UC SANTA BARBARA
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Sonia Fernandez

FOMO No More

It’s 6 p.m. on a Friday and you’re sitting around with friends asking, “What’s going on tonight?” You’d love to be where the action is … if you only knew what was going on, how to find it and who was there.

Enter BOOM, a college community-based application created by UC Santa Barbara economics major Tyler Peterson. Similar to visually driven real-time applications like Snapchat and Instagram, with the kind of event-building functionality found in Facebook, combined with smatterings of location services, BOOM helps users find each other, whether it’s for an impromptu social gathering, a lecture downtown that everyone’s talking about or a finals-cramming session at the library.

“We’re creating a virtual hub of college life,” Peterson said. The idea for the app came out of a vacation conversation between Peterson and Noah Pompan, his lifelong friend and fellow BOOM creator.

“We were asking ourselves, ‘What’s going on right now?’ and we realized that we had all these social media platforms, and we still didn’t know,” Peterson said. Despite being sociable guys — and perhaps owing to the seasonal ebb and flow of life in a college town — local friends, colleagues and like minds were hard to pinpoint, let alone hang out with. And figuring out the important details would take a fairly substantial amount of app surfing. That lack of information became the next entrepreneurial challenge for the duo when they realized that theirs was a need that existed in virtually every college community.

With gears turning, the pair designed an app that would essentially take the guesswork out of not only figuring out what their peers were doing, but also where they were doing it, by allowing tech- and social media-savvy young people to do what has become second nature: posting about their activities online. Users take photos and videos of themselves and their whereabouts and post them to the app's feeds, which in turn broadcasts — or "BOOMs" — that media to other registered users. The media is tagged by location and event, and all uploads with the same location/label are compiled in a scrolling feed viewable by other users. This allows people to locate their crew, whether they're across town, on the other side of the concert venue or the next table over.

The app won first prize in the Entrepreneurial Fellowship Competition at Gettysburg College (Pompan's alma mater). Since then the BOOM co-founders partnered with an accelerator program in Venice, Calif. and brought in lead engineer Greg Pynes. The friends recently brought the app back to UCSB for its beta testing/moment of reckoning.

"UCSB is such a great hub of intellectualism and student life," said Peterson, explaining that the feedback from such an active student base would be invaluable to shaping the app.

Not only has it proved effective at keeping BOOMers — so far a relatively small, select group — informed of each others' whereabouts, he said, BOOM also manages to convey the smaller, yet equally important pieces of real-time information, such as how packed the venue may be, whether there's adequate parking, or if the group has decided to migrate.

Geared specifically toward college campus communities, the BOOM feeds are "geofenced," meaning the global positioning services are limited to within a certain geographical distance from a base campus, in this case UCSB and Santa Barbara City College. This keeps the feeds and networks intentionally local and focused only on nearby events and places. Additionally, users have the option of posting to a general anonymous public feed, or to a private "friends only" feed. BOOMers may also edit location descriptions for privacy, changing specific addresses to labels only friends would know, or leaving only the distance calculation from the viewer's location visible.

The app isn’t just for big events, Peterson added. Users can BOOM virtually any activity and image (within the limits of decency, of course, and they do screen for overly explicit content) that is relevant to them as students and friends.

Creating BOOM has become a valuable learning experience for Peterson and Pompan, whose group is now sponsoring and mentoring other would-be UCSB entrepreneurs for an upcoming startup weekend.

“What was really important to us is to create a community,” Peterson said. “We’re enabling people to make the most of their time here, have the most fun and be the most productive.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.