

App helps traveling sports fans find spots to watch teams

Dawn Reiss, 10Best (a division of USA TODAY) 12:41 p.m. EST December 2, 2013

Fanatic app helps travelers find bars with like-minded patrons on game day



(Photo: Fanatic)

New York City's Evan Levine has always been a "huge hockey fan," rooting for the New York Rangers and watching the college football games of his alma mater, Northwestern.

For his job with Citibank, Levine typically travels two to three days a week all over the country, spending 85-100 days a year on the road. It's not always easy to find a place to watch a Rangers game. So

Levine was excited to learn about Fanatic, an app which allows him to follow his favorite sports teams and find local bars and other fans in cities across the U.S.

"I was in Maui and I was able to find a sports bar that had showed hockey in February, when everyone was watching the Super Bowl," says Levine, who also found Barney's Beanery in Santa Monica, Calif. for a Rangers playoff game, while he was traveling. "I wouldn't have had any idea about which bar would had the Rangers game on without the app. I could have watched the game in my hotel room, but to find a bar with a top venue for fans of your team can be difficult on your own."

Bonding over sports teams

Levine first heard about the Fanatic app from its creator Babak Poushanchi, 37, a New York City transplant who graduated with economics degree from Northwestern. The two met at Blondies Sports bar on the Upper West Side, where Wildcat fans had started watching football games. Poushanchi says he was one of "five or six" Northwestern fans who started going to the bar in the late 1990's. Then it was 20 or 30 people by 2003, Levine says. These days, Poushanchi says there is a line out the door of 30-40 fans when the inside hits its 250-person capacity inside.

10Best: [Blondies Sports](#)

That bonding experience prompted Poushanchi's idea to create his Fanatic app, using technology to help other people find a local place to watch their favorite team with like-minded fans no matter where they lived, worked or traveled. "I wanted a technology or service to accelerate that process and not take 10 years to go and re-create what we had done at Blondies," Poushanchi says. "There are a lot of people who are displaced fans around the world."

For nearly two years, he worked on creating the Fanatic app, which helps fans find the perfect sports bar or venue based on the user's location.

How the app works

After downloading the free app, users can then add the names of their favorite teams from 14 leagues, including many lesser-known ones: Bundesliga, Champions League, La Liga, Ligue 1, MLB, LS, NBA, NCAAB, NCAAF, NFL, NHL, Premier League, Serie A and World Cup.

The 'Games' tab makes users sign in with an email account or Facebook in order to see upcoming dates and times of games for the users' favorite teams. Underneath, there's a section called "top places to watch my teams nearby," which gives suggestions based on fans who have already gone to certain bars, and fans who have said they plan on watching upcoming games at particular locations. There's also an 'Explore' tab which helps users find new places to watch their teams. A Feed gives Twitter updates on favorites and includes ticker information about other Fanatic app users making plans to watch the game.


Users can create a plan to watch the game at home or at a suggested bar; they can also add their own favorite location which gives points within a tiered points system. More points are given to users who watch games in public and invite other fans and share their plans on Facebook. Right now there isn't any real reward for gaining points, but Poushanchi says he hopes to change that in the future. "What we are really trying to do is acknowledge and reward sports fans," Poushanchi says. "Today it is digital points, but we are going to wrap those points into something tangible in the future."

One team draws more travelers

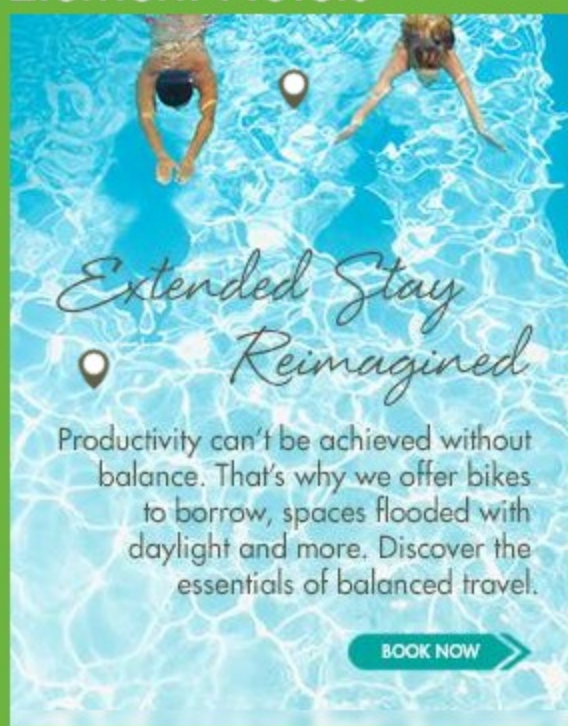
The top team in the app: the Chicago Blackhawks. "Hockey has a really passionate fan base," Poushanchi says, but acknowledges that could change as more global users add their team preferences.

Fanatic already has more than 10,000 users and 4,000 venues in a database that is integrated with Google Places, Poushanchi says, adding that he has received requests from bars as far as Paris and London.

In the next version of the app, Poushanchi says Fanatic will add commenting and rank fans. Poushanchi says he's also in talks with "global beverage brands, sports leagues and big sports content companies" to help improve the app's reward system.






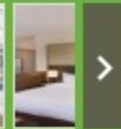
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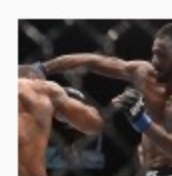
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