

Project Proposal

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Description of the Product

The product we are building is called MicSpot, an Android application designed to help stand up comedians find and sign up for open mics in the area, coordinate transportation with other comics to and from open mics, and discover new up and coming comedians.

Need for the Product

The current state of open mic comedy is messy and disorganized, and for new comics or experienced comics coming to a new area can be very difficult to navigate. Currently, the system for finding open mics is as follows: Each city's comedy scene has a Facebook group, which will have within it (best case scenario) a Google calendar containing the schedule of open mics for the area (Bay Area calendar shown below):

Bay Area Comedy Open Mics

Today: January 2017

Print Week Month Agenda

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Jan 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5pm OMG Sunday Night Mic 9pm Live Open Mic (mixed) @ The 9pm Hamburger 9pm Comedy Open Mic @ Khartour 10pm Open Mic at Milkbar	5:15pm Open Mic (mixed) @ Ugly N 6pm New Joke Workshop @ Mutiny 6:30pm Open Relationship Mic @ S 9pm Comedy Open Mic @ Khartour 10pm Open Mic at Milkbar	5:30pm Hysteria Comedy Open Mic 6pm Club OMG SF 6:30pm Poor House Bistro Open Mic 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri 6:30pm Oakland Queer Open Mic: Pas	5:30pm SF Eagle Open Mic SF 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri 7pm Comedia Open Mic @ Caffe Fr 8pm Party Central Open Mic @ Pen	6pm Comedy Open Mic @ Brainwas 6:30pm Open Mic (mixed) @ East B 8pm Cto.FAME.U.s (mixed) @ Igual 8pm Open Mic @ Tap's Keyes Club 8pm Open Mic (mixed) @ Belrose 1 10pm Free Word Happenings (mixe	6pm Happy Hour Open Mic @ Mutir 7:30pm Godfrey's Reality Check and 8:30pm Back Yard Comedy @ Back	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
5pm OMG Sunday Night Mic 9pm Live Open Mic (mixed) @ The 9pm Hamburger 9pm Comedy Open Mic @ Khartour 10pm Open Mic at Milkbar	5:15pm Open Mic (mixed) @ Ugly N 6pm New Joke Workshop @ Mutiny 6:30pm Open Relationship Mic @ S 6:30pm Scott & Marshall's Open Mic 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri	5:30pm Hysteria Comedy Open Mic 6pm Club OMG SF 6:30pm Poor House Bistro Open Mic 6:30pm Oakland Queer Open Mic: Pas 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri	5:30pm SF Eagle Open Mic SF 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri 7pm Comedia Open Mic @ Caffe Fr 8pm Party Central Open Mic @ Pen	6pm Comedy Open Mic @ Brainwas 6:30pm Open Mic (mixed) @ East B 8pm Cto.FAME.U.s (mixed) @ Igual 8pm Open Mic @ Tap's Keyes Club 8pm Open Mic (mixed) @ Belrose 1 10pm Free Word Happenings (mixe	6pm Happy Hour Open Mic @ Mutir 7:30pm Godfrey's Reality Check and 8:30pm Back Yard Comedy @ Back	
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5pm OMG Sunday Night Mic 7pm Hopmonk Open Mic Comedy 9pm Live Open Mic (mixed) @ The 9pm Hamburger 9pm Comedy Open Mic @ Khartour 10pm Open Mic at Milkbar	5:15pm Open Mic (mixed) @ Ugly N 6pm New Joke Workshop @ Mutiny 6:30pm Open Relationship Mic @ S 6:30pm Scott & Marshall's Open Mic 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri	5:30pm Hysteria Comedy Open Mic 6pm Club OMG SF 6:30pm Poor House Bistro Open Mic 6:30pm Oakland Queer Open Mic: Pas 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri	5:30pm SF Eagle Open Mic SF 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri 7pm Comedia Open Mic @ Caffe Fr 8pm Party Central Open Mic @ Pen	6pm Comedy Open Mic @ Brainwas 6:30pm Open Mic (mixed) @ East B 8pm Cto.FAME.U.s (mixed) @ Igual 8pm Open Mic @ Tap's Keyes Club 8pm Open Mic (mixed) @ Belrose 1 10pm Free Word Happenings (mixe	6pm Happy Hour Open Mic @ Mutir 8:30pm Back Yard Comedy @ Back	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
5pm OMG Sunday Night Mic 9pm Live Open Mic (mixed) @ The 9pm Hamburger 9pm Comedy Open Mic @ Khartour 10pm Open Mic at Milkbar	5:15pm Open Mic (mixed) @ Ugly N 6pm New Joke Workshop @ Mutiny 6:30pm Open Relationship Mic @ S 6:30pm Scott & Marshall's Open Mic 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri	5:30pm Hysteria Comedy Open Mic 6pm Club OMG SF 6:30pm Poor House Bistro Open Mic 6:30pm Oakland Queer Open Mic: Pas 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri	5:30pm SF Eagle Open Mic SF 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri 7pm Comedia Open Mic @ Caffe Fr 8pm Party Central Open Mic @ Pen	6pm Comedy Open Mic @ Brainwas 6:30pm Open Mic (mixed) @ East B 7pm San Francisco Queer Open Mic 7pm OVO (Oakland's Very Own Tav 7pm Poetry By the Bay (mixed) @ 7:30pm Ignite the Mic (mixed) @ TI	6pm Happy Hour Open Mic @ Mutir 8:30pm Back Yard Comedy @ Back	
29	30	31	Feb 1	2	3	4
5pm OMG Sunday Night Mic 9pm Live Open Mic (mixed) @ The 9pm Hamburger 9pm Comedy Open Mic @ Khartour 10pm Open Mic at Milkbar	5:15pm Open Mic (mixed) @ Ugly N 6pm New Joke Workshop @ Mutiny 6:30pm Open Relationship Mic @ S 6:30pm Scott & Marshall's Open Mic 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri	5:30pm Hysteria Comedy Open Mic 6pm Club OMG SF 6:30pm Poor House Bistro Open Mic 6:30pm Oakland Queer Open Mic: Pas 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri	5:30pm SF Eagle Open Mic SF 6:30pm True Hustle Open Mic @ Bri 7pm Comedia Open Mic @ Caffe Fr 8pm Party Central Open Mic @ Pen	6pm Comedy Open Mic @ Brainwas 6:30pm Open Mic (mixed) @ East B 8pm Cto.FAME.U.s (mixed) @ Igual 8pm Open Mic @ Tap's Keyes Club 8pm Open Mic (mixed) @ Belrose 1 10pm Free Word Happenings (mixe	6pm Happy Hour Open Mic @ Mutir 8:30pm Back Yard Comedy @ Back	

Events shown in time zone: Pacific Time

GoogleCalendar

Worst case scenario, the Facebook group will have a text file containing the open mic information for each week.

Finding open mics

This system is problematic for a number of reasons. The information display is cluttered and tough to scan, and gives no quick indication as to where any of these mics are located. Another issue is the appointment of the Facebook group as the nexus of

information for a comedy scene. These groups follow no standard naming convention, and can be difficult to find. For example, in San Francisco, the Facebook group is titled “Bay Area Comedy Network”. In Seattle, the Facebook group is called “Northwest Comedians”, and in Denver, the Facebook group is called “Colorado Comedy Coop”. As one can imagine, coming to one of these cities and looking for the main Facebook group can be difficult when one has no idea as to what the correct group is actually called. Additionally, one has to get approved to join the group after requesting to do so, and this can take anywhere from hours to weeks, depending on how diligent the group administrator happens to be (a completely voluntary job). MicSpot will address these issues by providing a consistent, open experience to whoever has the app, where one can go anywhere in the country and see the mic listings displayed on a map of that city, where mics that are happening that day are displayed as clickable green nodes and mics that are active but not happening that day are displayed as clickable yellow nodes.

Another issue with this system is how up to date an open mic listing is. Looking at the Bay Area Comedy Open Mic calendar above, someone well versed in the scene can quickly pick out several mics from the list that have been discontinued or now meet on a bi-weekly basis as opposed to a weekly basis as listed. Even if a mic is correctly listed and up to date in the calendar, the mic will on occasion get canceled some weeks due to unforeseen circumstances (producer’s car broke down, trivia night at the bar replaced the mic that week, etc.). This means that the only way one can really be sure that the mic is happening that day is if the producer posts to the Facebook group that day indicating that the mic is happening. This is problematic because any given comic may not be Facebook friends with the producer, and as a result not receive notification of whether the mic is happening or not, and either show up to a mic that got cancelled, or not show up to a mic that is in fact happening. In MicSpot, a producer will have the ability to add their open mic to the map, and once added with the proper parameters (duration, location, set length given to each comic, recurring basis, etc.), the producer will be prompted by the app the morning of the day the mic will occur with a simple opt in of “Is the mic happening today? Y/N”. The producer can respond to this with one tap, where comics will then be able to see if the mic is running that day or not.

Open mic signups

Signing up for an open mic is also a problem. Some mics have in person sign ups, where comics may have to get to the venue over an hour in advance to be guaranteed a spot. Other mics do online pre-signups, where the producer will post to the Facebook group some time the day of the mic to the Facebook group and allow comics to sign up for slots via commenting with their desired slot number on the post. This can be problematic because the vast majority of open mic producers work day jobs, so the sign up post will not be consistently posted at the same time each week.

This lack of consistency makes pre-signups tough for open mic comics that work jobs without the flexibility to be constantly checking Facebook for mic postings. MicSpot addresses the sign up system by allowing mic producers to automate sign up postings, where a producer can opt to have sign ups open at a set time of day the day of the mic each week. Comics then know when exactly pre-sign ups will be posted, and can plan ahead of time to take a moment out of their day at that time to sign up. Comics that consistently attend that mic can turn on sign-up notifications for the mic, and get prompted by the app to sign up for a slot once signups open.

Transportation Coordination

For many comics, it is not uncommon to do 2-3 open mics in a night, 4-5 nights a week. The transportation costs of doing this can add up over time, where sometimes taking a bus or train is too slow to make your spot, so one has to drive or Uber. Oftentimes, there will be multiple comics doing the same set of mics on any given night, and theoretically this would be used by comics to split transportation and save. However, in the current system there isn't much visibility on this, and one would have to track down signup lists on individual Facebook posts to find out who exactly is going to be at each mic, then reach out. MicSpot, having the list of comics signed up for each open mic, would address this need by highlighting to the user which other comics are doing the same open mics as them that night, where one can easily reach out and coordinate transportation from there.

Booking

The reason stand up comics go to open mics is two fold. The first reason is to try out new jokes and sharpen old jokes, and the second reason is to try to get noticed by other comics that produce shows and get put on paid showcases. However, oftentimes the other comics at an open mic will not watch the other comics' sets, and will instead choose to hang out outside the venue with other comics and smoke cigarettes. This means that even if a relatively experienced comic has been coming to the same open mic for months and consistently doing well, they still may be overlooked by producer-comics at the open mic who hadn't watched one of their sets yet. This is another area where MicSpot can offer a service, where comics can check into a mic upon getting to the location during the time parameters of the mic. The mic's page will display a "leaderboard" of sorts, where comics that have come to the open mic the most times will be at the top. This visibility will allow an up and coming comic's work to be noticed, and may make a producer-comic come inside to watch the comics set if they notice them to be particularly high up on the leaderboard, if the comic has a good set, they get the opportunity to be booked for paid work.

Reviews

Often, comics have no idea what an open mic will be like prior to getting to the venue. It would be nice for comics to be able to leave reviews on open mics to allow other comics to get a feel for the open mic prior to going there. MicSpot would allow users to write comments on open mics and display these comments on the open mic page.

Potential Audience

The audience for MicSpot will be stand up comedians across the country. This isn't a particularly large or wealthy group of people, and as such the lack of a legitimate business opportunity in the field explains as to why virtually zero technical innovations have been made. Stand up comics tend to be largely non-technical, and as such user-centered design will be emphasized in the development of the project.

Discussion of Competing Products

As previously noted in the paper, all of the functionality provided in MicSpot is currently manufactured through a series of google calendars, Facebook groups, text files, and physical pieces of paper. There is currently no other mobile application that serves the needs outlined that has gained any traction among comics.

High-level Technical Design

The project will consist of an Android application (frontend) which is responsible for displaying information to the user and fetching user input, as well as a backend which handles business logic and data storage. The Android app will be programmed in Java and will rely on standard Google APIs for displaying the necessary information. For instance, the Google Maps API will be used to display the location of the various open mics, and the Firebase Cloud Messaging API will be used to deliver push notifications.

For the backend, we will use Node.js and Express to create a REST API which will serve as the communication link between the frontend and the backend. We chose Node since all team members have previous experience with Javascript. All requests and responses to the REST API will be encrypted using SSL to protect user data. On the server, user data will be stored in a MongoDB database. Additionally, we will use the Facebook Login API to facilitate user signups. The backend service will be hosted on Heroku.

Resource Requirements

There are no unusual resource requirements for this project. We only need laptops for development and at least one physical Android phone to test the application. For the backend service, the free Heroku tier is likely to provide enough computational resources for our use case.

Potential Approaches

Alternative solutions we considered included:

1. A website based solution
2. A review site for open mics
3. An iOS app

However, with each of these alternatives, we found them to be less suited to meet the needs of our audience--comedians. While a website based solution would be accessible from any device with connection to the internet, the ability to coordinate travel and booking would be greatly hindered and users would most likely have to sign in every time they used the site.

A review site for open mics would be helpful to both comedians and potential audience members; however, this approach wouldn't provide comedians logistical information such as location, start time, organizer and who else is going to allow them to attend as many open mics as possible.

We found that we had more experience in Android than iOS so we felt our best work could be more fully realized in an Android app.

Assessment of Risks

The main risks of this project stem from the possibility of providing comedians inaccurate information regarding open mics.

Next Steps

Our next steps will be to interview potential test users and prioritize features based on insight we gather. Then, we will design the app, build the MVP and, if time allows, commence testing.