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**Introduction**

Goalpost is a web and mobile application that helps people achieve positive health outcomes through behavior change. Our first goal is to help people quit smoking.

Goalpost is owned by Social Code. Our goal is to help people live life to the fullest through optimal physical and mental health. We develop web and mobile applications that help people stay focused and healthy through setting achievable goals, identifying triggers and staying motivated. The goals we’re most passionate about helping people with are those associated with metabolic syndrome and chronic disease.

A recent report from [UK Cancer Research](http://www.nature.com/bjc/journal/v105/n2s/index.html) published in the British Journal of Medicine, attributes 45% of all cancers to lifestyle. Smoking is the number one cause of preventable death in the world. We want to help save lives.

**How does it work?**

Most health solutions aren’t medical, they’re social. Health is an area where almost everything has been tried to motivate people in a positive direction, from increasing alcohol and tobacco taxes, extensive advertising, societal pressure, laws, gyms, surgeries and drugs with limited success. Socialising and gamifying health and wellness ***in partnership with*** medical research and professional advice, has not been tried before and it is this combined approach that Goalpost is built on.

Goalpost works by combining persuasive technologies with an in-depth understanding of what it takes to change a behavior. We combine big data & analytics, crowd-sourcing, social connectivity (the support of your peers/social networks), professional advice and applied game design. We use plain English and engage the user in socially relevant ways resulting in improved health literacy and making positive health behavior - normative behavior.

**Social Networks**

Research shows us that peer pressure is one of the key motivating factors when it comes to changing behaviors. Our peers – our social networks can have a significant *positive* influence in helping us kick a habit or start a new one, something that we struggle to do on our own. We know for example, that people are five times more likely to quit smoking if they have the support of their family, co-workers and friends.

According to a study published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, the flagship journal of the American College of Physicians, the drinking habits of the people within your extended social group play a major role in determining your own rate of alcohol consumption.

([http://annals.org/content/152/7/426.full.pdf+html?sid=3c381325-f75f-434f-9b26-5faa1590b1d4](http://annals.org/content/152/7/426.full.pdf%2Bhtml?sid=3c381325-f75f-434f-9b26-5faa1590b1d4))

Researchers used data from the landmark Framingham Heart Study, which followed 12,067 people for more than 30 years and helped to define the patterns in social networks of other health issues such as obesity, smoking, and sexually transmitted diseases. In this analysis, the researchers sought to explore behavior patterns in a large social network.

“We’ve found that the influence of your friends and people you have connections with can affect your health just as much as your family history or your genetic background,” said Nichloas Christakis, MD, PhD and lecturer at Harvard University.

In the study, self-reported alcohol intake over time followed changes in the alcohol intake of the respondents' social contacts. The researchers found that a person was 50 percent more likely to drink heavily if a person they are directly connected with also drinks heavily and 36 percent more likely to drink heavily if a friend of a friend drinks heavily. The impact extended up to three degrees of separation. The researchers suggest this social phenomena could have other implications for clinical and health interventions. Social networks could be used to exploit positive health behaviors and further support group interventions.

"Our findings reinforce the idea that smoking, drinking, obesity and depression are public health problems that involve groups of interconnected people who evince shared behaviors," said Christakis. "In treating individuals for behavior-related conditions such as over-eating, we need to look at their social networks to identify and eliminate obstacles to abstaining."

**Professional Advice**

Game mechanics, persuasive technology and having the support of friends isn’t going to be enough for most people trying to quit smoking. Using gaming elements to draw people into something that won’t keep them sufficiently motivated is a real risk. In the end real change comes down to hard work. Goalpost works collaboratively with health professionals whose expertise helps inform the design of the behavior-related application, personalized health content and tracking tools. For smoking cessation, we partnered with Quitline and Smokefree whose professional services are based on extensive research and experience in helping people quit.

**Objectives**

Understanding how our needs and desires drive our behavior is fundamental to the design of Goalpost. Our attention is on directing and delivering value to users on an emotional level as opposed to reliance on functions or gimmicks. The skill is all about making the social and motivational elements of behavior change meaningful enough that the difficulties involved in the change process are transcended by engagement with the application, and that this meaning is sustainable over time.

We’re also closely monitoring what works and what doesn’t through tight feedback loops and deep insight into what it takes to achieve a desired behavior change. Goalpost adheres to the lean start-up model combined with iterative design and agile methodology. More specifically; user-centered design and test-driven development by increasing the frequency of contact with real people, therefore testing and avoiding mistakes and incorrect assumptions as early as possible.

Goalpost is the trading name of Social Code, founded by Siobhan Bulfin.

It is built on ruby on rails.