MVP - “Friend Trotter” mobile app

Ilja Aleksandar Panic
Copenhagen Business School
iljapanic@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I describe the process of validating a preliminary hypothesis for a mobile application aimed at users looking to get in touch with their friends using Facebook Login and Facebook OpenGraph.

1. HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis behind the “Friend Trotter” mobile app is based on a specific use case that hints at a potential need(s). A person takes a year off to travel the world. When that person was at a university they meet a lot of people from different countries and befriended them on Facebook over the years. Now they would like to meet some of these people when they travel from place to place. Now imagine that person would have an app on their phone that would show them which of their Facebook friends are close to the place they happen to be at. And also what things does the person have in common with these friends, so they can better choose whom to meet in the limited amount of time they have.

To see whether there is a need for such an app, the following hypothesis was examined:

People would like to be able to find and contact their Facebook friends who are currently around them and to see what interests and friends they share with them

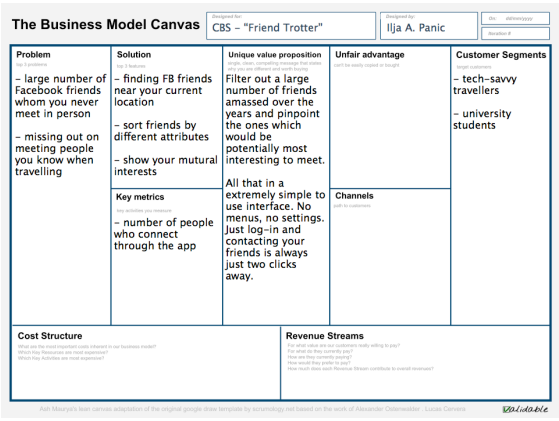

Figure 1. Business model canvas

In order to validate this hypothesis a very basic clickable “pen & paper” prototype outlining the basic functionality was presented in class. A higher fidelity prototype was tested with other students later on.

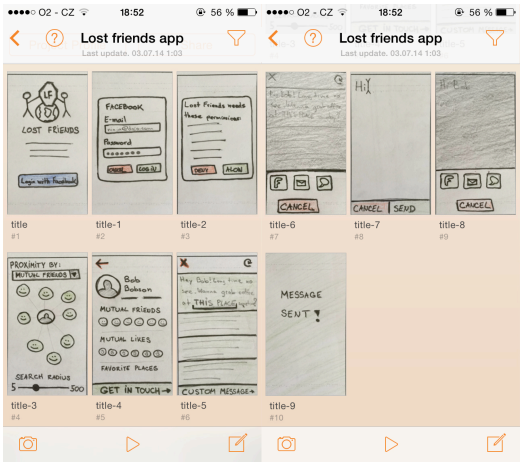

Figure 2. Initial prototype

2. TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS

Testing was conducted with fellow students in class. Test had a “think aloud” format, with one person observing (author of the app) and the second one (potential user) using the prototype and trying to formulate and share his thought processes while using the mockup of the app.

First two tests were conducted in one-on-one format, where the focus was primarily on the thoughts of the person testing the prototype. The third test involved one person playing with the prototype while two other people were observing and sharing their thoughts as well. In this case, the testing slowly turned into an open discussion with everyone expressing their opinions and ideas (including the author).

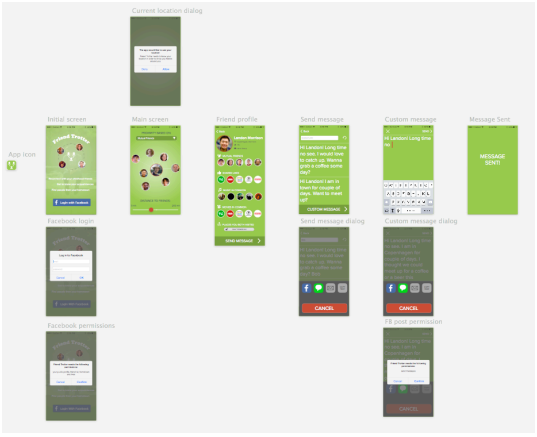

Figure 3. High fidelity prototype used in testing session

3. RESULTS OF TESTING

Testing identified three main issues with the app. Right at the beginning of testing, it was obvious that the high fidelity of the prototype was a limitation rather than an advantage in this phase. Testers were not distracted with the visual design per se, but they expected a higher level of interactivity, e.g. sliding the slider or

swiping through the list of likes. In short, there was no clear distinction between elements that are interactive and the ones that are not. The solution would be to gray out the elements that do not have any action associated with them.

The second problem occurred on the friend's profile. Several testers concluded that after pressing the 'Send message' button they would much rather prefer to be shown a dialog where they could choose how to contact the person right away. Instead of having to either choose a predefined message (those were unanimously marked as useless and impersonal) or use a custom message feature to write up their message and only after that being presented with the dialog for sending the message. This was a valuable insight, because removing these virtually redundant screens lowers the overall complexity of the app and makes the user flow more streamlined.

A third issue consisted of subtle nuances of language. There were two instances where testers identified potentially confusing wording. First was the 'Distance to friends' label in the search screen. One tester pointed out that some users may assume that this indicates the actual physical distance between the user and his or her friends. Simply rephrasing the label to 'Search radius' better illustrates the functionality. Second was the 'Send message' button. Couple of testers suggested that it sounds rather specific and that some users might imagine a full-blown chat-like functionality. From the suggestions, 'Get in touch' seemed like the most fitting substitution.

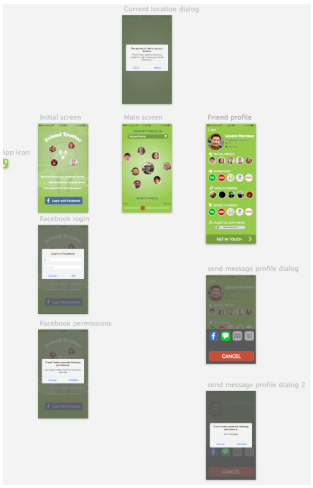

Figure 4. High fidelity prototype with feedback from users

4. DISCUSSION

Overall, the reactions to the prototype of the app were positive. However, every tester directly or indirectly hinted that there was something missing. They liked the idea and found the app useful, but it seemed like they could not imagine actually using the app to get in touch with their friends. From the discussion with the testers it emerged that they would love to use the app to meet new people. Especially using it to find people with whom their have mutual friends. More importantly, testers and the author concluded that the current version of the app relies on the outdated version of the Facebook API. The current version of Facebook OpenGraph API 2.x limits developers considerably compared to the previous version. Developers can now only access the list of friends who are using the app as well, not all of them. Without being able to access all of user's friends the entire app looses its purpose.

Considering the results of testing the natural progression of the app is a complete reconceptualization to focus on discovery of new people to meet and not to rely on user's current friends to provide traction for the app. There are many dating apps that have similar functionality (e.g. *Tinder*, *Badoo*) so the question arises whether there is a need for such an app.

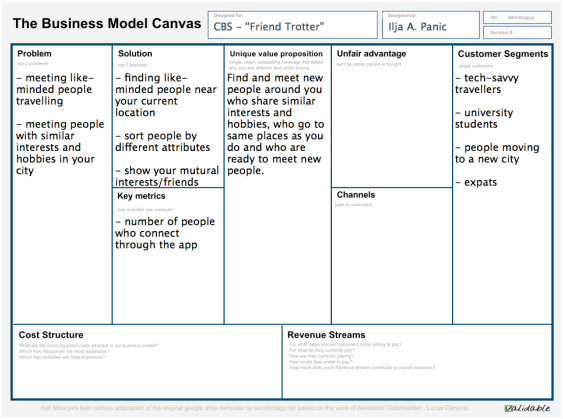

Figure 5. Revised Business model canvas

I argue that there is a place for the app like the one outlined above. However, there has to be a very clear distinction between this app and other dating apps, with the app explicitly focusing on finding people to talk to and share hobbies with, not (necessarily) date them. I am sure there have been attempts for something similar, but a dominant player still has not emerged on the market. I argue that the simplicity and "down-to-the-point" mentality of the app would offer a strong appeal to today's young and tech-savvy customers. If they are happy to rely on an app for their sex life, they should be happy to meet new like-minded people around them.

In conclusion, the initial hypothesis was proven wrong. A new hypothesis might be something along these lines:

People would like to be able to find and contact people around them with whom their share similar interests and hobbies