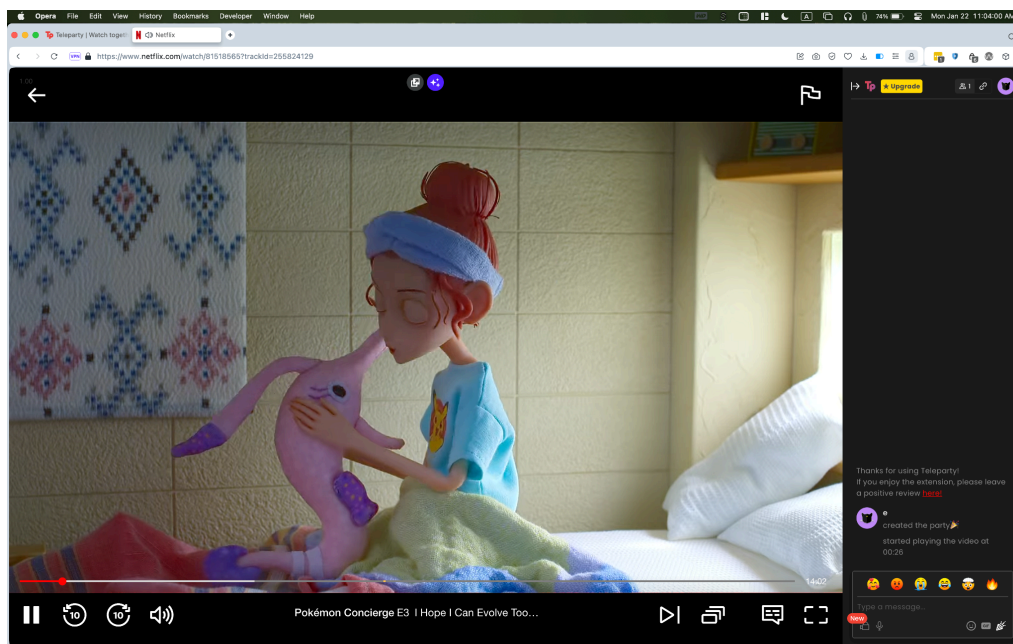


# Comparative Research: Long-Distance Friendships

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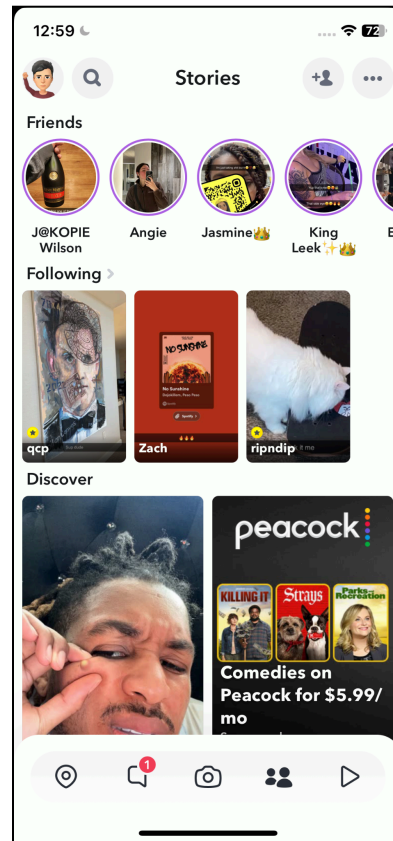
Our team aims to help people maintain consistent and meaningful communication with friends they consider long-distance. While many people want to interact more with their long-distance friends, they often face challenges such as busy schedules, time zone differences, or difficulty starting conversations. Through our competitive analysis, we hope to draw from the success of other products in a similar space to address the barriers that hinder consistent contact. We've analyzed 10 products—including mobile apps, web apps, and Chrome extensions—and provided insights into their diverse approaches, strengths, and areas for improvement.

## Teleparty (Netflix party)



Teleparty is a browser extension that helps people using different computers watch movies on Netflix or other video streaming sites in sync. Its target audience is people hoping to watch movies or shows while apart. This can include long-distance friends or people in long-distance relationships. This is generally a younger audience (primarily teens and people in their 20s). There are a few other apps that serve similar purposes (i.e. Metastream), but Teleparty is the most popular app of its type. It is an extremely simple extension, and upon installation, it walks the user through how to use it. The app does well because it integrates with existing streaming services and is just a simple browser extension. The only drawbacks are that both/all parties need to have active subscriptions to Netflix or whichever video streaming service is being used (it doesn't work with just one person having an account) and that sometimes videos get slightly out of sync (there is some room for improvement here at keeping the videos together).

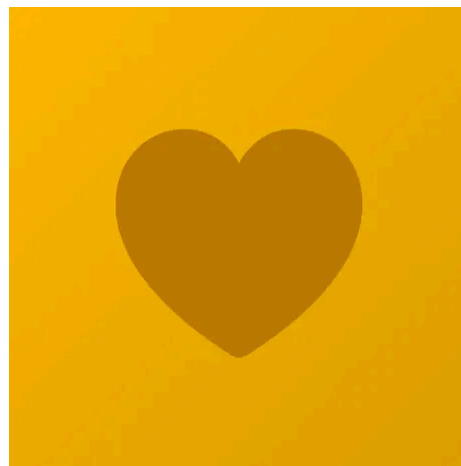
## Snapchat



Snapchat is a message and photo-sharing mobile application. Users send each other messages that “disappear” upon an initial view, making the app intimate and friendly. Snapchat also implements “streaks” to keep track of how many consecutive days any two users have interacted. Users can also share “stories” visible by all of their friends for 24 hours only. Teenagers and young adults generally use the app. It is used by both long-distance friends and ones who are closer in distance as well. It helps people share casual glimpses into their own lives with each other. Although other apps have since introduced ephemeral or disappearing messages (ex: WhatsApp and Signal), photo-sharing and ephemerality remain Snapchat’s primary key strengths, in addition

to its strong network of existing users. Despite this, Snapchat must work with moderation, as harassment is common on the platform, and the app could be improved by making it a safer place for its users.

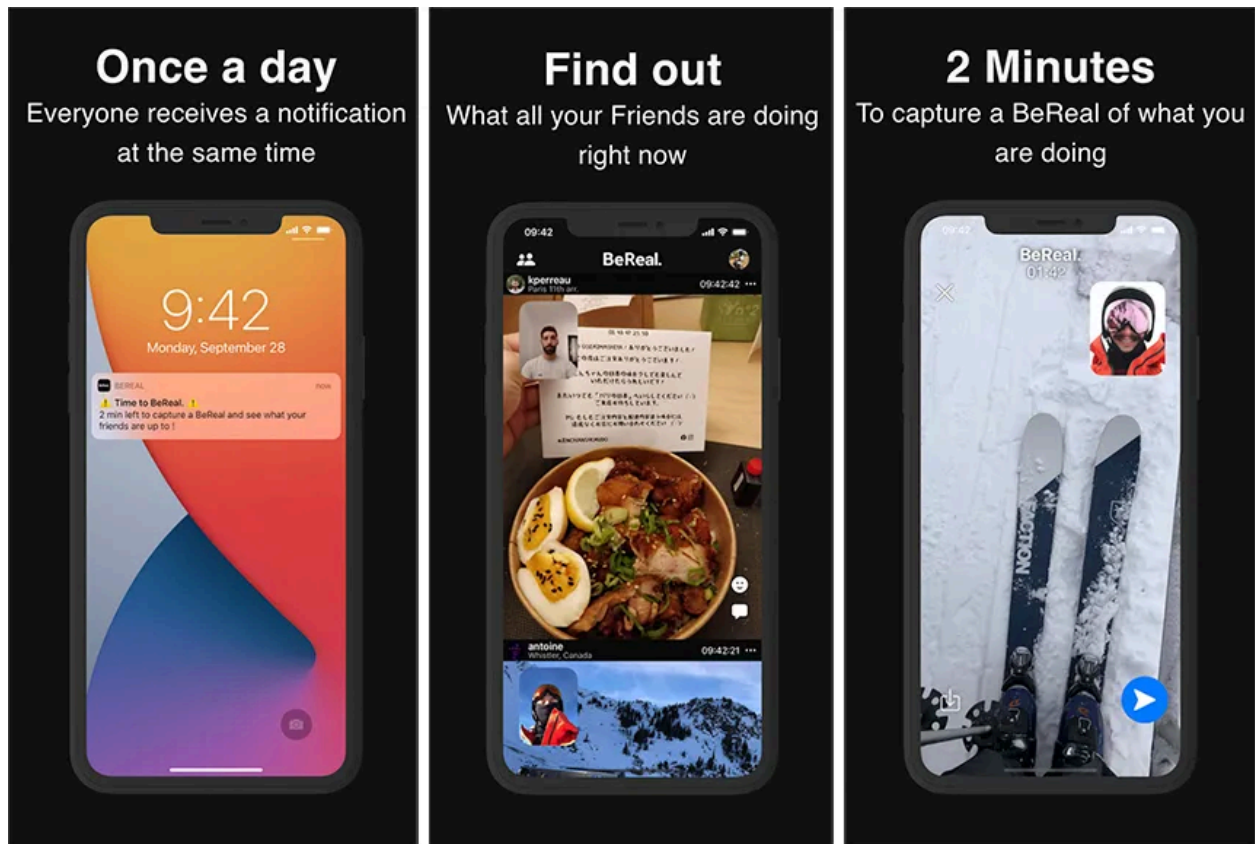
## **Locket Widget**



Locket is a mobile application that adds a widget to users' phones' home screens. This widget is updated with photos uploaded by their friends. The app is used by young adults hoping to have a more personal experience with their friends on social media. One way that Locket helps achieve this is by limiting a user to 20 friends. Locket also, despite having reactions, doesn't count or track said reactions beyond their initial display. Overall, these features make Locket very personal and seamless to use. Locket does a great job of reducing the amount of friction (as discussed by Dr. Wendy Wood) it takes to see what your closest friends are up to. Instead of needing to open an app to see an image of/from your friend, you'll see them whenever you unlock your phone. This

helps build a tiny habit (turning on your phone is the anchor, and staying in touch with your friends is the tiny behavior), as discussed by BJ Fogg. One possible weakness of Locket is that you have to check it throughout the day to see all of the pictures. If one runs up against the 20-friend limit and has active friends, checking their phone often may be incentivized. Accordingly, Locket could be improved by not incentivizing random checking/updating (ex: it could update/check for photos on a defined interval, such as daily at noon and 6 p.m.).

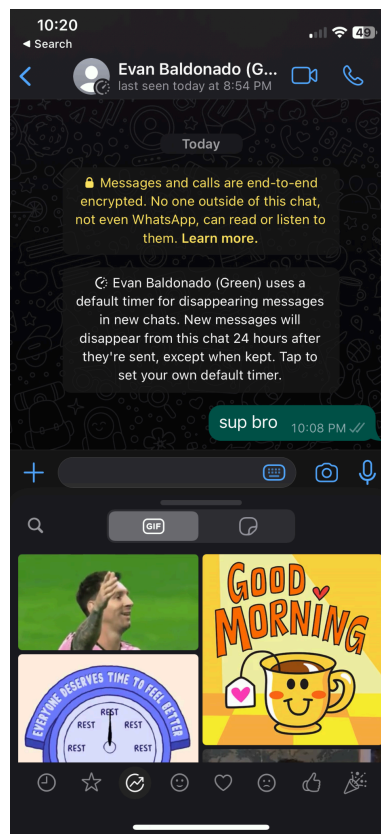
## **BeReal**



BeReal is a simple sharing app to share once a day your real life in photos with friends. Every day at a different time, everyone captures a photo within 2 minutes. The app is self-proclaimed “anti-social media,” - so likely to resonate more with young and millennial age groups. It’s unique in that it focuses on time-sensitive photo capturing,

and its branding has attempted to set the environment of the app to be much more casual and authentic than other social media app experiences. There is a great desire in the market for less superficial and commercialized social network experiences - this desire has led to its newfound mass popularity with BeReal. A few weaknesses are as follows: despite the time restriction - the app still allows users to take photos at any point in the day - which has sometimes led to users simply picking the most “photo-genic” part of their day to capture. It also does not allow for much interaction variability (eg. no long-form text or videos).

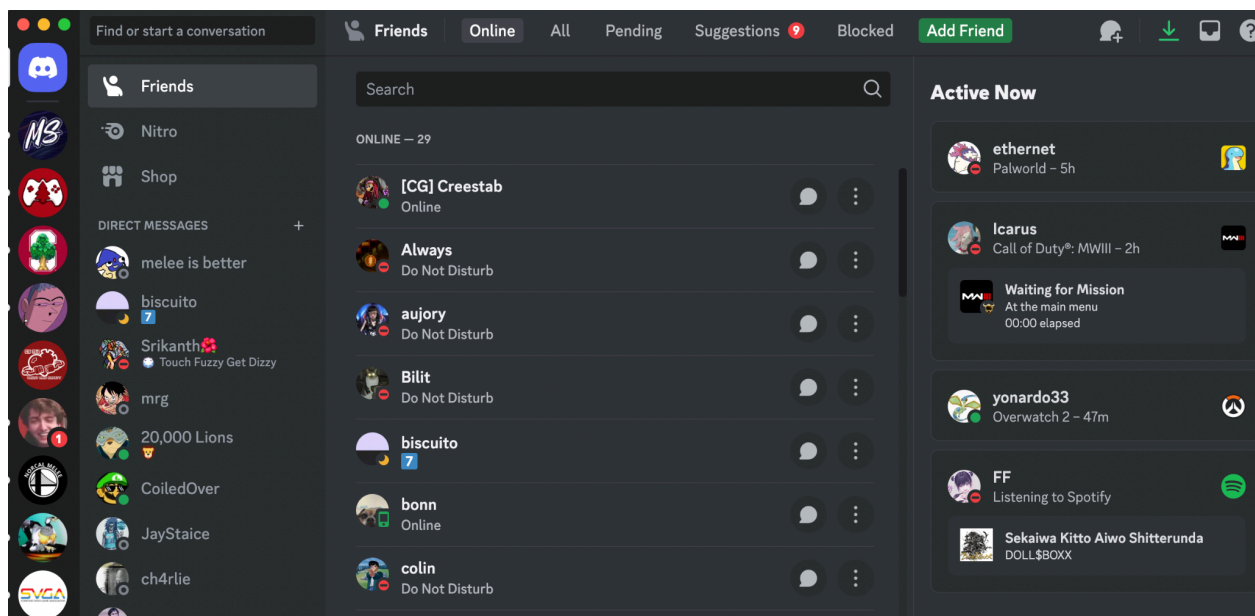
## WhatsApp



WhatsApp is regarded as the most popular messaging service used by the world and is particularly favored by users with international connections or those who value privacy. All of the conversations that take place are fully encrypted (meaning that only

you and your recipients have access to the conversation) and is appealing to people who want to communicate internationally because it is a free Wifi-based messenger. It also has many convenient messaging options not offered in standard SMS or iMessage, such as the ability to easily back up conversations, create large group chats, and search for key terms. The app is straightforward and only requires a phone number to create an account and sync your contacts. Where it falls short is that the average user may default to using standard SMS options, which require no setup to use, or another option like Messenger that already has many users synced on due to Facebook. Moreover, a user doing the diary study remarked that they found the WhatsApp UI boring despite being a frequent user and wished for more personalized features such as reminders to message their friends. Drawing from this feedback, we hope to incorporate more personalization into our product and give features that power users more ways to interact with our app.

## Discord

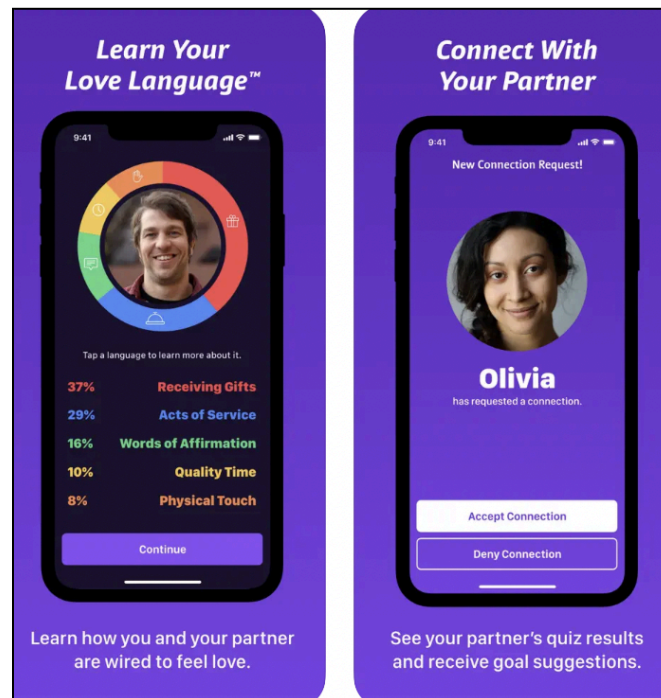


Discord, while primarily marketed towards gamers and tech users, is a great option for users interested in a messaging platform that includes high-quality streaming, voice chats, and strong organization through servers and channels. Its structure facilitates an easy way to join communities and foster sub-communities within servers. Joining voice channels is also convenient for users who want a low-friction way to hang out with friends. Many users take advantage of this by joining open voice chat channels to invite other users on the server to chat and hang out. Its branding and anonymity can deter users who value personability, however, as many users often opt to represent themselves with an online persona.

Moreover, while Discord servers lend themselves to easily joining communities, they can be difficult to manage. Discord lacks a convenient way to personalize where you receive notifications, as you have to manually opt-out and disable notifications for every server you are on. If you decide to mute all notifications by setting your status to DND, you risk missing DMs or server pings that you might actually be interested in. With our product, we hope to emulate the convenience that Discord offers by building community and allowing users to hang out with each other while optimizing their user experience.

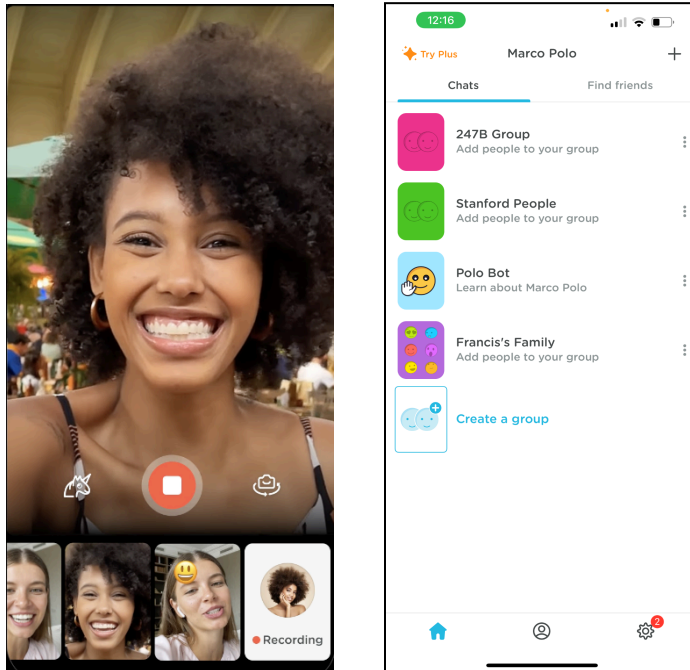


## Love Nudge



Love Nudge is a unique application focused on leveraging the science of relationships and love languages to better facilitate healthier relationships between users, specifically those in romantic relationships. It uniquely allows users to set goals and work towards them with their partner - this appeals to users looking for more methodical approaches to resolving issues in their romantic relationship. It's also helpful for folks who prefer basing their actions on recommended frameworks/studies. This research-backed approach is its biggest strength, though some user reviews focused on how more details on the breakdown of how to serve each other's love languages would help. Also, most of the goals and suggestions cannot be as personalized as in other applications.

## Marco Polo

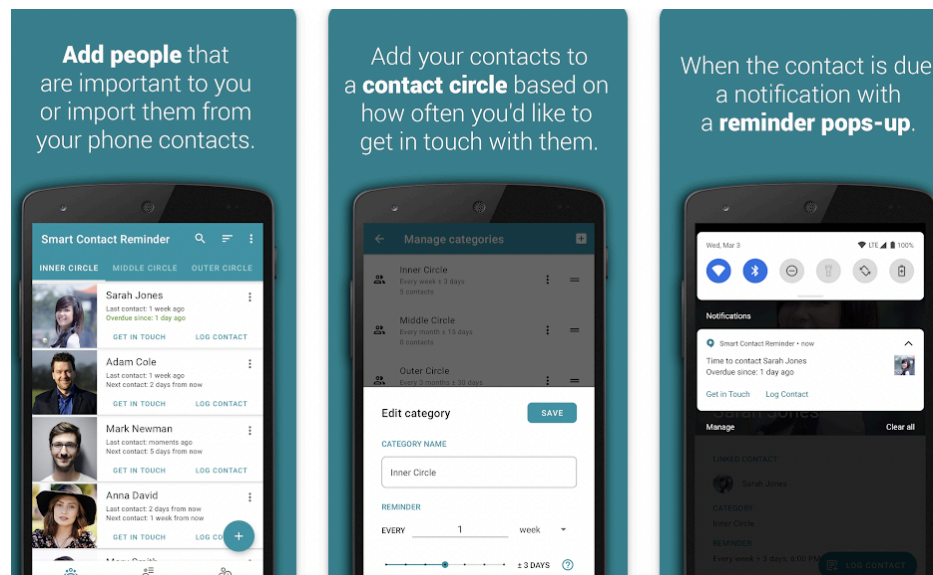


Marco Polo is a video chat app that allows people to make group chats where they can exchange video messages between close friends or family. This app is intended for families who are geographically separated but want to keep in touch meaningfully outside of the affordances of text and phone calls. The idea is that anyone who knows how to record videos on a smartphone could easily access the app's features. With Marco Polo, families and friend groups could create a group chat centered around video messages. The app allows them to send a video to chat so other members can see them live or asynchronously. Because the groupchats don't delete the videos as they do Snapchat, people can watch their group's videos retroactively at any time. While there are a multitude of apps intended to help family members keep in touch with each other, Marco Polo markets itself as an app easy enough for any member of the family to use and private enough that it might as well be a family phone call.

The app is straightforward and allows family members to asynchronously keep in touch with each other in a way that is more personal than voice mail but more personal

than a family group chat. Users can easily send and receive videos from their loved ones with minor input. It is probably easier for elders and children to send a video than it is to send text messages. The app's premium service costs \$120 a year, so families can get locked out from some of the app's better features, such as altering group settings, unless they get past this paywall. Additionally, video messages can be hard to parse for specific information if one is late to a conversation or is looking for a reference to an earlier video. The app could probably be improved if users could create threads within their group chats to discuss specific topics, but this would come at the cost of some accessibility for people with less smartphone prowess. People could hypothetically create multiple chats with the same group for different topics, which would likely become cumbersome.

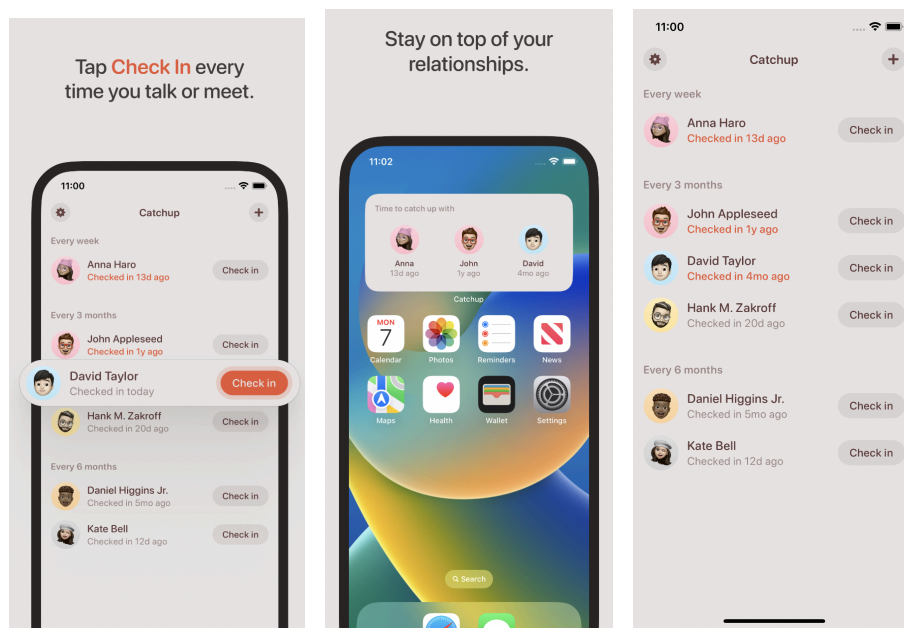
## Smart Contact Reminder



Smart Contact reminder is very similar to Catchup but instead focuses on the principle of circles of friends. As they advertise, "Take control of your social life with Smart Contact Reminder, your personal CRM and relationship manager!" It's unique in that it advertises its application to be helpful for both business and personal purposes.

Most unique is that it makes “proximity circles,” - which makes relationship closeness ultra-specific, as well as their persistent notification features. In terms of strengths, users feel great about the intentionality, organization, persistent notifications, and intuitive interface. To improve, users wished there were more visual options overall, another wished to log who initiated the conversation to rate quality, and some wished for more logging capabilities (eg. to save information about the person or update things they might forget).

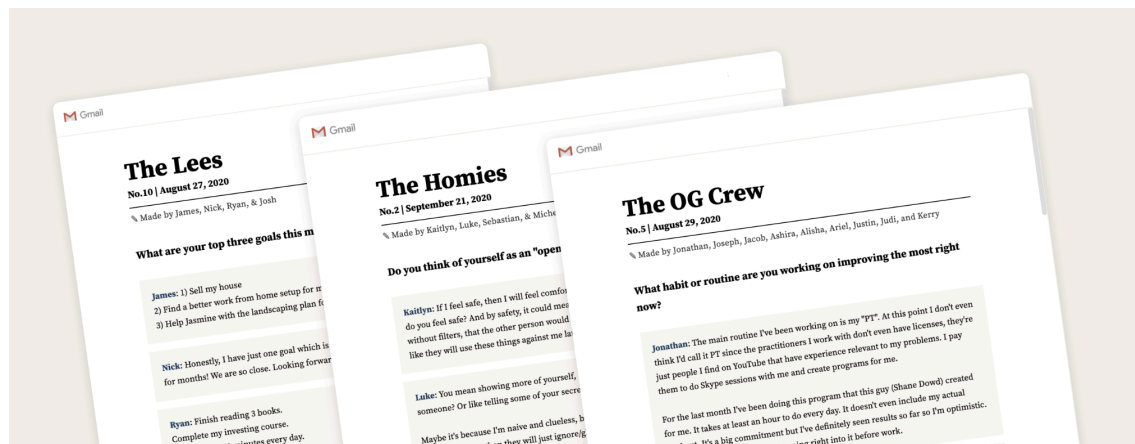
## Catchup



Catchup “aims to help you make your moments of connection more intentional, so you don’t end up drifting apart from those people you care about”. This application focuses on deriving more meaning from catching up with friends through simple reminders of when you last caught up. The interface is simple and clean, and it will note how often you’ve checked in and your contacts’ birthdays — so you don’t have to rely on Facebook for that reminder. This birthday feature stands out to me because it is a common struggle among people and myself. Regarding weaknesses, it looks like the “check-in” feature is manual - adding more friction to keeping track of relationships. As

well, the interface is very similar to the space dedicated to phone calls - so maybe it's not distinct enough. One major improvement they could make would be adding more suggestions to users on improving their relationships beyond just reminding them to reach out.

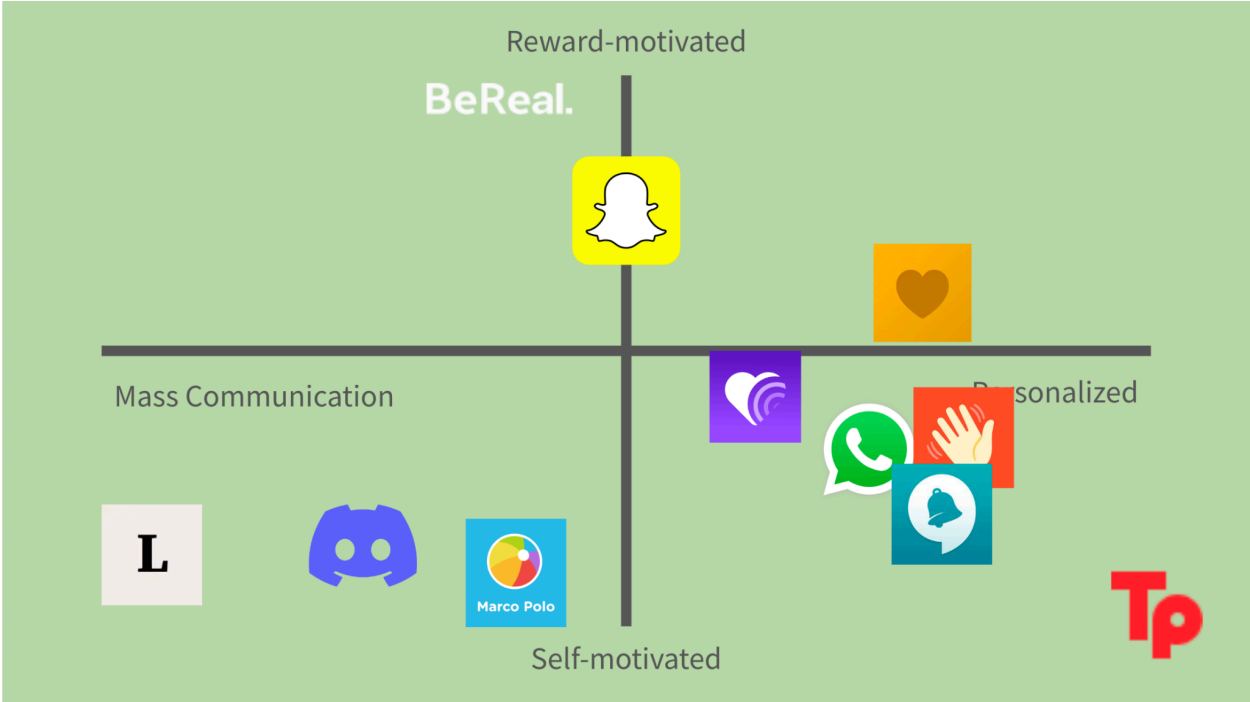
## Letterloop

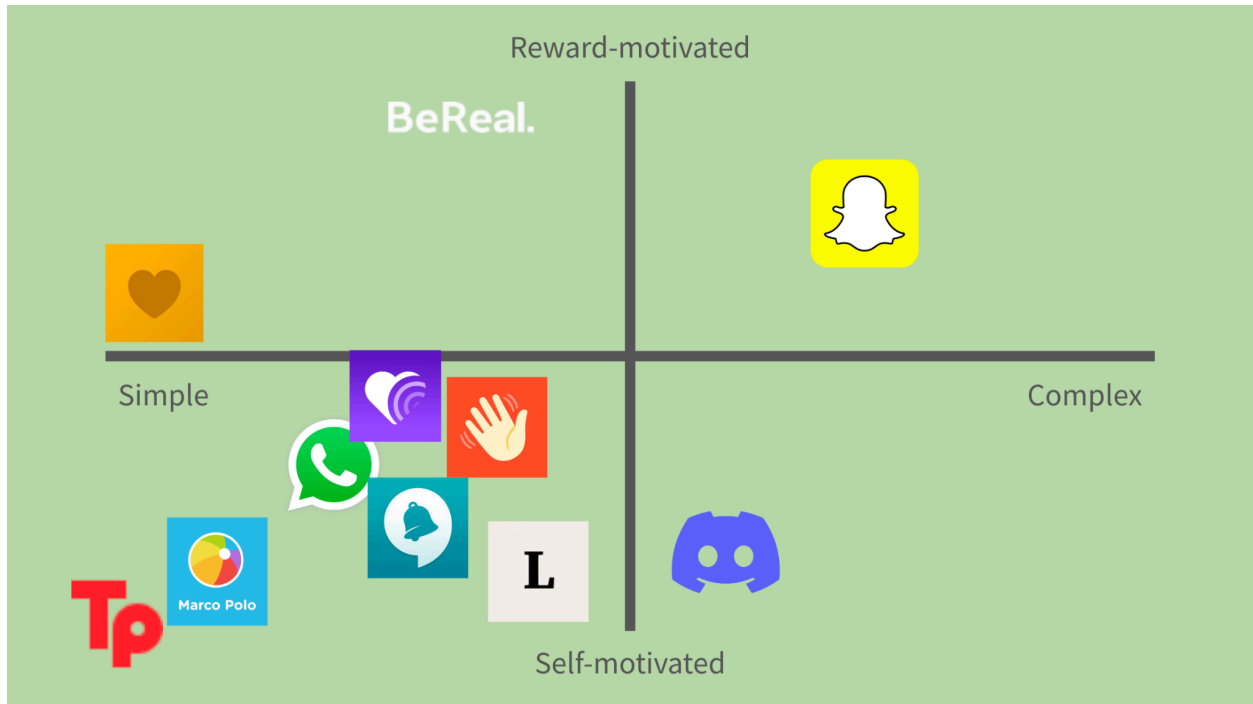


Letterloop is a unique application that allows users to start private or group newsletters. As they advertise, they allow you to “Start your private, group newsletter today— stay in touch, grow closer together, and discover things you never knew with the people in your life.” This application is helpful for those seeking more long-form communication with their significant relationships - and it's most unique in this format type compared to other applications in the space. It appeals to the popularization of newsletters, especially personal ones, meaning that it serves a large user desire that's already been demonstrated. Though the medium is a unique strength, it also might be a weakness, given the greater friction required to interact with longer-form content. For improvements, long-form content can sometimes seem like extra friction to users to both produce and read so maybe adding more variability to the newsletter format for users to add to would help.

# Insights & Conclusions

After exploring these products, we chose three categories to distribute them across. Our first comparison metric, which we used to compare against two different distribution charts, was established on how an app helps users stay in touch with their long-distance friends. These two ends we described as self versus reward motivated, the definitions of which are self-explanatory. Our other X-axes are more descriptive of *what* the interactions between friends can look like. We chose to look at the simple versus complex functionality of an application, mainly decided by the features an application offers. The other focuses on whether the communication in the app goes out to a large group of people or is more focused on personalized, one-on-one connections. Below are our comparison matrices:





Based on the two comparative charts, there are several important insights we concluded. One is that the simpler an application is in its features, the more it tends to have self-motivated aspects to relationship building. Another trend that stood out is that in the space of communication types, most applications tend to lean towards personalized forms of communication. Based on our literature review, we learned about the importance of close and distant communication - and the surprising insight that even casual check-ins with long-distance friends can be incredibly powerful and beneficial to one's sense of belonging and well-being. Many of these applications aim to better facilitate relationship building. However, there generally seems to be a large gap in the reward-motivated section of our comparative analysis - leaving us room to explore this unique section of the problem space that lends itself well to behavior change design.