



## **Center'd, the Who and How in Local Search**

**By Brian Wool, vice president of content distribution, Localeze**

Who says that Yahoo and Microsoft aren't joining forces? Don't tell that to Jennifer Dulski, former veteran at Yahoo, where she ran the local markets and commerce groups and Chandu Thota, previously the lead developer of Microsoft Virtual Earth. Dulski will be leading the charge at recently launched local search property Center'd as CEO and Thota will be applying his vast technology skills as chief technology officer.

Not only is [www.centerd.com](http://www.centerd.com) well armed with many industry veterans from across the local search space; the company is well funded also, having already raised \$6.5 million in capital from Norwest Venture Partners and KeyNote Ventures, as well as from high profile private investors.

I had a brief conversation with Jennifer Dulski a few days before Center'd launched:

*BW*

*Can you give me a high level overview on what the Center'd platform is all about?*

*Ms. Dulski-*

*Center'd is a local planning site that ties together local search, planning tools, and trusted communities to make planning easier. By marrying these three elements, Center'd gives people a way to seamlessly manage the core elements of planning: picking a place, picking a time, picking service providers, sending invites, and hosting. From basic local activities like figuring out what to do this weekend to more complex plans like organizing a school event that needs volunteers, Center'd provides the tools to get it done. Ultimately, Center'd aims to make local planning so easy that people spend less time planning and more time enjoying themselves.*

*BW*

*This is an interesting and different concept. What are your plans for building a loyal user base that would have a need for these types of tools?*

*Ms. Dulski-*

*Our site will be well optimized from an SEO perspective. We are doing all the right things to drive the appropriate traffic and usage to Center'd. But even more compelling is the viral effect a site like ours will have. For example if one of our users plans an event or party and invites 50 people, that 50 more potential Center'd users. The opportunity to grow our audience is tremendous.*

Most local search products today focus on the what and the where, i.e. what restaurant or what landscaper in San Francisco. Center'd introduces two additional components to the local search equation, the who and the when. This is a unique and clear differentiator to what is generally

available in the local search space today.

At first glance, users may find Center'd reminiscent of one of the many party invite or planning sites. However, Center'd also brings together a vast source of place data. Users at Center'd can access local business listings and add events like school picnics or other social or community events.

Center'd also provides users a powerful suite of planning tools to make all the tasks associated with planning and organizing an event that much easier to manage. Users can utilize tools at Center'd to pick venues, dates, invite guests and even manage nitty-gritty details like who is responsible for bringing the food or drinks to a given event. Because all of these elements are so nicely tied together, Center'd creates an interesting destination for communities to become engaged.

There are several other fun and useful tools within the site. Users can add images to define their nights out or events and there is a planning dashboard to keep track of everything. Another interesting feature I found to be very cool was the ability to designate Google Maps or Virtual Earth Maps as your default map.

Like many other sites, Center'd provides users with business reviews aggregated from across the web to make picking an event venue that much easier. However, because Center'd also brings a social media aspect to the mix, user's will also be able to see their friends favorite places.

This is another interesting use of local search in social media in my view. At Facebook, arguably the leader in social media, members of the same network can view what books or movies their friends have recently read or seen. Center'd adds a local search twist to social media by allowing friends to view how they're connected to each other through places like bookstores or schools. So the next time the girls are planning a "girls night out" Center'd can make the entire planning process that much easier.