



CSE 440

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PROBLEM

Within the past decade, technology has fundamentally changed the way we communicate. Social networking, text messaging, video chat—never before have we been so connected to the ones we love. Through these means we can deepen our existing relationships. In this way we develop social webs, expanded by small degrees of separation as we meet friends of friends. However, there is still little opportunity to bridge these webs which remain artificially divided by geography, perception, and opportunity. What if the man sitting across from you on the bus shared your love of motorcycle maintenance? What if the girl at the next table in the coffee shop had just finished refinancing her home mortgage and could tell you the pitfalls to avoid? What if we could interact in the real world based on what we held important instead of whom we knew? Well, then we would revolutionize the way we socialize.

ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM

Human beings represent an immense amount of stored information. Every single person is a collection of experiences, opinions, and ideas. For any individual, accessing this information is a problem of both availability and categorization. There are limited situations where communication with a complete stranger is socially acceptable (or available). And even with people we deem as friends, areas of common interest are often never explored.

We are currently living in the physical analog of an internet without search engines. We generally only explore our social network through links that we already know exist. Further, it may turn out that we have little in common with these new people anyway. What is needed is a tool that enables connections. A tool that allows us to preview who these people are we would otherwise never interact with and what they find interesting.

The aim is not to reduce people to a set of data points. Quite the contrary, the idea is to expose oneself to different ideas and viewpoints in situations where solitude would otherwise be the choice. The idea is to enable people to interact with others in a guided way.

There are services that exist to connect people, but they in general are either romantically oriented (dating sites), or are marred by misidentification and safety concerns (Craigslist). Both of these methods also require a commitment now for a later date. However, dating sites in particular have gained a considerable amount of acceptance within the last few years. One factor is likely that these sites do a good job of solving the “categorization” problem noted earlier. Profiles and member reviews help to give some preview of the people on the other end of the interaction.

Applications exist that that could solve the problem of pre-planning needed to make these connections, but they are geared more towards fostering relationships that already exist. Facebook locations and Foursquare both come

to mind as services that make excellent use of modern GPS technology available on smartphones, but lack an ability to create any new connections.

All of these systems have very successfully implemented pieces that work towards solving the problem of connecting different groups of people, but none have the full set of features required.

THE SOCIAL SOLUTION

Sociall is a mobile application designed to connect people. Each user of the service would have profile information listing their areas of interest. Users would then be able to list themselves (along with their location) as available for a casual chat, or view others in their area who are available.

Sociall would need to solve the two aforementioned problems of categorization and availability to be successful. Categorization would be accomplished by borrowing from the model of dating sites. In addition to users being able to provide their own information, other users they've interacted with will be able to provide feedback validating both the user and their claims. This sort of "reputation" system will hopefully solve the issues of credibility that come along with meeting strangers (this is similar the system that couchsurfing.org uses to vet users).

The problem of availability, or actually being able to find people to connect to given the desire, can be solved by using GPS like in Foursquare. By updating the idea of Craigslist meetups with real-time location information these connections become something that can take place on the fly. It no longer has to be something that is planned days or even weeks ahead of time, you can meet with the most interesting person near you in the spare hour you have between classes, at the coffee show, or walking in the park.

By combining the ideas of real-time location information with user profiles you end up with an application that allows you to develop connections with people in your free time.

SOCIAL USE CASE

You take the commuter train to and from work five days a week. It's an hour trip each way and you typically read a book to pass the time. You're typically a chatty person, but your attempts at casual conversation with other commuters generally end in discomfort for both parties. It's just not something that's the social norm. In the times when you do find someone who answers and reciprocates your inquiries, you've arrived at work before you reach the common ground where the conversation gets really interesting.

But now, with Sociall, these problems can be avoided. Today, you download the Sociall application. You load it up on your iPhone and create your profile. You discover that the woman sitting across the car from you is marked as "available" on Sociall. You see that she has interest in hiking. You go over to her and introduce yourself. By the end of the ride you've got three new hikes to check out and you've told her about a great new campground. You agree to go on a hike together latecse190m-section-xx@cs.washington.edur. Your stop has arrived so you thank her, leave her positive feedback, and head to work. The day goes slow because you can't wait for the weekend to try the Glacier Pass hike.