

Social network fans look to calm the update storm

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Startups and software applications that were hits among technology trendsetters at a renowned South By Southwest Interactive (SXSW) festival in Texas focused on using smartphones to collaborate or cavort with friends.

"Facebook has lost its ability to be personal and private," said Brian Magierski, the chief executive of Appconomy, the Texas startup behind group messaging service GroupedIn. "We need to make social personal

again."

Group messaging services let people exchange [smartphone](#) text missives to collaborate and coordinate with selected circles, such as clubs, teams, churches, schools and car pools.

"You are seeing a lot of different takes at this broad problem," Magierski said. "It's a 500 million person problem -- a Facebook size problem."

Social networking star Facebook has more than half a billion users.

Startups are seeing opportunity in connecting people to the small number of folks they truly share their lives with, and then linking them to local places, happenings or opportunities relevant to their interests.

"Facebook and [Twitter](#) don't go away by any stretch," Magierski said. "I still want to stay connected to the people I played hockey with in college, but they aren't the ten people I want to stay connected with all the time."

The slew of startups at SXSW included Evri, which lets people personalize news feeds based on topics getting a lot of attention in individual "social graphs" at Facebook, Twitter or other online venues.

"We search the Web and distill the signal from the noise into topics people really care about," said Evri chief executive Will Hunsinger.

"We essentially create an on-the-fly news magazine of the things you are most passionate about."

Evri, which is backed by funding from Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen's Vulcan Capital, provided a sneak peak at an application being crafted for Apple's popular iPad tablet computers.

"We think the table form factor is ideally suited for content discovery and consumption," Hunsinger said.

Lori James and Barbara Perfetti were at SXSW to introduce an online AreCafe that lets people form cliques based on what types of books they prefer.

The women said that the idea came from the large community that sprang up unsolicited at allromance.com, their website devoted to romance novels.

"We decided to develop the AreCafe because people are on [Facebook](#) and Twitter and that is a big ocean of people," James told AFP.

"You're friending your mom, your neighbor, your co-worker, and your preacher, and you might not want them to know about the spicy romance novels you are reading," she said.

"They might not have a lot to contribute to that conversation."

The virtual cafe features author interviews, book videos, and literature news along with communities based on genres.

ZeneScene showed off an application that uses location capabilities in smartphones to connect people with hip social happenings "in their own backyards."

Once people check in at a venue using increasingly popular services such as FourSquare or Gowalla they can start conversations with other smartphone lovers by posting images or taking polls with newly-launched Locaii software.

"It's a location-based conversation starter," said Locaii co-founder Aaron

Bannister. "You can list your favorite locations and get notified when cool things are going on there."

Startup LifeKraze aims to get Internet users to embrace healthy, active lifestyles using the power of personal social networks on smartphones.

LifeKraze lets friends award each other points for activities ranging from walking pups or eating salads to competing in marathons or other sports. Points can be cashed in for rewards at shops that partner with the service.

"We are connecting the outside world with what you are doing online," said Michelle Warren, of LifeKraze.

Other startups featuring new ways to use mobile devices for [social networking](#), shopping, geo-location or augmented reality will vie for the hearts of tech-savvy attendees at the annual gathering.

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