

Dear Networking Department,

I'm writing to share a detailed reflection on my recent experience at a 5-day hackathon in Berlin, which took place from July 21st to July 25th. It was an incredibly rewarding opportunity where I not only challenged myself in a new environment but also learned a great deal about collaboration, innovation, and the fast-paced rhythm of building something from idea to presentation.

1. Team Formation and Idea Selection

On the first day, all participants gathered for an introduction session where multiple ideas were pitched. This was an exciting way to start, as we got to hear a range of creative and impactful concepts. Each participant was then invited to choose the idea they felt most passionate about. I joined a team of five people who shared an interest in the same project: creating faster and more intuitive ways to access an application and its features, essentially, building shortcut workflows for both mobile and desktop platforms.

2. The Project: Enhancing User Access with Shortcuts

Our idea centered around improving the user experience by **designing smart shortcuts** that would help users interact with the application more efficiently. We approached this from two perspectives:

- **Mobile Shortcuts:** For mobile users, we explored how we could use **native mobile shortcuts** (such as those triggered via long-press on app icons, in-app gesture shortcuts, or widgets) to make common tasks within the app faster and easier. For example, instead of having to open the app and go through multiple screens, we proposed shortcut actions like "Search" directly from the home screen.
- **Raycast Integration (Desktop):** For desktop users, we integrated with **Raycast**, a productivity tool for macOS that works like a powerful Spotlight search. Raycast allows users to launch applications, perform quick actions, and run custom scripts using just the keyboard. We created custom Raycast extensions that let users interact with app features directly through command palette inputs, like searching content, running backend commands, or navigating features in one or two keystrokes.

This dual-approach allowed us to rethink the user journey from both mobile and desktop angles and design smooth, time-saving access points to core features.

3. Collaboration & Learning Experience

We worked intensely over the next four days, and what stood out to me the most was the collaborative nature of our team. We were a diverse group with different skill sets: some were developers, others focused on product and management. I had the opportunity to work closely with everyone, contributing ideas, testing the flows, discussing use cases, and helping organize the presentation.

It was fascinating to see how each role fit into the bigger picture. Developers handled the technical implementation, while others guided feature prioritization, user flows, and presentation structure. It gave me a clearer picture of how real-world tech teams function behind the scenes.

4. The Environment

The hackathon was hosted in a beautiful workspace where we were provided with both breakfast and lunch every day, which kept the energy high and allowed for casual networking and bonding over meals. I met many amazing people from all over the world, where each of us shared about our nationalities and exchanged information about the places we come from, some working professionals, others students like me. Everyone was passionate, and there was a shared excitement in building something from scratch under time pressure.

5. Final Presentations & Voting

On the final day, all teams presented their projects. Our team, which we named “**Shortcuts**”, demonstrated our shortcut system for both platforms, explaining our thinking and how our solution improves user productivity. After all presentations, there was a peer voting session where teams voted for each other in various fun categories, like “Most Futuristic,” “Best Design,” and “Most Practical Solution.”

6. Takeaways

This hackathon truly opened my eyes to how much can be accomplished in a short time when people work with focus and purpose. I left the experience with new technical knowledge, a better understanding of team dynamics, and more confidence in my ability to contribute meaningfully in a fast-paced, cross-functional environment.

I’m especially proud to have represented our university at this international event. It was an honor to be there among such a diverse and talented group of people, and I’m grateful for the opportunity. I will carry this knowledge with me and use it to contribute to future projects, both personally and professionally, and I’m excited to find ways to incorporate what I’ve learned here back into our local tech community and within our country.

In the next part of this email, I’m also including the invoices from the hotel and my plane ticket, as requested. Additionally, I’ve attached a few photos from the hackathon, some were taken with my teammate Sam, who served as our team lead, and Sergei, who was also a valuable member of our team and some of the pictures show the CEO of the company and we are also explaining our idea to him.

Thank you once again for your support and encouraging experiences like this.