

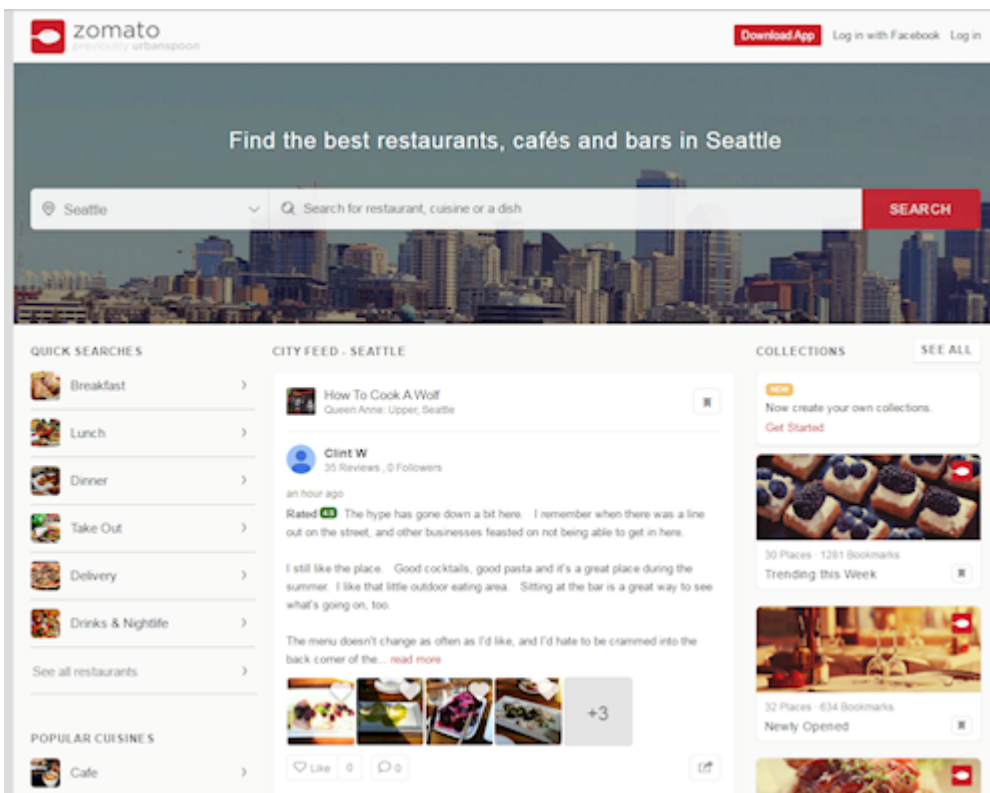
When we refer to "Restaurant Discovery", it is fairly natural to think of searching and finding, because, after all, it is to discover restaurants.

We know those names: **Yelp**, **Foursquare**, **TripAdvisor**, yet another a very hot name, **Zomato**, which [acquired Urban-spoon in 2015](#).

How does each of them help diners look for a restaurant? This article goes over and focuses on reviewing user experience on only restaurant searching from those mentioned websites. In part one, I will first go to Zomato.

## Zomato

The following is the screen of Zomato home page:



I like the cleanness of its interface and embedded with colors. Just at the first glance, it exposes a lot of food images. I will discuss content on similar websites in a different blog, here let's just look at the layout and interaction.

In this home page, there are 3 columns:

- LEFT: a set of filter controls;
- MIDDLE: city feed, with a list of diner posted content (reviews);
- RIGHT: collections

As you see, the part really useful for searching or finding a restaurant, is only the LEFT side. Of course, there is a very large text box in the top-center. It is good, and I like it. However, when you tap into the textbox, something pops up to distract your focus from searching (see it later).

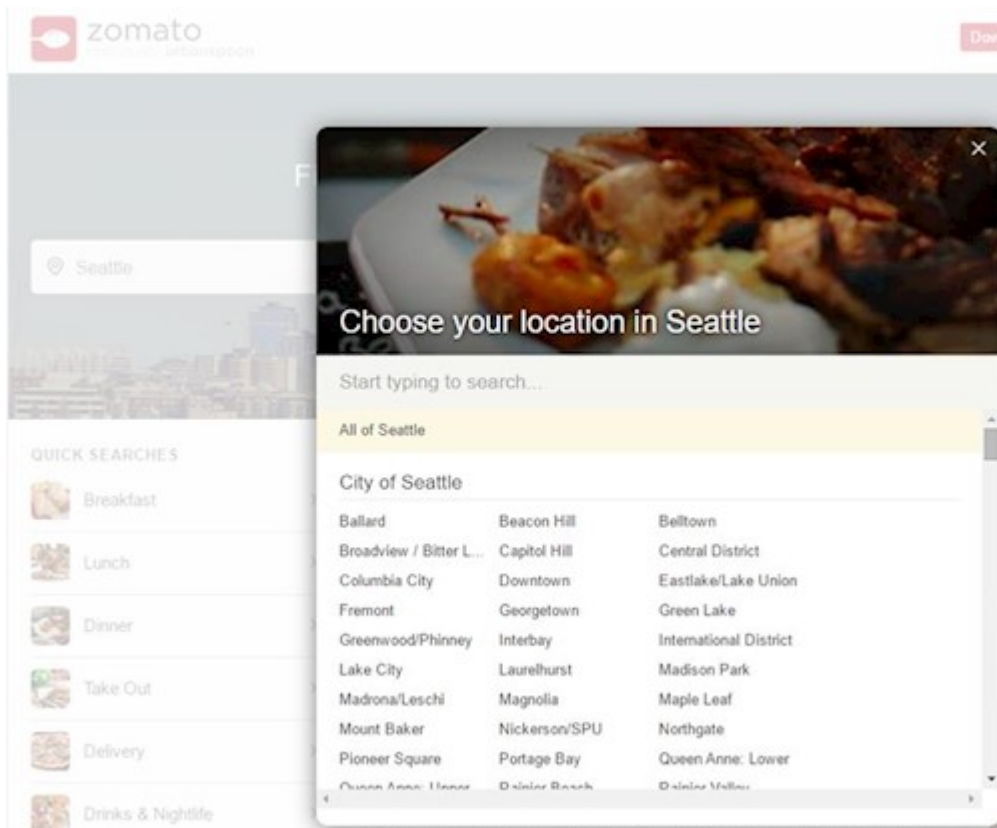
The middle part offers choices; however, the content is simply about other people, not me.

The right portion provides a collection of restaurants, which appears to be a good idea; trying to copy [ProductHunt's](#) collection concept. Unfortunately, accessing those information is inconvenient, i.e. must go through too many steps to find a restaurant. Unlike ProductHunt, which primarily was for browsing and following. A user on restaurant discovery is generally having much shorter attention span. I will elaborate this point in [Part Two](#).

Personally, I do not understand what purpose the "Quick Searches" serves for me. It has 6 choices:

- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Dinner
- Take Out
- Delivery
- Drinks and Nightlives

Here is a quick thought: if I open a restaurant discovery website at 9 pm, it is very likely I am looking for "Drinks and Nightlives". In fact, does it really matter? How about just show me what is currently open? In fact, if I can pick a time, the website should be smart enough to filter out all restaurants are not doing business at that time. Not to mention, in those 6 categories, many restaurants will overlap. Besides the fact this particular categorizing will not necessarily help me narrow down my search, the worst part is, when I first come to this website, click a "type", say "Dinner", I am seeing the following pop up window:



This is genius. I have to manually pick an area.

Did you see the scroll bar and can you imagine how long is it?

Two obvious drawbacks:

- The areas are ordered alphabetically, if I am living in an area starting with letter "W", I am forced to scroll to the bottom. Or you can argue, I can move the cursor to the text field and type "W" to search. Yes, that will make it a better experience (sarcastically).
- How does a person new to the city know what area he/she is at?

What will be a better approach? Of course, just detect my location and automatically select a starting area for me.

After selecting an area, I will enter a page with the top is a horizontal tab control that lists the same 6 categories. Interestingly, there is an additional option now: All.



Here is what puzzles me: what is a typical workflow for a user coming to a restaurant discovery website? The basic needs of a visitor are:

- Hungry;
- Needs a place to eat;
- Needs to know what can eat in that place;

By default, most people are open to all options, i.e. **ALL**. Next is to narrow down the search. But **Zomato** seems to be doing something very interesting: force me to narrow down first, and then provide me an option to open to **ALL**.

If we look at the additional filters in the left side, we can see Cuisine



Obviously, if I don't like any of those cuisines, I will hit [See all cuisines]. Yes, as the number indicates, there are 110 of them. So I am seeing this next:

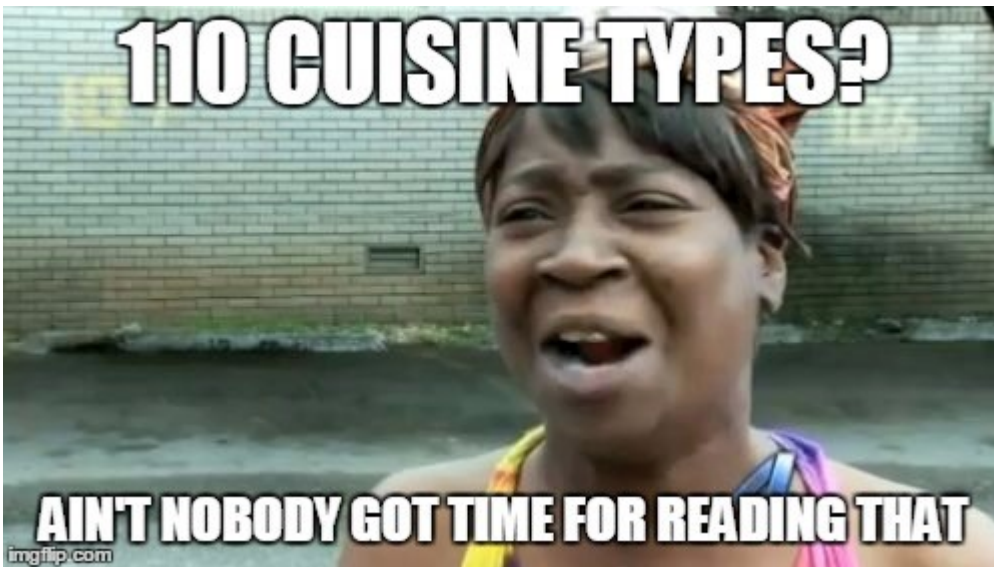
Cuisine
✕

<input type="checkbox"/> Afghan (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Chowder (21)	<input type="checkbox"/> Indian (51)	<input type="checkbox"/> Polynesian (1)
<input type="checkbox"/> African (19)	<input type="checkbox"/> Contemporary (34)	<input type="checkbox"/> International (37)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pork Tenderloin (3)
<input type="checkbox"/> American (527)	<input type="checkbox"/> Corned Beef (21)	<input type="checkbox"/> Irish (12)	<input type="checkbox"/> Potpie (8)
<input type="checkbox"/> Argentinian (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Crab (129)	<input type="checkbox"/> Italian (149)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pretzel (1)
<input type="checkbox"/> Asian (211)	<input type="checkbox"/> Cuban (7)	<input type="checkbox"/> Jambalaya (5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pub (235)
<input type="checkbox"/> Australian (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Cupcake (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Japanese (137)	<input type="checkbox"/> Puerto Rican (1)
<input type="checkbox"/> Austrian (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Delicatessen (113)	<input type="checkbox"/> Korean (33)	<input type="checkbox"/> Ribs (37)
<input type="checkbox"/> Bagels (7)	<input type="checkbox"/> Dim Sum (15)	<input type="checkbox"/> Kosher (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Roast Beef (1)
<input type="checkbox"/> Baguette (11)	<input type="checkbox"/> Diner (21)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lasagne (18)	<input type="checkbox"/> Russian (1)
<input type="checkbox"/> Bar (52)	<input type="checkbox"/> Doner Kebab (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Latin (11)	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvadoran (2)
<input type="checkbox"/> Barbecue (82)	<input type="checkbox"/> Donuts (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lebanese (5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sandwiches (61)
<input type="checkbox"/> Basque (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Dumplings (25)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lobster (45)	<input type="checkbox"/> Schnitzel (3)
<input type="checkbox"/> Beef Bourguignon (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Eastern European (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lobster Roll (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Seafood (167)
<input type="checkbox"/> Belgian (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Ethiopian (12)	<input type="checkbox"/> Malaysian (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Shawarma (3)
<input type="checkbox"/> Bibimbap (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> European (22)	<input type="checkbox"/> Meatloaf (5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Shrimp (124)
<input type="checkbox"/> Bistro (11)	<input type="checkbox"/> Falafel (9)	<input type="checkbox"/> Mediterranean (75)	<input type="checkbox"/> Singaporean (1)
<input type="checkbox"/> Brazilian (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Fast Food (13)	<input type="checkbox"/> Mexican (162)	<input type="checkbox"/> Soups (35)
<input type="checkbox"/> Brew Pub (23)	<input type="checkbox"/> Filet Mignon (14)	<input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern (36)	<input type="checkbox"/> South American (12)
<input type="checkbox"/> British (9)	<input type="checkbox"/> Filipino (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Mongolian (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Southwestern (1)
<input type="checkbox"/> Burrito (23)	<input type="checkbox"/> Fish & Chips (60)	<input type="checkbox"/> Moroccan (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Spanish (43)
<input type="checkbox"/> Cafe (55)	<input type="checkbox"/> Fondue (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Moussaka (3)	<input type="checkbox"/> Steakhouse (32)
<input type="checkbox"/> Cajun & Creole (11)	<input type="checkbox"/> French (44)	<input type="checkbox"/> Native American (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Street Food (1)
<input type="checkbox"/> California Roll (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Fusion (8)	<input type="checkbox"/> Nepali (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Surf And Turf (4)
<input type="checkbox"/> Canadian (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Gastropub (14)	<input type="checkbox"/> Noodle (85)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sushi (87)
<input type="checkbox"/> Cannelloni (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> German (15)	<input type="checkbox"/> North/Western Chinese (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Taiwanese (3)
<input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean (14)	<input type="checkbox"/> Greek (62)	<input type="checkbox"/> Omelette (56)	<input type="checkbox"/> Tandoori Chicken (2)
<input type="checkbox"/> Cashew Chicken (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Grill (4)	<input type="checkbox"/> Oyster (88)	<input type="checkbox"/> Tapas (30)
<input type="checkbox"/> Central American (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Gyros (14)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Rim (5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Thai (124)
<input type="checkbox"/> Ceviche (7)	<input type="checkbox"/> Halal (2)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pad Thai (7)	<input type="checkbox"/> Tibetan (3)
<input type="checkbox"/> Cheeseburger (11)	<input type="checkbox"/> Halloumi (1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Paella (8)	<input type="checkbox"/> Tortillas (24)

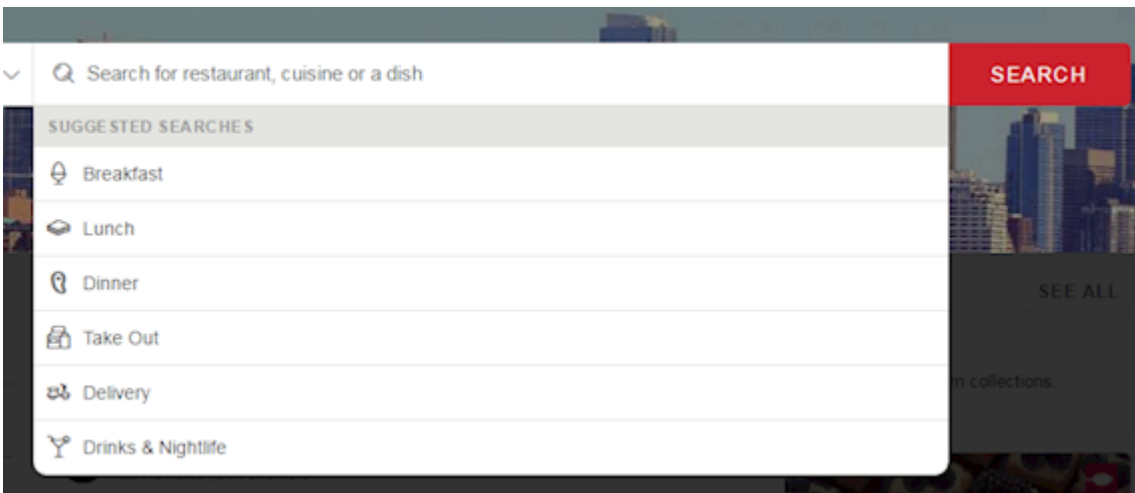
That is a long list to look at. I don't know if anyone ever goes through 110 cuisines and carefully select what he or she is interested. By then, the person might already have starved to death.

Here is my thought, which could be non-sense:

- If I want to eat a burger, does it really matter it's an American cuisine, British or an Italian cuisine?
- If a Japanese restaurant is offering a burger, which uses tempura eggplant as bun, Sashimi and Japanese Salad in the middle, with Mayo and other house sauce, call it New Sashimi Burger, does it qualify as "Burger"?
- If I want to eat Pork Belly, who cares what cuisine it is, if it tastes good? As far I know, French, Chinese, American and Korean can all make beautiful Pork Belly. Why do I want to limit to a specific cuisine?



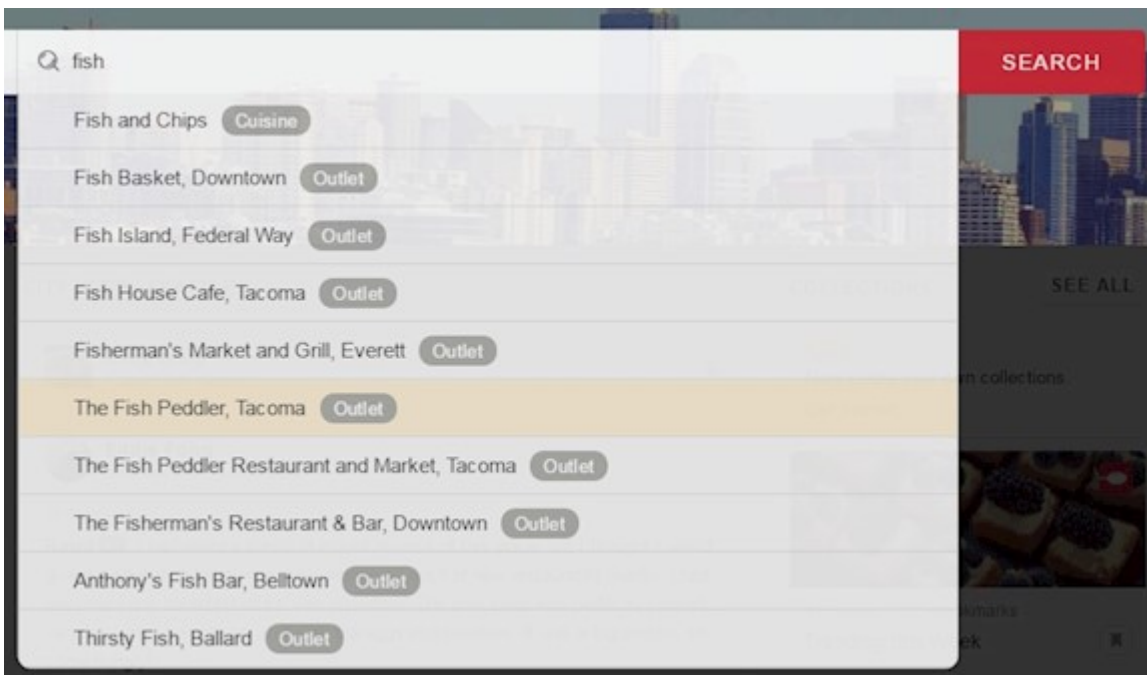
Finally, when I focus on Zomato's search box, the 6 categories immediately show up:



This is what I mentioned earlier, what could distract the users. Without any input, this popup reminds you to just click to select one of those 6 categories. When I first experienced it, I paused my action...because **it MAKES me think**: should I click, or should I enter? What will happen if I select one of those options? Can I still type?

In addition, please pay a little attention to the mask in the search box, noticing it says "restaurant" there?

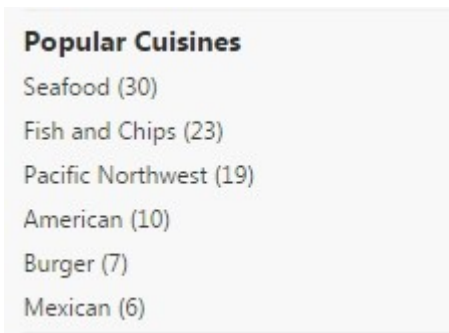
Once I start typing, I can see the result dynamically popped up (and those 6 categories are gone now):



Here is something really confusing. What is "Outlet"?

Once I select one, it comes out to be "Restaurant". So why don't they just call "Restaurant"? I really don't understand.

In the result page, I can see some new filter controls, for example, Popular Cuisines filter (when searching "Fish"):



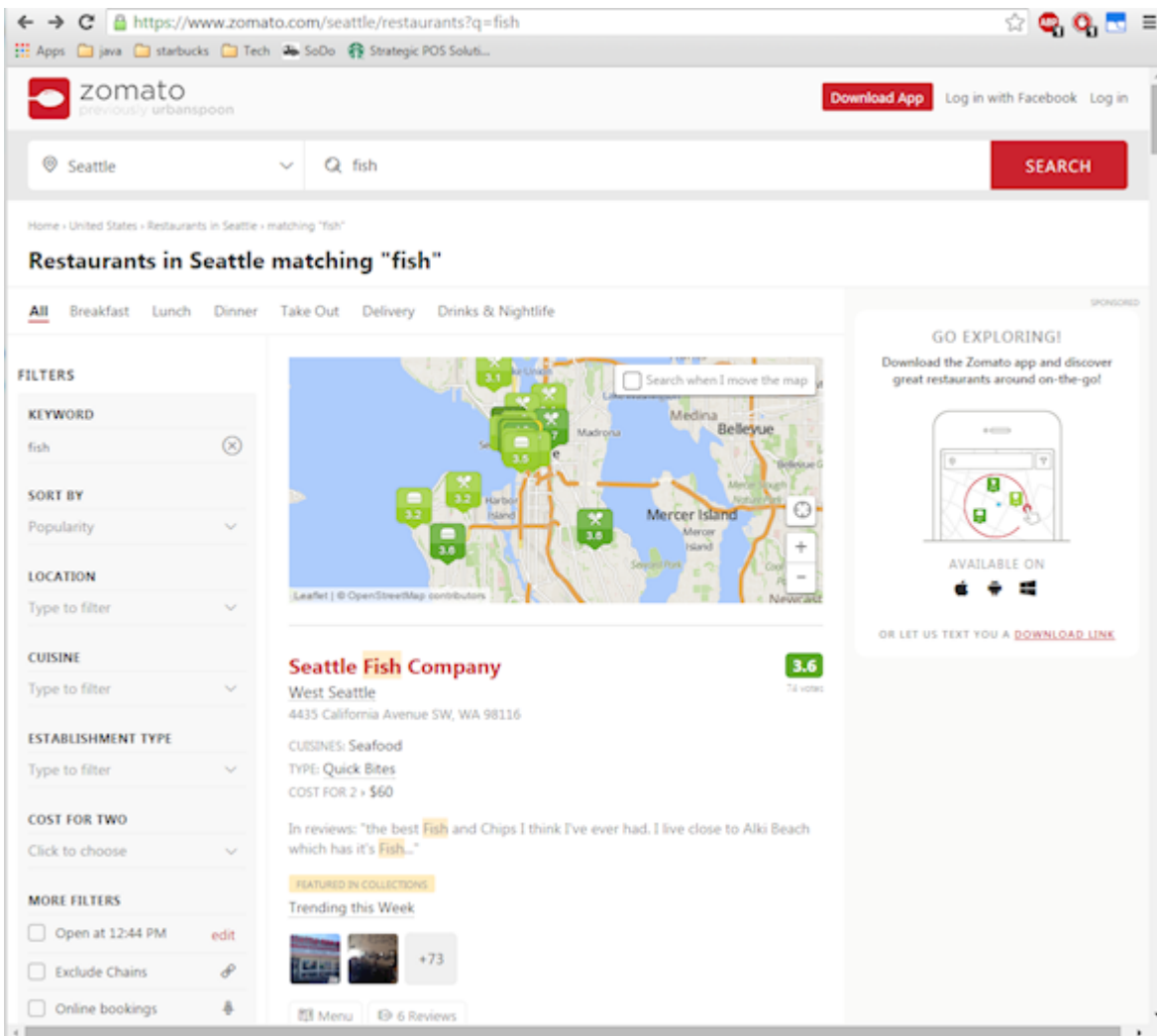
NOTE: this control does NOT provide a "More" button. So that's all the cuisines I can filter.

Just by looking at this control, I am confused because:

- Why I am not seeing Japanese or Chinese food? Then I realize the options are probably based on all the records shown on the current page.
- Are those options overlapped?
- If I choose [Seafood], am I seeing all results, since I am searching "Fish"?
- There is no where I can see how many items in this page, so what does (30) mean? Is it just a subset of the result?

I can probably ignore all the comments I made earlier and only look at the search results, which are the most important part in my entire restaurant discovery user experience. At first, I want to emphasize that I am using a monitor with 1920 x 1680 resolution, which means I expect to see more. The following is the result page from Zomato (on 1/6/2015)





Can you guess what was the first thing grinds my gear?

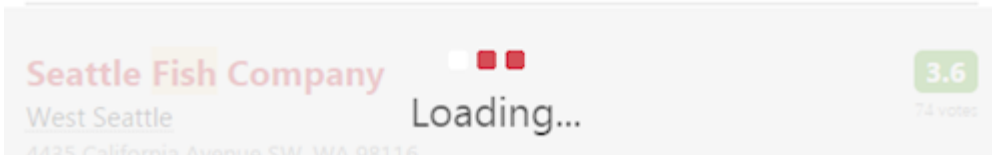
I can see **ONLY** one result!

It is true that I can use the map to hover those icons and scan results.

I did.

Here is a fun fact. I tried to use the feature: Search when I move the map. Zomato never finished loading.





Besides the never-finish-loading (after 15 minutes), can you see crowding those icons are? Personally, keep panning the map to find a restaurant is just not my thing. But, I do have to give them a kudos on using different colors for different rating when visualizing the restaurants. I do like that feature a lot.

It is very unfortunate that I was having trouble of using Zomato's search. The result list is long, I have to keep scrolling. The interaction is just not efficient, and the list doesn't help me locate (mentally) where they are, and what I can eat. They emphasize the restaurant name in each item; they then use light grey text (on top on a white background) to display some review text, which is very difficult to read. There are a lot to look at in each result, but I feel that I do not know what to focus, where I should pay more attention to.

You will have to try it on your own.

I could, scan each item and open it to read the full content. But again, ain't nobody got time for that?

The final question remaining is: how do I associate all those results with me, in terms of my location and my interest? In Zomato, there is none. Because the results are not selected based on my current location or searching for the food item, the results seem to come from everywhere in the selected city and the page highlight the restaurant name. I am guessing, if there is a bar called Dead Fish, but does not really serve any sea food, but could potentially show up in the list.

In the next part, I will describe the criteria I use for reviewing and discuss other 3 similar websites.