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Assignment 1

Vision

Organizing events is hard. It takes time, resources, motivation, and leadership to pull off a successful event, and these costs scale up significantly with the size or ambition of the event. Currently in most event organizing, these burdens fall on the shoulders of a small subset of those involved. This is because the complexity of involving more people in the organizing process seems to be too great to manage effectively. So it is that in almost all events, there is a small group of leaders who do all the work, and everyone else who merely shows up.

People love great events, but being an organizer is an enormous burden. Our aim is to reduce that burden. We want to make organizing great events effortless by moving the complexity off the shoulders of leaders and onto tireless, hard-working software that knows how to deal with it. We want to make it easy to share responsibilities among a large group of people without losing sight of the big picture, and we want to create incentives for people to be involved and contribute effectively to something greater than themselves.

To do this, we propose a web application that allows people to plan events in a way that the majority of the work to make the event happen can be shared throughout the group. This includes coordination of resources, tasks, and transportation needs. This application will also encourage contribution through a point system that rewards people who take on responsibility and go the extra mile for their group.

Many systems similar to this exist, the most prominent being events in Facebook and the website Meetup.com. These systems lack two big things: the ability to share the organizational burden effectively, and incentives for lending a helping hand.

The ability to share the organizational burden effectively means we want to reduce the work of organizing an event throughout its entire lifecycle–from concept to the day of. Facebook and Meetup.com are great resources to post information about events and see others register their intent to attend, but the major assumption is that the event is already planned. Message boards become a messy and disorganized ground for coordinating rides, figuring out who will bring what, and deciding what is going to happen. Without leaders who take on the organizational burdens of sorting through this information and keeping track of the big picture, the events will inevitably reflect their message boards: messy and disorganized. We think people should be able to have well-organized events without requiring superhuman efforts from people in leadership roles.

Incentives for lending a helping hand are important because they motivate people to take action and become involved. Organizing is the cornerstone of successful events, and all too often people have no idea of how to effectively help an event, or no motivation to do so. The current alternatives encourage people to attend events. We want to people to create events, together.

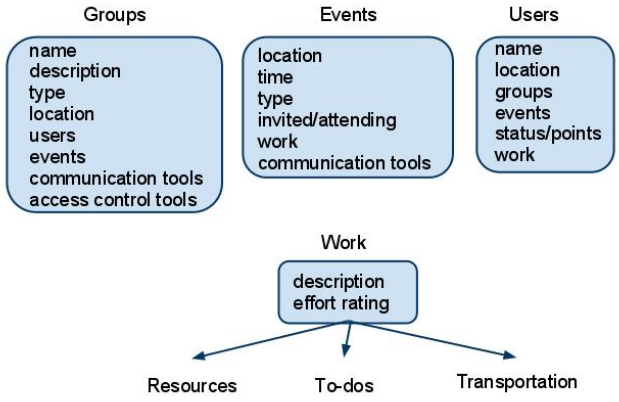
The targets for this product will be groups of people, whether well defined or ad-hoc, who desire to put on an event that is non-trivial in its organizational needs.

Software Architecture

This product will be a web application, and will take advantage of the incredible amount of frameworks and libraries that exist to make building such applications simpler. There will be a database, server side code, and client side code. Some of the frameworks that could potentially be used include Django, Web2Py, Ruby on Rails, Spring, Google Web Toolkit, and many more. We will also have the possiblity

to interface with other existing technologies such as Facebook, Google Calendar, and Google Maps.

At the highest level, the architecture will include users, groups, and events. The most interesting parts will be the components that allow the work of organizing the event to be shared and incentivize doing that work. The diagram below shows a very basic architecture, note that it is not a complete representation of the system.



Users will be able to create events, not necessarily linked to a specific group, and define the work that needs to be done to make the event a reality. People involved in the event will be able to take on parts of the work that are convenient for them, or that they feel they have good qualifications for. As work is completed, users will gain points for their contributions based on how the work was initially defined. There will also be a clear picture of the state of the event and its progress towards completion, and it will serve as a reference for those involved. As users gain points over time, their contributions will lead to more advanced privileges and greater status in the system. For example, the greatest contributors to a group could have the ability to create events, assign points to work, moderate discussions, etc.

Challenges and Risks

The biggest risk in building this system will be making sure that users find that it reduces the overhead of organizing events and that they actually feel more inclined to be involved in the organizational process. In other words, the software needs to successfully do what we promised above. To address this risk, we will need to get a lot of feedback from those who might use it, and iterate through many prototypes to figure out what ideas will actually work.

Another risk is differentiating our system enough from the current alternatives that it becomes desirable to adopt it. This means we should focus first on the components of our system that make it special, i.e. the incentivized sharing of responsibility in planning events. The other components, such as calendar integration, complicated access rules, etc. are not as fundamental and can be built after we know what we are building is going to work.