

New iPhone app Blendr offers dating in real time

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The creator of Grindr, a wildly popular mobile dating application for gay men, has come out with Blendr, a version of the app designed to appeal to both sexes and to heterosexuals. Blendr uses the iPhone's GPS location-sensing technology to find and connect users of the program with other users near them.

Joel Simkhai, the creator of Grindr, a wildly popular mobile dating application for gay men, has spent a lot of time recently thinking about women.

And two years after launching Grindr, which has been downloaded millions of times, the Israeli-born US citizen has come out with Blendr, a version of the app designed to appeal to both sexes and to heterosexuals.

Like Grindr, Blendr uses the iPhone's GPS location-sensing technology

to find and connect users of the program with other users near them.

The Blendr app, launched last week as a free download from [iTunes](#) or on Facebook, displays pictures, profiles and interests of other users who have "checked in" nearby and allows them to begin messaging one another.

"Blendr is essentially a new way to meet new people," said Simkhai, founder and [chief executive](#) of the Los Angeles-based company behind Grindr and Blendr. "We're helping you connect with the people in your immediate surroundings.

"You can actually see people in the same room, at the same restaurant, at the same gym, at the same supermarket," he continued. "People who are very, very close to you and are within walking distance."

Simkhai said he came up with Grindr after deciding that traditional [online social networking](#) was "not very social."

"You talk to your friends, you talk to your family, you [share photos](#), you share links, but you're staying in this closed network," he said.

"And so we said to ourselves 'Let's combine social and location and let you meet new people,'" he said. "Let's help you get outside your network."

Grindr was launched in 2009 and has been downloaded more than 2.6 million times in 192 countries, according to Simkhai, who said there are 50,000 Grindr online at any given moment.

Blendr was a year in the making when developers pondered the question: "Will women use it?"

"This was a question we were thinking about for a long time," Simkhai said in an interview with AFP. "We looked at Grindr and we said 'OK, what if we just take Grindr and change the logos and change the colors and release that?'"

"And we said, 'You know what, that's not going to work for women,'" he said. "So we actually spent the past year thinking and making it work for women."



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Simkhai said it was a "misconception" that women "have a very easy time meeting other people."

"I don't think that's true," he said. "They struggle to meet people of quality who share their same passions.

"And that's what Blendr's all about -- helping you find people who are as passionate as you are about the same kinds of things."

To make the Blendr experience potentially more appealing to women, the Blendr team incorporated enhanced privacy and safety features and put greater emphasis on listing a user's interests -- from hobbies to sports to music to languages.

"We've built up the privacy settings to make women and men alike feel more comfortable," Simkhai said. "We don't require any information other than your date of birth. We don't require a photo, we don't require your name, we don't require an email or a phone number."

With a "location toggle," a Blendr user can determine how accurate they want their location setting to be to other users.

"You can bring that to low if you don't want someone to know exactly where you're at," Simkhai said. "You can also block users. You can control who can see you based on gender or sexual orientation or age."

Simkhai said Blendr is more than just a "dating site," although he believes it does have a leg up when compared to online matchmaking services.

"A lot of traditional dating and social networking is very much a computer-based experience," he said. "It's not real time.

"With Blendr, if you go from one part of town to another, one block to the next, you'll see a new set of people," he said. "It's changing in real time."

"It's kind of a new category," Simkhai said of Blendr. "More of a social network that allows you to meet [people](#) based on your interests."

Blendr is currently available for the [iPhone](#), the iPod Touch and the iPad and as a Facebook application and Simkhai hopes to come out soon with a version for smartphones powered by Google's Android software.

It currently makes money from advertising but Simkhai said the company could offer versions in the future that offer some paid features.

He said it is still too early to release figures on the number of downloads for Blendr or the gender breakdown of users but the data will be made available "in the coming weeks or months."

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