

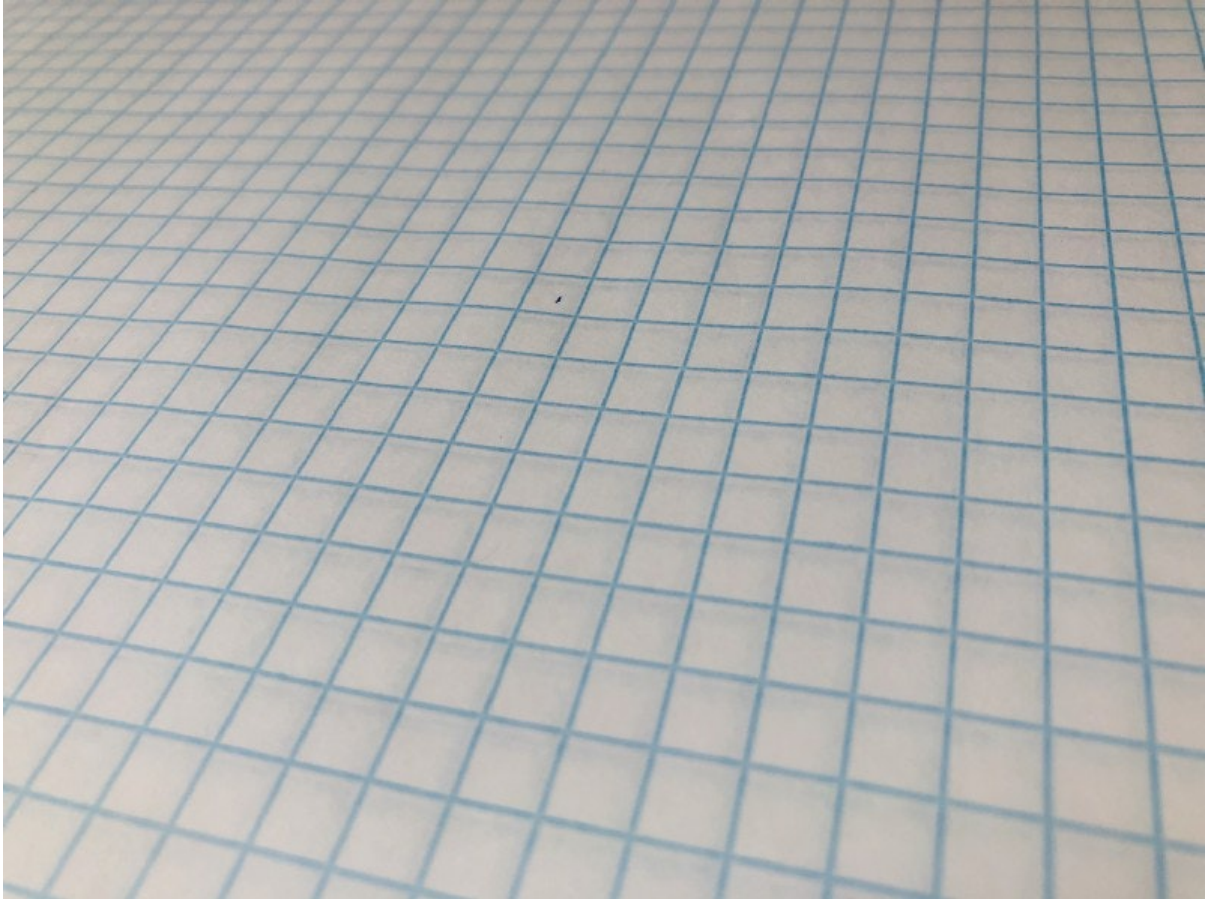
## 3 Apps That I Loved & Killed

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7-9 minutes

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**I tinkered with these applications throughout 2019, but none of them quite made it to the App Store. Here's what happened and here's what I'm up to now.**



I'm working on a new app right now. But I feel funny writing about it. I started this post a few weeks ago and then shelved it because its contents feel so trivial in the context of what we're dealing with. Though then it's sorta like, do we want *only* COVID-19 news and analysis (and Twitter feels like it's about 88% analysis, 12% news) or a mix of other stuff, too?

My new thing is in the consumer social space (although it's sneaky utilitarian) but not ready to share yet. Instead, I'm going to talk about 3 apps I made (and when I say "made," I'll be clear — they're my ideas, I'm doing the design, and I'm working with a developer) over the last year.

Those 3 apps only got as far as TestFlight'ing with friends and friends-of-friends and people I've gotten to know ([Ryan](#) would call them "modern friends") in tech. I didn't push to the App Store because I started to have what felt like critical doubts about their viability. They're still kicking around, if I ever want to put a new spin into any of them, but my resources are limited enough, and entirely focused on my new app.

Anyway, here are those 3 apps:

### **Buddy (spring 2019)**



Buddy was a video texting app. You would type a message, just like a normal text, only after you sent it, the recipient would see a video of your face, as you typed, with the text playing out across the screen. Or, rather than typing, you could also talk straight to the camera, confessional style, and the recipient would see your words display over the video, thanks to voice-to-text. (And you could toggle sound on/off.) The idea was to add more dimension and context to messaging and to make writing short messages feel a little more like talking face-to-face (and getting unspoken cues/hints like mood, location, appearance, etc.)

The problem? When I reverted to using other apps to message friends instead of Buddy, I thought, “Whoops. Probably not a good sign...” **It worked well and felt very fun with super close friends (often brought a smile to my face) but mostly awkward with everyone else.**

### **Supercut (summer 2019)**



Supercut was a collaborative daily vlogging app, almost like one big group story. It had a camera that let you record video. You could subscribe to other someone’s “cuts” and each day at 6 PM, an “episode” would drop, with all of their videos from that day stitched together in chronological order, intermixed with everyone else you subscribe to. (So there may be one cut from one friend at 9 AM, followed by a cut from a different friend at 9:15, followed by another cut from the first friend at 9:30, etc.) The episode would be available to watch for the next 24 hours (until the next day’s episode dropped) and then after that, the videos you contributed would go into your own vault, where they’d be accessible to you as sort of “home movies.”

I find the stories format to be a little whiplash-inducing: you tap one friend's story and it's a screenshot they posted 3 minutes ago, you tap another friend's story and it was a video shared 20 hours ago. I'm someone who's always stopping a friend while they're telling a story and saying, "Wait when was this?" The context of time is important to me. Putting everyone's videos in chronological order felt — feels — like a useful, orienting convention. Plus, many of us don't post enough to our story for it to feel like, well, a story — they're mostly just one-off, unrelated posts. The Supercut model, on the other hand, would have a beginning, middle, and end, and then it'd be over for the day. Only video, no photos or text. Cultural events, especially (think the Super Bowl, Christmas morning, New Year's Eve, etc.) would be so fun to experience in this format.

The problem: there are enough cameras and networks competing to capture what's happening in your life. Side note — I kinda hated this placeholder icon.

## Solo (fall 2019)



Solo was the simplest (and fastest to build...and lowest upside) of all these ideas. Think Instagram (or maybe Tumblr would be a better comparison) and you can share photos, videos, text, *or audio*, but the catch is that you can only share one thing — one artifact, one artistic expression — at a time. No likes. No comments. No captions. Only DMs and views. All new shares ("solos?") that your friends post are blurred out by default, and only when you open them are they un-blurred. You can choose to leave stuff blurred if you just don't want to be exposed to someone's BS for a day.

We're basically running our own media organizations with our presences online. Solo was an attempt to slow down. To share a little less and take in a little less. Everyone got the same amount of screen real estate — one pane — and if you shared something new, it replaced the previous thing you shared. You can count [Dylan Sprouse's Instagram account](#) as inspiration. Oh, and no uploads...everything had to be originally created within the app.

I don't know why this wouldn't work, aside from its straightforward-ness (some, perhaps the critic inside me, would say "dated-ness." Is that a word?) Anyway...I still like this idea.

RIP AIM. Pour one out for Peach. I miss you Vine. **Why is it worth looking at products that didn't catch on?** (*And not to put my apps in that category...they were about an order of magnitude away, but still.*) **The answer is because they're like alternate timelines. Places the internet, and by extension, culture and behavior, could've gone if not for something else.**

Bonus: here are two ideas I toyed with for a bit, didn't build, but still like.

## Offline (winter 2020)

This app would be a list of your friends, sorted by when they were last active on their phone. (So it'd say "Adam O'Kane — 10 minutes ago") That's it. I think it'd be surprisingly fun and interesting. It could also be a wellness thing, where you rack up points for inactivity (or certain kinds of screen use, maybe) and

compete against friends. Unfortunately, there's no Screen Time API, and none of the hacks we looked into were really viable, so I didn't go ahead with it. But I do think this would be fun to try.

## **NoNewFriends (1997. OK, not 1997, but I've had this idea forever)**

This idea would be easy for Houseparty or Squad to do, but they're busy with their own roadmaps and the global pandemic that is driving insane usage across their services, so I get it. Streaming video stuff is tricky but has [gotten much easier](#). I tinkered with something called Oddscreen years ago that was basically a jumbotron — the camera would go on a new person (any viewer could be put on, and they wouldn't know it was coming) and the audience could vote for them to get more time. But anyway. Back to NoNewFriends. NoNewFriends would be a video chat app where if you and I started chatting, our mutual friends — and only our mutual friends — could spontaneously join. If someone else joined our now 3 person chat, the 4th person would have to know all 3 of us. And so on. You could do a lot of cool things with push notifications. This is largely a tweak on Houseparty, but a very important tweak, IMO.

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Whew. That felt good to get out. If you're working on anything like this stuff (or even just in the general consumer social space) and want to bounce ideas around, I'd love to talk. I'm adamokane [at] gmail.com and [@adamokane](#). Thanks for reading!