The API economy: hacking messenger, social and work-leisure travel in Berlin

Want a glimpse of what the emerging API economy looks like? Look no further than the rapid deployment of travel apps churned out at THack Berlin by 64 developers, with new software tools.

Some companies and business sectors take months, even years, to release application programming interfaces (APIs). Take IATA's new distribution standard (NDC), which has taken years to be defined. And most airlines have yet to roll out any meaningful API-distributed products for affiliates or consumers.

At THack, big names in the digital travel economy – HomeAway and Skyscanner – tossed their vacation rental and metaserch APIs into hackers' hands, but with a twist.

Also contributing software to the hackathon was Xapix.io (pronounced ZAP-ix), a Berlin startup with a clever tool that circumvents the API user interface and connects directly to the endpoints of an API.

Simply put, developer teams could spend more time dreaming up cool features for their projects and bypass time-consuming integrations.

This hackathon gave a peek at two potential efficiencies coming to the API economy: first, rapid deployment of new marketing channels for travel sellers, and second, new distribution for digital travel products through travel sellers, like hospitality and airlines.

The API economy is a topic that will be debated by a Tnooz panel discussion titled "Online Travel Affiliate: the New Definition of OTA" during ITB Berlin on 10 March.

In a show of hands, well over 50 percent of developers said THack Berlin was their first hackathon. The XapiX tool eased their way into the deep end of the pool.

After the 24-hour hackathon, 13 projects emerged and three teams were stymied. Among the more interesting:

- Travel inspiration mobile app by Power Rangers that used music from Spotify and presented air and apartment rental choices from Skyscanner and HomeAway (using the XapiX tool for API endpoints)
- In-flight app by Groundscanner that linked a passenger's device to cities, points of interest, accommodations and other information under the plane's flight path (also using XapiX)
- Halfway, social-mobile app flight-accommodation suggestions for couples living apart to meet at midpoint locations with equal flight times
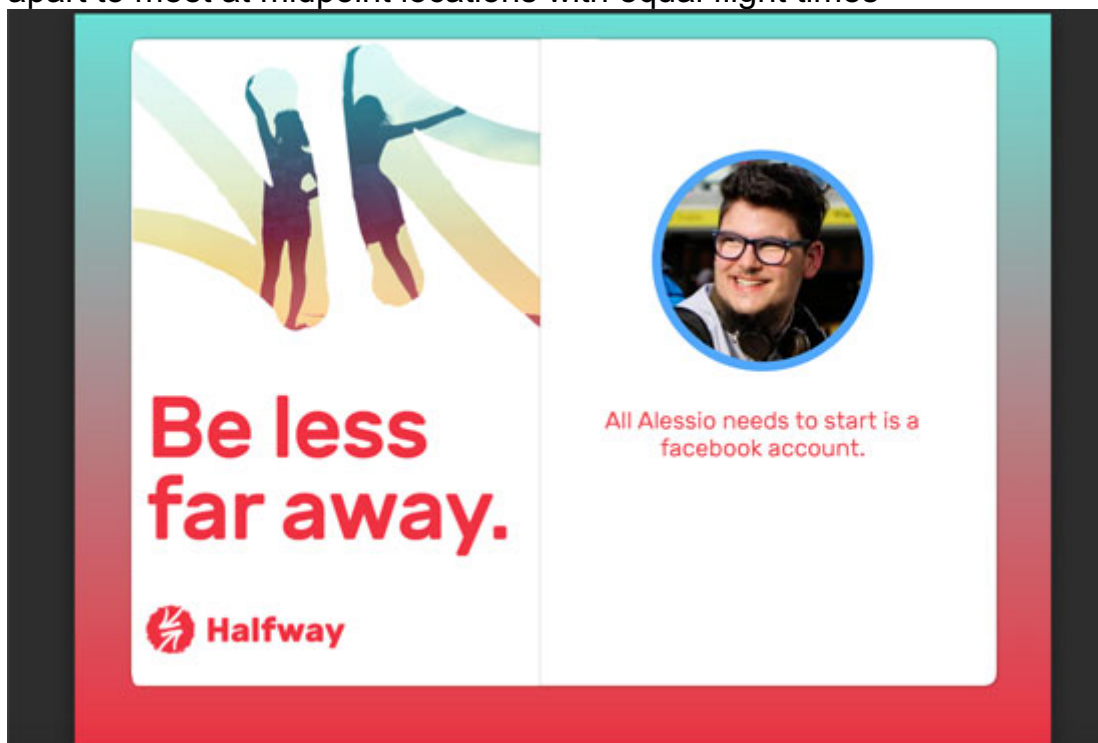
- A local events finder by Travel Genius implemented with natural language search on Amazon's Echo device
- Who Dat Girl's clever use of a mobile messenger app to create a travel "assistant" that implements Skyscanner, HomeAway, Telegram, XapiX-emulated TripAdvisor reviews and Google Maps; all of the APIs were connected by XapiX directly to API endpoints.

Meet (tr)Avel

Inspire YOU with destinations to visit

based on <u>what you like</u> doing when being on holidays

... on the dates you selected

... under the budget you defined

- A slick mobile-first app by DataArt for group communications about combined business-leisure trips; the mobile app connected to a mobile web application that used a bot to gather group flight and accommodation booking details for hassled travel planners inside a company.
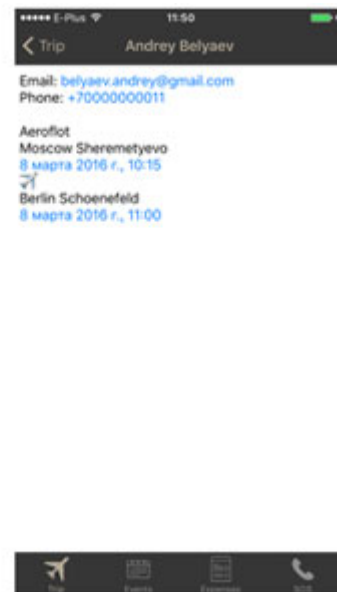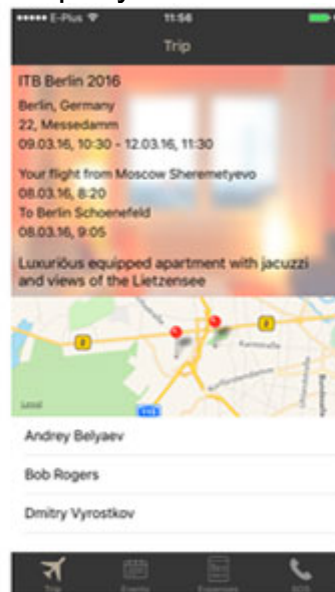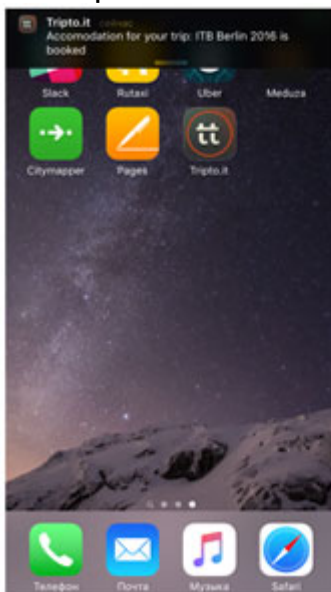
Prizes and special mentions went to:

Tnooz best large team (3 to 5 members): DataArt EUR1,500

Tnooz runner-up large team (3 to 5 members): Who Dat Girl, EUR500

Tnooz best small team (1 or 2 members): Power Rangers, EUR1,500

HomeAway best use of API: DataArt EUR1,000

HomeAway second prize: Travel Genius, EUR500

People's Choice (in a vote of developers): Halfway, EUR1,000 (also highly commended by Tnooz judges)

Special thanks to our judges, (from left) Alex Kremer, VP of Product, Actourex: Olaf Slater, Chief Product Officer, Trust International; Kieron Branagan, Managing Partner, Travel Transformation Partners — shown here, giving feedback to developers:

Original article – http://www.tnooz.com/article/THack-Berlin-2016-investable-startups/