

Designing Privacy Controls for Older Facebook Users

Executive Summary

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MSIT-Privacy Engineering Capstone Project

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At Facebook's request we investigated the particular privacy concerns of seniors (age 65+) regarding Facebook and to develop proposed remedies.

Information Gathering

We built off of existing research and prior attempts to develop privacy aids for older users to construct interviews and surveys to find places for improvement in Facebook's existing experience. We conducted 15 semi-structured interviews to identify privacy concerns senior users have on Facebook. Then, from our results, we developed a survey to find which concerns were most important and to find promising ways to provide senior users with better control of their security and privacy. Ultimately, we got 79 completed surveys.

Seniors were eager to share their concerns with us, and were pleased that a company like Facebook was interested in learning how they felt. Some takeaways from our study include:

- There's a widespread belief that Facebook sells data to advertisers
- Many people are not confident in their ability to control the audience for their posts
- The People You May Know feature is felt to be invasive, inaccurate, and "creepy"
- People were very interested in certain features that Facebook already has, such as post reporting and account memorialization, suggesting that awareness of these is not high
- Video is a popular format for instructional materials

We decided to focus on improving audience management notifications to reduce accidentally public posts and on adding more information and controls to the People You May Know feature. To evaluate our designs, we showed our prototypes to six seniors and to several domain experts, and used the feedback so garnered to iterate.

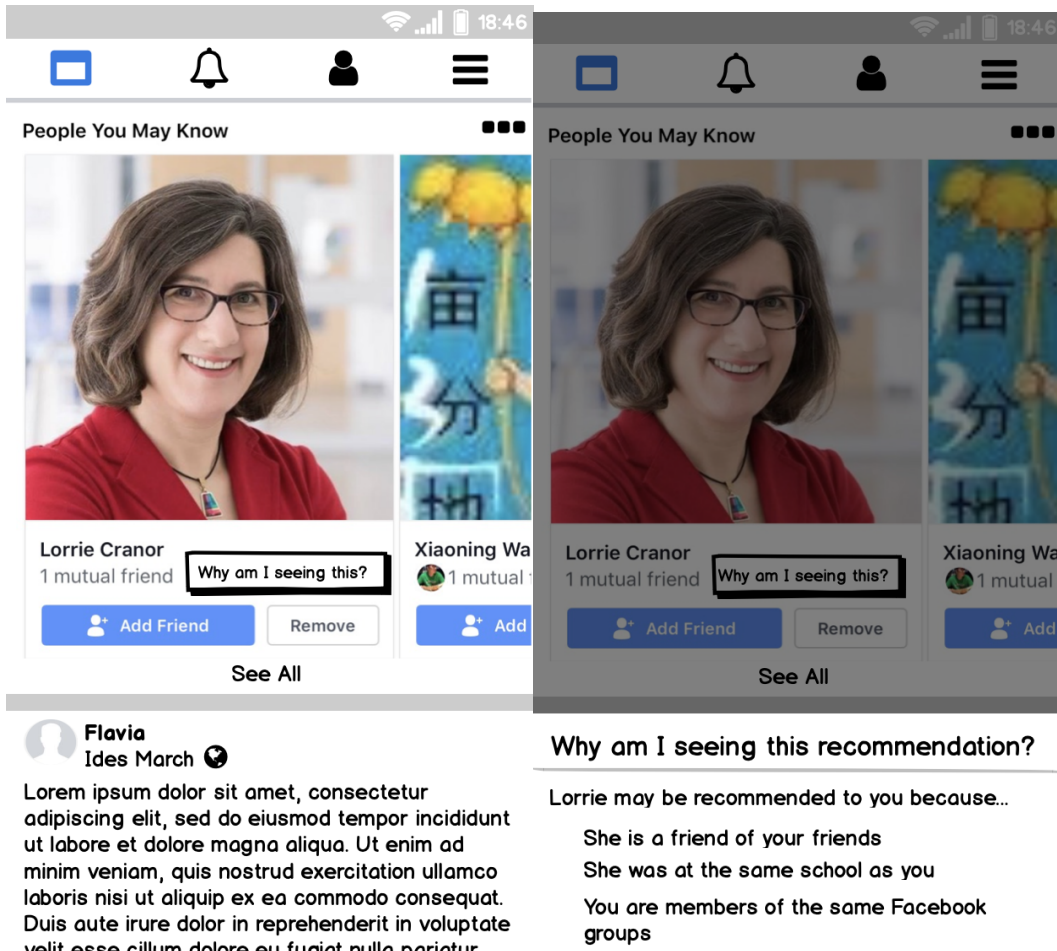
Audience Management



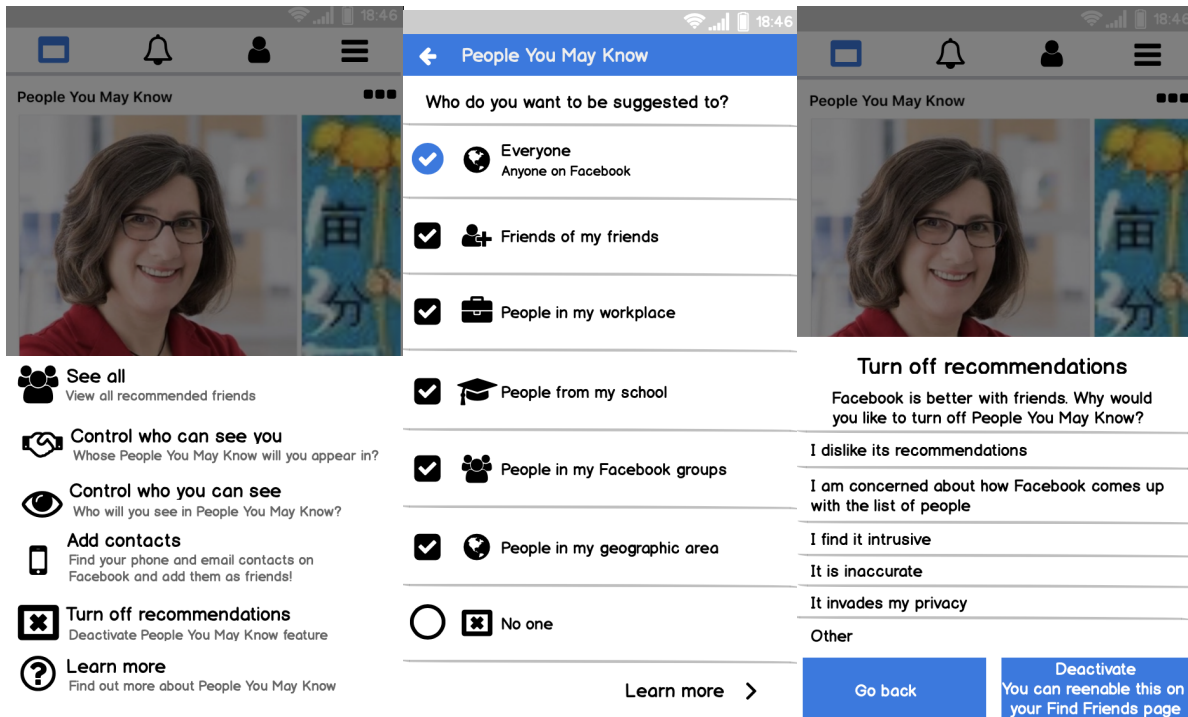
We found several interventions for indicating public posts that testers liked. Adding to the text prompt “What’s on your mind?” the sentence “Tell the World!” added an additional layer of explanation beyond the public icon. When people had a post set to public, highlighting the post audience control in the composer and coloring in the bar it was located in effectively drew people’s attention to the setting. These were even more liked in conjunction.

A pop-up confirmation box for public posts proved extremely popular, though we have concerns that it might become a nuisance if it displayed every time. We believe further testing is warranted to find what really works best, but we believe that our prototypes are a good start.

People You May Know



For People You May Know, we recommend adding the ability to see why someone was suggested by the feature, such as because they share a workplace or because of interests in common. Testers reported that this addition would assuage concerns they have about the opacity of the recommendations. It is necessary to ensure that this does not accidentally compromise the privacy of the recommended person, however.



We also developed a menu of controls directly accessible from People You May Know. In addition to links to existing Facebook pages for all friend recommendations, instructions for adding contacts, and information about People You May Know, we propose controls allowing users to choose specific categories of users that they will be recommended to and categories from which they'd like to see people recommended. Additionally, we allow people to turn off the People You May Know feature and provide their reason for doing so. People we showed this to felt more confident using Facebook's friend recommendation system, and found this a tremendous improvement from the current limited controls.

Many of our respondents indicated that Facebook is an important way for them to stay connected with their family, friends, and community. From our study we identified key privacy concerns and developed prototypes to help address these and add transparency and control to the user experience. In the words of one participant: "I think it's a starting point and small step toward empowering users to trust Facebook."