InspireUs

Group 2.2

Stage Five - Final Report

Executive Summary

In this report, we present InspireUs, a content-sharing platform designed to provide artistic inspiration to its users. This is done through a system of site-wide official prompts with fixed deadlines. Users are meant to produce creative work matching themes given by the site and share it with the rest of the community. Any sort of content is allowed, including artwork, writing, and videos. The main problems creators face that this platform addresses are creative slumps and gaining exposure. With abstract prompts that have a fixed deadline, creators are encouraged to push their limits and get motivated to make something. The separation of posted content into different themes and their frequent rotation allows a variety of creators be featured each day, which helps them be noticed.

Our primary end users are expected to be content creators and consumers, who do not produce their own content but enjoy viewing other people's work. Stakeholders include companies and organizations that may use the site to seek out talent or host their own custom themed events. We conducted research on potential users with interviews and personas. Interviews were done with a variety of content creators to gain insight on

their needs and gauge interest in the project. The results of these conversations were summarized by developing personas. These characterized different types of InspireUs users based on their skill levels, goals and interests.

We found that artistic slumps were indeed a common phenomenon among creators, and many interviewees believed that being given prompts would be useful to them. They also thought it would be interesting to challenge themselves with fixed deadlines, since it is easy to spend excessive time completing a piece when it may not be necessary. Based on this feedback and additional insight on existing platforms used by the creators, we began planning the interface for our site.

In our initial sketches, we first focused on core tasks like posting, browsing, and profile management. These generally shared common features found on other social media sites, but with emphasis on site prompts. To encourage active participation, we decided to include a site currency for purchasing profile cosmetics. Points would be awarded to users for completing certain tasks, associated with Badges as an achievement system. With these main features in mind, we developed prototypes for InspireUs.

Our high-fidelity prototype was given to another team for a heuristic evaluation. The main issues discovered were buggy links, a lack of user documentation and registration pages, and limited user freedom and error prevention. We addressed these problems by fixing navigation bugs, creating new screens, and providing more opportunities to prevent and correct user errors. In the next iteration of our design, we would like to expand on features not showcased in our current prototype, such as exploring archived posts and profile editing. We may also want to add new functions like a contest system to attach prizes to themes, and more ways to directly support creators. All in all, InspireUs is a platform with great

potential to bring forth creativity and give recognition to aspiring creators. Whether you're writing a story, creating artwork, making music or videos, InspireUs aims to inspire you.

Introduction

InspireUs is a creative content-sharing platform based around a rotating series of prompts. Users are encouraged to create content based on the themes provided by the site, and share their work for others to enjoy. The site supports all kinds of content including art, music, videos, stories, and video games. Each official prompt is categorized as either daily, weekly, or monthly, and lasts for the corresponding duration of time. Submissions for the current prompts are featured on the homepage of the site, but all past work is still archived. Users can also create their own "Community Themes" with deadlines and custom submission rules.

As with other social media platforms, users can like posts, leave comments, and follow specific creators. Every user has a Profile page to keep track of their likes and people they follow. The user's gallery of past work is also found on this page, allowing it to function as a portfolio. InspireUs also has a points system which is used as currency for the site. With points, users can buy decorations from the shop to customize their profile page as a fun side task. Points are awarded when the user earns Badges, which are achievements unlocked by completing certain requirements.

Design Problem

Anyone who is a content creator has gone through the experience of a creative slump. Regardless of whether you are a novice just starting out, or an experienced content creator with plenty of history on your plate, creative

slumps are annoying and frustrating to deal with, and may be hard to overcome. The primary problem that InspireUs solves is the need for content creators to come up with ideas for their work. By providing them a broad theme with a fixed deadline, creators are motivated to produce something that may push their boundaries. InspireUs offers creators flexibility, since the official themes rotate frequently and there are a variety of community themes available as well. Creators are free to browse around until they have a solid idea, and can even gain inspiration just from looking at what other people have posted.

Another problem handled by InspireUs is the desire for creators to receive exposure. New creators often struggle to get their work noticed, which can be demotivating and prevent them from improving. Part of this difficulty in getting noticed is needing to create content that is 'recent'. For example, it is more likely that artwork based on a film that just came out will get noticed compared to someone's personal work. This is unfortunate, but InspireUs reduces this issue by having rotating prompts that are always relevant to the site. In particular, the short time limit of daily prompts means that the pool of submissions each day will be relatively small, so individual works are more likely to be seen. InspireUs lets creators make things that are relevant while still having freedom, due to the abstract nature of the official prompts.

End Users and Stakeholders

For end users, we expect InspireUs to be used primarily by content creators looking to share their work, gain inspiration, or challenge themselves with timed events. We also expect a large amount of users to be consumers who simply enjoy viewing content and supporting creators by following them and commenting on their posts. Other users include administrators and moderators.

As for stakeholders, companies may wish to use the platform to discover creators they are interested in working with. For example, a small game development team may want to seek out independent musicians that could be commissioned to produce songs for them. Another way companies could use the site is for self-promotion. Hosting their own theme on the site, such as a logo-designing contest, could be a form of advertisement for them. Other groups that already manage prompt-based events, like Inktober, may also want to collaborate with our platform to increase their exposure and have a convenient place to archive all submissions. Lastly, alternate social media platforms also act as stakeholders, since users will likely share their InspireUs posts on multiple sites. This could affect the traffic they receive, so they would want to be aware of InspireUs if it becomes popular.

User Research and Findings

For our first research method, we chose to complete interviews. Although they are more time consuming than surveys, they are also more interactive and allow us to obtain more detailed data. We utilized interviews to check that our proposed InspireUs platform did in fact have interest, and to gather information regarding what potential users and stakeholders would expect and want from our system - from different types of content creators to the general users, who would be interested in viewing work from others, potentially gaining inspiration to create content in the future. We also made use of interviews to gather information regarding their experience using similar types of platforms. We wanted to make sure that our system was designed in a way that is easily accessible for everyone with differing knowledge and experience. Using the information we gathered from our interviews, we then created personas which summarized gathered data and characterized the diverse types of users and their differing levels of experience and goals.

From our research, we found that content creators often go through periods where they encounter a "block", and find it hard to come up with ideas and progress forward. Our InspireUs idea would help break out of this to get their creative juices flowing. We also found that InspireUs would not only help users come up with ideas, but our time prompt-based system would allow creators to challenge themselves. By focusing ideas towards the prompts within the time constraints, our site helps those who want to improve without taking too much time; from the data we gathered, many creators often spend more time than they would like to complete one of their pieces. InspireUs would not only encourage content creators to improve their skills, but would also provide a platform where they can increase their work's exposure, and see how others approach an idea with different mindsets and interpretations.

Design and Justification

Because prompts were the core of our project idea, we made key design decisions about them rather early on. We decided that official prompts should fall under daily, weekly and monthly categories. This would let our platform support a mix of smaller pieces with more time-consuming works, giving creators flexibility in the prompts they could use. We knew that posting and browsing would be important functions, so our initial sketches of the homepage tried to make these tasks intuitive and easily accessible. Each of us tried to include the standard features one would expect on a content-sharing platform, like post sorting, filters, tags and likes. We also focused on maximizing the utility of the profile page, since having a place to conveniently archive each user's creations was a priority.

To add some novelty to our platform, we decided to have a currency system using 'points'. A shop was added to the project to incentivize and reward users for participating with the site and unlocking achievements. We discussed possible rewards that points would unlock, such as ways for

users to affect what new prompts would appear on the platform. After brainstorming multiple different approaches, we ultimately decided to leave this voting concept out of the final submission. This was because we did not see it as a priority over the content we already had. Also, it seemed difficult to implement such a feature without giving users a head start on an upcoming prompt, which would go against the spirit of the site. Instead, we settled with points being used for profile cosmetics.

Heuristic Evaluation and Findings

Page link errors were the most critical problems our users encountered. They were not common, however some links functioned like back buttons which was not intended. Other important problems were in our user error prevention and user freedom designs. We had not implemented an edit or delete field for users when creating a new post or modifying an old post. Additionally, after buying an item in our shop, we had not added a confirmation window. This would have been useful in preventing accidental purchases.

We also had users who did not understand what "themes" were used for. There was a lack of documentation, which would have helped users better understand how our website works. This was a fundamental problem. We did not properly communicate the purpose of, or how to properly use our website to the fullest.

Some moderate problems included not adding more error popups. For our prototype we did not allow the user to encounter any errors, but adding error scenarios would have been a helpful design choice. There were some inconsistencies on our webpages. For example, not every page that was scrollable had a "go to top" button.

Lastly, some minor suggestions were to keep our interface more simple. Some people felt that it was too cluttered. Small visual interface bugs were present but didn't affect the user's experience overall.

Design Changes after Evaluation

The evaluations opened our eyes to some pretty key flaws in our design. We knew that these flaws needed an urgent fix, so we set them as our priority. The changes we focused on were page link errors, documentation, and the implementation of a signup and login screen.

Fixing page link errors was a critical issue to us, because users commonly found themselves on unexpected pages. This led to a confusion about how site navigation was meant to act. We made the changes in our design that corrected this behaviour, allowing for proper and error-free navigation.

Another common problem discovered was that many users were having difficulties with certain language used within our site, such as what a 'theme' is. To combat this we added a help page. This page is able to be found from the homescreen, readily available. Once on this page, users can find help on eight different categories. The categories align with different pages on our site, allowing users to understand each aspect of the site fully.

The last issue that we deemed critical was the lack of a signup and login screen in our prototype. This one was a pretty big flaw in our design, as we want our site to be open to everyone. The entire site is built off of community and that does not show when we restrict access by preventing users to create an account. We have updated our design to include a signup and login page allowing users to get the full InspireUs experience. Some other non-critical changes that we implemented this iteration were

adding in a follower's page in the profile to help find people who like similar artists, a sample FAQ page in the help section, and adding the ability for users to share their posts to Facebook.

There were other problems found that we decided were not critical, especially for the prototype. These problems mainly consisted of error checking. We decided not to implement this, as it does not seem like a key feature and the prototype is representing what the expected result is. However we also had small things that we were able to fix after the critical issues were dealt with. These were mainly consistency and visibility issues, such as a user's points reducing after a purchase or the 'New Post' button being changed to a 'Create Post' button.

Overall, the changes we made have improved the design substantially. They provide a much better model of our site, getting us close to the user experience that we desire.

Recommendations for Next Iteration of Design

In general, the current prototype could be fleshed out to show deeper interactions and features that were outside of the scope of our core tasks. The Explore page, which allows users to browse older posts, was only implemented at the surface level so its design was not discussed in detail. One suggestion was to combine it with the home page since they have similar layouts. Other functions that could be developed include error handling, profile customization, post creation with a full text editor, saving drafts, and a messaging system. In terms of design, we would also like to explore the layout and colour palette to determine a way to make the menus feel less cluttered.

There were many potential features that we brought up during our design process that may be useful to revisit for the next iteration. A suggestion from our heuristic evaluations was including a tutorial for new users, to make site navigation more intuitive. Another idea we had early on was a contest system with prizes to entice users to create submissions. To further incentivize site participation and increase support for creators, we could also consider features like user-created shop content with monetary value and a commission system.

Conclusions

From the very inception of InspireUs, we engaged with key stakeholders including artists, writers, and other content creators to find the pain-points that exist within the realm of content creation. Based on the feedback stressing creator's block and lack of engagement and visibility on content platforms, we have designed and prototyped a platform that lets anyone gain inspiration and express their creativity with the form of content they prefer. By introducing a multiple-prompt system based on time-frames and communities to organize content, the user is presented with both guidelines on the topic of the system, and the freedom to choose between countless different ongoing topics. Whether you are writing a story, creating artwork, making music or videos, InspireUs aims to inspire you. We paid special attention to ensuring that content creators could share their content in the form they are most comfortable in, with no artificial restrictions. We also introduced a fun engaging points system, that goes beyond just the content one creates, and enables a high degree of customizability for the profile picture that appears on every page, post and comment.

We truly believe that InspireUs will become the go-to place for content creators to find inspiration, discover other like-minded individuals and share their content with the rest of the world. Come join us at InspireUs, a

platform for creators by creators, where creator's block is a thing of the past!