Facebook Application- GatherTime

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ABSTRACT
Nowadays with the increasing of collaborative working, the task of scheduling meetings with a group of people is still a problem we have to handle. This task is even more difficult in an environment where the persons that are meeting only do that occasionally, like students in a university.

This paper presents a way to resolve the problem of scheduling meetings in a university context. We developed an application on facebook [1], GatherTime [2], with the goal of quickly gathering the time slots of all the participants for a meeting and then let them know when can they schedule their meeting.

Author Keywords
Facebook, meeting scheduling, calendar.

EXISTING WORK
There are already some applications in facebook that allows users to visualize their timetables. We would like to mention one in particular, the Class Timetables application [3]. This application allows students from a certain university to share their timetables. The pros are that the timetables are automatically on the system and it is very easy to compare the time with other friends. The cons are that it is a closed system (only works for students on a particular university) and the interface showing the calendar is a bit cluttered. We try to improve this solution with an open system, a cleaner interface and an easy way of entering time information.

INTRODUCTION
Many tools exist already that let people to schedule meetings. Still, most of them require that almost all of the participants use the same software and to have their calendar filled with updated information. This works well in enterprise environments where companies have calendars used by all employees that are updated with regularity. On other environments where people just meet occasionally, like students that gather together to work for an assignment, this does not work very well.

Why not take advantage of social network to solve this problem? Our idea is to have a facebook application where users can quickly enter their available time for a week and then compare it to their friends available time. This is not a calendar where users normally describe in detail what they are doing during the week. Our goal is just to show the available time slots for all participants in the meeting.

We have two main goals to our application: quick entry of available time slots and quick and efficient visualization of available time of all the participants.

To succeed our application must allow the users to quickly enter their available time slots in the week calendar. This week calendar does not represents a week in a certain month and year, it is just an abstract representation of the time.

Our second goal is to let users quickly look to the calendar week and check the best time to meet. Not only by showing the available time from all participants in the meeting, but how many people are busy for a particular time slot.

FIGURATIVE PROTOTYPES
Before we start coding, we developed our ideas using wireframes and figurative prototypes. These represent what we planned to implement and how we visualize our ideal system.

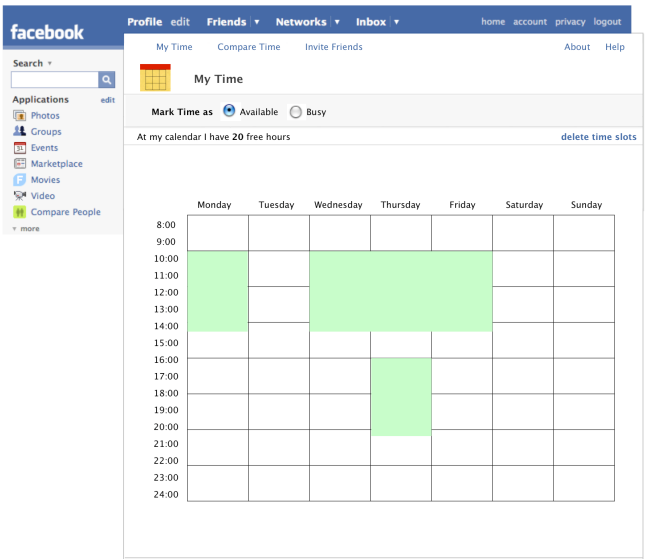

Figure 1 - Entry of available or busy time

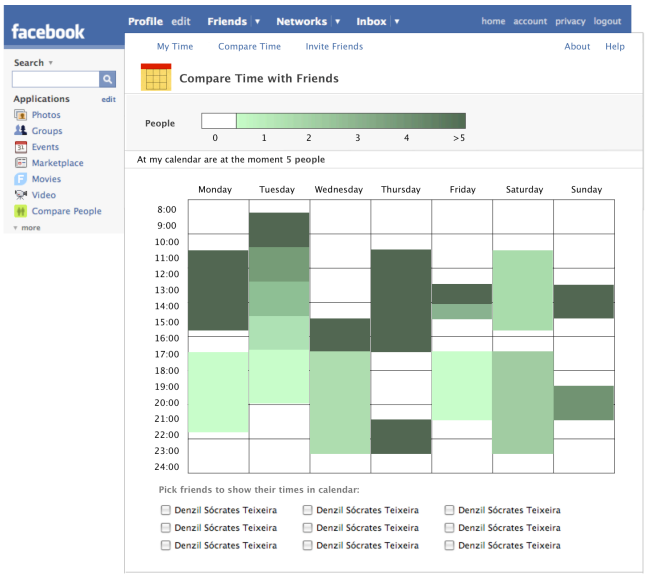

Figure 2 - Comparison of time slots with friends

As we can see in figure 2, the user can easily see which time slots are available and which of them have more people busy. The usage of color gradients helps a lot the user to quickly perceive which time slots are the busiest ones.

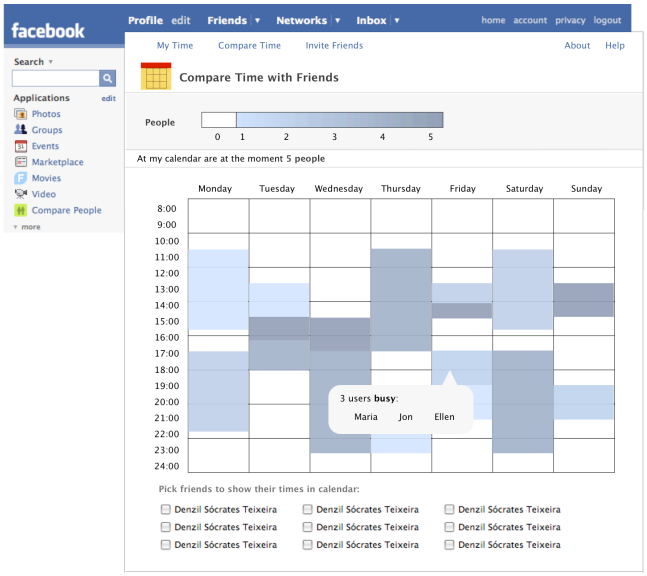

Figure 3 - Check which people are busy on a certain time slot

Figure 3 shows that how the user could see which participants are busy for a certain time slot. The user would click on the time slot and a balloon would appear.

IMPLEMENTATION

We implemented part of the application we indented to build. The application is divided in three pages: My Time, Compare Time and Invite Friends.

The My Time page allows the user to enter his busy or available time.

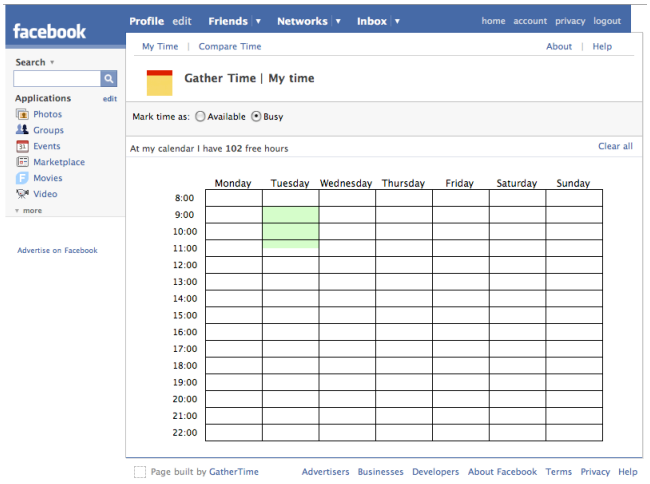

Figure 4 - My Time web page

The Compare Time page allows the user to select his current friends and to compare what time is available for all of them.

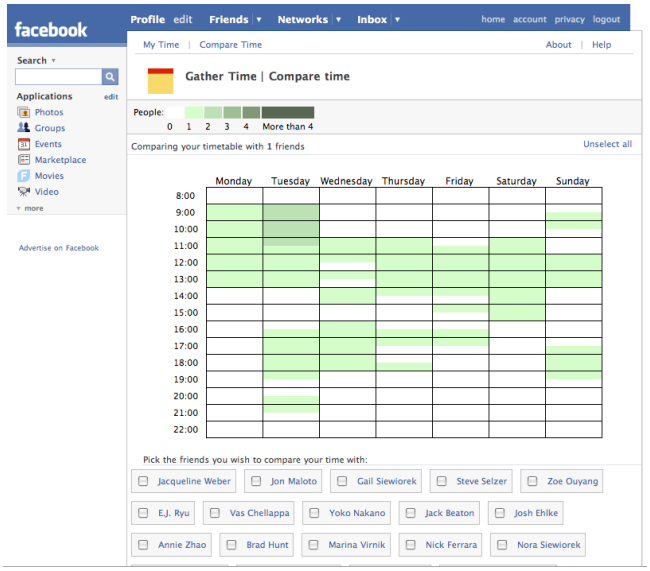

Figure 5 - Compare Time web page

The Invite Friends page was not implemented and should allow the user to invite people to use this application with her. That's why currently the user can compare the time with any friend of her network, even if her friend does not has this application installed.

LIMITATIONS

Although we wanted to achieve a fully functional visualization, such goal wasn't completely achieved. So, the application works with the following limitations:

- Friends cannot be invited to use the application.
- The balloon that would show which friends are busy for a certain time slot was not implemented.

CONCLUSION

Our experience with facebook was very interesting since we got to think more about how to use friends networks to solve daily problems such as meeting scheduling. We think that these kinds of networks can be applied to work context besides the leisure context.

Our solution aimed to be simple and straightforward to solve the problem of scheduling meetings. The future work is to test it with a bunch of students and see if it meets their real needs.

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