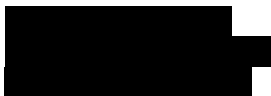


APRIL 2021

APPS FOR DIGITAL NOMADS

A Formal Analysis

Report by:



Project Manager:
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PROBLEM INTRODUCTION

Our group was tasked with exploring the possibility of creating a new app designed specifically for digital nomads. Digital nomads are those who travel the world while completing their work online. This is a fairly new lifestyle, one made possible with the invention of the internet. As this is the case, many of the challenges which face digital nomads have yet to be adequately solved. Thus, the purpose of this report is to determine what kind of app would be ideal in aiding digital nomads in tackling these challenges.



After analyzing our research, we discovered a few key issues shared among digital nomads. Key among them are loneliness and the lack of cohesiveness among apps which currently exist. Hence, it would be beneficial to create a new app specifically for digital nomads which would help combat these issues. It would be necessary to design this app with digital nomads in mind, as opposed to an app for a broader audience. Even so, we believe that this would be beneficial for the general population, especially in a COVID-19 and post-pandemic world where more people will be working away from a traditional workplace.

Our report includes 4 sections:

- 1) Research Methodology
- 2) Research Results
- 3) Discussion
- 4) Conclusion

Research Plan

To study whether revitalized apps were needed by digital nomads, we followed a five step research plan.

Phase 1: Develop evaluation criteria

Phase 2: Gain knowledge from readings

Phase 3: Perform surveys and interviews

Phase 4: Compare results with hypothesis

Phase 5: Analyze results and draw conclusions

This research plan was devised to provide a robust strategy that would allow our knowledge of the topic to expand and be able to form solid conclusions for the analysis.

Phase 1: Develop evaluation criteria

To consider what makes an app effective or ineffective, certain criteria were set amongst the team.

Popularity of platform - An effective app would have a large number of positive reviews (4+ stars) on the app store in addition to a large number of downloads (1+ million).

Available resources - A well formulated app would have several resources for users for either social or professional desires.

Ease of use - The app needs to be easy to use and utilize without reducing functionality,

These parameters will set so our initial research could have a common foundation between the different members of our team.

Phase 2: Gain knowledge from readings

Since our team consists of undergraduate college students living in a time where our education is primarily formatted online, we found great resources to learn more about what it's like to work digitally full-time. One of the most helpful resources was reading blogs from current digital nomads.

From the several blogs read from different authors, an analysis was done and found several common trends among them. Below are topics in which a percentage of the blog authors talk about experiencing.

METHODOLOGY

Loneliness

100%

Lack of home/good place to work

~67%

Excessive paperwork

~50%

Phase 3: Perform surveys and interviews

In addition to our reading analysis from different resources, other forms of primary research took place including a survey and interview. The survey was sent to primarily college students who are involved with various social platforms but were also targeted to digital nomads. As a result, the responses were a good mix of age, background, current professional position, and experience. The questions were worded such that the participant could explain their likes and dislikes of current platforms. The responses were made open-answer to allow for further elaboration and responses were collected anonymously.

To obtain an appropriate interviewee, a long-time digital nomad was chosen who had been living this lifestyle for over 20 years and has seen it change over time. They also had experience with different companies, locations (including abroad), and most importantly - apps. Below was one of the questions asked and her response which fueled our motivation for our suggestions.

Question: "Given today's world of technology, do you wish some other resources or apps would help your working life?"

Answer: "It would be nice to have it all located in one place or easier navigation between all them (apps)."

In addition to this interview, a survey was created to obtain a majority opinion over digital resources. This survey was sent to fellow classmates, teachers, family members, but specifically marketed for digital nomads whose responses were collected anonymously. Some of the questions included: This survey helped shape our understanding of digital apps from a user perspective.

Question: "What is your favorite social media application?"

Question: "Why is this your favorite app and what do you like about it?"

These same questions were then asked about professional resources such as LinkedIn or job blogs such as Purdue University's myCCO. Asking these questions granted us great feedback of why certain populations like or dislike certain apps. It further helped shape our understanding of digital apps from a user perspective.

Phase 4: Comparing results with hypothesis

After collecting information from our primary and secondary forms of research, we then reanalyzed our main hypothesis. Do digital workers really need new resources in order to improve their lifestyle?

And if new resources are needed, it is important to consider the potential actions for this. That means looking into the feasibility of designing, creating, and launching a new app. In addition, maintaining the system, working to keep it updated, and several other tasks that are involved with this process.

Having the idea for a new app can only go so far. Possibly there is a reason why some of these ideas have not been implemented yet, or worse yet, maybe they have been implemented in the past and were not successful. The team went back to our secondary research stage for some time to look into past apps or resources to see why they are no longer prevalent and what other resources soon faded away,

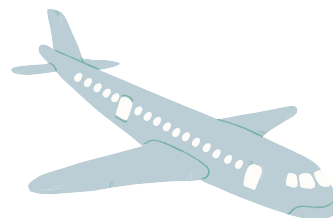


"I wish there was more cohesiveness between apps or some that can accomplish more things at once"
-Digital Nomad

Phase 5: Analyze results and verdict

We analyzed our idea to determine the cost-benefit ratio of a new app implementation. Using data gathered from blogs, survey information from participants, and interviews with digital nomads, we estimated whether a new virtual resource would be beneficial to society.

From the established criteria in phase 1, it was clear that many apps currently exist that successfully fulfill these parameters. However, very few exist that satisfy all of the criteria effectively or that do so with complete user satisfaction.



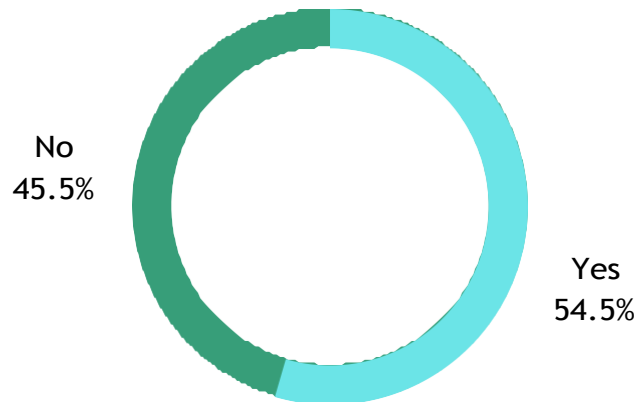
Data Collection

To determine the needs and desires of potential users of this application, multiple methods of data collection had to be performed. To determine an appropriate market we read through several accounts of current digital nomads to find typical challenges faced, interviewed a professional in the field to understand their perspective and surveyed college aged student from across the country to gather a data set of popular apps and benefits of each. All this data collected, we were able to analyze our results to determine common trends and extrapolate conclusions for user needs and desires. The graphs below represent our collected survey data.

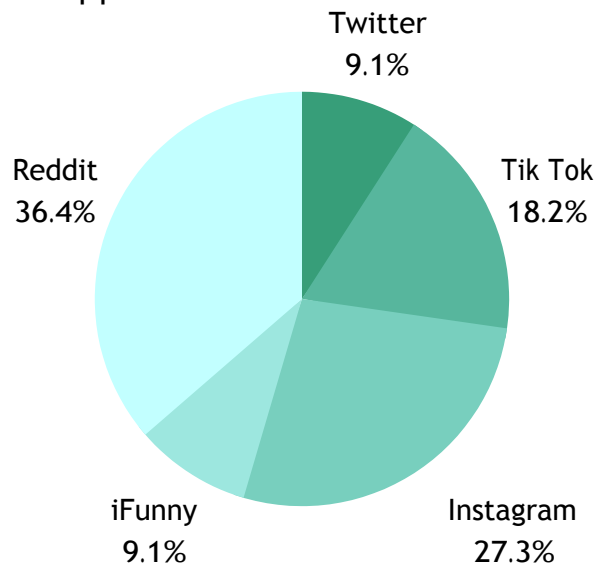
RESULTS ANALYSIS



Would you use an app combining social and professional networking?



Favorite social media app?



RESULTS ANALYSIS

What do digital nomads want from this app?

Data Analysis

Our collected results provided us with a variety of information regarding the users wants and needs. The first set of data to tackle were the common challenges faced by digital nomads. The three most commonly cited issues were with loneliness, instability with location and issues with paper work.

Loneliness

This first issue was the most commonly faced among digital nomads. The issue that many faced was that the lack of general stability in their lives made it very difficult to maintain healthy relationships. Without being able to be physically there with people, work relations, friendships, and relationships had the tendency to fade.

Instability with Location

Location also had the tendency to cause issue among digital nomads. A lifestyle in constant motion makes it hard to find a good, stable place to operate from, thus causing issues with productivity.

Issues with Paperwork

Along with moving making it difficult to find a place to work, it also presents legal issues. Moving around entails a lot of paperwork, for example having to deal with changes in banking information if you work internationally, or difficulties getting approved credit. This presents new challenges for the digital nomad

All these challenges in mind, we were then able to correlate the data presented on the previous page with the user's needs and wants. From our collected data we were able to make several relevant conclusions.

First, we surveyed a variety of candidates to determine what was their favorite social media app. The top three noted were Reddit, Instagram and TikTok. From these apps we then determined what favorite features each provided and what could be changed about social media apps to improve them.

Reddit

Reddit was enjoyed for its versatility. It provided a very organized system of a wide array of forums so you can easily find exactly what you're looking for and connect with like minds.

Instagram

Instagram was favored for its ease of connectivity. Most people enjoyed it for being able to stay in touch with friends.

TikTok

TikTok was favored purely for entertainment value, people enjoyed it for it's funny content.

Finally, what most people said they disliked about social media was the negative effect it tends to have on mental health.

Aside from the data presented above, our other major conclusions from the survey were whether or not people would want an app that combines social and professional and if they did not, why not. This question in mind, people tended to be split on wanting this sort of application. While many people said they would use it, a good portion were against the idea solely because they did not like the idea of personal and professional lives being that closely intertwined.

However, even with these concerns in mind, digital nomads still face many real issues with connectivity which could potentially be resolved or at least mitigated with the right type of application.

Digital Nomad Pros and Cons

As with anything in life, there are some pros and cons associated with digital nomad life and working ways. One of the big ones, which can be a pro and a con, is the fact that obviously it is an online position.

This is both a pro and a con because not everyone wants to work online, but this position is ideal for people who have social anxiety and introverts. In an article by Ohio State entitled "Advantages to Online Networking," "The Internet can be a great way to begin those casual relationships that turn into wonderful networking opportunities. Some of the advantages of networking online are:

- You can join various discussion groups and community forums covering a variety of subjects.
- You can "break the ice" before meeting someone in person.
- You can listen and be engaged as you wish.
- You set the tone."

This article, and this statement particularly, kind of summarizes some of the pros that are there for those working in the digital nomad field, but the pros/benefits are also there for the companies that employ these people. The infographic to the right shows just how these companies are succeeding with their digital nomads and remote work employees.

DISCUSSION



Remote Work

35-40% more productive than their office counterparts, and have measured an output increase of at least 4.4%

Workers produce results with 40% fewer quality defects

41% lower absenteeism

21% higher profitability



DISCUSSION

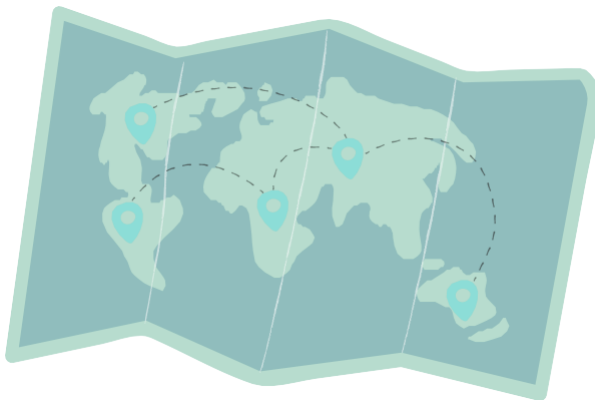


Solutions

At the moment, there seems to be no real solution to the many apps or websites that digital nomads work on. As we refer back to the quote received during the interview with Ms. Von Gunten, a digital nomad herself, "I wish there was either more cohesiveness between apps or apps that can accomplish more in a sense. For instance, on my phone, I have to download the apps like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, calendars, messaging apps, the Arbonne app, email apps, etc. that I will need to switch back and forward from regularly. It would be nice to have it all located in one place or easier navigation between them."

We can get a big understanding from this quote from one of her answers that there needs to be an overlapping cohesiveness between the major apps. She mentions some apps that she commonly uses for her job and tells about how her having to switch back and forth between them. I believe that us, as college kids, can also relate to this as not 1 specific app works for everything. So we also find ourselves flipping back and forth between apps to be able to do everything we have to.

The easiest solution: An app or other software that has the capabilities of multitasking all these things into one location. An app like this isn't quite there yet, but as the digital nomad population grows and the demand for an app like this increases, an app or other software will emerge to help our digital nomad friends and co-workers.



CONCLUSION

A Summary of Everything



Our group was tasked with exploring the possibility of creating a new app designed specifically for digital nomads. Through our research we were able to get a good basic understanding of what these people are looking for. We collected surveys from peers, as well as performed an interview with a digital nomad herself to get a more in depth view of the life and work style of a digital nomad. Through all of this data, we would like to see an app that would combine all the necessary resources needed into one place. A place that could be divided into forums to separate work from home. This is our ideal software.



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APPENDIX A

Digital Nomad Interview Transcript

1. If you could please state your name and position
 - a. My name is Mindy von Gunten and I am an Independent Consultant and Area Manager for Arbonne Co
2. What does your position entail and what type of work do you do?
 - a. Most of my work is virtual as of right now. It used to be a couple of days in the office each week with the rest of my time working independently, but with COVID-19 we learned that most of our work could be done entirely virtually, so now I only go into the office a couple times each month. Most of my work revolves around contacting my clients and providing products to them while recommending new items we have. As an independent consultant, I have a group of around 50 clients who all buy Arbonne products through me and I help choose the items that best fit their needs. I really enjoy it because it's almost like shopping but it's just for someone else you know?
3. What is your primary communication method for contacting your clients?
 - a. For new clients, the Arbonne website has a messaging service in which anyone can send me a message which then forwards to both my Arbonne account and my email. Our responses are preferred to be through the Arbonne website in which the client's account will receive the message or possibly their email. Occasionally clients will prefer email instead, but then it is harder to transfer information. For instance, if one of my clients wants to buy protein powder, the Arbonne website allows me to show her my recommendations and immediately add them to her cart. So having both the messaging, shopping and purchasing all on the same platform works really well.
4. Do you travel very often or do you primarily stay near where your offices are located?
 - a. Currently not so much obviously (laughs). Well as you know we currently live in Mason Michigan which is close to one of your office buildings but in the past, I have been able to do long periods of work remotely. For instance, you might remember when we lived in Germany for a few years. While there I could still do my work entirely even when across the entire Atlantic sea - it was pretty phenomenal actually and I'm thankful I could still have my job when moving to a different country. So yes you don't have to stay near the offices but if you are trying to move up the corporate ladder it is best to be in person.
5. So while you were in Germany, did you know of anyone else there who was working for Arbonne? If not did you find any helpful tools for connecting with employees or social media platforms?
 - a. I definitely didn't know of anyone else who was working for Arbonne while I was in Germany. It is a well-known company but they have really no outreach to European countries or any other countries for that matter. Obviously, I still had all my friends from back home I could talk to through facetime and WhatsApp which was nice. And of course, we had staff meetings I had to weekly attend, which was fairly difficult to coordinate with the time zone change but we were able to all meet for about an hour a week to talk about our work. But I mean outside of work of course Facebook was another way to keep in touch with friends back home and see what they were doing. It was weird though, almost as if now that I was so far away I didn't really care to see what they were up to, and I know that sounds terrible (laughs), but it was just because I was so far away doing my own thing starting a new life in Europe that I was so focused on that, that other things didn't take up my attention. It was kinda nice actually.
6. Given today's world of technology, do you wish some other resources or apps would help your working life in terms of the virtual format?
 - a. Hmm, good question. I wish there was either more cohesiveness between apps or apps that can accomplish more in a sense. For instance, on my phone, I have to download the apps like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, calendars, messaging apps, the Arbonne app, email apps, etc. that I will need to switch back and forward from regularly. It would be nice to have it all located in one place or easier navigation between them. Being an old person now like me, I am much slower at figuring that stuff out than younger folks. But I think for the most part there are a lot of helpful apps out there that really help our professional and social lives.
7. What are your favorite app and least favorite app you use for work and social life? Why?
 - a. I don't know if I have a "favorite" app, but I have enjoyed using Reddit for my social life. I like the anonymous factor of it. There are no profile pictures or usernames that reveal your identity. I think it is helpful because it is less about people trying to make themselves look better, like on Instagram or Twitter, and rather it's people being their true self and honest. That to me is effective because I have found really useful information on there and it is fun to read people's real perspectives. But as far as apps I dislike, I really don't like Twitter. The culture is just very degrading and people try so hard to use it as a leverage point for their views on certain topics. I do not have a Twitter but I do mostly use Facebook and sometimes Instagram. Those are much less frequent and I will only see a few posts from time to time of important life updates rather than commenting about every little thing that is happening around us.
8. What do you use to communicate with your fellow employees and do you wish there was a better alternative?
 - a. To the employees, I am close to I usually just text them. That is probably the easiest way since I am on my phone through the entire day and sharing pictures, links, and of course you know we like emojis, it is easy to exchange information quickly without much trouble. By using other apps I find it more difficult because I will forget to check them, or I have to learn a new set of buttons and settings, and yeah, it just gets more complicated. For employees, I don't know as well and I only talk to a handful of times I email them. That just has a bit more professional connotation and I am not looking for an immediate response. But then that does run into the trouble of if I need a response fairly quickly from someone I don't know very well, usually email isn't the best way to do that.

APPENDIX B

Blog readings and findings

Focusing on some of the challenges listed by different digital nomad blogs:

Blog: Xolo

<https://blog.xolo.io/9-challenges-of-being-a-digital-nomad-b81acd9f5ba>

Challenges:

- Medical Insurance
- Keeping Possessions Safe
- Wifi Accessibility
- Emotional Support/Loneliness
- Travel Disruptions leading to meeting delays/cancellations
- Financial Stability (Hard to constantly find freelance work)
- Managing Paperwork across countries
- Banking (Lots of fees, especially when using PayPal across multiple countries)
- Finding a Work-Life Balance

Blog: Krisp <https://krisp.ai/blog/common-digital-nomad-problems/>

Challenges:

- Too many opportunities to chase, hard to stay focused
- No days off if sick (Got to keep making money)
- Loud, hard for meetings
- Hard to know how much to pack
- Hard to find free time
- No home
- Not a lot of people can relate to what you are doing
- “Social Fatigue”
- Currency exchange can get confusing

Blog: Expat Financial <https://expatfinancial.com/5-challenges-digital-nomads-face-while-living-abroad/>

Challenges:

- Loneliness
- Maintaining income
- Lots of paperwork and “banking formalities”
- Medical Insurance

Blog: Traveling with Kristin <https://www.travelingwithkristin.com/digital-nomad-blog/2018/9/29/the-challenge-of-being-a-digital-nomad>

Challenges:

- Loneliness
- Dating is difficult
- Work-life balance is hard to achieve
- Keeping productive and motivated can be a challenge
- Finding housing
- Self-doubt

Blog: Wherever Writer <https://www.whereverwriter.com/digital-nomad-challenges/>

Challenges:

- Loneliness
- Lack of Stability
- Hard to maintain relationships
- Medical records become a mess
- Paperwork is hard to fill out
- Credit can be hard to obtain (Credit card companies don't like your lifestyle of lack of stability)

Blog: Spend Life Travelling <https://www.spendlifetraveling.com/emotional-challenges-of-digital-nomad-life-practical-solutions/>

Challenges:

- You will grow apart from your friends
- Hard to make friends, as you and other digital nomad will be travelling
- Maintaining a work-life balance
- Lack of a routine leads to stress
- No good physical workspace to work at constantly
- Feeling of a lack of a purpose
- If you're successful, the lack of stress can be stressful

Common Challenges:

- Loneliness - 6
- Medical Problems - 4
- Lack of a home/good place to work - 4
- Paperwork - 3
- Maintaining Income - 3