Tabletop Game Night App

Executive Summary

Tabletop Game Night is a web app to help busy adults schedule individual or recurring tabletop game nights, overcoming the scheduling challenges of people with multiple commitments on their time. It also helps to ensure that all parties can respect one another's dietary needs (e.g., kosher, food allergy, or vegan) in an activity that often features shared snacks and meals. User needs and design goals were determined based on the results of two personal interviews, and after conducting a survey which received 144 responses.

The Problem

Busy adults have a lot of demands on their time, and have trouble arranging their schedules to get together with one another and play games. According to my survey, 83.3% of respondents try to get together to play games once a month or more, and 65.3% of respondents have trouble coordinating schedules with others at least half of the time. More than a quarter of respondents reported difficulty arranging their schedules nearly every time!

The vast majority of those who responded to the survey also reported having food together while playing (97.2% reported having snacks, and 77.1% reported having meals) at least some of the time. Most people (61.8%) also have dietary restrictions or play with people that do (and a further 11.1% aren't sure), whether those restrictions come from food allergies, religious dietary laws, or ethical restrictions like vegetarianism or veganism.

Game selection turned out not to be a significant issue for the survey respondents: 87.5% reported that it was not a common problem, with 61.1% saying it caused a problem very rarely or never. Here the interview subjects were in the minority, so the app will not focus on assisting people with game selections, but may include a game library feature to help users indicate which games are available for a given event.

General User Profile

Users will be members of all genders aged 20 to 55. They will be generally well-educated (at least some college and up to PhD-level). Users will be employed or have other significant time commitments (school, parenting, freelancing, etc.). Users will have a desire to socialize face to face with others and share the activity of playing tabletop games. Due to their busy lifestyle, primary engagement with the interface will be via mobile phone touch screen, with secondary access from personal computer (either desktop or laptop).

User Goals

Users want to successfully schedule time to play tabletop games with their friends around busy and conflicting schedules. They want to ensure that any provided food will be safe and enjoyable for themselves and all their friends.

User Tasks

To support their goals, the users will need to perform the following tasks:
- Create a profile, including the following information:
  - Email address
  - User name
  - Dietary restrictions
- Enter personal availability
- Create user groups
- Invite others to join groups
- Create events, including regularly-repeating events like standing weekly game nights
  - Select group or users
  - Select time from common availability
  - Select whether event is 1-time, weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly
    - If monthly, select whether event should respect day number or day of the week (e.g., 4th of every month or 2nd Friday of every month)
  - Enter location
  - Enter event name
  - Enter event description, possibly including game information
  - Send invitation
- Accept or reject invitations to join groups, with optional text response
- Accept or reject invitations to events, with optional text response

User Inputs

Users will input their availability information either through a mobile-sized touch-screen interface or via keyboard and mouse inputs. While on mobile interface, most of the information for the user profile and for event titles and descriptions will be entered with the system's on-screen keyboard. Where possible, other information such as the time constraints will be entered via touch interfaces while on mobile devices (e.g., using swipe gestures to make selections), and via drop-down lists while on desktop. After users enter the information, it will be displayed back to them on subsequent screens so they can be certain it has been saved by the system.

User Research Methods

User research was conducted 2 ways: an online survey shared via Facebook and Google+, and a pair of face-to-face interviews. The results generally agreed, though the survey showed that the interview subjects were in a minority among potential users on a few issues. The interviews were conducted first, and the issues they raised formed the basis for the questions in the survey.

Interview Subjects

The interview subjects were a 28-year-old woman student with a part time job, and a 34-year-old man with a full time job and a toddler. Both are tabletop game enthusiasts (his preference is for board games, while hers is for roleplaying games). Both were asked about their biggest challenges and concerns regarding their attempts to engage in the hobby, and the following are some of their responses:
- Inability to schedule game time due to conflicting schedules with other players
- Difficulty selecting games which all participants will enjoy
- Concern about food selection due to others' dietary restrictions (food allergies, religious restrictions, or vegetarianism/veganism)
- Concern about the strain of hosting duties (who will host other players, often meaning extra clean-up duties before and after the event)
- Concern about managing group membership for recurring events:
    - Ability to communicate with members about recurring event and change parameters (change location or time for one instance or ongoing)
    - Ability to withdraw from future instances
    - Ability to eject problematic members from groups
    - Ability to withdraw from a group with or without a message

I used the information from the interviews to formulate questions for the survey, which I shared on Facebook and Google+. I limited the questions to issues which I felt I could address adequately with a web application: scheduling events, game selection, and food selection. Group membership would be an integral part of the event scheduling component, so no questions were asked about it. Questions about scheduling and game selection were separated from questions about food preparation and provision to minimize user cognitive load during the survey. The questions and the survey response numbers (absolute number, %) follow.

Survey Part 1: Scheduling

- How often do you try to get together with others and play games?
    - Once a year or very rarely (3, 2.1%)
    - A few times a year (21, 14.6%)
    - Once a month (15, 10.4%)

- ○ Twice a month (36, 25%)
- ○ Weekly (50, 34.7%)
- ○ Twice a week (11, 7.6%)
- ○ More than twice a week (8, 5.6%)
- Do you have trouble coordinating schedules with others to make time for games?
  - ○ Yes, frequently (almost every time I try to schedule something) (39, 27.1%)
  - ○ Yes, occasionally (about half of the times I try to schedule something) (55, 38.2%)
  - ○ Yes, sometimes (less than half of the times I try to schedule something) (38, 26.4%)
  - ○ No, or very rarely (12, 8.3%)
- Do you have trouble choosing or agreeing on a game or games to play with others?
  - ○ Yes, frequently (3, 2.1%)
  - ○ Yes, occasionally (15, 10.4%)
  - ○ Yes, sometimes (38, 26.4%)
  - ○ No, or very rarely (88, 61.1%)

Survey Part 2: Food and Diet

- Do you normally have snacks (including beverages other than water) available while playing games with others?
  - ○ Yes (112, 77.8%)
  - ○ No (4, 2.8%)
  - ○ Sometimes (28, 19.4%)
- If yes or sometimes, who normally provides the snacks?
  - ○ The host or venue (21, 15.2%)
  - ○ Guests (8, 5.8%)
  - ○ Both host and guests (109, 79%)
- Do you normally have a meal or meals available while playing games with others?
  - ○ Yes (36, 25%)
  - ○ No (33, 22.9%)
  - ○ Sometimes (75, 52.1%)
- If yes or sometimes, who most often prepares the meal?
  - ○ The host or venue (20, 16.4%)
  - ○ Guests bring food (3, 2.5%)
  - ○ Both hosts and guests (35, 28.7%)
  - ○ A delivery service (e.g., pizza delivery) (46, 37.7%)
  - ○ A takeout service which a guest or host leaves to retrieve (6, 4.9%)
  - ○ A restaurant or restaurants, which guests and host(s) travel to between games or on a break (4, 3.3%)
  - ○ Other (8, 6.6%)
- Do you or the others you play with have dietary restrictions (including food allergies, religious restrictions, or ethical restrictions)?

- ○ Yes (89, 61.8%)
- ○ No (39, 27.1%)
- ○ Not sure (16, 11.1%)

User Research Analysis

The survey responses aligned partly with the interview subjects, while demonstrating that they are likely in the minority on certain issues. The greatest surprise was that only 12.5% of the respondents indicated frequent difficulty selecting which game to play. Almost as surprising was the extent to which the majority of respondents reported difficulty with scheduling: 65.3% indicated difficulty at least half of the time. The low percentage of respondents reporting difficulty with game selection made that feature a low priority - any early implementation or testing would not attempt to resolve this problem.

A strong majority of respondents reported having snacks, and frequently or occasionally having meals while playing games. Most resolved the food supply issues for snacks via a collaborative effort of the guests and host, and about two thirds resolved the meal supply via delivery or a collaborative effort of guests and host. This is very interesting, considering that 61.8% responded to the survey saying that they or others they play with have dietary restrictions (including allergies, religious restrictions, or ethical restrictions). A further 11.1% weren't sure if others in their group had such restrictions. As such a feature would be relatively easy to implement by having users report it in their profiles and having that information copied into any event they respond positively to, a diet safety section can easily be added to the project.

User Personas

The following three user personas will help me develop specific user stories and tasks, while keeping my focus on features users will need and want.

Derek Green

Derek is a 38 year old man who works 40 to 50 hours per week as an IT professional. He is single, but lives in an apartment with a roommate and a few pets. He does game design as a hobby, and tries to stay involved in a few different play groups so he can be exposed to new games and have players to test his designs. He'd like to play at least twice per week, and hopefully more, but his schedule at work can involve unpredictable overtime and he has pet care responsibilities at his apartment. Derek has no significant food allergies or dietary restrictions.

Claire Hammer

Claire is a 25 year old woman who works part time at a retail store while attending classes for a graduate degree. She lives alone off campus in a small apartment. She enjoys playing games

with her friends from work and school, and likes introducing her classmates and coworkers to her hobby. She'd like to play about once per week, but her work schedule changes from week to week, which makes scheduling difficult. Claire tries to keep a kosher diet.

Andrew Delaglio

Andrew is a 48 year old man who works full time as a marketing manager at a small business. He lives with his wife and two teenage children in a house with a few pets. Andrew has hosted a monthly card game with his college friends for years, but his children's increasingly busy schedules have made it hard for him to schedule the last few games. Andrew is diabetic and lactose intolerant, so avoids dairy products and sugary drinks and snacks.

Use Case Scenarios

These three use case scenarios will allow me to demonstrate the key features of the app, while guiding how I design the interface. They will reflect the needs of the user personas listed above.

Create User Profile

Andrew Delaglio wants to start using the app to schedule the monthly game nights with his friends. When he first signs up to the app, he will have to create a user profile so his responses properly affect event guidelines.

Associated Tasks

- Load login page
- Click/tap "Sign Up"
- Select and enter username
- Select and enter password (with confirmation)
- Enter email address
- Click/tap "confirm"
- Load profile page
- Upload user image (optional)
- Enter diet restriction information

Task Flow Diagram

Creating User Profiles
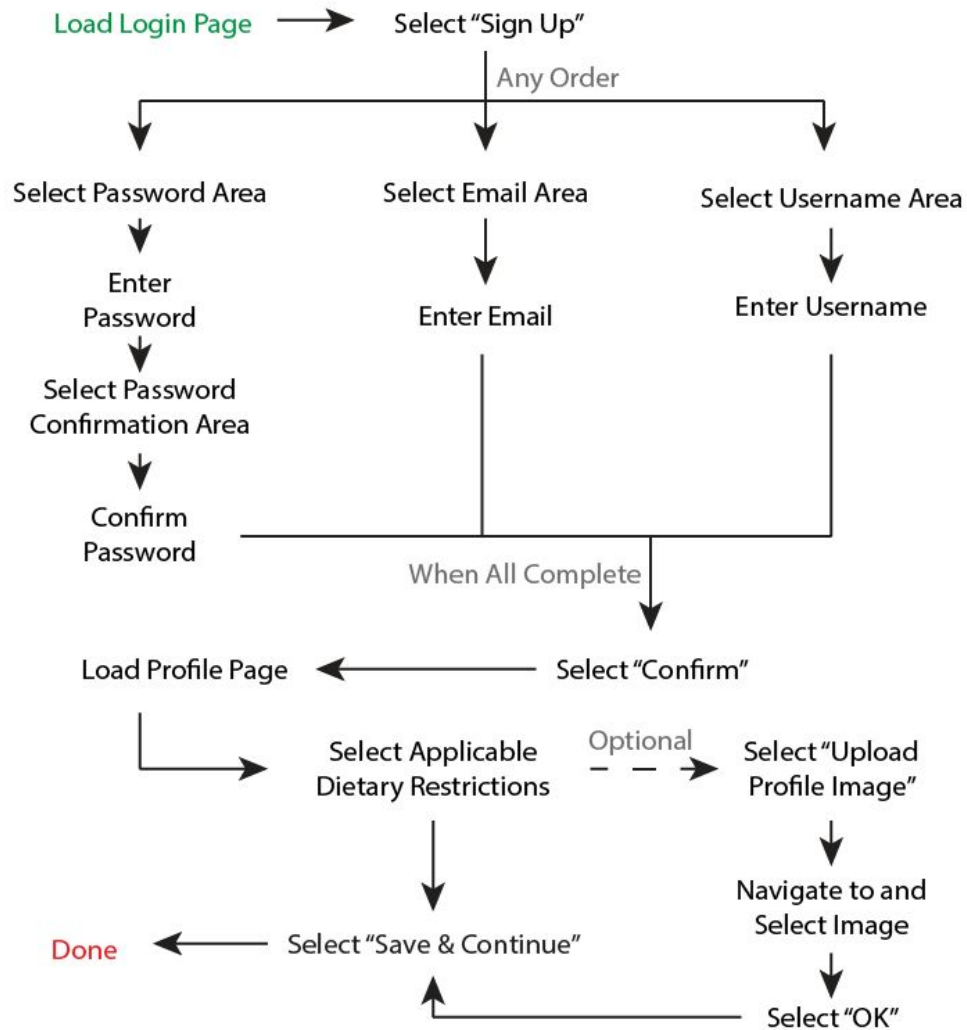
Set Personal Availability

Claire Hammer wants to be able to schedule a game with her friends, so she needs to update her availability information so that people in her groups can see it when attempting to schedule events. She updates her availability when her weekly schedule is posted at work.
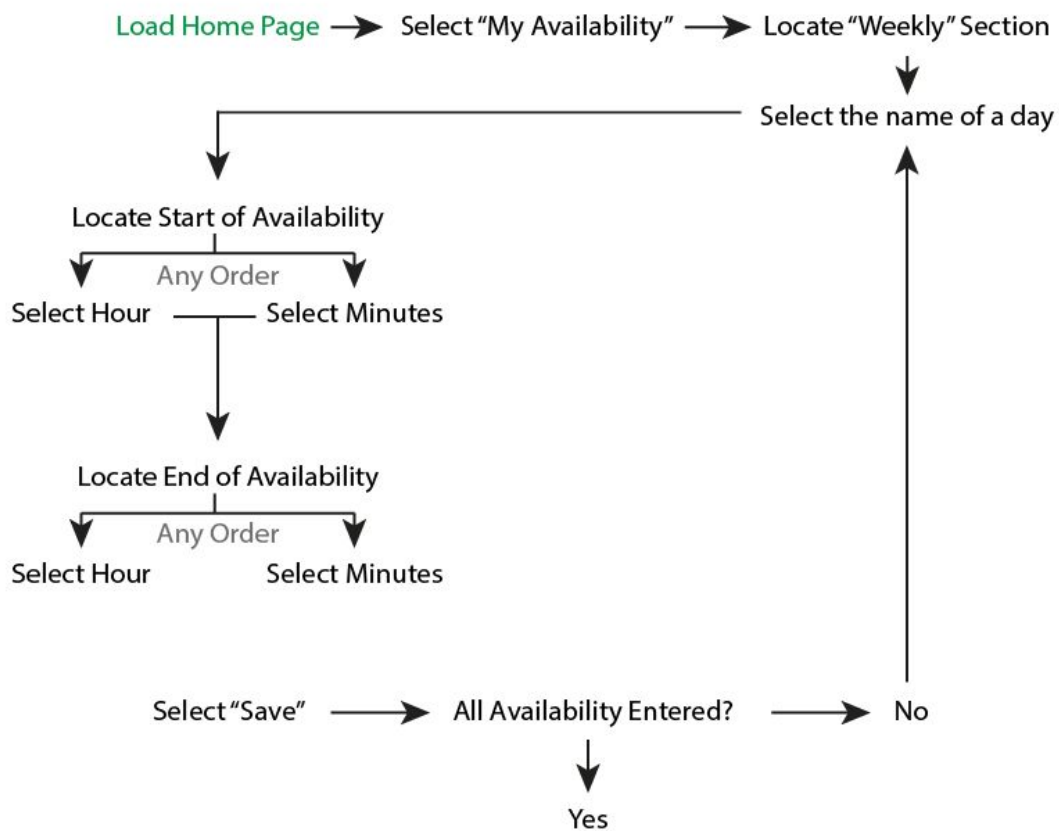
Associated Tasks

- Load home page

- Click/tap "My availability"
- Find "Weekly" section
- Click/Tap the name of a day
- Swipe/scroll time to select start of availability
- Swipe/scroll time to select end of availability
- Click/tap 'confirm'
- Review on "Weekly" section of "My Availability" page
- Repeat process starting with "Click/Tap the name of a day" until all availability is enterred

Task Flow Diagram

Setting Personal Availability

Load Home Page → Select "My Availability" → Locate "Weekly" Section
→ Select the name of a day

Locate Start of Availability
Any Order
Select Hour —— Select Minutes

Locate End of Availability
Any Order
Select Hour   Select Minutes

Select "Save" → All Availability Entered? → No
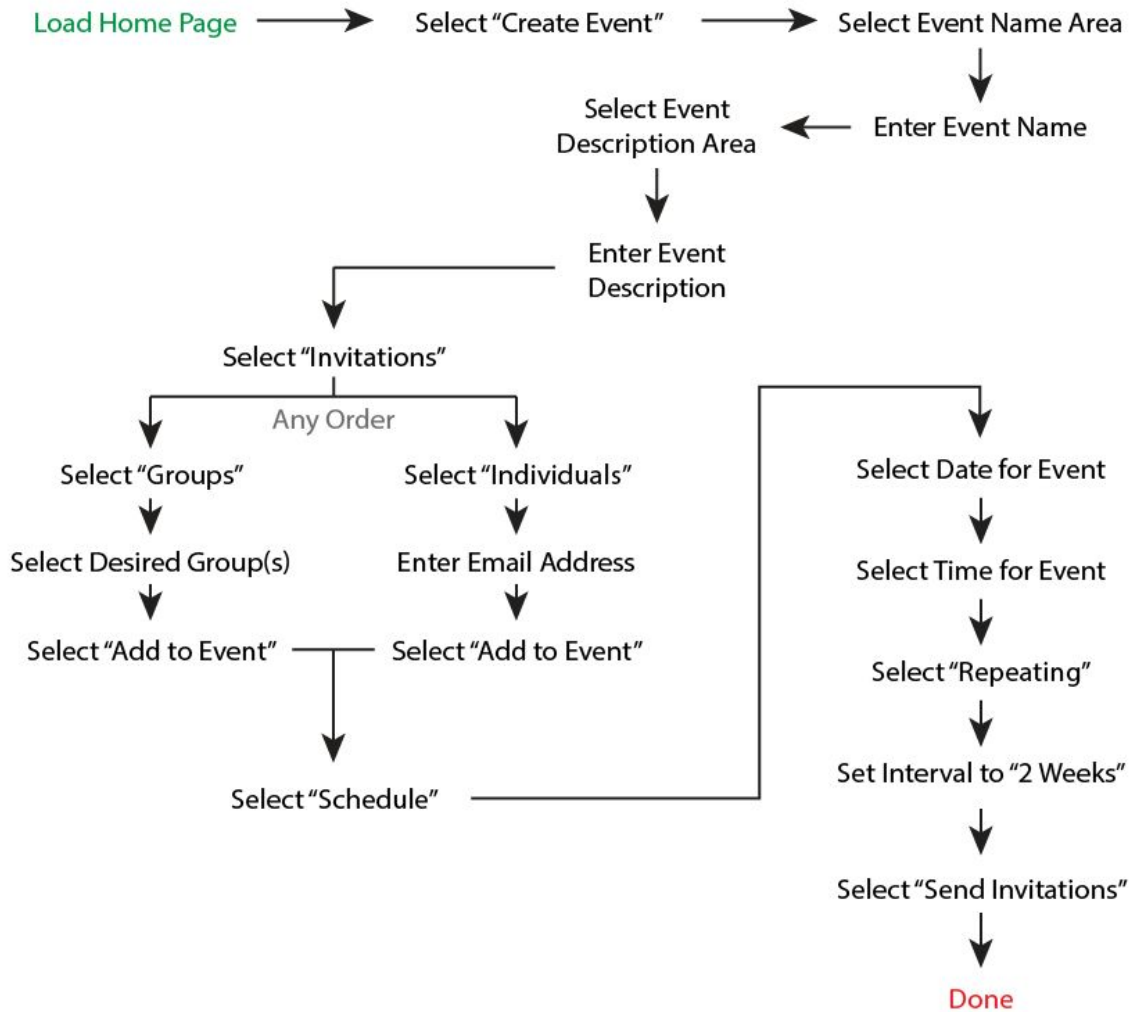
Yes

Create an Event

Derek Green wants to create a regular game night that meets every other week to test one of the games he is developing. He and many of his players use the app already, but he wants to invite a new player to the event as well.

Associated Tasks

- Load home page
- Click/tap "Create Event"
- Enter event name
- Enter event description
- Click "invitations"
- Under "groups", select "Playtesting" group
- Under "individuals" click to enter the new player's email address
- Click "Add to Event"
- Select date and time of first occurrence from listed available times
- Check "repeating"
- Select 2 weeks for repeat interval
- Select "Location"
- Enter name or address of location
- Click "send invitations"

Task Flow Diagram

Creating an Event

Load Home Page → Select "Create Event" → Select Event Name Area

Enter Event Name → Select Event Description Area

Enter Event Description

Select "Invitations"

Any Order

Select "Groups" | Select "Individuals"

Select Desired Group(s) | Enter Email Address

Select "Add to Event" | Select "Add to Event"

Select "Schedule"

Select Date for Event

Select Time for Event

Select "Repeating"

Set Interval to "2 Weeks"

Select "Send Invitations"

Done

User Experience Map

Timeline	User Mood	User Goal	Obstacle	Interaction
Day 0		Play Games With Friends	Scheduling Troubles	Discovers Application via other Users
Day 1		Arrange Games via App	Profile Setup	Signs up for Application
Day 1		Arrange Games via App	Group Creation	Encourages Others to Sign Up
Day 4		Schedule 1st Event	Selecting Available Time	Picks Time From List
Day 5		Play Games With Friends	None!	Recommends App to Others