9/13/2007 Customer Meeting (Duncan Hall) Minutes

Attendees
• Dr. Wong, Mr. Scanlon and wife, Corey, Kevin, Matt, Hubert, Dave, Jeeyun, Felipe, Rae, Brad, Yuan, Aaron, Sohum, Derek

Agenda
• Identify main goals
• Primary user scenarios
• Decide on communication

Discussion
• Introductions
• Communication procedures
  o Meet on at least a weekly basis at a scheduled time
    ▪ Need to figure out a time
      • Mondays, Wednesdays not available after 6 PM
      • Not available any day before 4.30 PM
      • It is possible to get loose and get here between 11.45 AM and 1 PM
    ▪ Current time works for everyone but Corey
  o Email: Lucas.Scanlon@rice.edu / Lucas.H.Scanlon@rice.edu?
• Problem: Helping people find information that they didn’t know they needed
• User cases
  o Someone can look for info online in a format that suits them best (text, visual)
    ▪ Search content by someone who is a specialist in that content
      • E.g. look up Mario Williams
      • Find content created by that expert, and it is labeled
      • Content is tagged, and specific content can by found by that
    ▪ Information is linked to other relevant or irrelevant pieces of information
  o Certain people may achieve certain level of notoriety and a company is willing to sponsor them
    ▪ Puts up information about general things that one uses/is good at which would allow companies to put up content on his site
    ▪ Some sort of user site/profile would be required
    ▪ Person posting content would have their own page
      • Can view a catalog of viewed information
    ▪ Some content is free to view, some is paid
      • Portions of information/content are free/paid
      • If person finds info, they can test out with a free version otherwise they have a transaction
  o Someone that is able to produce content that is valuable... such as a teacher or an expert
    ▪ People that are anywhere should have the ability to learn from them
    ▪ Current solutions need people to interface directly—what the problem is making that info available at any time
• The information must be clean and the search must be efficient.
• The question is how to make a search engine recognize info in a video stream as well as written.
• Also needs to have a payment structure.
• Users inputting feedback is a good idea. Based on credibility rating (people that are purchasing video content from them), their stature on the site grows. This stature will hopefully be judged by the end user.
• Your home page becomes a repository of your own ideas. It catalogs information that you have written or used or found.
  o You have an idea repository that is focused on your own learning.
  o How do you record content from your screen seeing that so much happens on a PC screen. Putting that up in a format that can be seen by other people.
• Modeling the educational network in the online world (BINGO— that is the business model)
• People recommending good content will have higher credibility in the long term
• Metric should be evolvable in both senses—the algorithm stays the same and returns differently according to data, and modules can be taken in and out as required
• Be able to request feedback from someone... for example requesting a professional to give feedback on content. Perhaps you can add a payment to that to get that feedback.
• Non-disclosure agreement for beta testers.
• Live lessons—for example video conferencing—not required as an immediate feature but something that should be possible as a feature of scalability
• Administration features
  o Reporting/logging methods and statistics—ability to spit the data out
  o Error log
• Definitely developing a browser-accessed application

Branding
• People are very careful about who they link to and who they do business with
• How will the site be branded? Is it going to be stuffy or laid back? Branding needs be appealing to both extremes and everything in between.
• Brad: Am more comfortable with a more standardized approach such as Facebook. Felipe: Can incorporate some sort of WYSIWYG development framework.

Questions
• Includes content already on the web or directly added to system?
  o Content must be directly added to system
• Are you describing a networking of information? Does the system figure out links between information?
  o System figures links out together
  o There are frameworks already in place that do that
  o Information that is not readily available to be manipulated in a commercial sense
  o Information must be linked to other information in a way that is not readily done by uploaders
• Do you want to incorporate Wiki-type tools that would allow community driven content? Who has ownership of the information? Can others fix faulty information?
  o It would be more of an ownership model—not freely editable by other users
  o Feedback can be posted about whether the content is accurate or good but only owner can edit the content
  o Regarding the Wiki model, thinking more about code in the background that is linking information
  o Look at RDF and Friend-to-Friend (?) and explore how that can be applied to this concept
• As far as paying for content, do you want us to handle transactions?
  o Let Paypal handle the transactions, specifically
• Are you looking at a Myspace profile or Facebook profile?
  o More flexibility in how the page can be shaped
  o Prefer a tabbed model
  o Be careful of linking too closely with something that already exists (such as Facebook, Myspace, Wiki)
• What is it about this product that others don’t do? There’s way information can already be linked on the way and you can search for information.
  o What differentiates here is accurately finding information that is related to other information and the user doing it themselves
  o Many factors in producing an end result—only way you can know that is if all those factors are linked together
  o Finding key information that you did not know you needed
  o This information can be identified by others, or by an expert, but the information must be linked together
  o The system must recognize, not necessarily the user
• The data must come from the user?
  o Look at the RDF. This may shape the thought process differently.
  o There may be another way that removes the user and their ignorance
  o The real key is accuracy and what the optimal way of achieving that is.
  o Is there a framework that understands the relevance of other information?
• What are your thoughts on developing custom frameworks for doing this process rather than standardized frameworks?
  o Heavily rely on standardized frameworks as much as possible so that it is maintainable
• When you are talking about knowing if the user is looking for something... don’t you have to start somewhere to go somewhere?
  o I’d rather you try and find that answer and finding out what the user is looking for and removing human ignorance.
  o If you look at frameworks and how information relates to each, that question would be narrowed.
• We talked briefly from the business side—sponsorship. Is there a profit side?
  o If someone purchases your content, it goes straight to your account
  o Of course the site makes content from that transaction.
  o The site gets a cut of everything.
  o Additionally, advertising.
• Is it completely free for authors to use the tools to post information?
• Yes, authoring tools are free.

• Is there a requirement or limit on who gets to post?
  o No, there is no limit like this... it is up to the end user to decide the credibility of that information

• Can anyone browse?
  o Anyone can browse, but need account to save or purchase

• Do corporate have some sort of authority since you measured sponsors?
  o Need to figure that out

• Would it be a good idea to integrate into the Facebook model?
  o As a business model, don't want to do that because it ties to Facebook
  o Within the network roles are defined but not outside of the network
  o Information harvesting from the web is okay.

• Can you tie this to scholarly magazines?
  o Yes.

• How do people establish their identity through this?
  o This is a question I have not answered yet. This may be a problem especially when the user community is young.
  o Prefer to use people with real names—this is a real person network
  o Need to find a way to track person based on their content if they put up inappropriate content
  o Thought is to link it some sort of real identity
  o Brad: There have been ways to detect inappropriate content.
  o Would really appreciate a way to keep malicious information out of the network.

• Notions include authoring, building credibility, measuring utility, billing. Do you envision you will be adding more capabilities or are these the only ones?
  o Definitely adding more. Business model may change over the next few weeks.
  o Perhaps wanted to model for a vendor how many people are using a site... should be able to pull up numbers

• Are you open to interacting with other institutions such as public school system?
  o Yup, but need to figure out the ways.

• Wouldn't it be better to make content free and get more users?
  o It is up to the content provider to decide whether the content they produce is free or if they receive some sort of income
  o If the information is truly valuable, people would not hesitate in paying an amount.

• Have you looked at other educational online systems such as Connexions or Rice’s Owlspace?
  o No... will looking at your expertise

• How scalable do you expect the implementation to be?
  o It has to be able to grow and it has to be scalable.
  o Have to have the requirement of running across different servers.
  o Processing should be spread across many servers.
  o The service needs to be scalable since it is expected to be growing at a compound rate especially in the first few months

• Do you have hosting in mind?
  o Not yet... going for Rice first and need to expect it to be able to be hosted in any standard place elsewhere
  o Needs to support primarily Internet Explorer and Safari (since Macs are useful in video editing, etc.)

• What technology do you anticipate in using for video?
  o You guys need to come back with the best technology.

• Do you plan to be able to section videos, break apart videos, tag videos... etc?
  o What I have in mind is people can have indices for video and people should be able to search through that index.
  o You should be able to zip through content to chapters that you want to go to.

• Is there other media that you want to be involved in?
  o Primarily video and text.
  o Images/audio if possible.
  o People learn in different ways so there must be many different type of medias.
  o Speech recognition is not a high priority

• If you type in “snare roll” into search box, what would I see?
  o Would show recommendations. It would be sorted by highest credibility/recommendation as established by colleagues and credibility.
  o Would see more of a text link.
  o Finding key information would be through link... though I do have not thought about
  o Person posting content would have to tell exactly what they are posting—could rely on other people
Action Items
- Figure out the best solution in terms of frameworks.
- Have a brainstorming session where we come up with as many crazy ideas.
- Split up into teams and explore 4-5 of these ideas.
- **WANTED FOR NEXT WEEK:** A mock-up of the GUI.
  - How UI will look like from a few different perspectives (text/video/audio/purchasing from users/etc.)
  - Not looking for fancy colored graphics (more like wireframes?)
  - Mock up of both end-user interface (client) and admin interface (running the business, selling the business)

Comments from Dr. Wong
- Customer is looking at something from his business perspective. If something does not make sense to him from his perspective:
  - Either he is right
  - You are not understanding what his business requirement is
  - The suggested solution does solve the problem but you need to convince him that it does...
- Part of the job is convincing the customer that what you are offering is what he wants (the customer has the final word on whether or not the proposed solution solves the business problem)
- Have to understand that the customer is asking for a tool that they have never used and doesn’t know how to build...
- Do not get stuck in a trap where the model depends on a view