



# THack SF Shows Just How Fresh Thinking Can Impact Travel Products

September 24, 2013

Recently I read a blog post by McKinsey titled “After a successful run at SFO last year, Tnooz returned to San Francisco for another round of open API travel hacking.



This year’s THack SF was held at the splendid new digs of Hotel Tonight on Market Street. The surroundings were fitting, as developers shared their visions of new, potentially disruptive hacks that they created in the days prior.

Both Hotel Tonight CEO Sam Shank and VP of Engineering Sam McDonnell took a moment to welcome attendees, and as disruptive agents themselves, were a fitting start to a hackathon promising to deliver some new perspectives.



And deliver they did – several of the concepts were interesting takes on common refrains from the travel space: travel inspiration, tours and activities, Millennials, and short-trip planning were all addressed by participating teams.

### Winner: Soireé, by Amadeus

Amadeus continues its winning streak with an impressive trip inspiration and planning platform based around a traveler’s existing Facebook profile.



The traveler logs in with Facebook, and the app pulls in the various interests already demonstrated: likes of bands, TV shows, Broadway shows, foods and other sub-groups.

The traveler can then search different experiences in a destination related to specific categories such as music and film. For example, if a user likes Les Misérables, the app would pull in available showtimes in the specified city if available.

Another great use case is for music travel: music fans will be able to see shows that mirror their interests in their destination, allowing for a custom-tailored itinerary beyond typical “tours and activities.”

This sort of interest-based, cultural tourism is the core appeal of this app – an appeal that the judges found significant enough to award the win to the Amadeus team.

This reporter also saw enormous potential here, especially in the Inspiration stage. While this was not present in the current iteration, subsequent versions could pull in YouTube videos, iTunes tracks, Soundcloud pages, and more, to create an engaging discovery interface for the cultural traveler.

This would be especially suited to music, but could really be tailored to a variety of interests – especially given the robust nature of most Facebook profiles, this app could become extremely sophisticated in the manner it builds suggested activities.

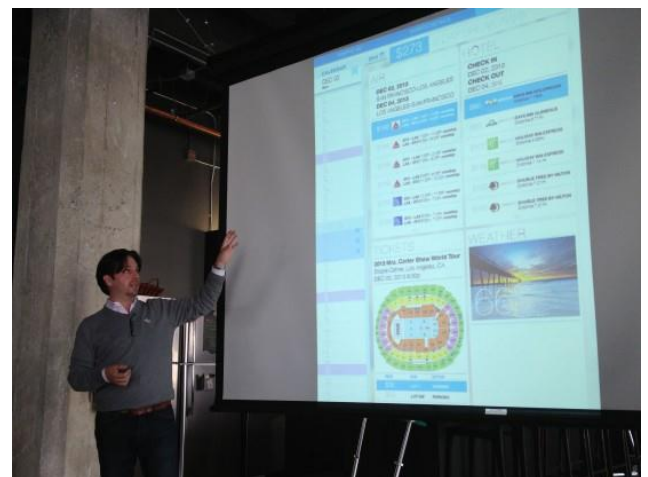
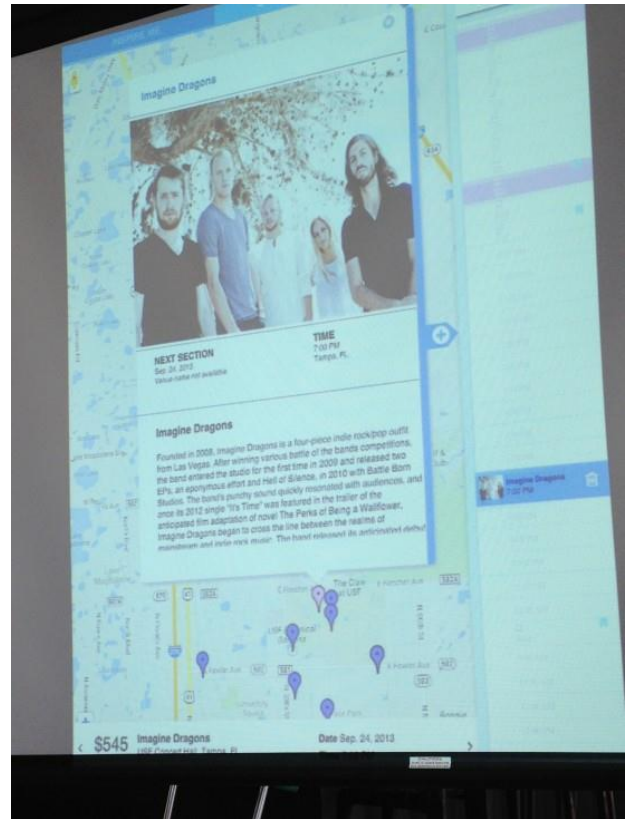
This app also has potential to become competitive with Facebook’s tentative steps to becoming a portal for travel discovery itself, using photos, check-ins and Instagram’s Photo Map to deliver a more directed travel inspiration experience.

The team created a smooth interface for adding events to a trip timeline, and then tying in flights and hotel information to make a complete itinerary.

The team submitted the following points as key to their coded hack:

- Soiree – A Travel Inspiration application, through events
  - Presents a selection of travel themes, based on user preferences taken from Facebook profile
  - Using the theme selected, finds upcoming events for that theme and across the world, using WCities
  - Offers the price of a 3-day package to go to each event for that theme, including air fare from the user’s current location from Amadeus Extreme Search, and a hotel at the destination from Amadeus fast hotel search
  - Shows a map of the destination, marking the event and your nearby hotel, and a selection of other nearby events and attractions drawn from Gogobot and WCities
  - Offers a timeline that can be used to build an itinerary from the map, to create a perfect trip

The 6-person team consisted of five developers and one UX designer, and the product was created in one weekend.



### Concept hack winner: wOOt or wOMp

The concept hack was a separate category allowing for folks to propose a concept without code. The winner here was Anna Kojzar from [PoshPacker](#), who presented a concept called wOOt or wOmp.



The concept was targeted squarely at the Millennials, which, as Kojzar reminded the audience, comprise a \$165 billion travel market comprising 1.8 billion travelers globally.

To best serve this group, both as they travel and while they are adventuring locally at home, the wOOt/wOmp concept is a Hot or Not for events. Users are presented with a series of events, which they can either wOOt (thumbs up) or wOmp (thumbs down). The service then profiles users accordingly, and delivers a weekend itinerary that most accurately reflects the wants of the user.

Users can also clue the service in on where they are financially – ie. whether they just got paid, are looking for something low-key, or are broke and have no funds to spare.

The concept was intriguing enough to the judges to get first place in the concept hack category. The features are unique, and offered up a different way to experience a location for a specific group of travelers. Some concern was raised whether it was a true “travel hack,” however the judges realized that this could apply equally to travelers away from home and while they are exploring their own home city.

Companies like [Flavorpill](#) have been curating local experiences for many years now, leaning on local tastemakers to create the must-do events of the week. Fresh travel startups like [Localeur](#) have focused even more exclusively on the curator model, bringing in a variety of local color to drive a recommendations platform for both locals and travelers.

This concept allows for some user participation, which not only offers a chance for better personalization but also plenty of fodder for buzz-building lists of “the hottest events of the weekend.” It’s also ideally suited for the limited screen real estate of a smartphone, and makes for a great localized app that can point users to their next event seamlessly.

#### Coded hack: Fitour.io

Greg Abbott from DataArt presented another judge’s favorite: Fitour.io, which uses new data unlocked by the M7 chip in the new iPhone 5C to bring “intensity level” as a new data point for tour decisions.

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## fitour.io

- Integrates with your favorite activity tracker
- Recommends a bookable tour or activity that matches your fitness goals
- Allows suppliers to add “intensity” data to a tour or activity

 DATAART  
Enjoy IT



Basically, tour guides or participants are given a device – or a way to opt in on a current device – to track their movements throughout a tour. This information is then captured and delivered right into the tour description, showing a traveler how much energy could be expended given the intensity level of the tour – miles traveled, feet climbed, length of time.

By integrating with APIs from other “move tracking” services such as Nike+ and Moves, the app allows a brand-new area of data to be including in the decision making process for travel. This could seriously change the way a certain sub-set of tour providers – and travelers – interact with tour inventory.



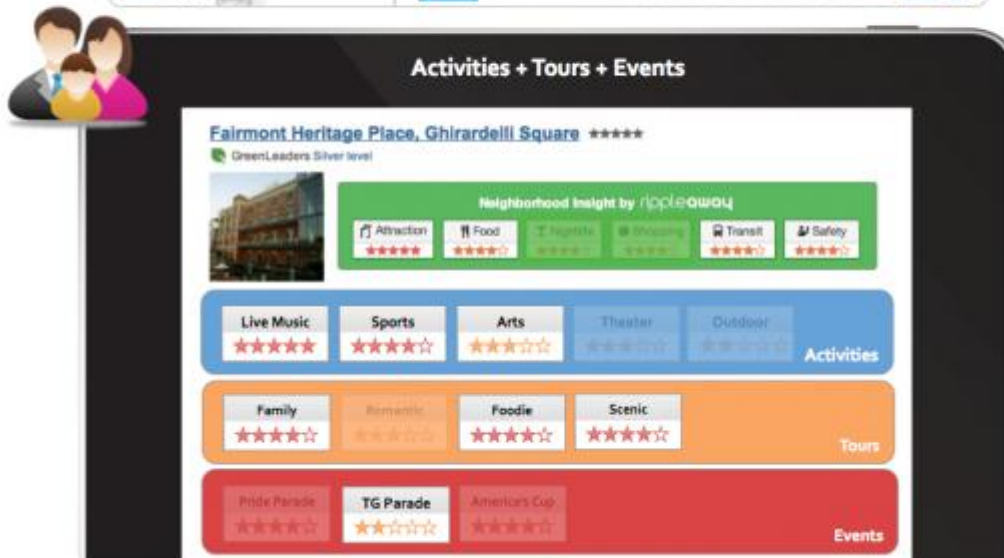
## What is "Load" now?

This hack also has the potential to reframe the way an active traveler views the T&A sector. Rather than a "boring tour," this is a lucrative opportunity to merge the significant travel and active markets. Travelers seeking more active tours could be matched with personal trainers who are now adding a new specialty to their offering: a mix of sightseeing and exercise that sheds new light on the destination.

### Concept hack: Ripple Away

RippleAway is seeking to add a comprehensive data layer to neighborhoods around the world, that could then be added to any neighborhood products (such as Airbnb).

## Insight 3D - Neighborhood + [Real]Time + Personalization



Some concern was expressed surrounding TripAdvisor's already-significant mass of content, however co-founder Alan Seong sees their data as more complex and nuanced, offering more information than sifting through dozens of reviews.

From Seong:

*"RippleAway is a "neighborhood dashboard" and "urban compass" that provides unique, hyper-local, objective insights.*

We collect, aggregate, and algorithmically extract a large amount of travel, geographical, and demographical data from various sources. We then rank and score each location and its immediate vicinity in relevant categories (e.g. safety, food, nightlife, shopping, attractions, and transportation) to enable travelers and explorers to quickly and visually digest information that influences their decisions.

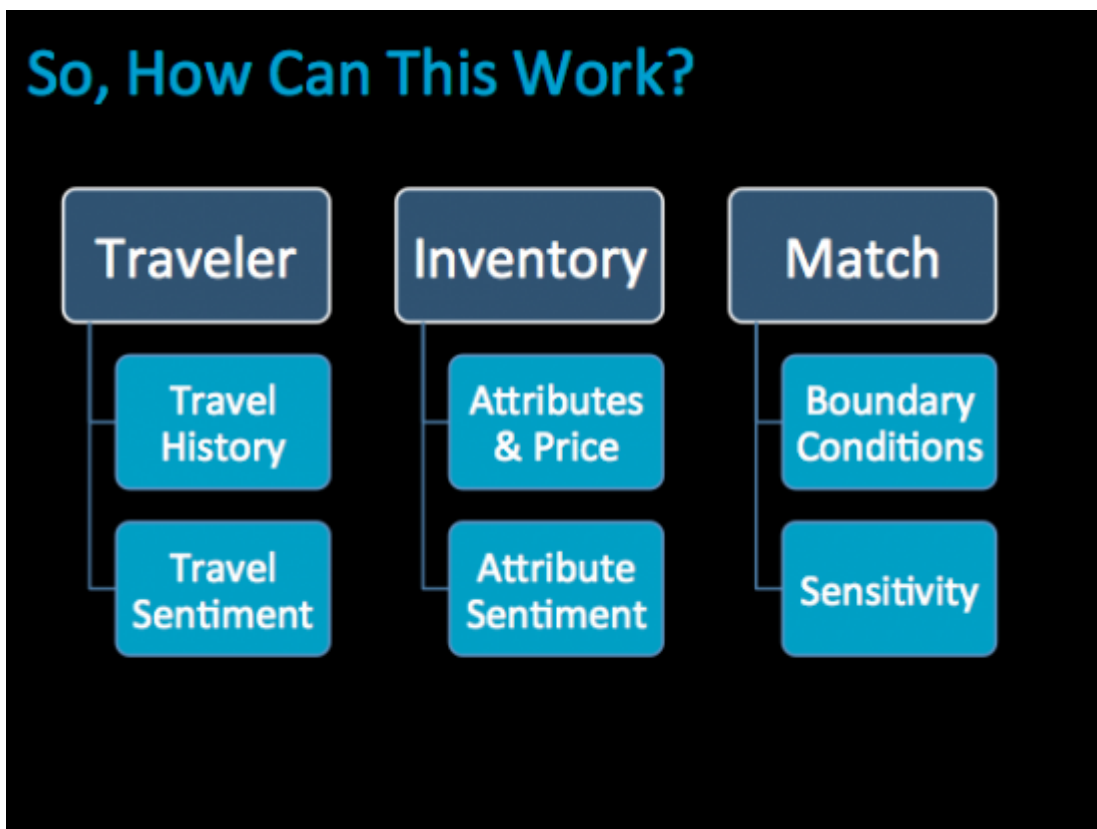
Today, we offer B2B (and B2B2C) solutions in form of widget, data feed, and API that can be easily integrated with existing travel, rental, and real-estate products.”

**Concept hack: Olset’s Trip in a Box**

One area that offers promise is the short, 3-day trip booking. What to do when you have a long weekend? What events are most suited to that experience? How can something like this be planned quickly, efficiently and affordably? That’s the issue that Gadi Bashvitz of [Olset](#) addressed with the Trip in a Box concept.



Using various APIs, such as Gogobot, Viator and Travelport, the hack allows a user to quickly create an itinerary based on already-provided preferences via connected networks.



Gogobot provides traveler preferences and offers up the Reviews API; Viator brings in tour reviews; Travelport Fuzzy Booking API offers flights, hotels and transportation; and then Wcities and Viator APIs can integrate actual bookings into the system.

This allows for a quick weekend booking without much effort, but one that ultimately ties more closely to interests using available data.

#### **Coded hack: Google Glass by Sabrelabs**

Mark McSpadden of Sabrelabs demoed something that oft-discussed here at Tnooz: [wearables in travel](#). By hacking Google Glass, McSpadden was able to create a series of travel cards that would allow travel managers to ensure compliance with simple things like complimentary WiFi, sticking to set per diems, and itinerary integration via Glass.



This was a hack-in-infancy, as Google has yet to release access to their API. The technology is also still very much in development, and therefore comes with its own limitations.

The hack would allow not only for compliance, but follow through on making that compliance happen. For example, pulling up nearby lunch places that offer lunch within the per diem allowance, or navigation directions to a place with complimentary WiFi. Basically, allowing the traveler easy compliance by providing direct access to the tools needed for successful policy adherence.

McSpadden pointed out one of the primary limitations of this technology in travel: screen size. "I've calculated it to be at 1/8th the size of an average mobile screen," he said in his presentation. This is obviously not much real estate, and therefore any hack utilizing the hardware needs to be focused on clear, direct information that aids in one specific task at a time.

It was extremely compelling to see firsthand how this technology will be used in the near future. With Glass set to be distributed widely in 2014 – along with its newly announced "Boutique" app store – there are more questions than answers. And there's also clearly a lot of work left to be done to tweak the device, which is why the Google Glass Explorer program is so vital to the device's success.

#### **Concept hack: 24 by Flights with Friends**

Kyle Killion, co-founder of Flights with Friends presented "24," a concept hack dedicated to helping travelers figure out what to do in the next 24 hours – after booking a hotel on Hotel Tonight, for example.

Killion described the concept, which can be viewed in the alpha version [here](#), thusly:

*"The idea is that you've just made a reservation on Hotel Tonight. Now you have 24 hours to have fun, we'll help you make the most of it. The 24 app takes your current location, finds all the tours and activities available on Viator, gets all the events happening on WCities in the next 24 hours, and lets you add them onto a timeline. In keeping with the theme I gave myself only 24 hours to code it. With more time I would add more activities, events and add dining options."*

