

Startup solving social isolation

Submitted by: Snack

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As many others, I've been working from home and I miss real-world interactions. Inspired by these events, I've built something to make the current social isolation a bit more bearable – a video chat roulette for distributed teams as a way to stay in touch with each other when working from home.

<http://aboutsnoack.com/>

Snoack is a Slack bot that enables teams to have virtual coffees: spontaneous, time-restricted video conversations with icebreakers. Distributed teams use Snoack to build authentic relationships with one another.

I have built Snoack for the COVID-19 Global Hackathon. It was one of the most upvoted projects among 18,000+ participants (<https://devpost.com/software/snoack>). I did not win, but it helped to be seen: we are now onboarding 20 Slack organizations a day, mostly through word of mouth and through Slack directory (people are actively searching for “water cooler” chats).

We've gotten some big wins already: Giphy, On Deck, Pioneer, and Founder Collective are already using Snoack. Since Snoack is free for public Slack communities, most of our users are founders, hackathons, indie makers, artists, and COVID-19 related Slack groups.

I am in the current On Deck cohort (On Deck is an invite-only fellowship similar to Y Combinator – but more hip <https://www.beondeck.com/>) and, now that all the daily workshops have to take place remotely over Slack, we've been using Snoack as a way to get to know each other. Every week we have a couple of hours dedicated for “snacking”. People love it and attribute Snoack as the reason for getting to know something personal about others in the On Deck cohort - which they would have otherwise not been able to with the absence of serendipitous, in-person interactions.

What attracts people to using Snoack is the lottery mechanics with variable reward and icebreakers that mimic quirky real-world conversations.

The lottery mechanism adds a fun and organic element to the conversations because you never know who you will be talking to until after you see each other in the video room – just like how you would never know who you'll bump into at the water cooler! People are matched based on their interests and availability. This way you cannot bail on people (or at least that would be really awkward for both of you!) After you see each other in the video room, we reveal your names and the icebreakers.

Our icebreakers are thoughtfully designed to reveal something about the other person beyond business and surface value, e.g.

- Who is your craziest/most interesting relative?
- What advice from a close family member has stuck with you the most?
- If you were to teach a class/workshop on any topic, what topic would you choose?

Ultimately, we want people to have fun. May it be the lottery mechanics, countdown to the end of the chat, or getting “snacks” (?????????????) as rewards - the entire experience is designed to feel like a game, as opposed to a forced social interaction. It seems to work – feedback is overwhelmingly positive and we are growing fast.

Snack’s mission (<https://aboutsnaek.com/mission>) is to make remote work feel just as natural and socially rewarding as what we are used to experiencing in the office.

Please address all enquiries to gajus@aboutsnaek.com.