

THE DAILY SNACK

Cultivo Media Prototype Report

**COLORADO
MEDIA
PROJECT**

CULTIVO

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Executive Summary



Prototype

The Daily Snack prototype was a set of two Twitter feeds developed in order to deliver a series of Colorado focused stories in an easy to consume medium. One focuses on lifestyle news, @CODailyLife, and the other focused on more traditional news, @CODailyNews. Test users were also asked to turn on notifications to receive push notifications when content was posted in order to replicate impactful push notifications. On these feeds, content ranged from links to full length articles, podcasts embedded within the stream, retweets of videos, and short updates. All of which were pushed out for a period of five days.

Results

The test users found the stream of content in the Twitter feeds engaging due to the nature of the feed and ease of consumption. But, it was also their interest in the stories that they repeatedly checked back on the feed to see updated content both throughout the day and the next day. The test users did find one single daily push of ten content pieces overwhelming and hard to engage with. Instead, on days four and five of the test period the content was pushed out in a morning and evening group of five. Several of the test users found this more approachable and a better fit into their unscheduled leisure time but asked for a consistent release time. Another

stand-out finding was that a few of the users found this a great format to more deeply engage with stories they initially heard about through the platform. Largely, users found the feed as a quick way to engage with content they would not normally take time to find and consume, including relevant Colorado content.

Recommendation

Based on both research and the experience our test users had with the prototype, a final version for this would be a stand alone web application using an aggregator across all Colorado journalist sources. A scrollable and shareable feed in bright colors with showcased photos would be the main feature. In order to determine if this is the right approach, more research and testing into how a Colorado-based aggregator could be profitable is needed. Based on findings from both GeoStory and StoryHound, a model that reflects partnerships with sources may be the most successful monetization strategy.

The Opportunity

Overview

There is growing demand today for news in short and engaging formats to be consumed as it fits in user's daily lives. This trend has been demonstrated through conversations with Coloradans, and both qualitative and quantitative research conducted by the Boston Consulting Group, NeimanLabs, Smith Geiger and numerous others.

News Landscape Research

From the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (2012) it was found that "seeking information via social network sites is a positive and significant predictor of people's social capital and civic and political participatory behaviors"¹. Meaning that across the board, current news consumers are seeing increased social capital as a benefit of consuming news.

¹ Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, Volume 17, Issue 3, 1 April 2012, Pages 319–336, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01574.x>

In addition to this, according to research by Smith Geiger, consumers today are consuming and evaluating a piece of content in 6-14 seconds. Short and quickly comprehensible content is overwhelming preferred by consumers.

Through the combination of these two research sets, the Colorado Media Project team saw an opportunity in providing easy to consume content in a shareable medium, allowing, and encouraging, users to share what they were reading, watching, or listening to with their personal networks. Currently, this is being served by social media, however social media tends to lack the Colorado-focused content hypothesized to increase social capital further. In order to break through the white noise of endless social media content, news needs to possess qualities (short, actionable, visual) that are currently missing.

Empathy Interview Findings

The trend for short, snackable content is well known, but the question remains on how it can be delivered properly for the Colorado reader. Six weeks of empathy interviews were conducted; discussing news consumption habits, news preferences, and pain points of Colorado residents. The sample for these empathy interviews was designed to reflect statewide demographics as closely as possible, featuring interviewees from different age groups, ethnicities, occupations, and hometowns. With the goal of finding a way to satisfy the reader and deliver valuable, informative content in mind, the interviews would shed light on the user behaviors Cultivo needs to design around in order to accomplish this. As the results were synthesized from the interviews, a number of themes began to emerge across several interviewees. One of these themes was that people used news apps during breaks in busy schedules, consuming short bits of content when their schedule would permit.



Chloe—Aspen

Program Manager, Aspen Institute

- Age: 29
- About Chloe: Grew up in Connecticut and loves getting outside

Chloe has to stay up on the hot issue of the day to feel that she is valuable at work and among coworkers



Vivian—Littleton

Seamstress, self-employed

- Age: 26
- About Vivian: Originally from Hawaii and spends a lot of time listening to radio and podcasts

“If there’s an argument back and forth [between friends] you have to be able to prove what you’re saying and if you don’t have a phone on you, no one will believe you”

Vivian

Two empathy interview participants

Ideating Solutions

During the community ideation session held on July 23rd, 2018, the following was presented to the group: younger audiences read news to increase their social capital and current consumers want smaller and more pieces of content. The attendees were asked to develop potential solutions to this problem prompted by two “How Might We” (HMW) statements which articulated the objective for the solutions. The two HMW statements addressing this problem were as follows:

HMW give someone the news they need to feel confident and smart in their social circles?

HMW give someone the news that makes them feel like a trendsetter when they are talking about news with their peers?

After the July 21st ideation session Cultivo held several smaller ideation sessions with Coloradans in the 18-35 target demographic before finalizing a vision for the solution to be built.

Prototyping Process

Final Idea

The Daily Snack is a feed of Colorado-focused stories from across of a wide array of news sources. It is focused on providing a diverse set of stories through both content, medium, and source. It enables and encourages users to consume a broad spectrum of topics in a short period of time and to share with their networks what they are consuming. By providing a new feed everyday of content embedded within the platform, the ease of access is increased as well as the need to keep users on the platform. The prototype was built using Twitter due to its existing structure for consuming short pieces of content in a feed format and being able to share easily.

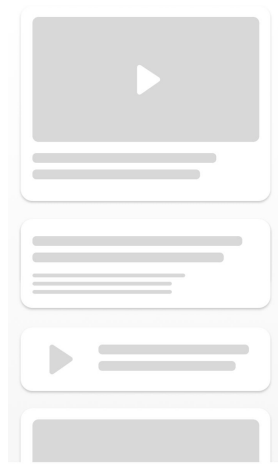
Building Process

It was determined the solution would need to deliver a large amount of relevant local content to people quickly. A proposed daily briefing with 5-10 pieces of short, snackable content would provide users/followers overviews of a number of topics and offer the ability to go deeper into the stories that users found particularly interesting. With feedback indicating the popularity of

photo, video, and audio content amongst news consumers, Daily Snack was designed to accommodate a mix of different formats.

User Experience and Wireframe

In order to provide potential solutions to the HMW statements, this prototype would require a quick, direct delivery to users while allowing them to go and check it at any time. By focusing on the delivery medium (Twitter), the content formats, and the content itself, this prototype would be able to provide users with easily accessible and easily comprehensible information.

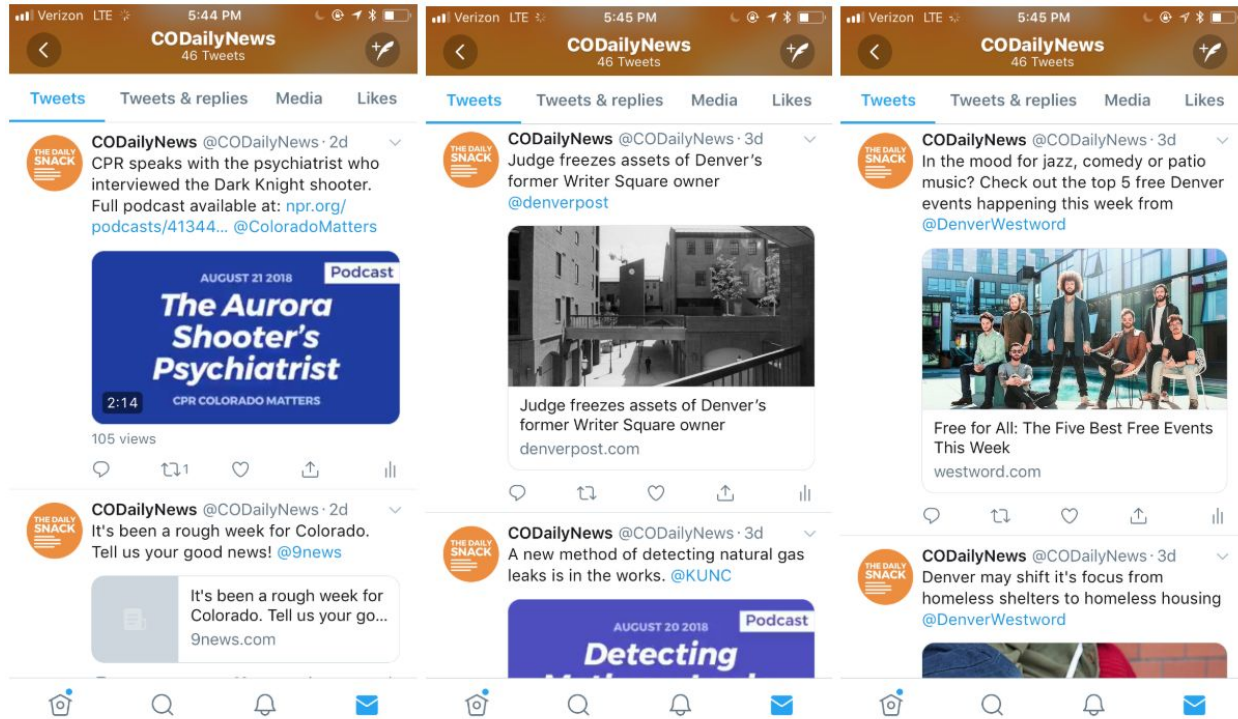


Daily Snack Wireframe Sample

Final Prototype Design

Two Twitter feeds were created in order to deliver the type of content each of our test users preferred.

One feed, @CODailyNews would post daily briefings of “heavy” news; politics, economics, community issues etc. The second feed, @CODailyLife, would provide daily briefings about light news; food and arts, lifestyle, and entertainment. The idea was to supply followers with short, relevant briefings to help them quickly feel informed, trendy and confident. With the format of the feeds, Cultivo provided content diverse in both subject matter and subject matter.



@CODailyNews Feed Examples



@CODailyLife Feed Examples

Test

For a period of five days the test group had the ability to consume roughly 50 stories across a broad range of embedded podcasts, linked articles, retweets from both newsmakers and sources, and linked videos. Initially we received feedback that the single push of 10 content pieces felt overwhelming so for days four and five the content was pushed out in morning and evening instalments of five.

In the deployment of a publicly available prototype, the opportunity existed to engage a larger audience for the work Colorado Media Project was completing, as well as gain a better understanding of how these prototypes would perform with a larger audience. In five days CODailyNews amassed over 160 followers while CODailyLife only acquired 29 followers. While original sources were tagged in both the following for CODailyNews was by far larger and more engaged with the content.

In terms of the smaller test user group, the focus remained on their consistency of use and timeliness of their consumption. These questions were asked:

- What did you experience with this prototype?
- Did you view the content from The Daily Snack? (opening articles, watching video, listening to a podcast)
- Did you find yourself coming back to view content from The Daily Snack?
- When in your day would you look through this feed? What were you doing?
- What were your favorite types of content? (photo, video, podcast, tweet, article etc)
- Did you discuss anything you learned from this with your network?
- Did you share any of the content from the stream with your networks?
- Can you tell me about any news you currently pay for?
- Have you ever considered subscribing to a local news outlet?

The goal of these questions was to understand if this prototype was able to easily fit within user's schedules and if they found it educational enough to increase their social capital quickly and easily. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes on average, thus allowing time for the test users to share additional ideas for the prototype in addition to feedback on the feed idea and prototype.

The Results

Overview

Both the test user group and several individuals from the larger audience found the feeds engaging, easy to use, and very interesting. They returned to it often and found themselves talking about the stories with their friends.

Key Findings Summary:

1. **Ease of Consumption and Timeliness**
2. **Stories inspired users to dive deeper with specific topics**
3. **Ten at once is too much, preference for more diverse mediums**
4. **Desire for breaking news, and some national**

1. Ease of Consumption and Timeliness

Each of our test users remarked on their enjoyment of the bright colors, mixed content mediums, and the extremely easy accessibility of the content in the already familiar Twitter feed. By using a bright and scrollable feed for the prototype, it was clear users would want this in a future iteration.

Additionally, each of the test users consumed the content at different points through their day. Cam consumed his all at once in the morning when he first got to work, Skylar checked his throughout the day when he had time, and Dustin preferred to consume when he got home from work in the evening.

“Being a ‘up and coming tweeter’ I enjoyed how easy it was for me to scroll through this content”

- Cam

“I consumed most of the feed the second I got home from work and sat on the couch, it was an easy way to not waste my time on Twitter”

- Dustin

2. Diving Deeper

Surprisingly, three of our test users actually found themselves clicking less through many of the articles and just picking two to three and doing a deep dive on them in their own time. A podcast

clip on the Aurora shooter's psychiatrist inspired two of the users to start researching more on the topic. While the initial hypothesis was that users would want to just scroll through the feed and learn a surface level on a broad array quickly, it was proven users wanted a diverse set of topics covered so they could pick a few and learn more deeply about them. Largely, the user group found the stories more interesting than they had expected local and state news to be. This surprised the Colorado Media Project team because it demonstrated the primary problem is not the quality of the content but the delivery and accessibility.

“The podcast clip about the Aurora shooter isn't news but is an interesting story that I wanted to engage with. I couldn't at the time but it inspired me to go listen to the whole thing later.”

- Cam

My initial reaction was “no way this is local news?? I'd actually read this!”

- Daniel

3. Content Amount

Since pushing 10 pieces of content at once felt overwhelming to the test users, the two separate pushes of 5 pieces was preferred. But, the limiting of a number was remarked as being a difficulty. Instead of limiting each day to 10, a possibly more impactful feed would be updated throughout the day.

Additionally, each test user expressed a desire for a different medium. While Cam preferred the diversity and consumed each form, Dustin preferred to just read the articles since he was unable to listen to podcasts or watch videos while at work. By continuing to provide different formats and mediums every day The Daily Snack can engage a broader audience with different consumption habits using one platform.

“When I had 10 minutes a day I would find myself drawn to it [The Daily Snack feed]. I wish the content was even quicker to get through.”

- Cam

“I get 8-10 news articles every morning from a google news Denver feed and click through 2 or 3 on average. It isn't breaking news though, it's always like the previous day kinda thing and found the same thing with the twitter feeds.”

- Skylar

4. Breaking News and National Content

With the nature of Twitter being so instantaneous, it was no surprise test users wanted the ability to rely on @CODailyNews to provide them with the stream of important and urgent information. In a final version this same feature would be included as an opt-in push notification for breaking news, similar to existing news platforms.

Secondly, several of the test users from the group wanted to see national news. Dustin and Cam both admitted they wanted national news that was relevant to Colorado and in the latter days of the test they were happy when they saw sources such as CNN and NBC in regard to crime news. Sources such as The Denver Post do offer national news coverage, but, test users expressed they wanted to see sources from the national level covering state topics.

"I saw an article from CNN about the man that killed his family and I realized I wanted to see how national papers were covering Colorado"

- Dustin

Recommendation

Conclusion

The Daily Snack offered an engaging and informative way for readers to catch up quickly throughout their day. With the diverse formats, content topics, and ways to share, users loved The Daily Snack. In order to be increasingly successful, this platform would have to keep these key features, make some necessary iterations, and continue to research/build the tech necessary to run and maintain the product.

Recommended Research

Platform

The Daily Snack as an included feature on a larger app or site which features more in depth content would give readers the ability to dive deeper. Given the powerful effect this prototype had on users, the feed would provide consistency, ease of use, and form habits. As an aspect of a larger digital platform for news readership the feed would both increase and provide a base for potential monetization and subscriber acquisition. **It**

would be necessary to conduct more research into how followers to a feed such as this translate into paid-subscriptions for a digital news platform.

Recommended Product Iterations

The Daily Snack would perform best as a part of a larger digital suite. As a bright and engaging feed on both mobile and desktop platforms, users will find themselves checking constantly, sharing their personal favorites, and engaging with the larger digital platform behind it. Due to the main feature of The Daily Snack prototype being the bite-size pieces of content, it will be important a user can very quickly decide if they want to click-through content or not. The strongest iteration necessary would be the selection of the content and the way in which it is embedded within the feed. During the prototypes test, podcast files had to be uploaded as videos, articles had to be linked to, and videos had to be either linked or embedded as well. Because the content did not live on the platform itself, some users found it difficult to engage, especially if it was behind a paywall.

Key features to include from the prototype:

- Bright colors
- Easy to share with friends and networks
- Short, simple headlines and copy with interesting photos to grab attention
- Videos, podcasts, and articles all in one place
- Diverse range of sources from local to state and national

Key additional features to include:

- Stronger algorithm for selecting stories
 - Ability to embed audio files and play as such on mobile and desktop
 - Share on other social media platforms
 - Embedding articles and videos within the platform
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Potential Monetization

The Daily Snack would shine most within a larger digital platform as a free digest provided to any follower through both email and web. Daily digests provide value to businesses by forming a genuine connection with current as well as potential subscribers. By demonstrating to potential subscribers the value the digest brings to them through an increase in social capital, those subscribers might subscribe to the main platform, especially, if their access to articles which come from the digest was blocked through a paywall.

A free model might also feature ad placements and promotions, while a premium account would remove these. A premium model might also provide increased customizability including geo-targeting, preference learning, and adjustments.

Because the likelihood of charging for a digest or a feed is minimal, the main reasons for including a platform like this are customer acquisition and continuing to provide value to current subscribers.

Resources Required

The projected resources and skills required to build and launch Daily Snack as part of a full platform are as follows:

- Content Sourcing and Aggregation/Quality Control
 - Email Development
 - Data Analytics focused on customer acquisition
 - Digital Product Design
 - Mobile/Web Development
 - Partnerships with paid news sources (potentially)
 - Sales for sponsored content (potentially)
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Cultivo Media Information



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Work With Us

Cultivo is a marketing and product development agency focused on providing innovative digital solutions to any problem your business is facing. Ranging from websites, apps and software, brand development, and marketing solutions.

Looking to work with us? Email scott@cultivomedia.com and check our work out on cultivomedia.com
