The CoW (Coffee on Wednesdays) Concept

CoW automatically connects people in communities for 1-on-1 meetings at mutually agreeable times on Wednesdays.

Sometimes, interactions between people in communities can become transactional, prescriptive, or impersonal to the point of limiting and prohibiting true connection. When this happens, the level of motivation decreases, and with it, the pace of learning and progress toward the mission of the community also decrease. To prevent this from happening, and to bolster serendipitous connections and deeper perspective, Coffee on Wednesdays enables unstructured 1-on-1 connection time between community members.

High Level Function

The app relies on a moderator sending out an email every week to the community. That email includes a form soliciting times during which community members are free on the next coming Wednesday. The app reacts automatically to the responses that come back from this survey and attempts to match each correspondent with a “chatter”, or someone with whom they have yet to meet who has indicated an overlapping available time. People can select multiple times on a given form response, which can net them multiple chatters on the next coming Wednesday. Whenever a match is made, each of the two chatters are sent a calendar invite. They can communicate with each other further if they want to meet somewhere different from the suggested place in the automatic invite or if they need to adjust other logistics. In addition, there is a possibility of enabling prizes issued to community members for every X CoW sessions they engage in. Whenever they have signed up for a multiple of X sessions, they are sent an email including the details of the reward (typically, it’s a small gift card to the community coffee shop – the recommended place for holding the session).

FAQ

*Why is this set up for Wednesdays, and can I change it to a different day?*

This app wasn’t originally developed to be released to any community; it was developed for a specific community that happened to have generally more free time on Wednesdays. Also, CoW was a rather delightful acronym as compared to CoM or CoF, for example. You can certainly tinker with the code and spreadsheet functions (recommend using test mode in the script) to change the day of the meeting. Note that if you do, you’ll likely want to change the time at which the emails are sent to people who did not receive a match (currently, this is set to 12:00AM Tuesday morning, so people have all of Tuesday to figure out how they’re going to otherwise make use of the time on Wednesday they had set aside).

*Can this work for a community that isn’t in a Google Group and may have non-Gmail email addresses?*

Making this change requires you to turn off the auto-email collection from the Google Form, add a question to the form asking survey correspondents to fill in their email addresses, and then double check that the script is referencing the correct columns on the spreadsheet. You might want to add a second question asking correspondents to verify the spelling of their email addresses. Note that disabling the auto-email collection from a Google Form opens it up to potential correspondence from outside your community, so share the links carefully. In addition, making this change may also require you to rework the automatic calendar invite function, as an incoming Gmail calendar invite may not be interpreted properly by a non-Gmail email address or email application.

*Can this work outside of Google Forms and Sheets?*

The CoW process relies pretty heavily on the Google Sheets and Google Forms, and it relies on functions in Google Script that reference and manipulate these Sheets and Forms. If you want to use a different set of tools to implement this concept, you can borrow from some of the pseudo code, but you’ll have to rebuild.

*What if I want to change the questions?*

Adding or changing the questions requires editing the code, as does changing the number of meetup options in the form. Changing what the times are represented by the options in the form, however, just requires you to edit the form.