

# Designing a better cook: a look at Yummly

Exploring the usability of an award-winning app



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Mar 29, 2018 · 9 min read



As a fairly recent college grad trying to break free from a lifestyle of ramen, Chick-fil-A, and taco Tuesdays, I've come to realize that being a good cook is pretty damn hard. Sure, there have been moments of cooking brilliance, but the process of searching for recipes, hunting down ingredients, and scrambling between laptop-pantry-mixing bowl like a headless chicken beats me down every single time.





One of the top image search results for "college diet"

Yeah, it's been a struggle. Suffice to say, help was needed.

## Enter Yummly

As an aspiring designer of both amazing products and amazing food, I decided to take a close look at the Yummly iOS app to help me learn to cook and to explore the usability of the app.

*Note: I am not affiliated with Yummly in any way (just in case my cooking skills didn't make that apparent enough).*

The Yummly logo is displayed prominently in the center of the page. It consists of the word "yummly" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters are a vibrant orange color. The "y" has a unique, rounded, and slightly irregular shape, while the other letters are more standard. The entire word is centered against a plain white background.

Yummly for your tummly!

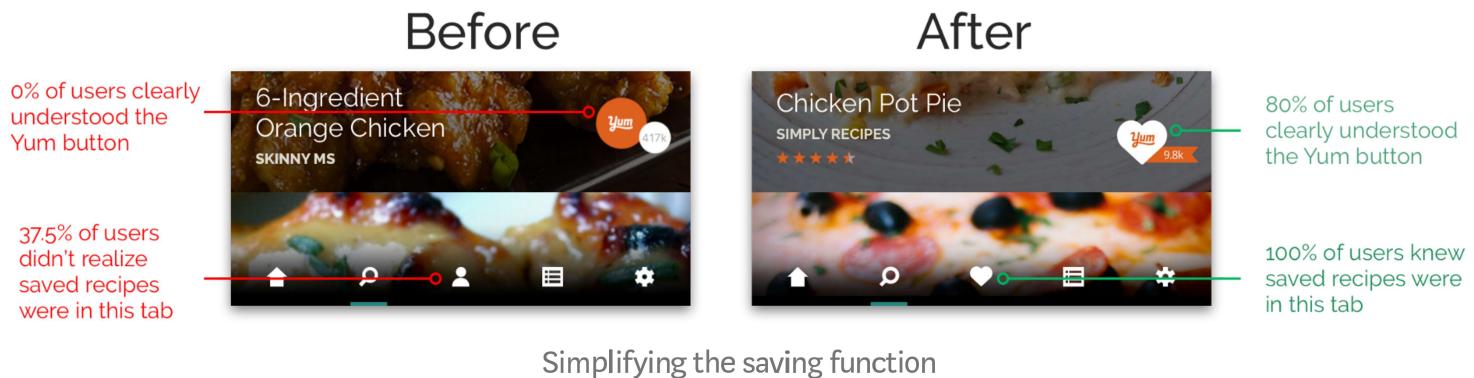
Yummly is a “smart cooking sidekick” that personalizes the cooking experience. Accessible from the web or via mobile app, Yummly provides features such as personalized recipe recommendations, recipe search and save, shopping list, and quick grocery delivery.

## Overview

Over a period of two weeks, I conducted guerrilla usability testing of the Yummly iOS app and identified that users were having **problems with the saving, sorting, searching, and filtering functions** in the app.

With user and business goals in mind, I designed solutions to address these pain points and validated the prototype with additional users. The result was a much more streamlined experience in which **using those functions was faster and easier**.

Here's a quick example: My test results showed that users were confused about the Yum (save recipe) button. I made it significantly easier to use by changing the shape and color of the button.



Let's dive into my process!

## Guerrilla Usability Testing: Finding the Pain Points

Whether you cook once a day or once in a blue moon, making food is at least somewhat relevant to a good chunk of the population. I assumed that the strangers I would test

with would at some point have needed to search for a recipe. I decided that guerrilla usability testing was the best method to use to be able to quickly gather insights while minimizing time and cost.

Due to this universal language of cooking and the nature of guerrilla testing, I decided to focus on what jobs users might ask Yummly to solve (the Jobs to be Done model) and envisioned three different scenarios and job stories in which Yummly could meet a need.

Scenario 1 <i>Jim looks for a recipe</i>	Scenario 2 <i>Laura wants the best cheesecake</i>	Scenario 3 <i>Carl plans around his food allergies</i>
<p>1. Jim plans on cooking dinner tomorrow night. He usually cooks a few times a week, but he's not sure what to make for tomorrow.</p> <p>2. Jim pulls up his phone to search for a recipe. His fridge is empty and he's due for a grocery run, so ingredients won't be a constraint. He's feeling some type of chicken pasta, so he wants to search for that.</p> <p>3. With the help of the app, Jim is able to browse through different chicken pasta recipes until he finds one that suits him.</p>	<p>1. Lauren is interested in trying out new recipes to see if there are any capable of besting the recipe her mother passed down to her.</p> <p>2. Lauren goes to her favorite recipe site to search different blueberry cheesecake recipes. She knows her recipe is amazing, so she only wants to see a list of the very best.</p> <p>3. Lauren messes with the site's options until only the best recipes are displayed. She saves the top three recipes to try out in the future.</p>	<p>1. Carl's soy allergy has always held him back from trying a vegan diet. But now, he wants to see if he can make it work.</p> <p>2. He searches vegan recipes online and finds that many of them include soy ingredients. He tries entering "no soy" in the search.</p> <p>3. He scours the results, double checking the ingredients to make sure they are soy-free and saves some to try later.</p>
Job Story	Job Story	Job Story
<p><i>When I plan on cooking a meal in the near future, I want to find a good recipe that fits my needs so that I can have a tasty meal to eat.</i></p>	<p><i>When I have a specific recipe I aim to look for, I want to order them by quality so that I can find only the best recipes to try.</i></p>	<p><i>When I have dietary restrictions, I only want to view recipes I can use so that I don't have to manually check which recipes are safe to eat.</i></p>

**With this in mind, I set out to evaluate users' abilities to complete the following tasks:**

1. Find a recipe
2. Find 3 highly rated recipes of their favorite dish and save them
3. View only vegan, soy-free recipes

4. Find recipes that only use certain ingredients in their fridge



# Guerrilla usability testing out in the wilderness

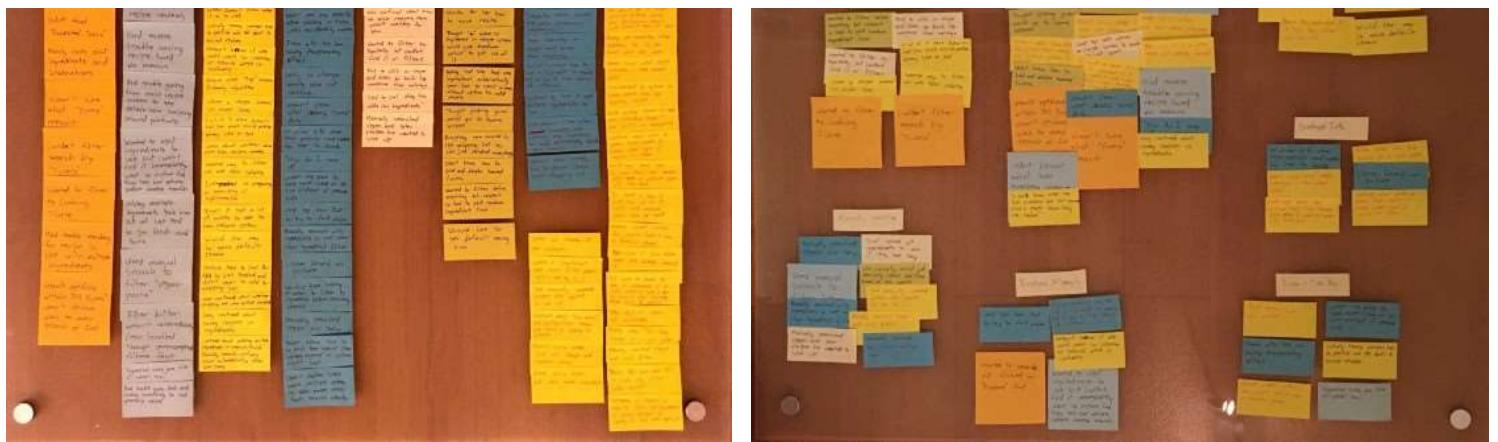
I tested with eight wonderful people (why you only need five, minimum) for about 15 minutes each in the Yerba Buena area of San Francisco, ranging from frequent cooks who regularly use recipes to novice cooks who have only cooked a few times.

As it turns out, **none of the users were familiar with Yummly**, so I was able to uncover many insights into the discoverability of different features and the ease of navigation throughout the app.

# Analysis: Prioritizing the Pain Points

After all the pain points were gathered, I noted the insights on sticky notes and grouped them by user. Then, I used affinity mapping to organize related pain points into categories so I could identify common themes.





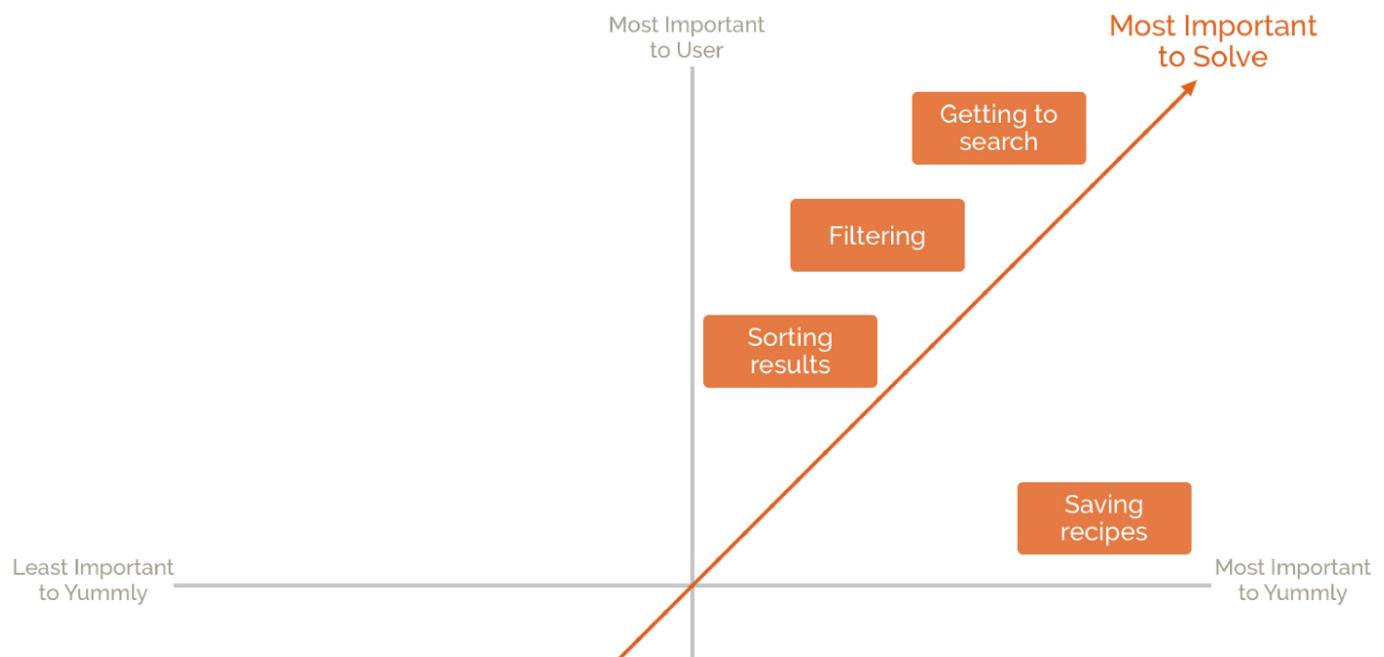
Pain points arranged and affinity mapped

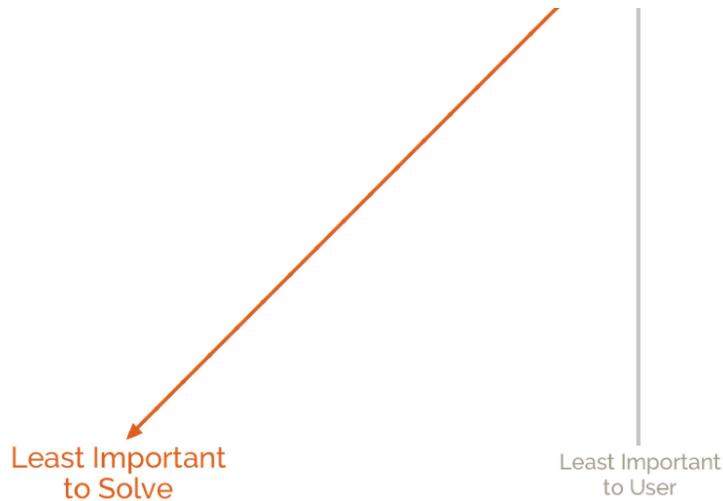
As themes among the pain points began to emerge, I used a 2x2 prioritization matrix to understand how they ranked in terms of importance to the business and importance to the user. This required making some assumptions about Yummly and its users.

**Assumptions about the business:** Yummly has an advertising-based business model, so success depends on daily active users.

**Assumptions about the users:** Based on my scenarios and job stories, I assumed that being able to find recipes that suit their particular needs and situations would be most important.

As a designer conscious of both business and user needs, this helped me decide which pain points were important for me to solve.

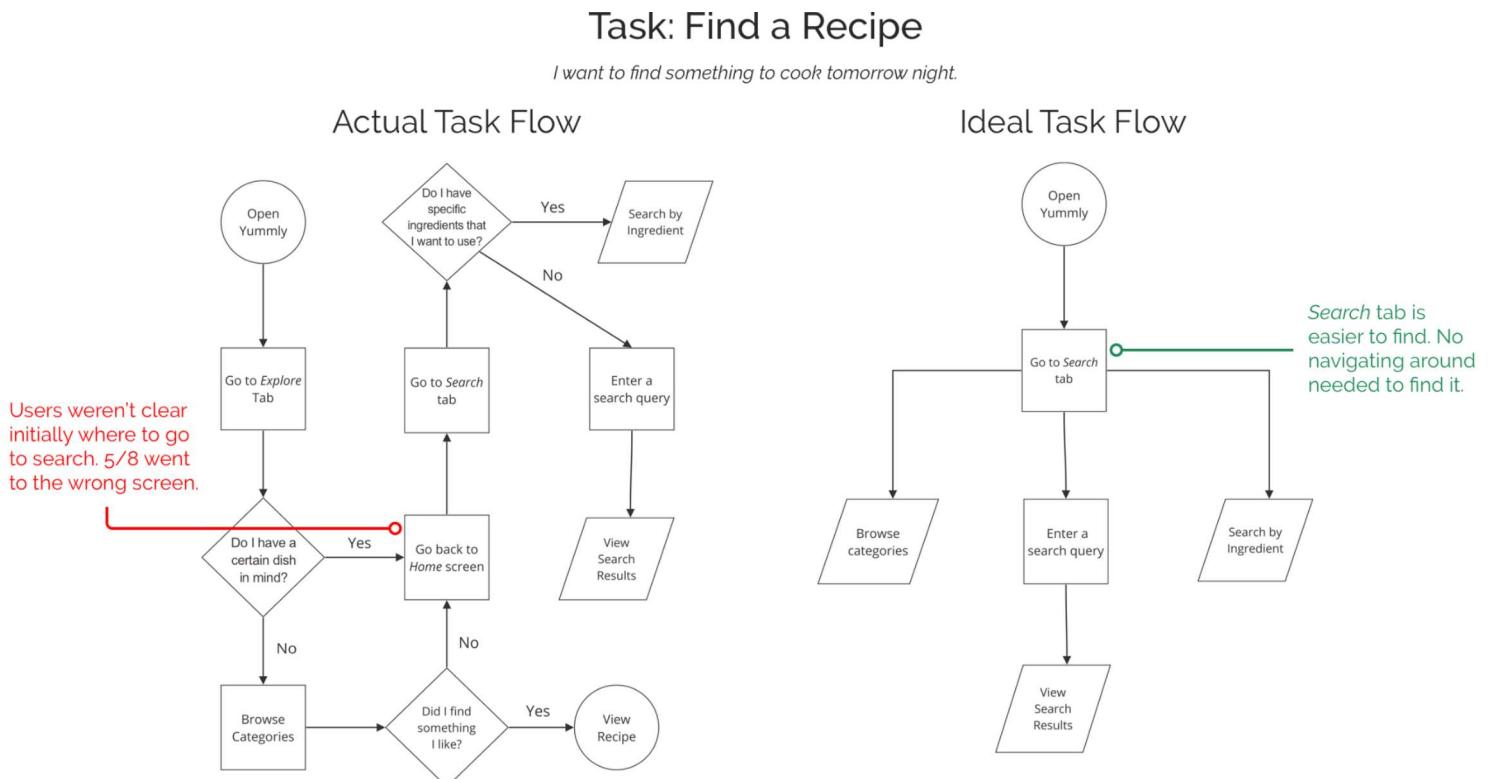




My highest priority were the pain points that fell in the upper right quadrant, ones the were important to both business and user.

## Solution: Eliminating Pain Points

I drew task flows as a way pinpoint the exact place where users were running into trouble in carrying out each task. Right next to these, I drew ideal task flows of how users would complete the same tasks pain-free. For the sake of space, I've only included one set of task flows.



Task flow illustrating the search function not being easily apparent or reachable (Pain Point 1)

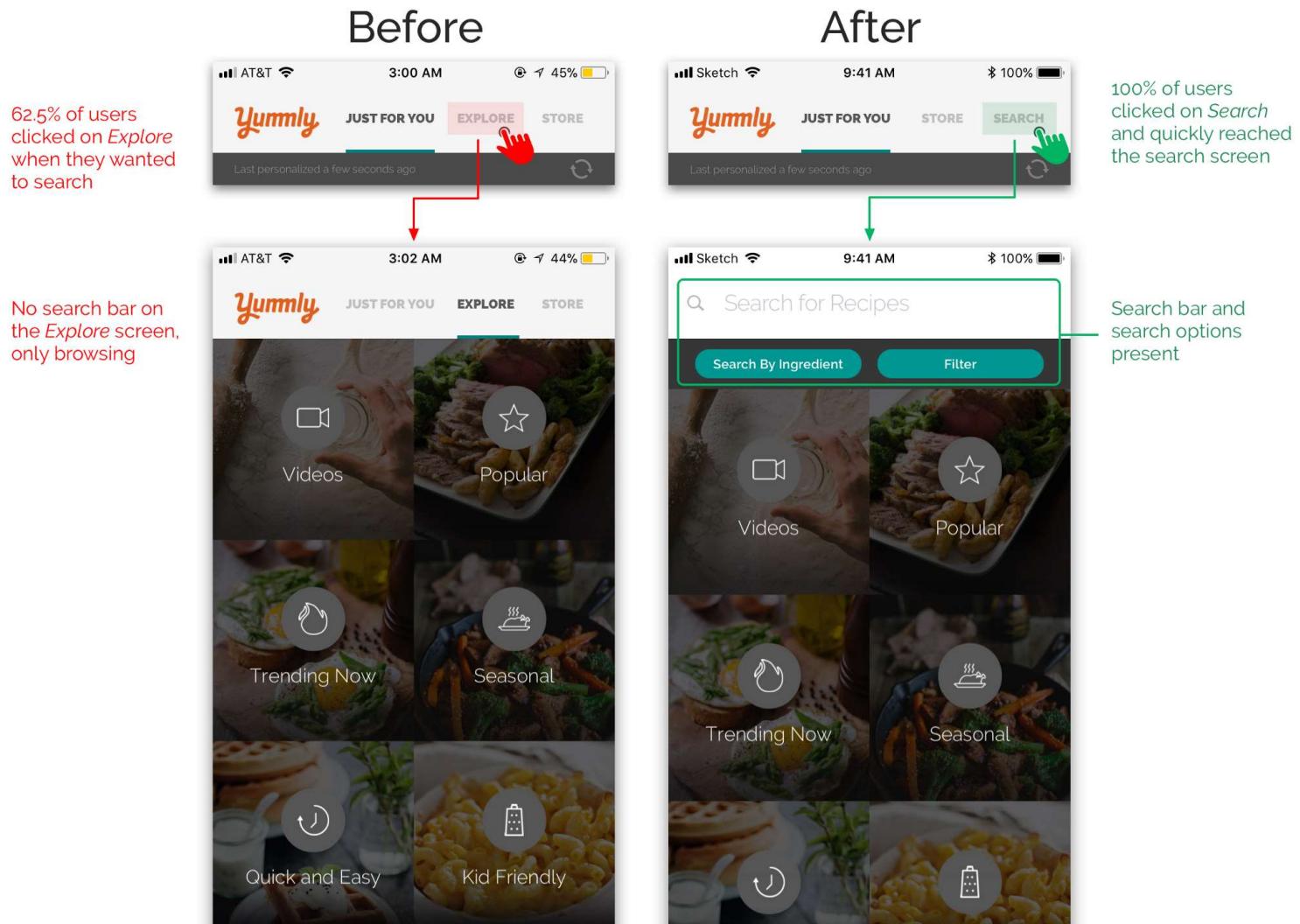
Now I had a visual indication of exactly where users were running into trouble and a goal for what I would have to change. With this in mind I generated design solutions based on these ideal task flows, created a prototype in InVision, and validated my solutions with five additional users.

Below is a summary of how I addressed each pain point.

## Pain Point 1: Search is not easily apparent or reachable

*On first sight, I don't know where to find a search bar.*

When trying to find a recipe, the first thing users did was tap on *Explore*, realize there was no way to search from the explore screen, and then have to navigate back and look for a way to search.





Trying to search from the home screen

**My solution:** I renamed the *Explore* tab to *Search* so users know immediately where they can go to search recipes. I also added a search bar and search options so users can manually search, in addition to exploring categories.

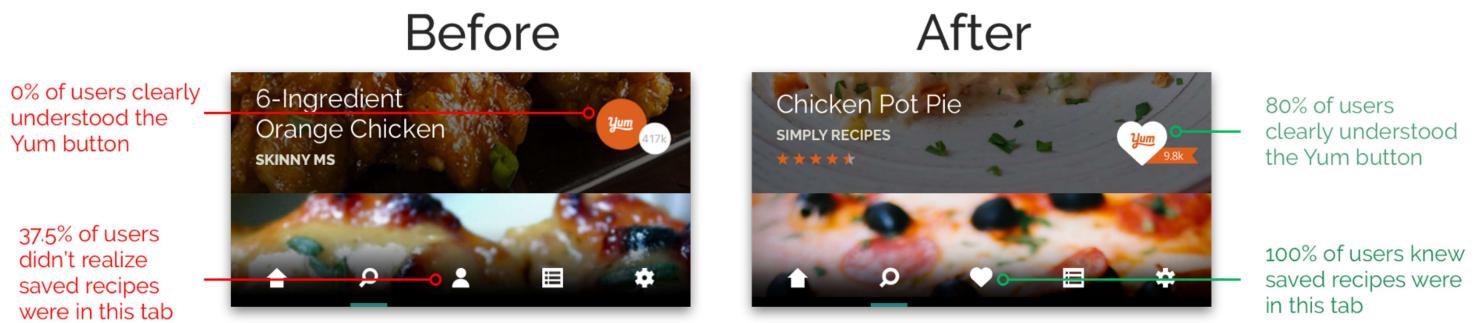
**Validation:** All 5/5 users were able to access the search step immediately from the home screen

## Pain Point 2: Confusion about saving recipes

*How do I save it?*

All 8 users were confused about the Yum feature, Yummly's way to favorite and save recipes. Some of those users didn't realize that Yum was a button that they could click, while others didn't know what Yum actually meant.

Once they figured it out, 3/8 users weren't initially sure where they could find their saved recipes.



**My solution:** I changed the Yum button from circular to heart-shaped, as hearts are a familiar favorite button signifier, and changed the unsaved button state to white instead of orange, as white makes more sense than orange to indicate an unclicked button state.

I also changed the number of Yums to be displayed on a ribbon rather than a circle. The ribbon is similar to the bookmark icon, acting as a secondary signifier.

I appropriately changed the person icon in the tab bar to a heart to make it obvious where saved recipes were stored.

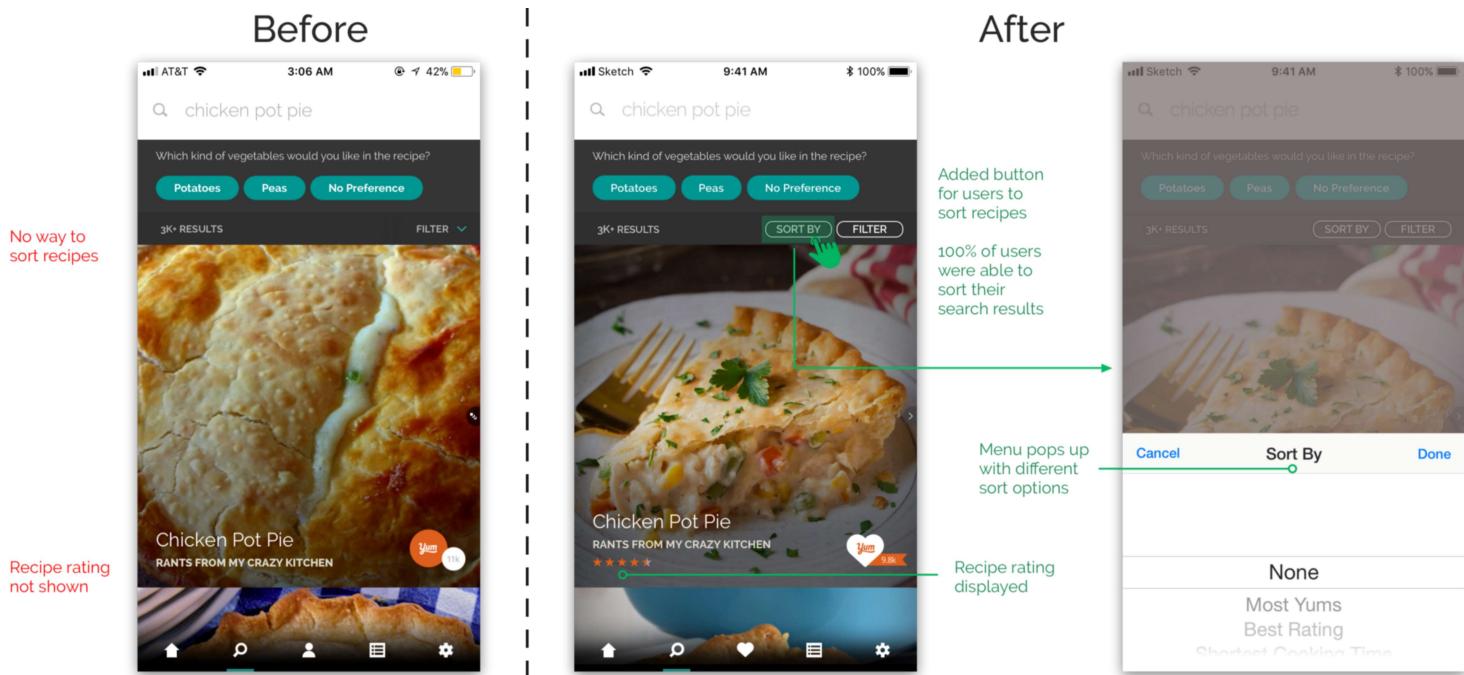
**Validation:** 4/5 users were easily able to save recipes. Only one user was hesitant because he wasn't sure if the button was clickable. All 5/5 users knew where to view saved recipes

## Pain Point 3: Unable to sort results

*I thought there was a way for you to view by most popular.*

On the search results screen, users lacked quick access to information that would help them decide whether a recipe is worth saving. Two users specifically pointed out that seeing the recipe's average rating required them to click on the recipe and wished it was visible at a higher level.

4/8 users wished there was some way to sort recipes by certain qualities, such as best rated or most Yummed.



**My solution:** Add a Sort button on the search results screen that would enable users to view recipes in order of rating, cooking time, or number of Yums. I also added a rating

display so users could have a sense of the recipe's quality without having to navigate.

**Validation:** All 5/5 users were able to easily sort their search results.

## Pain Point 4: Lack of filter visibility and feedback

**Lack of Visibility:** When presented with finding vegan, soy-free options, only 1/8 users used Yummly's built in filters. Everyone else manually searched some variant of "vegan no soy" instead. I observed that this was due to two main factors, the filter button not being present on the main search screen, and the filter button being difficult to see even when present.

The diagram illustrates the 'Before' and 'After' states of the Yummly app's search interface, focusing on the 'Search for Recipes' screen and its search results.

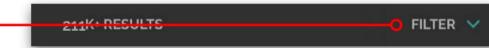
**Before:**

- Main search screen shows ingredient search.** A red arrow points to the search bar at the top of the screen.
- No options to filter search beforehand.** A red arrow points to the list of ingredients below the search bar.
- Enter a search:** An arrow points to the search bar on the results screen, which shows a search for "vegan".
- Filter button hard to see:** A red arrow points to the "FILTER" button at the bottom of the results screen.
- Apply filter:** An arrow points to the "FILTER" button at the bottom of the results screen.

**After:**

- Option to filter before searching:** A green arrow points to the "Filter" button at the top right of the search screen.
- Option to click button to view ingredient search:** A green arrow points to the "Search By Ingredient" button at the top left of the search screen.
- Enter a search:** An arrow points to the search bar on the results screen, which shows a search for "vegan".
- Filter button more visible:** A green arrow points to the "FILTER" button at the bottom right of the results screen.
- Apply filter:** An arrow points to the "FILTER" button at the bottom right of the results screen.

Button doesn't change when filter applied



Button changes state when filter applied



**My Solution (for lack of visibility):** Make the filter button more visible, and have a state change be indicated when filters are applied. I also put a filter button on the main search page so users have filter access right from the get-go.

**Lack of Feedback:** Particularly of note was my test with a person who was actually allergic to soy. She was able successfully find and apply the appropriate filters, but wanted to confirm that they were working and didn't have the feedback to do so.

*Okay at this point I don't trust the app and wouldn't use it anymore.*

She manually looked at the ingredients to see if she could eat them, and actually found that one of the supposed soy-free recipes actually contained a soy product. This made her lose trust in the app.

## Before

No reassurance for users with dietary restrictions



## After



Provide tags so users with restrictions can quickly assess recipe

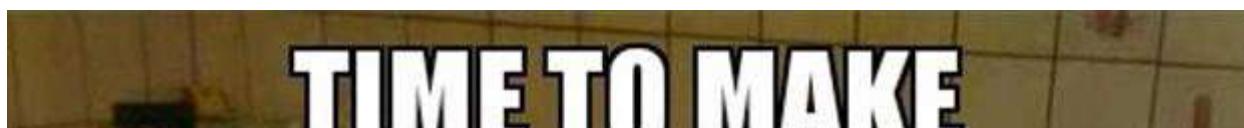
**My solution (for lack of feedback):** Provide tags on the recipe overview to show that recipes were vegan and soy-free.

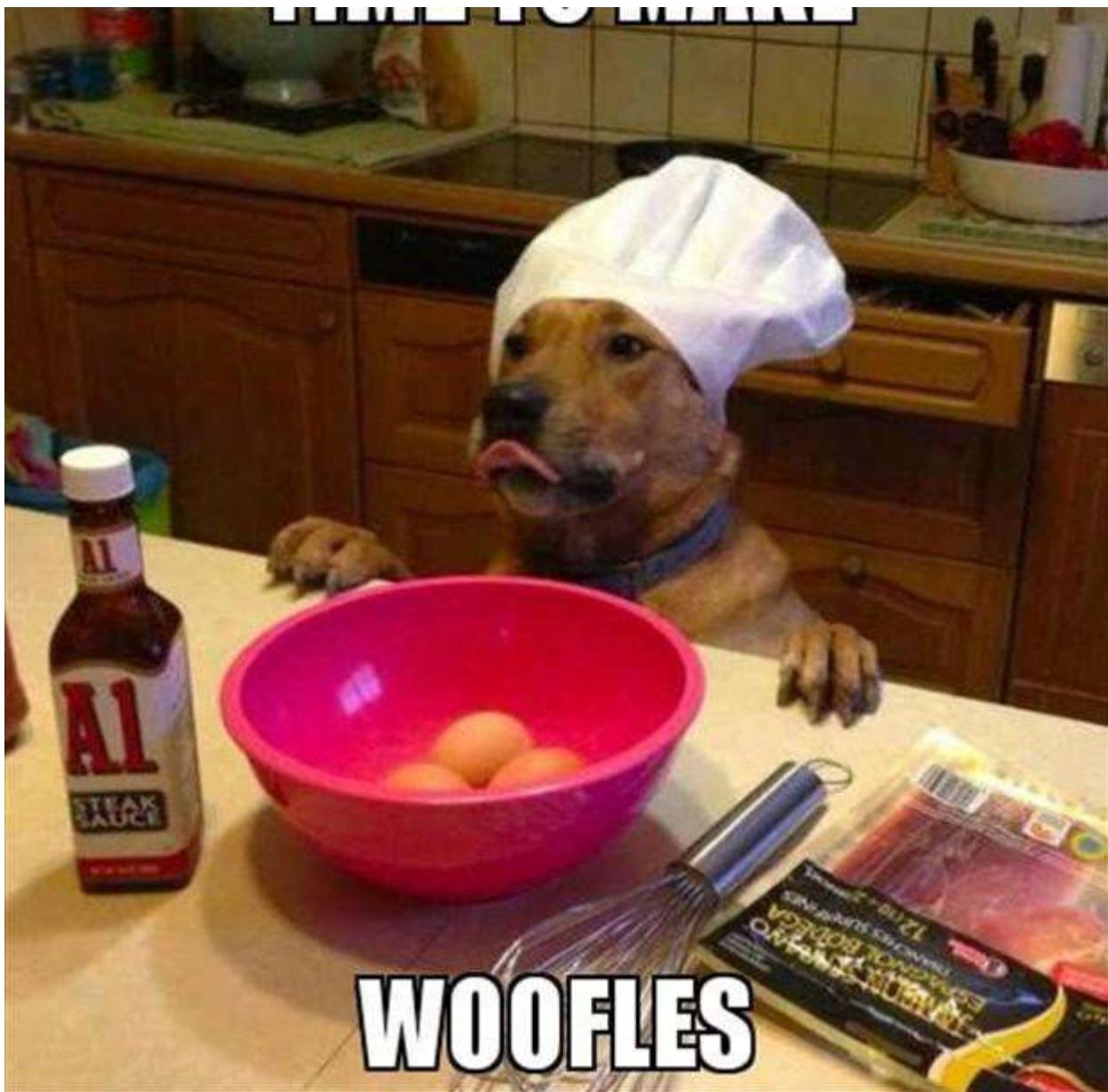
**Validation:** All 5/5 users were able to locate and apply filters.

## Going Forward

### Cooking-wise:

Become a masterchef with the help of Yummly! 🍴





What I will no longer be

## Design-wise:

Outside of everything I learned by doing and working through challenges, some of my specific takeaways from this project are:

**Affordances are especially important for new users.** Since everyone I tested with were first time-users of Yummly, a lot of the pain points I found (saving, filtering, searching) were a matter of the users being unfamiliar with the product and not knowing the full extent of what they could do. Having to address these pain points reinforced the importance of having affordances and making systems usable without help (or at least making the help easily retrievable).

**There may be tradeoffs between branding and usability.** The Yum button, with its orange color and logo mark, was a unique take on the favorite button. Unfortunately, it confused users and decreased usability. Using a more traditional favorite button would make the function clearer, but then Yummly would lose some of its branding and character. My redesigned button was a hybrid of the existing button and a generic button, as I tried to balance the tradeoffs.



Different options for the Yum button design, each with potential trade-offs

**Edge cases need to be considered.** To my surprise, one user interacted with the app completely differently than everyone else: the user who was allergic to soy. She had to take extra precautions and dig deeper into the recipes than other users. Referring back to Jobs to be Done, she had a larger job than the other users. Cases like these need to be considered in the design process, otherwise users with these larger job reqs will look elsewhere.

Special thanks to Zac Halbert, Jake Fleming, Amy Weibel, and Jeff Nissen. Finger tap icons made by Yannick from [www.flaticon.com](http://www.flaticon.com).

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