

Project Proposal for a Social Food App to Schedule Meals with Friends

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Abstract. The purpose of this project is to create an application for an integrative way for people to initiate social get-togethers. Essentially, this is an application that serves as a one-stop shop for people to set up meetings with their friends for meals in an impromptu fashion. The application will eliminate the need to use multiple standalone applications to coordinate having a meal with friends. This will primarily be a mobile application that will assist people in finding a place to eat, coordinate with friends easily, and schedule a meal to eat. This should be fairly inexpensive to create, but will require heavy alpha and beta testing to ensure the optimal efficacy of planning a social get-together to have a meal or drinks with friends that relieves the feel of the hassle of filling out an entire form to schedule a large-scale event or activity with friends.

Keywords: food, chat, schedule, friends, meal, drinks, one-stop shop, mobile app, impromptu

1 Problem Definition

A mobile application needs to be engaging, user-friendly, exciting, and functional. To create an app that follows these general guidelines, the mobile app needs to allow users to rapidly go through the entire application from start to finish. In the context of this application, users need to be able to create meal outing activities, invite friends, and schedule all of this with a very simple user interface. For this project, the focus will be specifically on how users are able to perform the aforementioned tasks in order to schedule eating with friends or groups in an easy-to-use, yet functional manner. Currently, people use several apps to perform this task, and it turns out to be much more laborious to set up a meal with friends than it actually needs to be. People love eating food with friends, family, and other social groups, so why should it be so strenuous to plan having a meal with them? This app will address and solve this issue by giving users a simple platform to do so.

2 Research

The project's mobile application should resemble Yelp, iMessage, GroupMe, and Google Maps. In that sense, the mobile application will use Yelp and Google Maps APIs to implement functionality that allows users to find local establishments to eat and drink. The iMessage portion will be modeled by an in-app chat system that will also send out notifications to users when they have been invited to a meal event. The service that is available and scalable is Twilio, and they allow developers to configure a manner by which apps can send SMS messages to users who do not already have the app. Otherwise, an app-specific notification will appear on the user's screen.

Using these combined APIs and related services in the app, users will be able to schedule meals with their friends and other social groups with a minimal number of taps. The notification system will give users the feel of impromptu event planning and relieves the difficulty of coordinating everyone together at an agreed-upon location. With this app, users will finally be able to perform all these tasks within one integrated and unified app, instead of having to navigate back-and-forth between several different apps, where important information is typically lost.

3 Prototypes and Challenges

As described earlier, this app can be implemented in many ways to achieve the same goal: to make the meal-planning process more efficient, as it should be. The guidelines, however, are fairly clear. Users need to be able to use the app with as much ease as possible to plan a meal with friends or other social groups.

One of the possible methods is to have a calendar feed on the home page. This will allow users to immediately see their schedule in a very concise and compact way. From there, the user can go through several user scenarios. First, the user can create a new meal event and invite friends and groups through pre-processing of contacts into friend circles. This will serve as a mechanism to designate users' preferences. Once the event is created, notifications will be sent out to invitees, and the group will be able to collaborate on the location and time in a chat room. The challenge here is that we want the app to not feel like a Facebook event, where events are typically planned further in advance in a pre-meditated fashion. In this app, users should be able to create a meal event as they think of it, so the user interface for creating a meal event should be as fluid and hassle-free as possible. The meal should be planned and scheduled ideally for a meal later that day or evening, so as to fit the impromptu nature of the app.

A second possible method that addresses the unwanted feeling of filling out a form to create a meal event would be to have a meal creation page that allows users to omit all of the "Who, what, when where, why?" questions when sending an invite, and leave it up to a voting system to decide on where to eat and when. Certain tools that allow developers to easily implement that sort of system would be using a Yelp API for

food locations to vote on, and using a similar tool as “WhenIsGood?” or “Doodle Poll” to collectively determine a time to eat as a group. This way, scheduling would be as efficient as possible. Now, the main challenge that is brought up here is screen real estate. Mobile applications have fairly limited space on a screen to place buttons, icons, banners, and information. Thus, in order to not clutter the screen with all the aforementioned tools that supposedly simplify the event-creation process, it needs to be determined which pieces of information are most important at the time of event-creation and leave the rest for the chat-room and voting.

The main objective needs to be kept in mind throughout the entire design and implementation process. Users need to be able to use this app as a more efficient manner of planning a meal get-together with friends and family than going through several standalone apps such as iMessage, GroupMe, Yelp, and Google Maps. They will all be integrated on one platform to ease the process of grabbing a bite with friends and other social circles. Users ideally will log into the app via a Facebook login to collect immediate data from that person, and import their local contacts for the purpose of ramping up quickly to begin using the app to its full potential. Users should really benefit from this one-stop shop app to perform this unnecessarily inefficient task.

4 Results

Ultimately, the goal of this project is to make the meal-planning process much more efficient than it currently is. In addition, this would be a validation that the problem exists and it is much more of a difficulty to plan a meal with friends than it needs to actually be.

As users begin to use this app, data can be collected on which restaurants users love to eat most at, and analytics can be performed on that data to determine the most popular restaurants and partner with them to advertise on the app to serve as restaurant recommendations for users.

Furthermore, this data can be used to garner information on when certain restaurants are most busy, and find out user preferences in terms of time and location that they like to eat. This will provide detailed information for future users in terms of giving crowd-sourced real-time information on restaurants and their seating availabilities, envisioned on a later version of the app.

Appendix



Figure 1. Removal of using separate standalone apps to perform one task.



Figure 2. Combination of Location Services, Yelp, and a chat room to easily send invites to friends and groups.

Acknowledgements / Honor Code

“On my honor, as a student, I have neither given, received, nor observed any unauthorized assistance on this assignment.” – Vincent Ning

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