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Roam: Where She Goes

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ROAM: WHERE SHE GOES

Tamara Lewis

Honors Project

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Information is everywhere and, with that, the ability to create endless avenues of resources. With the world moving toward the digital age and mobile app development becoming its own category for streamlining information, I wanted to create a platform for consumers to access the information they needed that fit the fast-paced lifestyle of today. More specifically, I wanted to design an app for a travel guide that gave the user all the information and material in one source. By discussing the features, the underlining background of this concept and its design, I will uncover the elemental purpose and overall understanding of this application's functionality.

The app, Roam, was designed to be a one-stop destination for all happenings and information related to, and tailored for, the lesbian community. Since everything can now be accessed from the palm of your hand, I wanted this app to feel no different. Not only does it include locations where women can go meet and connect with other women, but it also gives suggestion for when the best day of week is to go to a certain place. Information such as special events, brief descriptions and turn-by-turn navigation to each location is also provided. An extension to the guide includes a personal calendar that notifies the user of an upcoming event in their area as well as a weather feature to help predict if it's best to plan for outdoor venues or go to a gallery opening or restaurant instead. I wanted this app to have a concrete but spontaneous feel that you can access it either on the go or have the option to sit down and actually plan your day.

Since Roam is only a simulation of an app, I wanted to create other elements surrounding this app that would help give the illusion of its functionality to bring the design to life. An important component to that was to create a promotional video that not only showed the functions of the app but also integrates its use in daily life. Using a resource called *invisionapp*, I was able to create a prototype of the app using my designs and linking them together to transition like a functioning application.¹ This simulation was used in the video, which ultimately helped to tie the story together. In addition to the video promo, creating a case study also seemed to be vital for users to understand the app's content. From detailing its filters and features to specifying the typography, this study gave an overall analysis of the app for use.

My interest for creating this app originally stems from my own experiences and involvement in the lesbian community. Coming out as a gay woman, I wanted to explore this new sense of freedom that I discovered within myself but, more importantly, I wanted to envelop myself around other women like me. Unfortunately, the same year I came out was also the same year that the only lesbian bar in town shut down. I was still able to go to other locations in the area, but they all were predominately male based and lacked any incentive that would attract women's interest. However, after I began meeting people and exploring more of my surroundings, I was able to figure out where women went on certain days of the week. As I began to engage myself in the community and felt more accepted, I

¹ "Invisionapp." *invisionapp*. <http://www.invisionapp.com>.

craved to experience more and began travelling to other cities to expose myself to what their gay life had to offer.

I travelled the country for the better part of a year and began to notice a similar pattern in each gay community that was almost identical to experiences I had back in my hometown. Every city that was said to have a gay community primarily marketed toward the demographic of young gay males. Although, within the gay community, there are many sources that give information on various events, meet-ups, festivals, etc., many of these sources are specifically geared toward the interest of young gay men, with little to no information for the lesbian community.²

I would attend many special events, festivals and gallery openings that ultimately were a let down because it was not marketed for me. There were even places that had entire city blocks or neighborhoods devoted to the gay community but were heavily influenced towards gay men. From clubs to restaurants, to shopping, these locations were all for the gay man leaving maybe one location where lesbians would sometimes socialize. It wasn't until I started talking to the locals in these cities that I began to realize that women only go to certain places on certain days, which you wouldn't know as a visitor because it is not openly advertised.

I slowly began to realize that these communities were very much similar to my own. You had to be familiar with the environment and get information from heresy to understand when and where the lesbian community would be that day or

² "Gay Cities" <http://www.gaycities.com>.

night. It was almost like decoding an encrypted message, but once revealed, the message was easy to follow. From then on, I set out to a new city with the same goals in mind; find the advertised gay community, talk with the locals, and explore my findings. Sometimes it would work out and sometimes it wouldn't, but after awhile finding the lesbian community became a lot easier and less daunting of a task. And to make things even better, once I started finding these events where I could network with other women, so many avenues for social media began to open up.

Finding one plug for social media led to another plug through social media that pertained only to the networking of the lesbian community. It soon became apparent to me that it was not that the lesbian community wasn't advertised, it was just that they were not advertised as well as events for gay men were marketed. They weren't advertising their materials on physical websites like most event promoters would, but instead relied solely on social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to promote their upcoming or ongoing happenings in that specific city.

It seemed so backward to me that these promoters were advertising their events on social media pages when there were websites specific to gay culture that they could just upload their content where a wider audience would see it. I began doing more research about this and it soon became apparent that I was not the only one who found this to be an odd way to broadcast new content. Most of the women I spoke with didn't even know these events were going on and, like me, only thought that the gay community only advertised toward the male demographic. The more

cities I visited, the more I became aware that this issue was universally prevalent. Creating this app was not only a personal interest to me, but something I could create for someone else. Knowing the experience of coming out as a gay woman and trying to find a place of belonging and acceptance can be frustrating. I wanted to make that process easier for someone who is going through that same struggle and might too hesitant to go out and find places on their own.

I wanted this app to be a one-stop shop for all lesbian needs, however the more research I did, the more I began to realize how many sub-communities there were that would fit within the blanket of the overall community of women. With more locations opening up as gay friendly environments, there is a need to categorize them according to the individual's needs. Although it is nice to be in an accepting atmosphere, most lesbians are also looking for a place where other women primarily frequent on a regular basis.

Since the average app and smartphone user dominates the younger side of the age demographic, I wanted to target ages around 21–35 for the use of this app. Most restaurants, bars, and social events surround their promotional material around this demographic as well, so it seemed fitting for my app design to also play to their appeal. Research shows that this population is more prone to seek out new places of social interaction and activity than most, as well as expand their

connections and network for experience and knowledge.³ When designing an application or system, the goal for me as a software architect was to minimize the complexity by separating the design into different areas of concern. Within each area, the components I designed focused on that specific area and didn't mix code from other trepidatious regions.

Since this guide is intended for a younger demographic, I wanted the design to reflect similar trends seen today. I wanted it to be simple and clean to keep the look of elegance and sophistication as well as using angular shapes to lure appeal. The first element that was needed to tie this app together was the logo. Right from the beginning, I wanted this app to evoke the interest of women and let them know that this was made specifically for them.

By incorporating the female symbol in the logo as well as integrating a rich and prominent purple color through the design, the audience would instantly know who and what this product was intended for. According to G.D. Schott, the most established view is that the female symbol "is derived from contractions in Greek script of the Greek names of these planets, namely Thouros (Mars) and Phosphoros (Venus). These derivations have been traced by a PhD researcher at the University of Twentie named Maarten Renkama who illustrated how Greek letters can be

³ Ponchione, Alissa. "Marketing Matters." Marketing Matters: Attracting The Right <http://www.nightclub.com/promotions/all-promotions/marketing-matters-attracting-right-demographics>.

transformed into the graphic female symbol still recognized today."⁴

The color purple combines the calm stability of blue and the fierce energy of red. It is often associated with royalty, power, and ambition peace and pride.⁵ The color choice was also intended to call out affiliates that use purple as an identifier. A few of these symbols of self-identification that include some shade of this pigment include bisexual, asexual, intersex, transgender, genderqueer, genderfluid, lesbian and lipstick lesbian.⁶ These elements were meant to help reflect the users themselves and what they embodied: femininity, power and freedom.

In addition to these components, the choice of type was essential to the overall experience when using this app. I used Trade Gothic and Helvetica Neue as the primary typefaces throughout the app mainly for ease of app integration and readability. The use of san serif typefaces was essential to the design for not only the aesthetic but also for functionality. According to Janie Kliever, who is a writer and graphic designer for Design Artistree Creative Studio, san serifs are ideal for social media and mobile applications and are "beneficial fonts that display well on

⁴ Schott, G.D. "Sex Symbols Ancient and Modern: Their Origins and Iconography on the Pedigree." Hwadmin. <http://www.bmj.com/content/331/7531/1509>.

⁵ Bourn, Jennifer. "Meaning of The Color Purple |." Bourn Creative. 2011. <http://www.bourncreative.com/meaning-of-the-color-purple/>.

⁶ Petronzio, Matt. "A Storied Glossary of Iconic LGBT Flags and Symbols." Mashable. <http://mashable.com/2014/06/13/lgbt-pride-symbols/#wgVEPw70LOqs>.

screen.”⁷ Brainstorming the qualities and characteristics was important to how I wanted the design to communicate to the audience. The mood and personality I was going for was to keep the design casual and playful, which I think these typefaces embody. But more than the mood or character of these typefaces, I wanted them to related to the context and suitability of the functional matter. I used Trade Gothic primarily as a display type for titles while using Helvetica Neue for the subtitles and body copy to keep the text easy on the eyes and less distracting, so users can easily skim or scan the material.

In addition to the color scheme and type choice, the content for the app was essential for its functionality. I didn’t want this to come off as a dating app, so I tried to keep the focus on the locations and events rather than the customization of the user’s profile and interaction with other users. Aspects such as a filter tool, weather, calendar, map/navigation, and a descriptions page were the main elemental features that would instantly showcase that main functionality of what this app entails.

Tying it all together would be the use of the app through interactive prototyping and integrating it into the promotional video. Thanks to a design and collaboration platform called Invisionapp, I was able to integrate real-world functionality by the use of prototyping my designs and hot spotting transitioning elements to create a seamless flow of usability. By dragging my files into

⁷ Kliever, Janie. "Font Design - How Designers Choose Which Fonts To Use." Design School. <https://designschool.canva.com/font-design/>.

invisionapp, I was able to draw clickable areas on my designs that lead to other screens that I created to give Roam the look and feel of being the real thing.⁸ By using this prototype in the promotional video, I could seamlessly show how the app's function could easily be tied in with daily life and travel.

Both the video and the interactive prototype of this app was what helped to bring the overall creation to life.

In conclusion, I feel that my personal interest and background as well as the strategic choice of color, type, design and app use ultimately led to the success of Roam. Once developed, I believe that this travel app will help women with similar interests be able to easily find places where other women like themselves can come together and interact with one another. Overall, it will not only strengthen this community of women, but also help the community grow by creating new events for women to attend and enjoy.

⁸ "Invisionapp." invisionapp. <http://www.invisionapp.com>.

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