Spoiled Tomatillos Report - Green Monkeys

Project Overview

Earlier in the year we were asked to create a webapp for Northeastern University-based stealth-startup HuskyTek. Our final product is “Spoiled Tomatillos” a web application with a mission to create a social-network for cinephiles to connect and review movies. The users of this platform should be able to review and rate movies in a way similar to IMDB or Amazon while also maintaining and creating meaningful relationships through adding friends and sharing their opinions on movies with them, similar to Facebook. Existing sites like IMDB and related websites already allow users to review movies. However, these sites do not encourage social interaction among the community of movie-watchers. Social media platforms, on the other hand, allow users to create and maintain relationships with others, but they do not have the directed focus that the review websites offer. Both of these systems have worked well in their respective domains, but we think there is untapped potential in combining them.

Spoiled Tomatillos is not necessarily the end for HuskyTek’s ventures into this realm. We believe that in addition to movies, user want to be able to use the tools of social media to interact with others on all their favorite forms of media consumption. In particular, we want to expand the platform to allow users to connect over music and literature. We think these two genres will be fertile areas of expansion for Spoiled Tomatillos and are conducive to the effective recommendation system we created with our application.

Final Product

Our team developed a product that we are all proud of. Like any project there are reams of features we would have loved to include in this site, for example, improving and extending a user's interactions with their friends. Still, we think that we implemented a lot of great features. We wanted to create a product that had ease of use and both simple and effective UX design. This was integral in how we went about designing our product. We frequently had others review our product either on our production server or through mockups and demos to do so. Therefore, we kept our functionality simple and had a very departmentalized design.

Having the main transitions of our website based on a tab bar and a search bar, we created a simple flow. Users can go to the "Home" tab to see their recent activity and general information pertinent to them. They can also go to "Profile" to see information the information they wanted to share with others and also access their friends' profiles. This allows users to both give some personality and flair to their account and have a quick reference to their friends' profiles. There is also a "Movie" bar for users to see suggested movies for them. Being a website with a focus on movie reviews, we felt that quick and easy access to them was very important. Users can scroll through the movies and once they find one they are interested in, they can click on it to go to the movie's page. On the page, users can write reviews, rate the movies on a five star scale, and recommend movies to friends. They can also see the reviews left by others and themselves. Being able to both write global reviews and interact with friends makes these movie pages an example of the union we are trying to create with Spoiled Tomatillos. Furthermore, there is a search bar for users to search for either movies or users. This gives users more control and allows them to search for specific titles and users that interest them.

Development Process

Our two core focuses since the beginning of the project were ensuring our product was secure and facilitating that the user experience was both easy and enjoyable. We spent a lot of time focusing on the security of Spoiled Tomatillos and making sure our users' information was not compromised. Through utilizing defensive programming techniques, refusing to send sensitive user information as plain text, implementing encryption through secure third party encryption keys, and utilizing salts, we feel confident that our users will have a secure experience with Spoiled Tomatillos. Furthermore, we wanted to ensure that users felt comfortable and in-control when using our application. To facilitate this, we interviewed multiple people and had them try our application (both in a general sense or in specific situations) to get their inputs on potential improvements and opinions on current implementations. Through incorporating that input in the development process and frequently getting new input along the way, we feel that we have matched our product closely to the wants and needs of our potential users.

When it comes to developing the code itself, there have both been things that we've done well and things we could you done better. Our team got along very well and there was a strong team dynamic. We were comprised of people with multiple skill sets, however, there was not always overlap between these skill sets. That being said, our team members were always willing to help another learn a technology or style of programming that they were not previously acquainted with. This comradery and willingness to help was one of our team's strongest points. We also met in person fairly frequently and worked on code together. Working side by side with other members allowed us to smooth through confusions and issues more quickly. While we did work well together as a team, we did have issues with communication and planning. The bulk of our meaningful communication happened in the team meetings. While these were very effective, not everyone could make them and they did not occur everyday. This led to a decent bit of confusion, especially when we changed our backend to Node.js. In a way, changing the backend was beneficial as it caused us to reach a critical point where we knew communication had to improve as it was becoming a real problem. Because of this, our communication noticeably improved and we became even more active in person and over Slack. We were slow to practice effective communication techniques, however, over the course of the semester, we have become much better at communicating and working as a team. These, we believe, are the biggest takeaways from the semester. While we learned many things, the really took to heart the importance of timely and effective communication and proper team dynamics.

Project Retrospective

Our team learned alot from this class both from in class and with the project. With the project, our team members improved their skills in a variety of areas, however, the biggest takeaways were user-centered design, testing, time-management, and communication.

None of us had previously asked for potential users input as frequently as we did in this project. Doing so allowed us to better see what our audience wants and combat any biases in our code. Frequently incorporating feedback from potential end-users is a great way to keep one's product up to date and relevant.

All of us had tested our code before, however, the material we learned in class improved the quality of tests we wrote for our project. Keeping different criteria in mind when testing is an important part of making sure one's code is working properly and improving one's test suite.

Time-management and communication were our biggest takeaways from the semester. It is important to start work early, especially when you are working in a team setting. Making sure that everyone has a buffer to combat confusion and difficulty with the codebase is an integral part of making sure a team is functioning properly. Furthermore, starting earlier and utilizing proper time-management techniques is not the only key to making a team work effectively. Communication is equally as important. Making sure that one's teammates are aware of how they are progressing helps the team better gauge the current status of their project and what steps need to be taken in the future. Utilizing communication platforms, such as Jira and Slack were extremely useful as they offered us both a referential bulletin board to quickly see what tasks remain and also an outlet for us to simply talk amongst ourselves about the project. Overall, this project was extremely helpful and taught us how to better write quality code in a group setting.