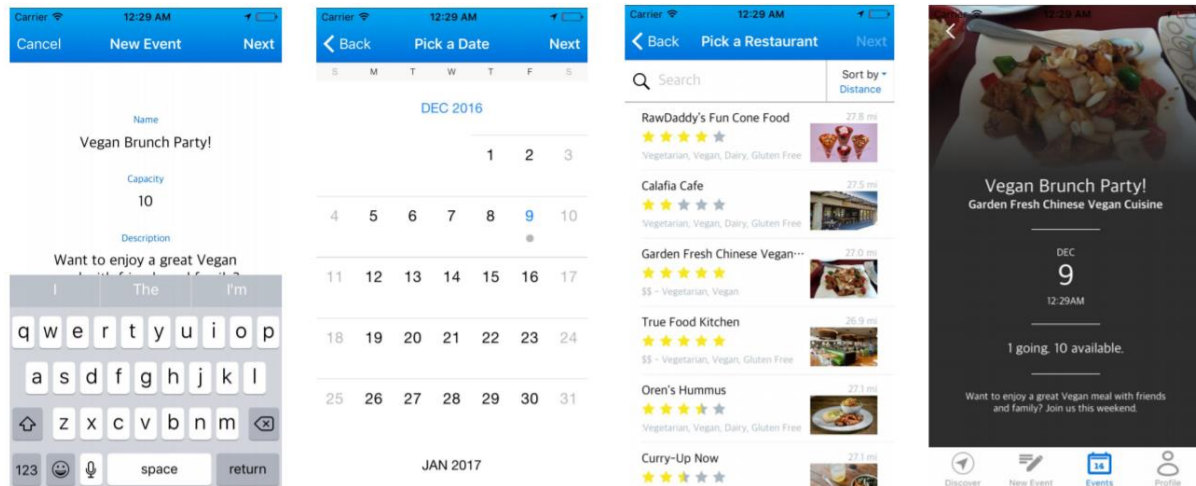
However, in retrospect, it was the people with the most severe and life-threatening conditions that expressed this desire. Thus, the ultimate "less restricted" target users may not share this intense craving to find meal companions because they may already be able to share meals, albeit inconvenient at times, given the severity, or lack thereof, of their condition.

That said, these users may still find value in the restaurant search tool, but they may prefer to use this tool to take their existing friends to these restaurants rather than expand their presence within the app and meet new people by attending and hosting meetchewthere events. In this case, the app dramatically misallocates resources by devoting too much functionality to serve a need that doesn't really exist. This unfortunate result may be avoided by refocusing the functionality of the app away from events and instead building out the restaurant search feature to support searches by location, type of venue, kid-friendly, etc… as well as include a reservation/booking system, interactive menus, order ahead/take out options, among other functionalities.

Subjectivity of the Critique

The preceding critiques are both subjective. My initial impressions of the interfaces, speculation about and/or evaluation of their assumptions, and development of different and likely use cases all stem from my past experiences and how I think about the world. For instance, my assessment that recipe search seems to take the backseat to recipe browsing on the NYT Cooking site is partially driven by the fact that I am and always have been drawn to images, so the structure of the sight causes me to direct my attention to the many browse-able features and ignore the search bar. However, someone else who is not as much of a visual thinker/learner may pay more attention to the search features because the images are not as compelling to them. That said, this admitted subjectivity does not invalidate my assessment. Instead, my assessment, as with anyone else's, must be taken with a grain of salt and viewed in context of who I am and my past experiences. For instance, while I frequently use the NYT Cooking site to browse and find recipes, I have never created an account, nor did I even know such an option was available until I performed this critique. Thus, I represent one type of user and my critique of the site has merit as to my, and other users like me, experience with and understanding of the site. So, since all critiques are subjective, the more important question is the relevance of my critique. Relevance may best be measured by the number of other users who are, or may be, similar to me and share my experiences such that the more of these people that exist, the more relevant my critique is.