



PROPOSAL FOR NEW YELP FEATURE:

USER-GIVEN COVID-19 RATING

Prepared for: Yelp

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Introduction

Yelp dominates the reviews world; on average, more than 178 million visitors use the service every month. In the new COVID-19 world, the need for trustworthy, comprehensive reviews is more important than ever. The Yelp community needs businesses to prioritize public safety by taking precautions such as asking customers to wear masks, sanitizing frequently, organizing spaces for effective social distancing, and limiting the customer capacity, so that Yelp users can safely continue supporting local businesses, exploring new areas, and contributing to the Yelp community.

Yelp relies on its community to engage and interact with its service, giving accurate and trustworthy information to other Yelp users. The current platform does not allow users to fully provide that information for the Yelp community. This proposal solves this issue by presenting a new feature that would give the Yelp community a better Yelp experience during the pandemic.

Meet Harry.

Harry is a father of young children and a member of the Yelp Elite Squad. Harry takes care of his mom who is immunocompromised, so he is very careful when visiting public places. Prior to visiting a business or restaurant, he uses Yelp to research his potential destinations.

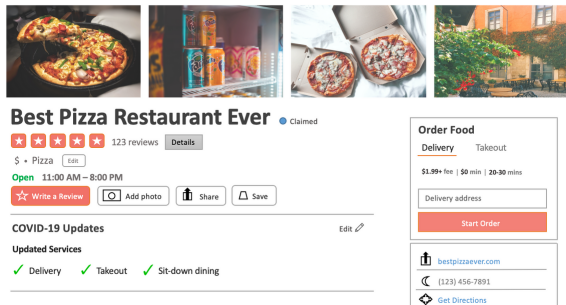
Last weekend, Harry wanted to pick up a pizza from Best Pizza Restaurant Ever and bring it to his mom's house for dinner. Their reviews looked good, and the business owner self-reported that COVID-19 safety measures were in place.

When he arrived, he noticed there was no social distancing and most people were not wearing masks. He felt flustered because, according to Yelp, it was safe to visit. He decided not to get pizza from Best Pizza Restaurant Ever. Entering the restaurant put both Harry and his family at risk. If only he could have found more information about their adherence to COVID guidelines before driving all the way there!



The Current Situation

In June, Yelp announced a program that encourages businesses and restaurants to self-report their COVID-19 safety procedures. It is not a requirement to self-report, so countless Yelp pages are lacking critical information. This is a great first step, but there is still an unmet need. Members of the Yelp community (like Harry) need a platform for crowdsourced information on COVID safety, and Yelp is in a perfect position to fill this need.

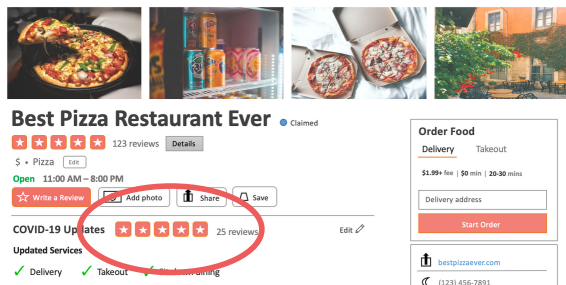


Before the feature

The Ideal Situation

A separate COVID-19 rating given by the Yelp community.

A COVID-19 rating feature allows users to rely on the Yelp community to determine whether they can safely visit any given business or restaurant and gives users a granular metric by which they can compare businesses and restaurants, so they can make more informed decisions. The COVID-19 rating feature will easily fit in the “COVID-19 Updates” section on every Yelp page, as seen below.



After the feature

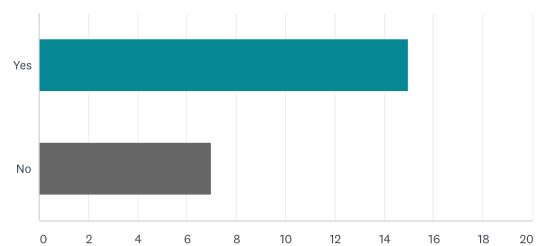
The Plan

Research

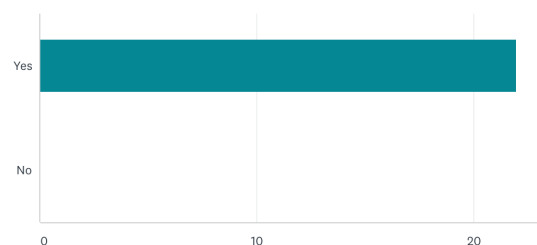
An article recently published in Forbes calls for the addition of a new COVID-19 rating feature on Yelp. In the article, Larry Magid, a senior contributor for Forbes, and Dr. Yaneer Bar-Yam, an expert in the origins of pandemics, provide support for this feature: *“These sites should add COVID-19 safety as a rating criteria so when you look up a restaurant, grocery store, or other business, you can see how they are perceived as handling the COVID crisis.”* Magid personally noted that he has been discouraged from contributing to the Yelp community and leaving reviews because there is no feature that allows him to rate places for COVID safety.

Magid and Bar-Yam are not alone in their ask. Their suggestions were supported by a group of members and non-members of the Yelp community. In a recent 2-question survey, a total of 22 individuals (including Elite Squad members and non-members of the Yelp community) expressed interest in the addition of the new COVID-19 rating feature.

Question 1: Are you a Yelp user?



Question 2: Would you be interested in a feature that allows reviewers to give a separate rating for COVID-19 safety?



Benefits

Encourage higher engagement and participation.

The Yelp community will have all the information they need to feel comfortable and confident when visiting local businesses and restaurants. With no user-given COVID-19 rating, some users rely less on the app due to a lack of information. The survey results indicate that non-members would be interested in this feature, meaning that there could be an increase in Yelp users.

Give business and restaurant owners current customer perceptions.

This feature not only helps support businesses and restaurants that currently prioritize COVID-19 safety but also serves as a guide for the ones that need to take more steps to prioritize this issue.

Allow the Yelp community to separate their general satisfaction from their COVID safety satisfaction.

Yelp members who currently leave reviews have a lot to consider when deciding what overall rating to give. Adding a separate COVID-19 rating allows members to make informed decisions about their ratings and feel confident that their ratings will be representative of their general experience along with their approval of COVID-19 safety measures.

Spark a PR opportunity.

Yelp's competitors already lack many features that Yelp possesses. If Yelp is the only platform with the COVID-19 rating feature, this will be a hot topic in the reviewing world.

Increase profits.

Not only will this feature help the users, it will also increase company profits by driving more people to the site and increasing ad revenue.

Potential Objections

Poor timing.

Ideally, this feature would have been released at the same time as the COVID-19 Updates feature was added to each Yelp page, but the COVID-19 pandemic is not going away any time soon. Additionally, when the pandemic eventually dies down, the feature can be removed simultaneously with the COVID-19 Updates section.

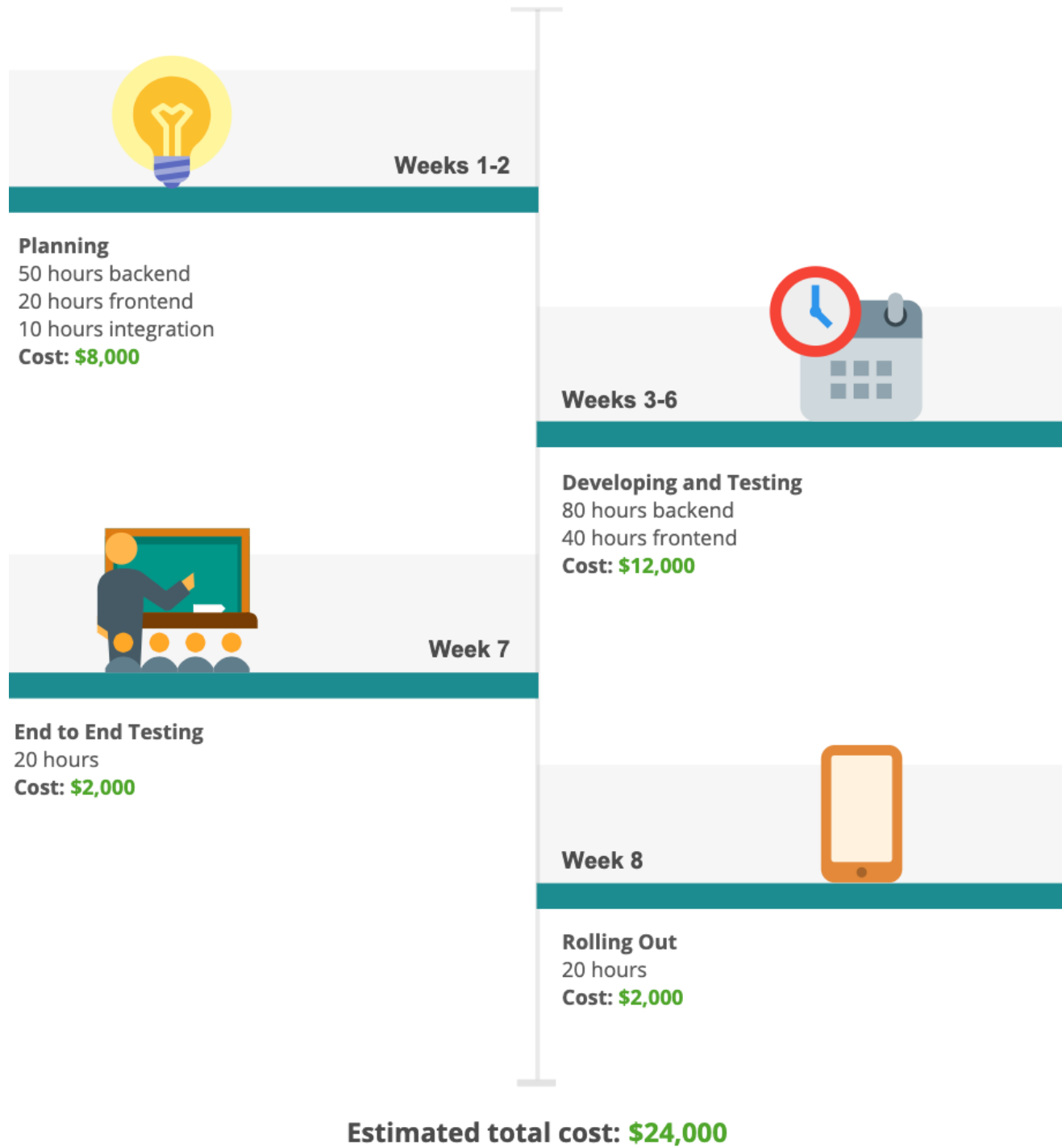
Layout and design.

Some may worry about the overall design and placement of the new feature. A second five-star rating may look too cluttered next to the general one, so adding it into the “COVID-19 Updates” section on every Yelp page will help separate it into a relevant section.

Yelp users can currently edit the COVID-19 Updates section and select the safety measures taken by restaurants/businesses.

While this is true, these features do not allow individual comments, nor do they receive a lot of engagement/participation. A five-star rating is something Yelp members are used to and comfortable with, so they will already be familiar and with the user experience of the feature.

Timeline and Budget



Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to make accurate, unbiased, and relevant information more and more important. Yelp is the most popular review platform and has always provided members with a way to connect with and serve the Yelp community. Today, further steps must be taken to ensure that members of the Yelp community are informed about their local businesses and restaurants. By adding a new user-given COVID-19 rating feature to every Yelp page, Yelp can allow their users to continue leaving comprehensive, accurate, and complete reviews to support local businesses and restaurants and their communities.