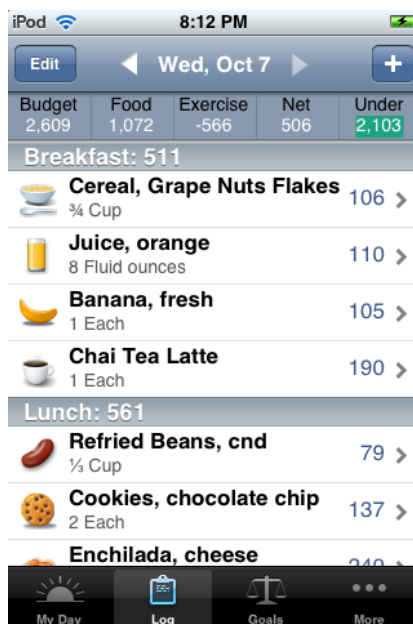Joseph Muhm

PROBLEM:

Mobile weight loss applications tend to be similar in function and present only motivated users with sufficient value. These applications, such as *DailyBurn* and *Lose It!* for the iPhone, typically allow the user to set weight goals (either weight loss or maintaining weight), rely on the user to input exercise and food consumption data daily, and display graphs and charts tracking progress towards the user's goals. This model works well for users that are intrinsically motivated and strongly determined to reach their weight goals. But, for the casual user, the value obtained by seeing charts and graphs of progress toward health goals does not justify the effort to input data daily. If more value could be gained by using weight loss applications, the number of users who incorporate the application in their daily routine and ultimately become healthier would increase.
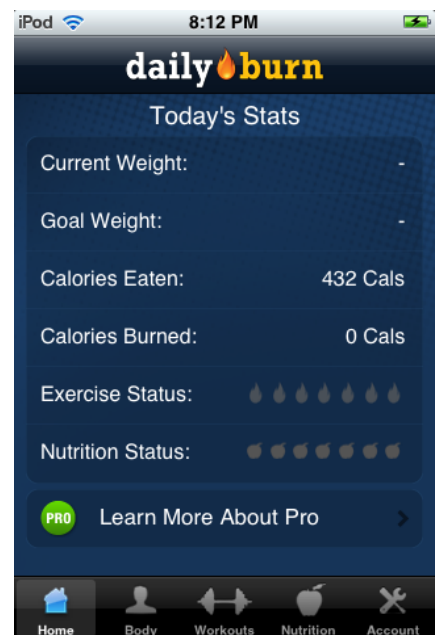
ANALYSIS:

After using several weight loss apps for the iPhone, I reached the conclusion that the amount of effort to input food and exercise daily far outweighs the value of seeing progress charts for the casual user. Simply keeping a record of daily food intake and exercise could present enough value for some users to integrate the app into their diet and exercise routine. But, I believe that this is not the case for most people. Many people need social pressures to motivate themselves to keep to their diet and exercise routine. This is evident in the large number of exercise groups and dieting programs. Although social networking has become so prevalent in mobile computing, these weight loss apps have not added a social component, which could introduce similar social pressures as exercise groups and dieting programs.
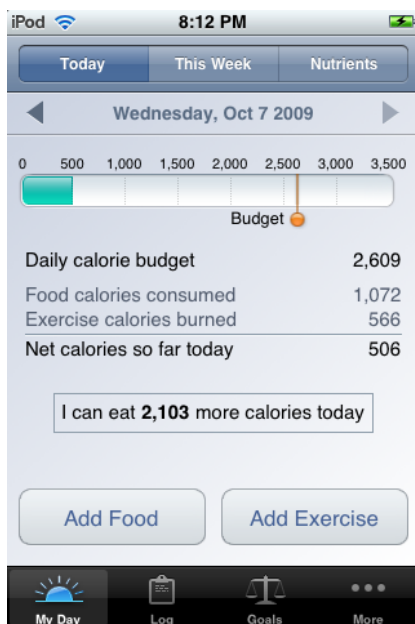
| *Lose It!* daily stats screen | *Lose It!* data input screen | DailyBurn stats screen |

Of the weight loss apps I tested, *Lose It!* and *DailyBurn*, *Lose It!* presented better information in a more effective layout. The user inputs food data, which is broken up into meals, and exercise data and sees the remaining calorie budget for the day all on one simple screen. The app displays graphs of the daily, weekly, and long-term progress towards the weight goals. This app allows the user to track other nutrients such as fiber, and carbohydrates. *DailyBurn*, on the other hand, was difficult to use and did not present data as effectively. The styling of the app was better than *Lose It!,* but the content did not match.

IMPROVEMENT:

The main feature that I am suggesting that neither app has is an in app social experience where users could track their progress against friends. This adds a social pressure for users to keep with their diet and exercise routines and input their daily data. People like to display their accomplishments and are willing to exert a little more effort if others can see the results. Adding collaboration allows users to promote their weight loss progress, which motivates them to follow their routine and use the app.

There are four aspects to the social experience that would make the app more engaging to the user. First, the ability to friend other users and share your data with them. This would add accountability for users to follow their diet and exercise routine until their weight loss goals are met. Second, selecting weekly fitness leaders based on various criteria and displaying these leaders to all users. This motivates users to strive to do there best to possibly obtain widespread recognition. Third, allowing users to start communities that others can join which promote common goals. This provides a support group, which members can offer support and suggestions to one another. Finally, adding a service for friends to send in app messages.   This would increase the accountability aspect by allowing friends to offer encouragement or question why someone has fallen off track.

SCENARIOS:

Currently when a user installs and launches a weight loss app, they are prompted for statistics such as height, weight, and date of birth. Then they are able to input a desired weight and given the opportunity to choose how fast they wish to lose weight. After this initial setup, the user adds in daily food and exercise info. The user can then see graphs depicting progress towards the set goals. Some apps will suggest workouts or allow the data to be uploaded to the web. This basically describes the entire functionality of the weight loss apps I have tried.

If the collaborative aspects mentioned above were added, the experience would be much richer. Imagine a user logging into the collaborative app and seeing that after their lazy weekend they have fallen off the fitness leader board. This causes the user to redouble their efforts to follow their diet and exercise plan. Then the user sees a friend has sent a message wanting to know why the sudden slip from the routine. After inputting their food and exercise data, the user sees they are still one of the healthiest amongst their group of friends. Finally the user gets a message from the weight loss community they joined offering encouragement to keep to their routines, reminding members that they are halfway towards their goal of losing 10 pounds to two months, and suggesting exercise and diet plans for the next week.

The second scenario presents a much more engaging experience from the user's perspective, which keeps the user actively working toward their health goals. With the addition of social pressure, the user is more motivated to follow their diet/exercise routine, input daily their food and fitness data, and offer encouragement to friends.