Local/regional hubs competitive analysis

Competitive Analysis Summary

Purpose

Overview of current practices and general structure of existing meetup sites

Identify potentially useful techniques and things to avoid. *[Struggling with this one! I think I may have been premature with this purpose]*

Identify questions for user interviews/contextual inquiries and for ourselves.

Competitors

For this analysis, I reviewed four websites.

1) http://loco.ubuntu.com/ - Ubuntu's regional meetup organizational site
   https://www.flickr.com/photos/wispfox/albums/72157670346963233
2) http://meetup.com/ - the most commonly used site for regional meetups. (is it US-centric? What do other countries use? See 'questions for users')
   https://www.flickr.com/photos/wispfox/albums/72157673502663516
3) https://www.citysocializer.com/ - Very event-focused site.
   https://www.flickr.com/photos/wispfox/albums/72157673872243535
4) http://www.bigtent.com/ - a barebones site for parents and their kids.
   https://www.flickr.com/photos/wispfox/albums/72157672661407220

Results

Overall:

A simple home page is better to help encourage potential users to explore further without overwhelming them.

Search results are hard to do correctly, and can easily become overwhelming.

Including a photo of a group or event in the search results helps the group seem more approachable.

Make separate pieces of information more visibly separate using spacing and font techniques. This helps readability.

Integrated real-time discussion is missing from every one of these competitors. Definitely a gap we can fill.

Individual Site Summary:

Loco.Ubuntu is closest to our own goals. They want to have teams, but only one per area to reduce fragmentation, so they make creation of teams complicated. They did not appear to have anything specific to schools, and had a good point about having admins of smaller area groups needing to be aware of/take part in the group for the areas they are in. They want it to be very easy to find and

join teams and events, so those are easy to do. Discussion is not as well incorporated as I think we would like it to be for our purposes. I have no real sense of how difficult suggesting/creating events is, as I did not join a team (and suspect that an admin is the one to do so anyway, which I would not be).

Meetup.com wants to make creating groups, attending meetups, and just generally doing things with other people as easy as possible. It's got the easiest mechanism to create new groups, join groups, suggest events, join events, and discuss things of the four. We may, however, not _want_ all of it to be easy peasy. Given that groups in Fedora are representing Fedora, group creation may want to be closer to the Ubuntu level of complexity.

Citysocializer wants people to go out and do things. There is very little on-site discussion, and no groups. It's all about the events.

Bigtent appears to be meant for group creators, rather than for group users. So creating a group, and the homepage, are very clean and clear and simple. The actual sites for groups need a lot of help.

Questions for users:

What are people currently using?

What are their thoughts on the existing method?

Questions for us:

Do we want to allow people to search on both group and event keywords? It might be difficult to know what words to use in either case. Do we want to suggest events/groups based on existing linkages (existing people they follow, existing teams they are part of)?

Which users? Fedora ambassadors, where? Non-ambassadors, where? i18n?

How much information should be visible to the public (ie people who are not logged in) about groups or events? How about to people who are logged in but not part of that group?

What, if anything, do we want to do about verification of teams? Only allow confirmed ambassadors to create them? What about if an ambassador goes away? Does the 'this has had no activity in [foo]' suffice to explain that something is not active? How will they show up in searches if active/not active/archived?

How easy do we want to make creating a team or event? Or suggesting an event? Creating teams seems pretty complicated on Ubuntu, but that also helps reduce fragmentation. I have no idea how most of the competitors handle creating events, but it's really, really easy on citysocializer.com.

	Loco.ubuntu.com	Meetup.com	Citysocializer.com	Bigtent.com
Home page	Reasonably navigable. The upcoming events navigation map is perplexing in part because it also talks about social messages. Not clear why there are blog posts on the home page of the events page. Maybe they are related to events? Good choice of top navigation elements (both about and how to are especially relevant), but 'events' and 'meetings' are confusing when separate and not explained.	Meetup defaults to a search when not logged in. If you are logged in, it shows you your next event at the top of the page, followed by a search box, your meetups and then suggested meetups. It seems overly busy to me, at least at the end of a long day. This may be due to a combination of their red color scheme and the size of the browser I am using.	Does a good job of explaining why you might want to use this, although there is a _lot_ of information at a first glance. Once you are logged in, it becomes somewhat more organized, although I feel that there is still too much information on the page. I think the BuddyUp feature is a little odd, especially when I hadn't yet put much in my profile to key off. It makes it feel like a dating site.	Their home page is refreshingly simple. It has a big search box over some women chatting (which may suggest they expect women and not men to use the site…), an explanation of what the site is about and why you might want to get involved, and a brief blurb explaining that there is an app.
Finding teams/groups	Clicking on the large map to find teams results in a _very_ difficult to interpret list of teams. There is no real clear differentiation between what is and is not an active group, and the teams which have not been verified are first for some reason. (alphabetical? Verified is after unverified…) It is highly unpleasant to parse through this list to figure out if there is anything	The result page for meetup is reasonable to interpret. There are a sane number of results above the fold, with names and number of members over a photo from the group. For some reason, there is a single slot above the fold which contains a result that relates to other groups of mine, rather than the search terms I used. I don't entirely know what 'recommended'	There aren't really any? You can add people to your network, and you can see what's going on in your area or globally. But as far as I can tell, it's about events and people rather than specific groups of people.	After you search by zip, you get a list of matches. It is not clear what 'best match' uses for its algorithm, and the way they separate bits of information doesn't make for quick or easy interpretation. The amount of information any group includes varies wildly. It's difficult to tell from looking if one might want to join a group at this point. Users would just have to select a few to look at to decide.

	relevant to one's location. Perhaps allow more narrowing down of location past continent?	means for a search term, but it _is_ useful to let people select their method and know what is currently in use. I like that my next event shows up at the top of every page if I am logged in.		Some groups just linked elsewhere, rather than having info on the site. That's probably easier on the people using the site, but not for people trying to find info.
Finding events/meetings	Events are public, meetings are private (in the lingo of Ubuntu). You can find events either by clicking on a pin in the lower left-hand map or by clicking on Events in the top nav bar. This will show you both global (recurring) events and events for particular teams. These are organized by date, not location, and while there is a map available there does not appear to be any way to limit the results by a location. Clicking on a specific event will bring you to it. You can find meetings by clicking meetings in the top nav bar. This is also organized by date with no way to filter.	This is done either by finding a group you're interested in and looking at their events, or using the 'Calendar' search function. The Calendar search function isn't a bad way of handling this, as you can enter keywords, distance, and location, and then look at specific time periods.	There's not much for searching. Mind you, there also weren't many events in Boston. You can filter by category and by date of event. However, there does not appear to be any way to filter within category (and the categories are large: https://www.flickr.com/photos/wispfox/29730082261/in/album-72157673872243535/) The site also suggests socials in a sidebar, although I have no idea what it's using for those suggestions.	This was not separate from finding a group.
Joining groups	Prominent button on a team's page. (although strangely less so than the 'contact this team'	Large obvious join button both at the top of a group's page and down in	N/A	There is a big button on the site, both in the list of groups and in a particular group.

	button) You do need to login/register before joining, however.	the photos of members.		
Joining events/meetings	Not necessary, as information about meetings and events is publicly available. That said, if it's a team meeting, it just tells you the channel to join and provides a link to join the freenode IRC on the web. I think the closest thing to joining is joining the group hosting a meeting or event.	If you are already a member of a group, it's a simple 'RSVP' option. If you are not, the button instead says "Join and RSVP". Pretty easy to find.	When you've selected an event to look at, there is a prominent 'join this social' button. (You can't see much about an event if you are not logged in) Clicking it asks users to cancel their place if they can't make it, and then they need to confirm and join if they still want to do so. _Very_ easy to join.	Probably not separate from joining a group. Some groups just listed locations for anyone to see, which therefore doesn't require joining anything.
Discussions	There are mailing lists (not inline; link goes to sign up page), forums (also not inline, but the link goes straight to them), and IRC (links to web IRC client). There are also links to the website and wiki pages. At least, this is true for verified teams. Unverified only has 'contact this team' buttons.	You can comment on events, groups can have polls, and groups can have discussions/message boards (forums, basically). You can also message people directly. There does not appear to be any real-time conversation option on the site.	There are places to comment (and converse) on specific events, but otherwise it looks like conversation happens in person and through direct messaging.	Couldn't find this.
Creating/ suggesting an event	I cannot tell how this works without joining a group (and possibly not even then; perhaps only admins can do this?).	There is a "Suggest a new Meetup" option for groups one is a member of, which sends mail to organizers of the group. This is not an option if you are not a member of a group. I suspect that one has to be an organizer to add an	Very easy to do. At least two different mechanisms. One is a brief version of the other. Brief: https://www.flickr.com/photos/wispfox/29057014293/in/album-72157673872243535/ longer: (2 screenshots) https://www.flickr.com/photos/wispfox/29186858343/in/album-72157673872243535/ and	No clue.

		event, which I am not.	https://www.flickr.com/photos/wispfox/29777344496/in/album-72157673872243535/	
Creating/ suggesting a group	Complicated! Not sure of the interface for this; may go on behind the scenes. See https://wiki.ubuntu.com/LoCoTeamHowto Definite goal to keep sub-teams (eg: Greater Boston would be a sub-team of Massachusetts, and that of the US and that of NA) aware/part of what's going on in their over-groups.	There is a "Start" a meetup group link at the top of every page. Clicking it will bring you to a wizard to help you create your new group. It first asks for location, then topic (from existing ones, it seems), then the name (suggested based on the topic) and who should join and what it will do (minimum length required to continue), and step four says "What it means to be a Meetup -Real, in-person conversations -Open and honest intentions -Always safe and respectful -Put your members first We review all Meetups based on our Community Guidelines." and requires you to agree and continue to actually make it.	N/A	Creation of a group appears to be very easy, and is indeed what I think the main purpose of this site is. I did not create an account to see how it works after the initial stage. Good job of explaining things when they become relevant. Not sure why they require people to tell them where they heard of them… https://www.flickr.com/photos/wispfox/29804903046/in/album-72157672661407220/

Structure of main page:

Loco.ubuntu.com, not logged in – grey is navigation, black is blog content

meetup.com, logged in – grey is navigation, light grey is 'next meeting' info, black is search results

Citysocializer.com, logged in – grey is navigation, light grey is activity feed, black is photos.

bigtent.com, not logged in – grey is navigation, light grey is 'why is this something that I should care about?', Dark grey is an ad for the app, and black is the photo splash at the top.

These structures are wildly different, although everyone has some sort of navigation across the top.

Bigtent's home page was much cleaner and easier to parse than the others.

Structure of event page:

ubuntu.com, not logged in – grey is navigation, Black is event description, light grey is photos, dark grey is map and address

Meetup.com, logged in – dark grey is navigation, light grey is info about the group, black is info about the event.

Citysocializer.com, logged in – dark grey is navigation, light grey is details of events and comments, black is event photos/categories/summary details

Bigtent.com, not logged in – Grey is navigation, light grey is details of the group (and eventually events and messages), black is the splash for the group

Meetup's event page was easiest to interpret, perhaps due to the smaller number of well-separated pieces of information. Bigtent had a small number of pieces, but they were poorly separated and thus difficult to scan through for the information one might want.